PERFECT CONTRITION

A GOLDEN KEY OF HEAVEN

BY

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PREFACE

THIS little work treats of an important truth, one which, however, is too little appreciated by the faithful, and it treats of it in so attractive and instructive a manner that these few pages are more valuable and practical than many volumes.

St. Alphonsus Liguori, among many other little books, wrote one on Prayer, which he called—"The great means of salvation." He desired to see the book in the hands of everyone, because it treated of so important and effective a means for enabling souls to gain Heaven. In a slightly different, but not less true sense, may we call acts of perfect Charity and Contrition the great means of salvation; nay, they are more closely related to the attaining of salvation than prayer alone.

And hence I desire that this little booklet may be in the hands of all—convinced that by the attentive reading of it, and practicing its maxims, the gates of Heaven will be opened to many, very many for whom otherwise they might have been closed forever; and that many more remaining in God's grace, will preserve their right to Heaven, and their eternal happiness will grow and be increased immeasurably. All Christians should
be solidly instructed concerning the extent of the efficacy of an act of perfect Charity and of perfect Contrition. It is a matter of incalculable importance for the time of their own death, and that of others at which they may be present. No one should forget this truth while in health; in time of sickness or in danger of death it is all the more important that the nature of perfect contrition should be clearly and deeply impressed on those who may have forgotten it or who only imperfectly understood it. For this reason I wish this little booklet the widest circulation possible, and I doubt not that it will bear fruit of innumerable graces.

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INTRODUCTION

Dear Reader, the title of this little booklet has, no doubt, excited your curiosity and you wish to know what is meant by "A Golden Key of Heaven." It may be that your suspicions have been aroused, and your pastor may have warned you in his Sunday instructions against superstitious pamphlets and leaflets of prayers found on the sepulchre of our Lord,—miraculous prayers that absolutely guarantee to protect you from sudden death by lightning, drowning, etc., etc. "But" you may think "if the title of this little booklet tells the truth, it suits me exactly. I could make good use of a Key of Heaven, and it is even a golden key which the author holds up before my eyes and so it must be a valuable one; if the key fits and is not counterfeit, it is just the right thing for me."

Yes, my dear friend, the Key of Heaven fits,—it is pure gold, and it is easily handled; it is nothing else than Perfect Contrition. It opens Heaven for you at will, on any day and at any moment, when mortal sin has barred Heaven against you. It may be that the priest, the bearer of the keys of God's mercy cannot be with you in the hour of death, then perfect contrition alone is your last and only
PERFECT CONTRITION

I

What is Perfect Contrition?

Contrition is a sorrow of the soul, a detestation of sin committed, to which is joined the purpose, the sincere determination to lead a better life, and to sin no more.

To be of any avail, Contrition must be interior, that is, it must be in the soul, and not merely be uttered with the lips, without reflection; that would be merely a sorrow of the lips. It is not necessary that this interior contrition should manifest itself outwardly, as for instance, by sighs or tears; these may be signs of contrition, but they are not the essence of contrition. The essence of contrition is in the soul, in the will, which sincerely turns away from sin, and, to God.

Contrition must also be universal; that is, it must include all the sins committed, at least all the mortal sins.

And finally, Contrition must be supernatural. Contrition, like all good things, must come from God, through God's grace, and with the help of God's grace it must produce its effect in the soul. But be not uneasy if you do not feel it, for God certainly will give you the necessary grace if you ask Him for it, if you have a good will, if you are contrite from a right, supernatural motive. If the motive for contrition is derived from nature,
from pure reason for example, if you are sorry only because you must suffer sickness, disgrace, temporal loss, etc., then the contrition is merely natural and worthless; but if the motive for contrition is a doctrine of Faith, for example, if you are sorry because you offended God, deserved hell, purgatory, lost Heaven, etc., then it is true and supernatural contrition. This true and supernatural contrition may be twofold, perfect and imperfect.

