
In Quietness and in Trust -

totally and consistently to God in absolute dependence on Him:

So I ask Thee for the daily strength
To none that ask denied,
And a mind to blend with outward life
While keeping at Thy side,
Content to fill a little space,
If Thou be glorified.

God's enabling grace and strength must be prayed for day by day for without Him we can do literally nothing. And we must ask confidently, without doubting, since we have been promised that what we ask for in the name of Jesus will be given to us, even though in some of our darkest moments this may seem not to be so.

Our most pressing immediate need therefore will be to know how to hold the outward and the inward together, particularly in our times when what we are about is so little understood. We certainly need to ask for 'a mind to blend with outward life', without our falling into sin or compromise, while at the same time we seek to be at one with our God and Father, looking constantly for the guidance of His Spirit in all our necessary commerce with the world. And here once again, as Anna reminds us, it is humility that will be our saving grace – the forgetting of self in the recognition of who we really and truly are, so that in all things God may indeed be glorified.

Only thus can we hope to hold out in the many tensions that confront us all, and only here can we find that true contentment which accepts what is, without useless and energy-consuming protestation, but which yet refuses to sit down under what could, should and must be changed.

'In quietness and in trust shall be your strength.'



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In Quietness and in Trust - the last art of contentment

It is hard sometimes to be at peace in our faith, glad to be who and where we are and sure of who God is and of His unbounded love for us. Somehow it seems especially hard with the world as it is: so much cynicism and blatant mockery of the old certainties on which we have based our lives. Niggling fears creep into our prayers and reflection: just suppose it is all illusion . . .

That is the moment to nip temptation in the bud. It is the moment to recollect, to remember past blessings and assurances, and to claim with St Paul that we know whom we have believed, and are assured that He will keep all that we have committed to Him, and He to us, safe and secure until His last great and glorious day. Nothing can come between ourselves and the love of our God and Father, made openly known to us in Christ Jesus our Lord and Saviour. To go back to the moment of our first consciously remembered "Yes" to God and reclaim it is to know that nothing has, can or will change in our relationship with Him. He is eternal Love. Even out and out sin is no ultimate barrier if we go back, behind it, to the place of our first tryst with our Lord with genuine repentance and the will to change things for the better. He is there with welcoming, open arms.

There we can start off again, with the same confidence and trust we knew in our early days. But in addition we now have the intervening years of experience to enlighten us. Moreover, the old hymns and prayers, many of them now sadly long out of use, the ones we used to sing and say with such fervour, can be taken up again by us, at least in our personal devotions. We shall find that they move us at still greater depth now as we discover new levels of meaning we never dreamt of before. The thoughts and sentiments of those who composed them are grasped more readily since our experience of life allows us to be more in tune. It is all real stuff that applies to me. Anna Laetitia Waring (1820-1910), writing more than a hundred years ago, eloquently but simply expresses something of the quiet confidence in God and His providence that we hark back to with such nostalgia. Never mind the cynics who would call it mere sentimentality. We can know otherwise:

Father I know that all my life
Is portioned out for me,

And the changes that are sure to come
I do not fear to see,
But I ask Thee for a present mind
Intent on pleasing Thee.

Yes, we can quite openly and unashamedly call God our Father, since this is how He is for us just as He always has been. In our younger days we learned that He had a plan for our lives and that everything that happened would be a part of that. Like Anna Laetitia, in moments of fervour, we gave all to God and fearlessly accepted in anticipation whatever might be in store for us in consequence. Now? Perhaps, looking back, we need to repent for our lack of trust at times, our very real doubts and fears in the event of all the changes and chances of life. Possibly we didn't keep to our promise to hold God in mind always with the intention of fulfilling His will moment by moment. If we believe ourselves to have failed here, there is still time and space to change. Anna continues:

I ask Thee for a thoughtful love,
Through constant watching wise
To greet the glad with joyful smiles
And to wipe the weeping eyes,
And a heart at leisure from itself
To soothe and sympathise.

The greatest and supreme commandment is that of love, as St John tells us so frequently – but not any kind of love. Even love can be imprudent and selfishly motivated. The love Anna asks for is Christlike and, as she terms it, 'thoughtful'. It is a wise and prudent love gained through prayerful experience and observation. Such a love knows how to be all things to all people, forgetful of self so that it can rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with the weeping. That is a costly way of living, as Jesus showed us, and we fail a thousand times as we journey through life. How can we begin to achieve it? Anna reminds us – self-forgetfulness again, 'A heart at leisure from itself' – putting resentment, self-pity, grumbling, discontent aside so as to be ready to console others in their distress.

We need, then, to want the things that really matter, to have our wills in the right place, a costly business again:

I would not have the restless will
That hurries to and fro,
Seeking for some great thing to do
Or secret thing to know.

I would be treated as a child
And guided where I go.

Anna knows well enough that in her prayer she is asking for the greatest thing possible, that **God's** will should be done in and through her life, and hence that she should become tractable, willing to be taken by the hand like a little child and led along, by God. Soon enough even a child can become wilful and wayward but there are also those beautiful moments of trust and confidence, simplicity and gentleness – the essence of true humility.

Fulfilling God's will does not therefore mean a spectacular self-aggrandisement, a being applauded by the world at large – doing something great, discovering a new truth – anything like that quickly evaporates, though usually not before it has tumbled us into a prideful self-esteem and God-forgetfulness. A backward glance at our lives can show us only too vividly the comic-tragedy of our pathetic little acts of strutting self-importance. It is in the inevitable fall that follows that we eventually feel the need to grope our way back to God again.

So, whatever turns up in life, through the interaction of God's providential purposes and our own free but sometimes perverted will, the one thing necessary remains – **LOVE**, of God and of neighbour:

Wherever in the world I am,
In whatso'er estate,
I have a fellowship with hearts
To keep and cultivate,
And a work of lowly love to do,
For the Lord on whom I wait.

Life, then, might have taken us to the other side of the world, or the passing years changed the context beyond recognition, yet in the light of eternity nothing has changed nor can it. We may not use the passage of time or any cultural, political or religious changes and developments to excuse us from continuing to fulfil God's law of **LOVE**. We have to cultivate that love, find new ways of expressing it if needs be, all the time keeping *ourselves* in our true and secondary place. Our Lord will always give us the clue and directive if we wait on Him with humility and simplicity of heart, even though we might get bruised, battered and bewildered on the way.

All of this is a task which isn't any easier for us now than it was when we first believed, just as Anna knew equally well – unless, of course, we entrust ourselves