



“You will know them by their fruits.” Mt. 7:16

MADAME JEANNE GUYON

(Catholic)

This saintly woman was born April 16, 1648, and died June, 1717. She was converted July 22, 1668, and immediately bade farewell to worldliness in every form. A few years later her husband died, and after severe trials she gave herself to God in an irrevocable consecration and entered the sanctified life. She says:

“Great was the change which I had now experienced; but still in my exterior life, I appeared to others quite simple, unobtrusive and common. And the reason was that my soul was not only brought into harmony with itself and with God, but with God’s providences. In the exercise of faith and love, I endured and performed whatever came in God’s providence, in submission, in thankfulness, and silence. I was now in God and God in me; and where God is there is as much simplicity as power. And what I did was done in such simplicity and childlikeness of spirit that the world did not observe anything which was much calculated to attract notice.

“I had a deep peace which seemed to pervade the whole soul, and resulted from the fact that all my desires were fulfilled in God. I feared nothing: that is, considered in its ultimate results and relations, because my strong faith placed God at the head of all perplexities and events. I desired nothing but what I now had, because I had a full belief that, in my present state of mind, the result of each moment constituted the fulfillment of the divine purposes. As a sanctified heart is always in harmony with the divine providences, I had no will but the divine-will, of which such providences are the true and appropriate expression. How could such a soul have other than a deep peace, not limited to the uncertainties of the emotional part of our nature, but which pervaded and blessed the whole mind! Nothing seemed to diminish it; nothing troubled it.

“I do not mean to say that I was in a state in which I could not be afflicted. My physical system, my senses, had not lost the power of suffering. My natural sensibilities were susceptible of being pained. Oftentimes I suffered much. But in the centre of the soul, if I may so express it, there was divine and supreme peace. The soul, considered in its connection with the objects immediately around it, might at times be troubled and afflicted; but the soul, considered in its relation to God and the divine will, was entirely calm, trustful and happy. The trouble at the circumference, originating in part from a disordered physical constitution, did not affect and disturb the divine peace of the centre.

“One characteristic of this higher degree of experience was a sense of inward purity. My mind had such a oneness with God, such a unity with the divine nature, that nothing seemed to have power to soil it and diminish its purity. It experienced the truth of that declaration of Scripture that ‘to the pure all things are pure.’ The pollution which surrounds has no power upon it; as the dark and impure mud does not defile the sunbeams that shine upon it, which rather appear brighter and purer from the contrast.”

She had been accustomed to the luxury and splendor of Paris, but circumstances made it necessary to move to a little cabin; but poverty’s vale had no discouragements for her, for her spirit was as exultant there as in a palace. She says:

“It had a look of the greatest poverty and had no chimney except in the kitchen, through which one was

obliged to pass to go to the chamber. I gave up the largest chamber to my daughter and the maid. The chamber reserved to myself was a very small one; and I ascended to it by a ladder. Having no furniture of my own except some beds quite plain and homely, I bought a few cheap chairs, and such articles of earthen and wooden ware as were necessary. I fancied everything better on wood than on plate. Never did I enjoy a greater content than in this hovel. It seemed to me entirely conformable to the littleness and simplicity which characterized the true life in Christ.”

Like all “who follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth,” she was the object of much persecution, and even in her little hut her enemies pursued her with a relentless hatred. She says:

“It would be difficult for me to enumerate all the unkindness and cruelty practiced toward me. The little garden near my cottage I had put in order. Persons came at night and tore it up, broke down the arbor, and overturning everything in it, so that it appeared as if it had been ravaged by a body of soldiers. My windows were broken with stones, which fell at my feet. All night long persons were around the house making a noise, threatening to break it in, and uttering personal abuse. I have learned since who put these persons upon their wicked work.

“It was at this time that a notice reached me that I must go out of the diocese. Crimes were tolerated, but the work of God, resulting in the conversion and sanctification of souls, could not be endured. All the while, I had no uneasiness of mind. My soul found rest in God; I never repented that I had left all to do what seemed to be his will. I believe that God had a design in everything which took place; and I left all in his hands, both the sorrow and the joy.

“It pleased God,” she says, “to make use of two or three ecclesiastics. Attached to the prevalent views and practices, their repugnance to the doctrine of faith and of an inward life was at first great. One of these persons at first vilified me very much. But God at length led him to see his errors, and gave him new dispositions.

“People,” says Madam Guyon, “flocked together from all sides, far and near. Friars, priests, men of the world, maids, wives, widows--all came, one after another, to hear what was to be said. So great was the interest felt, that for sometime I was wholly occupied from six o’clock in the morning till eight in the evening, in speaking of God. It was not possible to aid myself much in my remarks by meditation and study. But God was with me. He enabled me, in a wonderful manner, to understand the spiritual conditions and wants of those who came to me. Many were the souls which submitted themselves to God at this time; God knows how many. Some appeared to be changed as it were in a moment. Delivered from a state in which their hearts and lips were closed, they were at once endued with gifts of prayer, which were wonderful. Marvelous, indeed, was the work of the Lord.