What is perfect Contrition? Perfect Contrition is a sorrow which comes from the love of God; imperfect Contrition, or attrition is sorrow which comes from the fear of God. Contrition is perfect if it comes from perfect love of God. Our love of God is perfect when we love God because He is infinitely perfect, beautiful and good in Himself (this we may call love of benevolence), and because He has shown His love and goodness to us in so effective a manner (or love of gratitude). Our love of God is imperfect if we love Him because we hope for some benefit from Him. When our love is imperfect we are thinking principally of the gift; when it is perfect, on the goodness of the giver. In imperfect love it is rather the gift that we love, in perfect love it is the giver that we love not so much for the sake of his gift, as for the love and goodness which are shown in the gift.

Contrition is measured by love. According to this standard our contrition is perfect, if we are sorry for our sins from perfect love of God, from the love of benevolence or gratitude. Our contrition is imperfect if we are sorry for our sins, because we fear God, because by our sins we lose God's reward, Heaven, and deserve God’s punishment, hell or purgatory.

In imperfect contrition, or attrition we think principally of ourselves, of how sin makes us unhappy—according to the doctrines of Faith. In perfect contrition we think principally of God, of His greatness, beauty, love and goodness, of how sin is an injury to Him, yea, how it has caused Him suffering and pain in the work of our salvation. In perfect contrition we desire God's good and not merely our own good. An example will make this clear to you. Peter denied our Saviour: he went forth in the night and wept bitterly. Why does Peter weep? Not because he thinks—"Ah how ashamed I must feel before my fellow Apostles!" His sorrow in that case would have been merely natural and worthless. Nor because he fears that his divine Master will deprive him as he deserves of the apostleship, and of his office of Chief pastor, and will exclude him from His kingdom; for then his contrition would have been true, but imperfect. No, Peter is sorry and weeps for his sin chiefly because he has offended his dear Master, who is so good, holy and worthy of love, and because he has repaid His exceeding love with ingratitude; and thus he had true, perfect contrition.

Have you, my brother, reason, as Peter had, to be sorry for your sins through love,—true, grateful love for God? Oh certainly! You could more easily count the hairs of
your head than the benefits of God. And if I enumerate a few, you may well answer with St. John at the mention of each one: "Let us therefore love God, because God first hath loved us" (1 John iv. 19). How then has God loved you?

"I have loved thee with an everlasting love," He says to you, "therefore have I drawn thee, taking pity on thee" (Jer. xxx. 3). Yes, He has "loved thee with an everlasting love." From eternity while as yet there was no trace of you on earth, He cast His eyes upon you with infinite wisdom and love, and prepared for you a body and soul, Heaven and earth, as a mother's love prepares everything before her child has come into the world. He has given you life and health, and all your natural endowments, and He gives them anew to you every day of your life. By reflections like these, the heathen could come to the knowledge and perfect love of God, how much more you who are a Christian; for you know in quite a different way the love and the goodness of God which you enjoy in a supernatural manner; for God has taken pity on you. When you as well as the whole human race were lost through original sin God gave His Only-Begotten Son, and He, your Saviour, redeemed you by His cruel death on the Cross. He thought of you with heartfelt love when He suffered the terrible agony in the Garden of Olives, the bloody scourging and crowning with thorns, and when He carried His heavy Cross up the long, bitter way of Calvary, and when He shed His blood in unutterable torments on the Cross—He was ever thinking of you with heartfelt love as if you were the only human being on earth. And what follows from this? "Let us therefore love God, because God first hath loved us."

God has drawn you to Himself by Baptism, the first great grace of your life, by the Church whose child you then became. Others are obliged to take trouble and pains to find the true Faith; God in His infinite love gave it to you in infancy. God has drawn you to Himself, and is ever drawing you by the Sacraments which you have received, by the numberless interior and exterior graces whereby He daily overwhelms you, yes, you are, as it were, swimming in a sea of the bounty and love of God! And He will finally crown His love by taking you to Himself in Heaven, and making you eternally happy. What do you owe Him in return? Love for love. "Let us therefore love God, because God first hath loved us."

