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# God Will Provide

*How God's Bounty Opened to Saints—  
and 9 Ways It Can Open for You, Too*

**PATRICIA TREECE**

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*God Will Provide: How God's Bounty Opened to Saints—and 9 Ways It Can Open for You, Too*

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*To all who need and want  
Divine Providence  
in their lives*

and

*to God's friend and mine  
Alice Williams  
whose prayers have obtained  
from Divine Providence every kind of grace  
and blessing for me, my family,  
and countless others.*



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## A NOTE TO MY READERS



Don't be afraid to read this if you're not Catholic. The principles are universal and will work for anyone willing to give them a try. If the word *saint* seems strange, call them "God's friends." And yes, some of God's non-Catholic friends turn up here, too.

Because there are some stupendous true stories in these pages, let me assure you: anything involving a saint is taken from the authentic sources as verified by the individual's order, shrine, or my years of research into the individual's life, writings, letters, and the testimonies, often under oath, by those who knew them. The smaller number involving non-saints happened to people of the highest integrity I know personally (except for never having the honor of meeting the late founder of Habitat for Humanity, Millard Fuller) or are events I was involved in myself.

As an example of my sources, the prologue you are about to read was written from the testimony of an eyewitness, a saint's coworker and fellow Capuchin Franciscan. The Capuchin order supplied a copy of the account for my work. However, since copious footnotes scare away some readers, it was decided to put only some sources in footnotes and give others in a section entitled "Sources on the Saints," found at the back of the book. I hope this solution will promote readability for all, while without too much trouble, providing for you who need surety that I have not made up even one of this book's amazing events!





# God Will Provide

The Depths of the Great  
Worldwide Depression of the 1930s  
St. Bonaventure Friary  
Detroit, Michigan

"Father Solanus, Father Solanus!" Father Herman Buss rushes into the porter's office, where his fellow Capuchin<sup>1</sup> has been giving himself totally, as usual, to someone in need. "Sorry," Father Herman says as he brushes past a radiant-faced woman heading out of the office door. "There's nothing to offer the men. Not even a scrap of bread, and we've got two or three hundred waiting for the door to open."

The porter of St. Bonaventure's Friary on Mount Elliott Avenue, Father Solanus, turns serene blue eyes to Father Herman. He nods in understanding. He doesn't say, "Why tell me?" After God himself, the poor and the sick are Solanus' greatest love.

As for the sick, whether in Solanus' three posts in New York, Indiana, or here in Detroit, Michigan, there have been so many "impossible cures" through the smiling, stick-thin Capuchin's prayers that he has been charged with keeping a log of visitors'

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<sup>1</sup> One of three major and many smaller religious Orders that follow Christ via St. Francis of Assisi's spirituality.

prayer requests and the results. He does so gladly, knowing it is God, not he, who heals.

The poor and hungry always turn up at monasteries. Solanus has fed many a man in the friary kitchen—sometimes cheerfully setting his own simple dinner before his unknowing guest. But feeding individually will no longer do. The Depression has brought the desperately hungry out in unprecedented numbers. The Capuchins have opened a soup kitchen—although the standard meal is not soup but a meaty stick-to-your-ribs stew meant to sustain someone eating only once a day. The kitchen is down the block from the friary in a building devoted to Third Order (that is, lay, or non-ordained) Franciscans. Although no one voices this, Father Herman has no doubt that Solanus is the spiritual force behind the kitchen, that in an ongoing miracle is feeding as many as three thousand a day.

Whenever Solanus' job of porter lets him get away, he helps materially as well. This may take the form of a trip out to a farm to pick fruit a farmer offers or to help load free vegetables for those hearty stews. Wisconsin farm-bred, his brown habit's hood slung back, Solanus finds the same stores of energy for throwing sacks of potatoes onto a volunteer driver's truck that he once displayed as part of the Casey brothers' baseball team. In town he pitches the needs of the hungry to butchers, bakers, and anyone with significant food to spare.

But the day has come at last.

