



Daring Practical Faith in Divine Providence

Part Nine

Father Joseph Kentenich, *Childlikeness Before God*, 161-164

Introduction: In Part Nine, we continue Father Joseph Kentenich's retreat talks given to the Swiss priests' community of the Bethlehem Fathers in 1937. Part Eight concluded with Father Kentenich's insights on our saying *yes* to the gift of cross and suffering that God gives to us. Father Kentenich then invites us to develop a daring faith in attitude and action.

A childlike trusting *yes* to my way to heaven

Father Kentenich continues:

Finally, my *yes* is a childlike trusting *yes* to my way to heaven. What do I mean by that? Will my way of life ultimately lead me to heaven? ... Am I one of the elect? ¹ I cannot answer this [with absolute certainty]. Only childlikeness gives certainty. (....)

Thought question: Why do you think Father Kentenich says that *only childlikeness gives us certainty of heaven*? (Read what Jesus says in this same line in Matthew 18:3.)

Daring as outward activity

Father Kentenich takes another angle with the following insight:

The hero grows apace with the difficulties he faces... Those who are spiritual cripples will collapse along the way... [The] **daring** interior attitude takes concrete form when faced with the challenges of life. This is **daring** as outward activity. Let me explain to you the reasons for this kind of daring, and its characteristics.

The reason for daring in attitude and action

Father Kentenich continues:

The reason is obvious. If the attitude of my soul is heroic, it must show in deeds. This is obvious but becomes all the clearer through Sacred Scripture. Because of Christ, this heroic attitude runs deep in the blood of Christianity. This is easily forgotten, especially if we live a comfortable life. ...Therefore, the heroic side of Christianity should be something you [make attempts to] see and acknowledge. Hear, for example, the words of Our Lord: *The kingdom of heaven suffers violence, —this does not mean political violence! —and the violent take it by force!* (Matthew 11:12). Christianity is not a religion of comfort, but of heroism.

Thought question: Why is Christianity a religion of heroic daring? Give examples.

The danger of comfort

As an aside, Father Kentenich shares the following insight:

...Can you blame people for rejecting Christianity when the only Christianity they see is enslaved to comfort? We really need to form a much more united front. Why do we have so much infighting? The enemy is upon us and beats the drums of heroism—and we? Sometimes one is reminded of what was said by a German scholar.² He compared the Germans to horses. What do they do when

¹ Chosen for heaven.

² Johann Joseph von Görres (1776-1848), German publisher and Catholic lay theologian.

they are attacked? They back into a circle and kick each other! Isn't it a lot like that in the Church? We should really look beyond the trivial and [what is] secondary. At stake today is the whole future of the world! According to the wish and will of its founder, [Jesus Christ,] Christianity is a heroic religion.

Thought question: What are some situations where Christianity is not seen as a heroic religion?

Kinds of heroic deeds

Father Kentenich puts forth the following challenge:

Do you want to hear other expressions to back this up? *If your eye is your problem*—how brutal this sounds! —*gouge it out and throw it away!* (Matthew 5:29; 18:9; Mark 9:47). Or: *You must give up home and farm...* (cf. Matthew 19:29). These are not words for the faint of heart; Christianity demands the ultimate heroism! You will always notice that Christ does not only demand a heroic attitude, but also heroic deeds.

To be sure, we must immediately add that Our Lord is reasonable; he does not demand the highest heroism from all. ...Every person in the street thinks he/she must be a hero overnight. But heroes are not born in a day!

Wise moderation with maximum demands

Father Kentenich continues:

Consider the *wise moderation of Our Lord*. His concept of the universal Church is really a Church of the people. He knows that most people are not heroic and cannot be heroic... Christ is therefore moderate and does not want to quench the smoldering wick (Matthew 12:20).

But on the other hand, we hear *his maximum demands*. Where can we find the golden mean? The way I see it, if we make maximum demands it must always be with an appeal to generosity...

Thought question: Why are the maximum of demands of Christ balanced with an appeal to generosity? (Example of the rich young man with many possessions in Matthew 19:16-22.)

You may versus you must

Father Kentenich then explains that the devil wants to manipulate people, but Christ is different:

Jesus Christ is not seated on his throne. He is with his own! How marvelous an image... *If you want to be perfect...* (Matthew 19:21). [This is] an appeal to our good will. It is a master stroke to govern ... this way - on the one hand firmly demanding what is required, on the other hand appealing to heroism through the *you may*. Whoever finds the golden mean here is a master educator.

Christianity demands heroism, but normally a heroism asking the maximum on the level of *you may*, not *you must*. There are times, of course, when there is no other choice but for the individual Christian to be heroic or lose his relationship with Christ... Under normal circumstances the heroic Christian will be an everyday saint who shapes the simple everyday circumstances of his life with a great spirit of love. But if circumstances change, Our Lord demands ... that we be heroic in professing our faith and in [making] sacrifices. A heroic religion demands outward heroism. (...)

Thought question: How are we being challenged to live Christianity heroically today?

-to be continued in Part Ten-