Now ask yourself the great question: "What return have I made to God for His love and goodness?" Answer. "I have repaid Him with ingratitude and sin!" And are you sorry for this ingratitude? "Yes, certainly." Surely you will now make amends for your past ingratitude by greater love towards your great and loving benefactor? "Yes." Then you have perfect contrition, sorrow arising from the love of God. This repentance, this sorrow from love of God, is called Perfect Contrition.
The Christian has a higher kind of contrition when he loves God because God in Himself is infinitely beautiful, noble, perfect and worthy of love, quite apart from His merciful love for us. A comparison will make this clearer to you.

There are stars so distant that we never see them, and yet they are as great and beautiful and majestic as our sun, which gives us warmth and life. Thus God would be great, and beautiful, and noble, and worthy of love, even if there were no world, and no creation, and if no eye of man had ever seen or perceived that eternal light in heaven, the love of God—He is by Himself, and for Himself, and in Himself the highest, most perfect, and most lovable Good. This is what the expression—in Himself—means which you find in your prayer book or in your act of Contrition.

Then meditate awhile on the steadfast, manifest and attractive love of God as it is clearly shown you in the bitter sufferings of your Saviour.

II

How is an Act of Perfect Contrition Made?

Perfect contrition is a grace, a great grace of the love and mercy of God. You must earnestly ask for this grace, not only when you are preparing yourself for confession, no, the sincere prayer—Lord, give me the grace of true repentance, of true contrition for my sins—must be one of the chief exercises of your spiritual life. And then God's grace will not be wanting provided there is good will on your part.

How can we easily dispose ourselves for contrition?

Place yourself really or in imagination before a crucifix in the church or in your room. Look with pity on the wounds of your Lord, and seriously think for a short time—Who is it that is hanging there and suffering on the Cross? Jesus, my God and Saviour. What is He suffering? The most dreadful pain in His bloodstained body all covered with wounds, and in His soul overwhelmed with sorrow and shame. Why is He suffering so? For the sins of men, and for my sins. (He also in His bitter sufferings thought of me.) He suffered for me, desired to atone for my sins. Thus let the warm saving blood of your Redeemer as it were, trickle down upon you; and with heartfelt love look upon your suffering, crucified Saviour; forget Heaven and hell in the thought of your sins; repent of them because they have been the cause of such suffering to your Saviour; protest that you will never again crucify Him by new sins—and then with heart and lips, slowly and recollectedly repeat your act of Contrition.

An act of Contrition may be made in various forms, and you may express it in
your own words. A few forms of contrition are added to the end of this booklet. I will here give you a simple form of contrition.

Act of Contrition

"O my God, from the bottom of my heart I am sorry for all my sins, because by them I deserve Thy just punishment in this life and in the next, because I have been ungrateful to Thee my greatest Benefactor, and above all because I have offended Thee the Most Perfect and Most Amiable Good, my Saviour who hast died on the Cross for my sins. I am firmly resolved to amend my life, never more to offend Thee and to avoid the occasion of sin."

In this act of Contrition "because" is used three times; each "because" introduces a motive of sorrow, first for imperfect and then for perfect contrition; for it is easier to rise from the imperfect to the perfect, and hence it is well to combine them. In the act it is said:

1. "Because I deserve . . ." This is the motive for imperfect contrition.

2. "Because I have been ungrateful . . ." This motive brings us nearer to perfect contrition; it merges into perfect contrition. The sorrow for having returned with ingratitude the love and goodness of God, moves us to replace the ingratitude by love, and whoever grieves from love for the insult offered to the ignored benefactor has perfect contrition from love of God.

3. "Because I have offended . . ." Here is a motive for perfect contrition resulting from perfect love of God, sorrow for having offended God, the Sovereign, Most Perfect and Most Amiable Good. Moreover we express sorrow for our sins because they have been the cause of the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ, the Man-God, who has loved us even to the death of the Cross.