In spite of all Father Solanus has done, in spite of all Father Herman, assigned there full time, has done, in spite of all the volunteer lay Franciscans who cook, serve, and themselves donate, have done, the kitchen is out of food.

Father Solanus walks back with anxious Father Herman, who will never forget and later report in writing<sup>2</sup> what happens next. Solanus goes out to the men. He doesn't tell them he is sorry there is nothing to feed them today. He tells them truthfully, "There is no food." Then, even as some—among them men who have not eaten for several days—prepare with despairing faces to turn back toward the street, he says authoritatively in his low voice permanently scarred by childhood diphtheria, "Wait. Just wait. *God will provide.*"

Lined up are men of every stripe—the gamut of Protestants, a sprinkling of Jews, devout Catholics and Catholics in name only, and people who have nothing to do with any kind of religion. Without insistence, Solanus—whose God-given miracles go out as readily to any who ask as to his fellow Catholics—invites them to join him in prayer. Many follow along as he says the *Our Father* with its petition "Give us this day our daily bread."

Barely has the last word left his lips when a man dressed in a bakery uniform seemingly appears out of nowhere, making his way across the line of men with a huge basket of bread. One basket isn't enough for two hundred to three hundred men but no matter: as he passes into the kitchen, his voice floats back saying he's brought a truckload of foodstuffs.

Relieved and overjoyed, some men start to cry, tears glistening on whisker-stubbed cheeks.

Solanus, who sees God do astounding things day after day, says, "See, God provides. Nobody will starve so long as you put your confidence in God, in divine providence."

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<sup>2</sup> Testimony of Father Herman Buss in *Written Reports Concerning Fr. Solanus Casey, OFM., Cap.* June 4, 1984.



## INTRODUCTION



Most of Solanus' listeners on that day of the Great Depression were too sunk in their own sadness or too hungry to draw out from his words any practical personal application. Most who wept did so not because they had been suddenly enlightened by a great truth that would remake their lives but because—amazingly, unexpectedly rescued—they were going to eat after all. Those without faith in supernatural realities may have chortled, "My lucky day," or the well-educated murmured, "A wonderful coincidence." Those with faith, most likely, would have been inclined to ascribe the "miracle" to the prayers of Solanus, obviously, from what had happened, a "holy person" with whom they had nothing in common.

What Solanus longed for others to grasp is the subject of this book: that if you're willing to open yourself to it, this kind of answer to prayer—demonstrated by saints of our time like Venerable<sup>3</sup> Solanus Casey—is available to everyone, including you.

This book, that is written for you with love from God, God's saints, and the author, braids encouraging, authenticated

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<sup>3</sup> Venerable, often shortened before a name to Ven. (similar to shortening Saint to St. and Blessed to Bl.), is the title for those whose heroic virtue has been formally recognized and is an early state of the process toward official sainthood in the Catholic Church. Before heroic virtue is official, candidates are titled Servant of God.

incidents of how God met the financial/material needs of holy people from the so-called modern era (some canonized, some beatified, some on their way, and some just saintly folks whose holiness will never be recognized beyond a limited circle) with ways for *you* to position yourself to receive this kind of help. Called divine providence, it is the caring, providing, needs-fulfilling aspect of God. Each chapter covers a particular aspect of living in divine providence and suggestions, with examples from the saints, for reshaping your attitudes and actions to that end.

Need you become a saint? Let's put it this way: the surest way to receive a truckload of foodstuffs when you need it is to be holy. But I know a fairly large number of people who live by the guidelines in this book as best they can—Catholics, Protestants, Jews, and unchurched—who are not saints but whose lives demonstrate that these principles work. The book will report some of their prayer answers, too.

Living by these principles will lead you unavoidably toward becoming a better and better person. And since that's how one moves toward maximum human fulfillment and a joyous life after death, you could say that what you have here are guidelines for dealing not only with your material/financial needs but with your emotional and spiritual ones, too. In financial terms, you get "two for the price of one"!

CHAPTER *One*

In Life's Dance, Why Not Let  
God—Who Knows All the  
Steps—Lead?

