



## ***Daring Practical Faith in Divine Providence***

### **Part Four**

#### **Father Joseph Kentenich, *Childlikeness Before God*, 149-152.**

**Introduction:** We continue with Father Kentenich's insights given at the retreat for the Swiss priests' community of the Bethlehem Fathers in 1937. In Part Three, Father Kentenich developed the theme of the Father's personal *yes* by looking at three levels of divine providence: God's general, special, and most special providence. First of all, general providence applies to the birds of the air, the lilies in the field, etc. This Part Four continues with the second point.

#### **God's special providence**

Father Kentenich's insight into the second level follows: *Scholars say that this special providence is directed to creatures endowed with spirit and grace. Their evidence comes from ... Old and New Testament scripture passages which compare the heavenly Father with a hen<sup>8</sup>, a mother, and so on. We ought to compile such passages and meditate on them again and again<sup>9</sup>. ... Take note of such marvelous images as the child at the breast of the mother (Is 66:11-13); the mother who can never forget her child—and even if she did: I will not forget you! (Is 49:15). Or the image of the hen and the chicks (Mt 23:37; Lk 13:34). Or the passage in Matthew: Consider the lilies of the field... and the birds of the air: If the Father cares for them, how much more will he care for you, O you of little faith! (cf Mt 6,28-30). The Father is concerned about each and every detail of our lives. ... In the New Testament we find how the Father loves each individual and is concerned about each detail in our lives...*

**Thought question:** What biblical image of God's special providence reflects my life experience?

#### **God's most special providence**

Father Kentenich continues with explaining the third level of God's providence: *In addition, there is a most special providence. It refers to the elect: those with the grace of perseverance, namely those who have attained not only grace but also glory. Which leads to the difficult question: Can I consider myself one of the elect to whom most special providence applies? If I am, I belong to those for whom (as St. Paul puts it) the whole world was created (cf Rom 4:13ff and 1 Cor 3:21-23). ... For sure I am the object of God's special providence, i.e. I am personally loved by God. And if I can assume that I am also the object of God's most special providence, then I am loved by God in an extraordinary way.*

**Thought question:** Where have I experienced being personally loved by God?

#### **The criteria for being among the elect**

Next Father Kentenich explains the difficulty knowing if we are among the elect. He explains: *You know that scholars ... like to find criteria which allow us to assume with a fair degree of certainty that we are of the elect. Among them is the criterium of a deep and tender love of the Blessed Mother. According to them, it is one of the most certain criteria. But such things are speculative. The mystery remains. Anyone who is simple and childlike knows how to leap over this abyss. But why should I not suppose that the scholars are right?! If a deep Marian devotion is demanded of us, then thanks be to God! If I do what is asked of me, I will have done my part.*

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<sup>8</sup> See Dt 32:11; Ruth 2:12; Ps 17:8; 36:8; 56:2; 61:5; 63:8; 91:4. The Church Fathers often spoke of God as a hen while alluding to these passages.

<sup>9</sup> Father Kentenich followed his own advice on this point while in Dachau. When he composed the prayer "I Beg You Father for all the Cross and Suffering" and included a beautiful meditation on the attributes of the heavenly Father, including *shepherd, mother, hen, and eagle*. See *Heavenwards* (Waukesha, 1992), 113.

Father Kentenich refers back to the point of the fatherly personal yes of God with the concluding thought on this point: *At the end of such a long passage, you only need to know one thing: My Ita Pater [Yes, Father] must be enlightened by the threefold Ita fili [Yes, son/daughter].*

**Thought question:** Why does a deep love for the Blessed Mother help us have a certainty about faith?

### **A fatherly heroic Yes**

Father Kentenich then explains the third point of the Father's threefold yes: *The Father's yes to me must not only be fatherly kind and fatherly personal, but also fatherly heroic. It sounds a bit odd to speak of a fatherly heroic yes, for God's activity does not cost him any effort. But try to think in human terms. You will grasp my point at once when I quote that famous passage of Scripture: For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son (Jn 3:16), even in the terrible form of being nailed to the cross. What do I conclude from his suffering and death? It proves how fond the heavenly Father is of me. For God so loved **me** that he gave his only-begotten Son!*

**Thought question:** How does God show his heroic love for me?

### **I have been purchased at a great price**

The heroic yes of the Father is difficult to understand but Father Kentenich explains: *At this point I really ought to stop and take some time to let it sink in. Similar well-known passages from Scripture could help shed light on the full meaning. Make an effort to grasp this: I have been purchased at a great price (cf 1 Cor 6:20; 7,23; 1 Pet 1:18f). Study how much God values you! If we want to become his children, we must personally experience our high dignity! Don't become a victim of mass [suggestions]! We stress how good God is—our misery has only been mentioned in passing. All things being equal, people today must more strongly emphasize the [saying of St. Leo the Great]: Remember your dignity... The child must realize how he is enveloped by love, and experience faith as tangibly as possible.*

**Thought question:** Why is it important to remember that we have been purchased at a great price?

Father Kentenich continues: *These thoughts compel us to seriously reform our thinking. People today must experience in every way possible their high personal dignity in and because of God. This is why we should, for instance, not be too quick to say—even though it is true—Next to the universe you are so small! We should rather look at the truth from the other side: Next to you in the exaltation of grace, how small is the whole universe! Is that true? Without a doubt! What is the beauty of the mountains ... compared to the soul in the state of grace?*

**Thought question:** Why do we need to reform our thinking and see our high personal dignity?

To conclude this part, Father Kentenich again emphasizes the great mystery of God's love: *Today we need to be convinced of our elevated personal value. You should see how this increases your self-respect and how it awakens a great childlike love. You have been purchased, and at a great price! (1 Cor 6:20). I do not look on the life of Christ merely to tell myself how poor and sinful I am, but also to recognize my value, to lift myself up through the example of Christ's life and suffering to the experience of the Father's love. For God so loved me that he gave up to death his only-begotten Son! I do not need many truths if I live out of this one truth.*

**Thought question:** What great truth does Father Kentenich encourage us to live in our everyday life?

*-to be continued in Part Five*