4. Finally comes the purpose of amendment—"I am firmly resolved . . ."

Perhaps you think perfect contrition is too difficult, and impossible for you, that it is not for ordinary men. Is that true?

III

Is It Difficult to Make an Act of Perfect Contrition?

It is true that more is required for perfect, than for imperfect contrition, the latter alone being necessary for confession. And yet with the grace of God perfect contrition is attainable by all who have the good will; for it is in the will, not in the feeling. Everything depends on whether we have the proper motive for our sorrow, namely because we love our good God above all things, and detest our sins from love; it depends on this, not on the duration or intensity of our sorrow. Perfect contrition is often confounded with a supposed greatest intensity of sorrow; but perfect contrition has degrees and stages, and
it needs not be the highest and the most intense, such as that of St. Peter, St. Mary Magdalen, St. Aloysius and many others. Such contrition is edifying and good, but it is not necessary; a much lower degree of true and perfect contrition effects the forgiveness of sin.

To give you confidence in your ability to make acts of perfect contrition, you must remember that for many thousand years before the time of our Lord, in the Old Law, perfect contrition was the only means whereby men could obtain forgiveness of sins, and enter Heaven. And at the present time there are many millions of heathens and heretics, and all of these who are saved, will be saved only and entirely by perfect contrition; therefore the good God could not have annexed the forgiveness of sin to a very difficult condition, but to one which is possible to all, for—"He wills not the death of the sinner." But if perfect contrition is possible for those who without any fault of theirs live and die far from that fount of grace, the Catholic Church, can it be difficult, Catholic soul, for you who have so many more graces, and are better instructed? I maintain that you often have perfect contrition, without knowing it or thinking of it; for example, while devoutly hearing Mass, while making the Stations of the Cross, while piously contemplating a crucifix or a picture of the Sacred Heart, while listening to a sermon, and so forth. Furthermore, you can often express the most ardent love and the most heartfelt sorrow in a few words, provided you have the proper intention and motive, namely, the love of God. For example by the ejaculatory prayers: "My God and my All!" "O my Jesus, mercy!" "O my God, I love Thee above all things!" "God be merciful to me, a sinner!" "Jesus, I live for Thee!"

My God, with all my heart I love but Thee, And this the keenest anguish causes me. That I've offended Thee, my greatest Good! Oh wholly cleanse me in Thy precious Blood!

Finally, perfect contrition cannot be beyond our reach, because God has given it the power to produce such excellent effects; therefore He desires us to excite ourselves to it, and He will help us to do so.

What are these effects?

IV

What Are the Effects of Perfect Contrition?

Exceedingly great! It always and immediately produces in the sinner forgiveness of sins before he has confessed them in the sacrament of Penance (but he must have the intention of confessing them later, for this intention is necessarily included in perfect contrition); and perfect contrition produces this effect not merely in danger of death, but whenever it is excited in the heart.
sinner therefore obtains the remission of the punishment of hell, from being an enemy he becomes a child of God, and an heir of Heaven, and his former merits revive.

In the just man, perfect contrition secures and increases the state of grace, remits venial sins of which he repents in the act of contrition. It also remits the punishment due to sin, secures and strengthens the soul in the true and steadfast love of God. This is the great miracle of the love and mercy of God which He works in the Christian soul through perfect contrition.

These effects of perfect contrition are so great, that they might appear to you incredible. You have heard that a person should make an act of contrition in danger of death, but as you may think it scarcely possible that perfect contrition works such divine wonders in health and at all times, we will see whether this statement is true and can be proven. Yes, the truth about perfect contrition is as firmly established as the rock on which the Church is built, and as the Word of God.