**N**OBODY WOULD STARVE, SOLANUS ASSURED THE HUNGRY, SO long as they had confidence in God.

God wants to provide for everyone. Divine mercies fall like life-giving rain on both the just and the unjust. But if you put up an umbrella of self-sufficiency, anger, or disbelief, God respects your freedom to remain parched and dry.

Still, if you're tired of going it alone and want to live in God's providence, you can turn over your life to God's leadership. If you take a bunch of kids on a picnic, they expect you to provide everything. A life that is turned over to God—even though you'll need to do all the things common sense dictates to help yourself the way the kid has to get ready to go and feed himself—invites the same expectancy.

It's simple: just tell God you *will* to let him lead in life's dance (or captain your ship or guide you on your life journey—whatever metaphor you resonate to). If you turn around and find you're trying to run the show on your own again, don't be surprised. Laugh at yourself, if you can, and start over.

If the idea of God's leadership makes you have to pray, "I trust you. Help me trust you more," that's great, because it's truthful. Being truthful is absolutely essential in forming a real relationship with God, and it's true that trust has to grow in most people.

What if it's worse than that? What if your need for control is so great that giving your life to God is terrifying? If that's true for you, and you are in serious financial or other difficulties, try thinking of it as allowing a firefighter to lead you out of a building collapsing in flames. Or if things aren't that bad, picture yourself in any kind of a house being invited into a much finer, more spacious one. And keep pondering this: God does not want your surrender to enslave you. He wants your surrender to his loving leadership so he can free you from all those ideas, habits, and situations that imprison you—including your terror of losing control. He has no mold either: He loves variety and rejoices in your uniqueness, loving you with a completely unselfish desire for you to become all you can be. Your fulfilled life gives God glory and joy.

### WHO NEEDS TO SURRENDER?

On the other hand, you may think, as a believer, you have no need to surrender. The life of Bl. John XXIII (d. 1963) can shed light on that. The impoverished, peasant sharecropper's son could never remember when he didn't want to be a priest. That his dream meshed with God's desire for his life was obvious when God provided the means through scholarships and gifts.

Still John, *like everyone*, eventually faced an important choice between "my way and thy way." In 1925, long before e-mail, cheap long distance, and other means existed to keep in close touch from afar, jealous people got the popular churchman exiled to remote non-Catholic Bulgaria. The transfer meant burying his gifts, loneliness, and isolation, hostility by the host people who feared and hated Catholics, and leaving behind his beloved family, hardest of all the two unmarried sisters who had lived with him. Named archbishop, which would mean nothing in Bulgaria, John took the motto "Obedience and Peace." He chose surrender to a plan he couldn't understand *and that made him suffer*, ignoring friends who urged repeatedly that he complain. Bishop John spent the next roughly twenty years in Bulgaria, Turkey, and Greece among wily monarchists and their determined Communist assassins, anti-religion republicans, and Fascist or Nazi invaders, and the guerilla movements opposing them. Religiously he worked with unfriendly Orthodox and wary Muslims, plus the imperiled Jews he helped rescue in World War II (he had already worked with Protestants and other non-Catholics as a military chaplain during World War I). Then he served nine years in secularized post-WWII Paris, among atheists, Socialists, and hardheads on both left and right. In a world suddenly shrinking due to new technologies, these experiences formed a man uniquely qualified for the papacy because of his wide understanding of other peoples, cultures, philosophies, and faiths. As for John's personal life, his experiences of God's care led him to dub himself "the son of providence." His wholehearted surrender also made him a saint, as well as one of the happiest, interiorly freest men in history.

Did you grow up with a dream? Often your dream is your dream for a good reason: it's God's desire for you too. Sometimes, on the other hand, God has a bigger, better dream that will bring you a richer life. Another saint exemplifies that. This is her story:

Imagine that you are little Francesca Cabrini, the youngest of a very big Italian family. You have your own unique dream. When you grow up, you are going to be a missionary to China. One day you are enjoying some sweets at a family gathering. To tease you, someone says, "Oh, Francesca, missionary sisters don't eat sweets." You swallow the mouthful with two feelings—a bit of sadness and a lot of determination. If sweets are going to stand between you and your dream, you don't want them. The teaser was only kidding. But you don't know that. You never take another sweet—not just that day, but ever.

