



Rob and Sharla Walsh
Provincial Couple
Teams of Our Lady
emmettwalsh@me.com
503-939-8577

“The giver or the gifts?”

Letter 74

Fr. Henri Caffarel

being present to God; Letters on Prayer

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Frances, thank the Lord who is helping you to pray. The desire for mental prayer, the attention to God that comes so easily during prayer, and the joyous that wells up in you like a living spring, are precious graces. You see, God himself often chooses to teach his children how to pray. In order to make them decide to set out on the path of mental prayer, he comes to their rescue in a manner perceptible to the senses.

It is important to realize that after a while, he will withdraw his graces of initiation. This is so that the soul, once weaned, will go forward in pure faith. The day will come, and perhaps soon, when you will be required to believe in dryness and darkness, what you are now experiencing in fervor and light. Prepare yourself for this new phase. As I read your letters, I sometimes fear that you are clinging more to the gifts than to the Giver. What matters is to be pleasing to God, not to delight in his graces. This is as true of the sensible graces received during mental prayer, as it is of all God's gifts. If they are not used as paths to intimacy with God, they will become enslaving idols.

This language is probably too abstract for a high school girl. An illustration taken from a movie may make my thought clearer to you.

A very poor young peasant couple are living in a cottage. On the wife's birthday, the husband goes to the neighboring town with his meager savings. It's crazy to spend this money—but when one is in love...He brings back a precious package, and quickly hands it to his wife. She is delighted to find a pair of stockings. This is something wonderful for her because, being a poor peasant woman, she has never worn any. She admires them and can't stop turning them over and over, caressing them tenderly. She does not notice that her husband is sad, and turns away as if he were intruding. He comes back, and finds her still completely engrossed with the stockings. Finally, he can't stand it any more and shows his vexation. The young woman understands at

once. She grabs some scissors, and cuts the stockings to pieces. She recoils from anything that can turn her eyes away from her beloved, even for an instant. And she rushes into her husband's arms.

Frances, may the Lord's gifts be an invitation to rush into his arms, and not a temptation to delight in them for their own sake.