In the general Council of Trent (Sess. XIV, c. 4), the Church has placed in clear and unmistakable light the most important dogmas of faith which were always taught in the Church. This great Council teaches: "Perfect contrition, contrition from love of God, justifies man and reconciles him with God even before the reception of the sacrament of Penance." And perfect contrition does that always; for the Council says nothing of doing it only in case of necessity and in danger of death. And the Church bases her doctrine on the word and teaching of Christ, when for instance He says: "If any man love Me (and he does this who has true contrition in his heart), My Father will love him, and we will come to him and will make our abode with him (John xiv. 23). But that God may dwell in him, his sins must be blotted out; and thus perfect contrition, sorrow from love, effects this. The infallible Church has always taught the same doctrine, and when the heretic, Baius, taught otherwise, his teaching was definitely condemned by the Church.

The Fathers and theologians without exception teach the same truth. Reason tells us the same. For it, as has been said, in the Old Law which was a Law of fear, perfect contrition produced such great effects, how much more must this be the case in the New Law, which is a Law of love. But now you may say: If perfect contrition remits sin, why go to confession?

It is true that perfect contrition effects what the sacrament of Penance effects, namely the forgiveness of sin; but it does not produce this effect independently of the sacrament of Penance. The sinner must have the intention of confessing the sins forgiven by perfect contrition; at least all mortal sins must be confessed; for so it has been ordained by Christ, and His ordinance cannot be changed. Should any one refuse to confess the sins already forgiven by perfect contrition, these sins, it is true, would not be re-
vived, but the sinner would lose the state of grace, because he is unwilling to fulfill the bounden duty of confession. Must we, after making an act of contrition for sins committed, confess them as soon as possible?

It is not strictly necessary, but advisable and most earnestly to be recommended, because then you are more certain of having obtained forgiveness, and because the sacrament of Penance confers other great graces, called actual sacramental graces.

A wicked thought might easily occur to one who knows what perfect contrition and its effects are. "If the forgiveness of sin can be so easily obtained by means of perfect contrition, I need not go to confession so often, nay, I may sin as much as I like for I can always elicit an act of contrition afterwards. Isn't this true?"

No, it is not true; for he who thinks thus certainly has no perfect contrition; for he does not love God above all things, he does not wish to break entirely with mortal sin, he is not earnest about amending his life, which is as necessary for perfect contrition as for confession; in short, he is wanting in good will, and therefore he will be without the grace of God which is absolutely necessary for perfect contrition. He cannot deceive God even if he deceives himself; for he who has perfect contrition, is firmly resolved to avoid mortal sin, he will be more eager than ever to receive the sacraments, he will strive with God's grace to free himself more and more from sin, so that he may always be a child of God. Perfect contrition is an excellent means of assistance for such as faithfully and honestly strive to gain, and to remain in the state of grace, especially for habitual sinners, who have a good will, but in consequence of former transgressions fall occasionally into their former sins, but it is no help for such as hope to be able to sin the more fearlessly. These convert the precious heavenly remedy of perfect contrition into a hellish poison. Therefore be not perverse, and do not allow the precious grace of perfect contrition, the great means of good, to become for you a means of evil.

V

Why Is Perfect Contrition so Important, not to Say Necessary?

It is important in life and in death.

1. It is important in life.

How precious is the state of grace! Sanctifying grace is not only the ornament of the soul, but it penetrates its whole being and makes it a new creature, a child of God and an heir of Heaven. Sanctifying grace is the magician's wand which changes all to gold, to the gold of heavenly merit.

How sad, on the contrary, is the condition of the Christian who continues to live in a state of sin. All his actions, all his prayers and good works remain without reward for
eternity. He is an enemy of God, and when he dies, his soul goes to hell. For this reason the state of grace is so very important and necessary for the Christian.

The Christian who has had the misfortune of losing sanctifying grace recovers it chiefly in two ways:

a. Through confession.
b. Through perfect contrition.

Confession is the proper and ordinary means of regaining sanctifying grace. But this means is not always at hand, therefore God in His goodness has given us an extraordinary means, and this is perfect contrition.