Finally you grow up and after many setbacks—foremost that no missionary order will accept you because you are too delicate, too frail—you have become a sister. A priest, seeing that you would not give up your dream and no one would take you, directed you to found your own order. You have named it the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart, because you are crazy about Jesus. You are going to take him to China so the Chinese can bask in his tender love too. Other young women have joined you, and you are ready to go.

And today, unbelievably, you have an audience with the pope himself! But what is this? Can your ears be working? No. No. No. The pope is saying, "Don't go to China. You are needed in New York and Chicago, Seattle and Los Angeles, in the Colorado mining camps and other places where your fellow Italians are

dying without a word of comfort in their own tongue, where they are leaving orphans with no one to care for these children but well-meaning people who can't speak to them in their language and have no special love for—maybe even look down on—our Italian culture and religion. Take Jesus to America. Forget China."

If you cut your beautiful dream into little pieces and throw it away, because you see that what is wanted by the Lord is something other than what you have worked and dreamed toward your entire life, *that* is surrender at the heroic level.

Such a spiritual heroism led American naturalized citizen and patroness of immigrants Mother Francesca Cabrini to sanctity as a canonized saint and took thousands of people with her to holy lives and Heaven: North Americans, South and Central Americans, Europeans, and perhaps—in the divine economy, where things renounced for God can be offered up as prayer for others—a lot of Chinese too.

## ACCEPTING A TWIST ON YOUR DREAM

Another form someone's call to surrender can take is accepting a twist on your dream. In the case of Father Solanus Casey, joy followed accepting a new, humiliating spin on being a priest:

Young Casey's love—after a teenage relationship didn't work out—slowly turned to God, not in bitter disappointment but in awe, wonder, and joy. Having learned to be comfortable with many kinds of people from such jobs as streetcar conductor and prison guard, he heard God's call to use his great ability to love

others in the priesthood. Irish-American, he was permitted by God to have classes in Latin or German. Although he was smart enough, he had no flair for languages, and tackling complex subjects, such as canon law, dogma, and Scripture, in a foreign language proved extremely tough. In the end his unimpressive scholarly attainments led the Capuchins—who recognized his spiritual and interpersonal gifts—to offer ordination but only as a “simplex priest.” This rare type of priesthood denoted that a man didn’t “know enough” to preach on dogma or to hear confessions that sometimes involve complicated moral situations.

Hurt, maybe even indignant, Solanus swallowed his pride and surrendered to God’s twist on the dream plan. Because of these limitations, he couldn’t function fully as a priest, so he was given the lowly job of porter, the man who answers the monastery door. With this second surrender, Solanus was positioned to be God’s instrument for thousands of physical, psycho-spiritual, and moral cures over his lifetime, as seekers of prayer, consolation, healing, financial assistance, food, or other help rang the bell. His life became fuller and fuller in joy as he gave himself away in service to humanity, living out God’s plan for his priesthood. Many times he exulted, “All God’s designs are wonderful for those who have faith.”

Surrender—while it boils down to willingness to trust God’s leadership—has many facets. Hopefully, you’ll soon see more and more the wisdom of surrendering *everything* as much as you can. For example, here and in the next chapter are six additional, specific aspects of surrender with holy examples for each. The

examples are plucked—take me literally here—from thousands of possibilities, since every saint has surrendered to God, either early or late. From them you can preview that by letting him lead, he will be able to do incredible things in your life, awesomely enlarging its possibilities and meeting your needs.

*1. Surrendering to God means giving your goodness to God.*

When you give your goodness to God, you give him your dreams, your talents, your special gifts, including those virtues that come easily to you or that you have acquired with hard work. There are countless gifts—yours might be engineering things or nurturing others, building houses or one of the arts, cooking, working with money or organizing things, or more subtle gifts such as the ability to see another's point of view that makes a mediator or the gift of prayer. Your virtues might include a cheery disposition, moral or physical courage, generosity, warm hospitality, or financial integrity.