“They were grievously chagrined,” says Madame Guyon, “that a woman should be so much flocked to and sought after. For looking at the things as they were in themselves, and not as they were in God, who uses what instrument he pleases, they forgot, in their contempt, to admire the goodness and grace manifested through it.

“God also made me of service to a great number of nuns, virtuous young women, and even men of the world. Among those was a young man of the Order of the Knights of Malta. Led to understand something of the peaceful nature and effects of religion, he abandoned the profession of arms for that of a preacher of the Gospel of Christ. He became a man constant in prayer, and was much favored by the Lord. I could not well describe the great number of souls, of whose spiritual good God was pleased to make me the instrument. Among the number were three curates, one canon, and one grand-vicar, who were more particularly given to me.”

Her “Method of Prayer” was destined to exercise a mighty influence in the Land. One thousand five hundred copies were immediately given away by a good old man in Grenoble, and wherever they were

eagerly read they stirred the people up to seek God. Three hundred copies were found and burnt in Dijon some time after this!

One day she entered into a church in which some religious services were performed. The priest, who had the direction of them, observed her; and after they were concluded, went immediately to the house in which she lodged, and stated to her, with great simplicity and frankness, his inward trials and necessities. "He made his statements," she remarks, "with as much humility as simplicity. In a short time he was filled with joy and thankful acknowledgments to God." He became a man of prayer and a true servant of God.

"But, notwithstanding this unfavorable state of things, God," she says, "did not fail to make use of me to gain many souls for himself. He was pleased to regard me with great kindness. In the poverty and weakness of his poor handmaid he gave me spiritual riches. The more persecution raged against me, the more attentively was the word of the Lord listened to, and the greater number of spiritual children given to me."

Some of these persons were involved in the trials she endured. A number were banished from the city, chiefly on the ground of having attended religious conferences at her house or with her. One was banished, she states, against whom nothing further was alleged than his having made the remark, that her little book, meaning probably her book on Prayer, was a good one.

On the 29th of January, 1688, she was suddenly ordered to go to a convent, where she was kept separated from her daughter, and hardly treated, yet she coolly says:

"When none came to see me, with whom I might converse, I wrote; when tired of writing the incidents of my life, I corresponded with my friends; when opportunities for doing good in this manner did not present themselves, I solaced the hours of solitude by writing poems."

She was offered her liberty if she would consent to the marriage of her daughter with a godless nobleman, nephew to the Archbishop of Paris.

"God allows suffering, but never allows wrong. I see clearly that it is his will that I should remain in prison and endure the pains which are connected with it; and I am entirely content that it should be so. I can never buy my liberty at the expense of sacrificing my daughter."

After eight months' imprisonment, she was set at liberty by the intercession of Madame de Maintenon, and immediately began again her course of private meetings, but now devoting the time more entirely to those who were saved and seeking sanctification.

"After the labors of the day, I have for some time past, spent a portion of the night in writing commentaries on the Scriptures. I began this at Grenoble; and though my labors were many and my health was poor, the Lord enabled me, in the course of six months, to write on all the books of the Old Testament."

It was at this time that she made the acquaintance of Abbe Fenelon, afterwards Archbishop of Cambray, who became a sanctified witness to the truth, and remained until death not only a fearless champion of the cause of holiness, but a true friend to the persecuted lady, who had been to so great an extent his mother in the faith.

On the 8th of July, 1695, the Dutchess of Mortemar came to the convent to take Madame Guyon back to Paris. It was no sooner known that she was in Paris than the city was in an uproar. She soon had to hide, and after some six months she was found and sent to prison. She says:

"I passed my time in great peace, content to spend the remainder of my life there if it should be the will of God. I employed part of my time in writing religious songs. I and my maid La Gautiere, who was

with me in prison, committed them to heart as fast as I made them. Together we sang praises to thee, O our God! It sometimes seemed to me as if I were a little bird whom the Lord had placed in a cage, and that I had nothing to do now but to sing. The joy of my heart gave a brightness to the objects around me. The stones of my prison looked in my eyes like rubies. I esteemed them more than all the gaudy brilliance of a vain world. My heart was full of the joy which thou givest to them who love Thee in the midst of their greatest crosses.”

The seven years preceding her death were spent in retirement. Thus lived and died one of the most remarkable women of any age. She lived amid the corruption of the dark ages, yet obtained a knowledge of God that would put most of us to shame. Possibly she stressed penance and mysticism rather too much, but for a profoundly holy life, manifesting itself in utter annihilation of the self-life, she had few equals.

Source: “Chosen Vessels” by J. O. McClurkan

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