Imagine that you have had the great misfortune to commit mortal sin; and when the turmoil of the day is over, your conscience reproaches you and you feel remorse. It is impossible to go to confession; what is to be done? God places into your hand the golden key which opens Heaven for you; be sorry for your sin out of true love for God, promise Him sincerely never to commit it again, and resolve to go to confession as soon as you will have the opportunity; then you may hope that you are again reconciled to God, and you may lie down in peace. How sad, however, is the condition of a poor Christian who does not know about perfect contrition, and does not make use of it. He lies down and gets up with mortal sin in his soul, he continues to live in his sad condition for two, three, or four months, even until his next confession. Thus it may be for years, that the almost constant spiritual night of mortal sin is interrupted only by short intervals of the sunlight of the grace of God after each confession. How sad is the state of this person, almost always in mortal sin, an enemy of God, without merit for Heaven, in danger of eternal damnation!

Moreover if the Christian is conscious of grievous, unforgiven sin before the reception of a sacrament, for example, of Confirmation or Matrimony, he can make himself worthy of its reception by making an act of perfect contrition. Only before Holy Communion, an act of contrition would not suffice, it is then of obligation first to go to confession. But the practice of making frequent acts of perfect contrition is important for the Christian even in a state of grace.

First of all, we are not quite certain whether we are in the state of sanctifying grace. The certainty is increased by every act of true and perfect contrition.

Again, how often is the Christian in doubt whether he has yielded to some temptation; this uncertainty cripples all joyful activity in the service of God. What should he do? Examine whether consent has been given or not? That would be fruitless. Make an act of perfect contrition, and he will be secure.

But supposing we had all possible certainty of being in the state of grace, even then perfect contrition would be most precious, because grace in the soul is increased by every act of perfect Charity and Contrition, and an increase of a degree of grace is worth more than all the riches of the world.
By every act of perfect Charity and Contrition venial sins and imperfections, which are the stains of the soul, are forgiven, and the soul becomes ever more beautiful before God.

By every act of perfect Charity and Contrition temporal punishment due to sin is remitted. Think of Mary Magdalen, of whom our Lord said: "Many sins are forgiven her because she hath loved much" (Luke vii. 47). In this connection we highly prize indulgences, good works, alms-deeds, and justly so; but here is something even better, here is Charity, the Queen of Virtues.

Finally, every act of perfect Charity and Contrition confirms the Christian ever more in good, he becomes stronger to resist evil, so that he may hope for the great grace of final perseverance.

2. Perfect contrition is important in life, but especially so in death, or in sudden danger of death.

During a great fire in a town the lives of hundreds of persons were endangered. In the midst of a heap of moaning people, a child of twelve years knelt down and began to recite aloud an act of contrition, briefly explaining why he did so, and asking them to make it aloud with him, and thus perhaps many of the dying were saved forever.

You are continually exposed to many dangers and you may meet with an accident when least expecting it. Railroad accidents, death from injuries received by fire, electricity, street cars, and in other ways, too numerous to mention, are of daily occurrence. Having met with one of these accidents, you may be carried dying into the house, and people may run for the priest; but before the priest can come it is too late, and you need him so badly! What can be done? Interiorly make an act of true contrition, of contrition from a grateful love towards God, towards your suffering Saviour, and you will be saved forever, then will perfect contrition be for you a key to Heaven at the last moment, in the last great need of body and soul.

I do not say this that any one may sin presumptuously by trusting in perfect contrition at the last moment, for it is very doubtful if any one guilty of such abuse of grace will be in a proper disposition to make an act of perfect contrition. What was said above of the great benefit of perfect contrition, pertains to persons of good will.

But in case of an accident, when no priest can be had, will there be time for an act of perfect contrition? With God's assistance, yes—for it does not require much time to make an act of perfect contrition, especially if one has been accustomed to make it frequently while in health; the soul can form and finish it in an instant. In such extraordinary cases the grace of God is more efficacious, and the mind quicker. At the awful time of death a moment seems as long as hours do now. I will prove this to you from my own experience.