One way of trying to let God lead when making decisions about developing and using your goodness is Ignatian discernment originating in the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius Loyola. Ignatian discernment is an effort to recognize what's going on in one's soul based on feelings of consolation (peace, joy, contentment) and desolation (restlessness, anxiety, troubled unease). If considering a possible decision brings not momentary exuberance but ongoing feelings of peace and joy, while there is no absolute guarantee, it probably indicates God's design. Consulting trusted mature Christians who know you, such as your confessor or friends *who truly want what is best for you*, can be another way to find the path God has laid out for your maximum

fulfillment. One way or another God will lead if that is your desire. Take two examples:

A man today titled Bl. Louis Martin dreamed of using his physical prowess, courage, and love of God as a monk in an Order that saved travelers in the high Alps. Sincere efforts in that direction just petered out. His continuing surrender to God led him step-by-step to become a successful businessman instead—not only a maker of fine watches with his own shop but also a successful investor. His desire to save others was fulfilled not only by those he physically saved from drowning, fire, or in wartime, but by his philanthropies, that included saving people who were down and out financially.

Around the same time, Zélie Guerin tried to take her gift of love for God into a convent but was told, "This isn't the life for you." Discerning this was true, she studied and learned a skill—in her case making the luxury good called Alençon lace—becoming a successful businesswoman with a number of employees. Her desires to serve God would be fulfilled not only in the way she treated her employees and those she did business with but in a holy marriage and family. Today, known as Bl. Zélie, the once would-be-nun discovered, "I was born to be a mother."

Although each had initially planned to live celibate lives in religious orders, Louis and Zélie met and married. Their marriage, rooted in God, was hugely successful, in their deep love for each other, that helped each other achieve spiritual greatness, and also as partners in business (eventually Louis closed his to take over the traveling portion of Zélie's), in charitable undertakings, and in parenthood. Had Louis and

Zélie insisted on entering monasteries, they would have never developed their great talents, not just for business, but for marital love and parenting. Themselves beatified saints, this couple became the parents of St. Thérèse of Lisieux and of Servant of God Léonie Martin.

2. *Surrendering to God means giving God all your interior ugliness whether small or large—even those failings and sins still hidden from you—by continually being open to acknowledge imperfections and humbly doing your best to improve.*

What this has to do with divine providence can be summed up as clearing space. Assume that your mental attic is crammed with unforgiveness, envy, resentment, and anger. All that baggage, perhaps accompanied by going over your “he/she done me wrong list” obsessively, can leave little or no room in your mind for reveling in God’s goodness, his love for all (even those you hate), his mercy, and the wonderful way he meets your needs. Maybe under your rug is a trapdoor into sexual obsessions you turn to rather than deal with real relationships. That space could hold a lot of God’s supply if you’d let him help you clean it out. Maybe your vault is so crammed with greed, there’s no room for real riches. You get the picture.

This is not a book on inner healing. So let it suffice to say saints are people who, having surrendered to God, have with divine help cleared out all deliberate sin and the majority of their failings. Above all, they have wrestled into submission the pride- and anger-based trip-ups of good people: *righteous indignation, helpful criticism, justifiable anger, deserved punishment, and other rationalized nastiness.*

The space created is where the saint's heart, mind, and soul bask in God's presence and providence. So the more space you create—and this is a lifelong task—the more room you have for God's providential bounty of every kind.

Okay, so you're willing to accept that, if not a mean bone, there might be a mean sliver in your body. Surely God will not deny your needs by holding you responsible if you don't know you have various little meannesses inside? He won't, but it never hurts to open yourself to the need for repentance and change. To the degree you do that, you will receive from God, just for being open, as if you had already changed a great deal. (Scriptures actually *speak* about this in a parable of those who have done very little work getting paid like those who accomplished a lot because of the Master's generosity—look at Matthew 20:1–16, *The New American Bible*, Saint Joseph Edition.)