For I was once in great and terrible danger
of death, it lasted scarcely eight or ten seconds. But in that short time I could, and did think of much; my whole past life and what would happen after my death, flashed through my mind in an instant. But may God be thanked, it was fortunately decreed that I should live, or I should not have been able to write for you the Golden Key of Heaven. The first thought that occurred to me in those dreadful moments, was what the catechism teaches is the duty of every Christian in danger of death, namely, a cry of sorrow and a prayer to God for contrition. This was my experience, and perhaps it was this that first taught me the value and esteem of perfect contrition, and that I now seek as much as possible to spread the knowledge and esteem of it among others.

But the compassion which you have for your own soul in danger of death, you must also have for your fellow Christians in similar cases. How foolishly do people often act at such a time! They run to and fro, stand about lamenting, yell to one another, run for the doctor, for the priest, for water, for any remedy, while the dying person is nearing his last moments,—and perhaps there is no one that thinks of his immortal soul, to use the few precious moments remaining in trying to save it by repeating the act of perfect contrition. In such a case, go quietly and gently to the sick and dying person; place the crucifix before his eyes when that can be done; ask him in a low voice to direct his thought to what you are saying, and to pray with you; repeat to him slowly and distinctly the act of contrition, even if he seems to hear and understand nothing. Thus you will have performed a great act of Charity, and the dying person will thank you for it eternally in Heaven. You can, in this way, assist even a dying person who is not a Catholic. Without speaking to him of confession, make with him an act of the love of God, of the love of our crucified Saviour, and then repeat to him slowly the act of Contrition.

VI

When Must We Make an Act of Perfect Contrition?

1. If you have thus far followed me willingly and faithfully, I may present myself to you, dear reader, and hand in hand, may frankly, sincerely and earnestly request you to do God and your own soul a favor by devoutly making an act of contrition every night in your night prayers. As there is no perfect morning prayer without a good intention, so there is no perfect night prayer without the examination of conscience and an act of contrition. It is certainly no sin to omit it; but it is a good advice which I am giving you. "Examination of conscience and an act of contrition at night," you say, "that may be very well for the religious and the perfect, but it is not for such as I, who have no time for it, and am too tired at night."
Indeed! How long do you think it takes? Half-an-hour? No. A quarter of an hour? No, it may be done in a few minutes. Listen: You say your night prayers every night, I suppose. Think then for a few seconds of the faults and sins of the past day, and before the crucifix, slowly and attentively make an act of contrition. Then you may rest in peace. By saying your night prayers you said, as it were, to God “Good night, Father,” and by mercifully forgiving you your sins God answers “Good night, child.” What do you now think? Do this in future, and you will not regret it in eternity.

2. If at any time you should have the misfortune of committing mortal sin, do not remain in that wretched state, but immediately rise from it by making an act of perfect contrition. Arise in that same hour, or at least when you say your night prayers, and do not delay your confession too long.

3. Finally, dear Christian soul, sooner or later you must die. Should sudden death overtake you, which I sincerely hope will not be the case, you now know where the Golden Key of Heaven is to be found. Quickly raise your heart to God in heartfelt, perfect contrition. By the good and frequent use of it during life, you will have time, grace, and will to make your act of perfect contrition, and perfect contrition will save you.

4. If, however, you are prepared for the journey to eternity before death overtakes you, then let your last conscious act here on earth be one of heartfelt love towards God your Creator, your Saviour and Benefactor; let it be an act of perfect contrition for the sins of your whole life. Then you may cast yourself into the arms of a forgiving God, and may God be to you a merciful Judge!