### BEING READY TO CHANGE

How do you open yourself to being sorry for wrongs and to being ready to change? Cultivating honesty with God—who knows it all anyway and loves you way more than you do—is a key. In my case, I received the grace to pray, "God show me my faults." Well, the parade has never stopped. But God is as gentle as the best of mothers. He leaves a lot of distance, even years at times, between the revelations. Sometimes a realization arrives like Father Solanus' bakery man—just suddenly there. Other times insight comes through reading about the saints.

For instance, God once got through to me about gossip through reading about the parents of St. John Neumann (d.

1860), who are among the "hidden" saints of the world. Anyone who tried to gossip in the Neumann home quickly had the subject changed by Mrs. Neumann, and any guest who plowed on anyway was not invited back. I finally got it that *all* gossip was wrong, including the kind I excelled in, where you and a close friend talk about someone's faults under the guise of helping them through prayer.

Besides the flash insight or realization through reading, sometimes an area calling for change wells up in prayer. As the big areas get cleaned out, smaller ones come up and old resistances to change fade, seeing how each little bit of progress expands life.

As you ask God for help to live a life with more room for divine providence, remember: perfection is reserved for God alone. Even saints, to protect them from egotism, have imperfections to regret. Canadian Holy Cross Brother St. André Bessette (d. 1937), one of the Church's great instruments of God's healings, suffered fatigue-triggered crankiness, and oversensitivity that imagined censure where none was intended. He made frequent use of Confession, God's gift to those who sincerely want to change. Bl. Louis Martin's successful investments made him aware that, without watchfulness, he could become too caught up in the pleasure of making money. In Servant of God Dorothy Day's interviews with Harvard professor Robert Coles (published as *Dorothy Day: A Radical Devotion*), the founder of the Catholic Worker houses of hospitality is open about many spiritual struggles typical of holy people, among them struggling to serve, as well as to work with, others in a warm comradely, not condescending or indifferent, way, to do good year after year without self-righteousness or pride. In her personal

diaries, edited by Robert Ellsberg as *The Duty of Delight*, Day records such self-criticisms as "I criticize [others while] I justify myself." The solution in her case, she feels—to avoid the implicit sense of superiority—is to consider everyone better than herself. (Obviously this would not be helpful to those with unhealthily low ego strength.)

Acknowledge but do not be lured into over-concentration on your negative traits. Insight into a fault that leads to self-condemnation is not of God. Recognition of faults that is rooted in God leads to real sorrow for them but concentration, with joy, on changing, not self-rejection. (It is God, after all, who asks us to set the bar at how we love our neighbor by how we love ourselves.) To make the process easier, keep your eyes more on the God of love (and if that isn't your concept of God, working on that is a good starting place) and less on yourself while you make more room for providence, through patiently and gently rooting out what slows down or halts the growth of your love of God and neighbor.

### A LIFE-LONG PROCESS

Surrendering your ugly areas is always a lifelong process. When the middle of Zélie and Louis Martin's five daughters brought her outgrown dolls to the younger two, the youngest, Thérèse, put out her arms, crying, "I want them all." The future St. Thérèse of Lisieux gradually outgrew this childish greediness all the way to sanctity. She learned well that it's hard to receive God's bounty if one's hands are full of things

snatched in greed, and that there is no need to be greedy if you live in divine providence. In fact, greed says, "I can't trust God to provide, so I'd better wade into life with both hands and grab my share—and yours too." Yet many of us who sincerely see ourselves as generous—and who *are* generous in many areas—have pockets of unacknowledged greed. These may be as simple as always snatching the biggest cookie, or the largest steak from the grill, stealing time at work for long personal calls, or taking office supplies for family use, or as insidious as wresting the last quarter percent of interest from someone who desperately needs a loan in hard times, or trying, perhaps at a garage sale or visiting an impoverished country to get some obviously poor person to sell you for less something you don't need and can easily afford. People who are basically good may do all these things without thought. But as you more and more desire to surrender, God will gently reveal yourself to you so you can blush and change.

Don't be surprised if God shows you the egotism mixed up with your virtues. For instance, you may *never* take the biggest cookie—and be very proud of that and feel quite superior to the cookie grabbers. Yes, egotism—usually unconsciously in the early stages of surrendering—is often found even in "doing good." I don't mean the egoism that is blatantly opportunistic, such as the man who told my relative that, now that he had his law degree, as part of his strategy for becoming important and wealthy, he was going to join the "best" community philanthropic group and the church of the town's movers and shakers. (Hopefully God laughed and snuck up on him inside the pew he entered only to feather his nest.) I mean the kind

of hidden, subtle ego drives found in even saints-in-the-making. For instance, Ven. Solanus Casey's early desires to be complimented on his sermons or otherwise praised were only gradually overcome as he became aware of these yearnings and realized they were subtle forms of pride. And don't think you'll ever be egoless. The canonized St. Padre Pio said the ego *will* die—about ten minutes after you do. When you get glimpses of your egoism, do what you can to curb its driving your actions and enjoy a healthy rueful laugh at yourself when it does. Then look on the bright side: recognition of mixed motives brings the humility that is a tremendous claim on God's bounty.

In his seminary days, the future Pope John XXIII gained humility by discovering pride, ambition, and other ego elements mixed with his sincere desire to serve God and others, then struggled to give those weaknesses to God. In personal notes collected after his death as *Journal of a Soul*, he noted other realizations as he went through life and new surrenders, as well as gradual spiritual gains over the years in the areas of old conflicts. He acknowledged God's help by writing on the fiftieth anniversary of his ordination, "My merit: God's mercy."

You may find with John, as you work to make room for God and the freedom God brings, that some of the virtues you surrender to God at some point, oddly, need resurrender as weaknesses. For instance, John had a natural tendency to see the best in people and the virtue to never say to anyone else what he wouldn't want said to him. This goodness became a weakness when, as a bishop, he was charged with oversight of other priests. He struggled to do God's will in the matter,

wasn't sure what that was, and finally concluded he'd have to lead by example not by dressing anyone down. A delightfully witty man, he blamed God "for sending Jesus to set me such a bad example."

## LETTING GO OF UNFORGIVENESS AND HATRED

Probably the single biggest barrier to God's providence is deliberate unforgiveness and its partner, hatred, that is held onto and even justified. It's all right, it's virtuous, you may tell yourself—and many of us do the same—to hate terrorists, one political party (or the other), pro-choice adherents (or pro-life, depending on your view)—all those who are "bad." God has sad news if you see life that way: a person or group's political, religious, or other views differing from yours or mine does not make anyone "bad"—being misinformed, as another or an entire group may be (if it isn't you or I who are wrong!), never justifies hate. Even the terrorist cannot be hated—only his actions—because he is a child of God, who loves him. Maybe you can handle that, barely, but if it's an individual such as a family member, maybe an ex-spouse, or someone at your work who treated you badly, it's easy to feel justified in such hateful acts of unforgiveness as trying to get even and attempting to turn others, even children in the case of warring spouses, against your "enemy" as well. Forgiving seems something God would not expect *in this situation*. Well, bad news again: God may join you in hating the evil done to you—forgiving does not mean

putting up with or condoning—but God wants you to forgive the doer of evil so you won't have to carry that terrible burden of hate. Or, as my aunt used to put it picturesquely, "Hate only rusts the vessel it's stored in."

Besides the harm it does to you physically, emotionally, and spiritually, hate ties you to the one you hate until you cut yourself free by forgiveness. If you have fallen into the devilish view that hate makes you powerful, be sure the fortress that hate builds keeps evil in and only bars the door to God, love, and good. It is not hate and unforgiveness but love and forgiveness that armor you against anything life can throw against you.