Now, dear reader, I bid you farewell. Practice what you have read in this booklet. Love and practice perfect Contrition, this grand means of grace which the mercy of God gives you to rise from mortal sin at any moment, and not only in danger of death. This easy means which profits you so much, this last means which, in case of need, alone can save your soul, and rest assured perfect Contrition will be to you a source of grace in life and in death,—a true Golden Key of Heaven.

Various Acts of Contrition

I

O my God, I am sorry that I have sinned against Thee, for Thou art so good: I will never sin again. Oh! pardon me, and help me with Thy grace.

II

O merciful God, I have sinned! I am no longer worthy to be called Thy child. Thou hatest sin; I have loved it. Thou punishest sin severely; I have despised Thy punishment. Thou hast always been so good to me,
and I have offended Thee. Thou hast suffered so much for me, and I have grieved Thee.—Ah, I am sorry and it grieves me to have been so ungrateful. Pardon me, O best of Fathers, and accept me again as Thy child. I love Thee with all my heart, and I will never more offend Thee.

III

O my God, from the bottom of my heart I am sorry for all my sins; not only because by them I have rendered myself unworthy of Thy grace, and liable to Thy just punishment in this life and in the next, but especially because I have offended Thee, the Sovereign, Most Perfect, and Most Amiable Good, whom I now love above all things. I hate and detest all my sins, and am firmly resolved never more to offend Thee, my most amiable God, and carefully to avoid the occasion of sin.

IV

O my God! I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee, and I detest all my sins, because I dread the loss of Heaven and the pains of hell, but most of all because they offend Thee, my God, who art all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of Thy grace, to confess my sins, to do penance, to amend my life. Amen.

V

O my Lord and my God, I have now examined my conscience. Ah, how many grievous sins have I again committed. How many times have I offended Thee! What would have become of me, had I died without confession? I might not have been saved, nor have entered Heaven; I might even now be in hell, burning forever in that pool of fire, with the devils and the damned. When I consider that Thou hast cast the angels out of Heaven on account of one sin, and that by sin the brightest angels became hideous devils,—what would I have deserved for my numerous sins! Now I am sorry for having committed them, still more so when I see Thee, O my Jesus, hanging on the Cross. There I see Thy hands and feet pierced by nails, there I see Thee crowned with thorns and covered with wounds and blood. Who hast nailed Thee to the Cross, and why dost Thou die suffering these great torments? Ah, this is caused by sin, and by my sins also. But behold me now, O Jesus, truly sorry for having sinned. I will no more crucify Thee by my sins. No, O my God, never more. Thou art, indeed, my greatest Benefactor. Out of pure love hast Thou done everything for me, and hast given me all I have: life and health, food and clothing, my good parents and my Guardian Angel. Thee alone must I thank that I am not a heathen, but a child of the holy Catholic Church. Instead of loving Thee more for these manifold blessings, I have been ungrateful and have
grievously offended Thee, O best of fathers. I am now sorry from the bottom of my heart, and wish sincerely that I had never sinned. I am truly and really sorry for having so often offended Thee, my best and most loving Father, whom I should have loved above all things. I detest all my sins and firmly resolve to amend my life and to become again Thy good and obedient child. I earnestly pray for Thy holy grace, that I may accomplish this good resolution. Amen. Our Father. Hail Mary.

**Prayer of St. Francis Xavier**

O God, I love Thee—only Thee—
Nor love Thee that I saved may be,
Nor that I know who love not Thee
Shall burn in hell eternally.
Thou, Thou, my Jesus, on the tree
With outspread arms embracedst me,
For me didst feel the nails, the spear,
For me didst suffer shame and fear,
And pains and torments manifold,
A sweat of blood, with griefs untold,
Nay death itself—and all for me,
A sinner vile as vile can be.
Why then, sweet Jesus, love not Thee
Who loveth me so tenderly?
Not that I may Thy glory see,
Nor hell's eternal tortures flee,
Nor any way rewarded be,
But only as Thou hast loved me,
So love I now, and will love Thee,
Only because Thou art my King,
And Thou the God of every thing.