Let the following brief examples of forgiveness encourage you in the sometimes very hard but critical task of surrendering whatever grudges, resentments, hatreds, or other kinds of unforgiveness might wall you off from receiving all God wants to give you: When a man tried to assassinate St. John Bosco (d. 1888) because of Bosco's success in leading the young to Christ in the Catholic Church, Bosco built a home for his would-be assassin, whose bullet had missed by inches. He did this because "we should do good to our enemies."<sup>4</sup> And he did this work of charity secretly. (To demonstrate how Christians should live, Pope John Paul II, on the other hand, publicly visited *his* would-be assassin to forgive him.)

Oddly enough it may be easier to forgive a hired assassin than a member of one's own family. But Bosco forgave a half-brother

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4 It is not doing someone good to let an individual murder you, of course. The powerfully built Bosco—who used to hammer a nail into the wall with his bare fists to delight the youth he served—any number of times fought off assassins who attacked him up close rather than by a gun fired through a window.

who forced him to become homeless very young to avoid this older kin's cruel abuse and to escape his own potential to sin by angry deeds in reaction. With hands not clenched in angry unforgiveness, but empty to receive, Bosco's life is full of amazing gifts of divine providence, some detailed in this book, to meet his and thousands of others' material needs.

The child later named Bakhita, or "lucky one" (d. 1947), a little girl of the Nubian Dagiu tribe in Darfur, the Sudan, used to look at the sun, moon, and stars and wonder, "Who is the master of these beautiful things?" She felt a great desire to see and honor him. One day the child was kidnapped, forced into chains, and after more cruel treatment, sold into slavery. Among her various masters were still more cruel people. One beat her daily. Another had the slave's breasts and belly decorated by razor, the wounds stuffed with salt so they couldn't close until the desired pattern of scars formed. Eventually she ended up owned by an Italian and was taken to Italy. There she discovered a new master called Jesus, who loved her. Eventually, Bakhita became Sister Josephine in the Canossian Sisters. She was notable for her gratitude to God for his gift of himself and for her great efforts at forgiveness of all who had used her so horribly. Once she said she would kneel before those who tortured her and kiss their hands because everything she had undergone had brought her to know God. As for the torturers' responsibility, she said they didn't act so much from malice as from habit, and she pitied them. Filled with this spirit of forgiveness and love, Bakhita was greatly loved in life and is a saint today.

Pope John XXIII was called a Communist or "Commie sympathizer" by good people filled with hate during the Cold

War. Even some in the Vatican schemed to paint him in ugly colors for the very deeds that saved the world from nuclear war during the Cuban Missile Crisis. John wrote an account for the historical record of one plot against him and on the margin noted, "I forgive and I put it from my mind."

Dutch Carmelite Bl. Titus Brandsma (d. 1942) in Dachau concentration camp forgave the nurse who, with others, was using him as a lab rat during one of the infamous Nazi medical experiments. He set in motion her eventual conversion, giving her his rosary and promising his prayers, before she murdered him with a lethal injection. She testified years later to this in the official inquiry that preceded Brandsma's beatification.

Brandsma was the exception. During WWII fear and hatred were normal reactions to Nazi cruelties. But when the older Dutch woman Betsie ten Boom (d. 1944) was taken apart by the Gestapo and brutalized to make her confess where Jews were hidden in the ten Boom home (he failed), this Dutch Reformed Church member's reaction was quite different. She told her sister Corrie, who rushed in to comfort Betsie when the Nazi left, "Oh, I feel so sorry for him." Betsie was taken to a concentration camp, where she died from the miserable conditions, but she would continue to feel only compassion for those whose spirits were clouded by brutality. To the end she dreamed of rehabilitating such persons—a dream that Corrie, who found forgiveness much harder, would actually bring to life after the war.

A good simple prayer to surrender unforgiveness is: "Lord, you know I have unforgiveness in my heart toward *N*. I don't want this. I *will* to forgive, and I ask you to bless *N*." Forgiveness is an act of the will. Feelings may take a long time, even years, to

fall into line. *Don't let yourself think you haven't forgiven when old feelings well up.* When that happens, simply repeat your prayer and deliberately turn your mind away from those feelings toward higher thoughts—perhaps of one of these saints.