

## Letter XII (To one living in the world)

Downside Abbey  
Stratton on the Fosse  
Nr Bath

April 11, 1927

My dear....

As to advice, I can only tell you what I think.

I recommend you prayer, because it is good for everybody, and our Lord tells us to pray. As to method, do what you can do, and what suits you. It seems obvious that the spiritual reading and meditation fails to help you; and the simplest kind of prayer is best. So use that.

But prayer, in the sense of union with God, is the most crucifying thing there is. One must do it for God's sake; but one will not get any satisfaction out of it, in the sense of feeling "I am good at prayer", "I have an infallible method". That would be disastrous, since what we learn is precisely our own weakness, powerlessness, unworthiness. Nor ought one to expect "a sense of the reality of the supernatural" of which you speak. And one should wish for no prayer, except precisely the prayer that God gives us—probably very distracted and unsatisfactory in every way!

On the other hand, the only way to pray is to pray; and the way to pray is to pray much. If one has no time for this, then one must at least pray regularly. But the less one prays, the worse it goes. And if circumstances do not permit even regularity, then one must put up with the fact that when one does try to pray, one can't pray – and our prayer will probably consist of telling this to God.

As to beginning afresh, or where you left off, I don't think you have any choice! You simply have to begin where you find yourself. Make any acts you want to make and feel you ought to make; but do not force yourself into *feelings* of any kind.

You say very naturally that you do not know what to do if you have a quarter of an hour alone in Church. Yes, I suspect the only thing to do is to shut out the Church and everything else, and just give yourself to God and beg Him to have mercy on you, and offer Him all your distractions.

As to religious matters being "confused and overwhelming", I daresay they may remain so—in a sense—, but if you have the right simple relation to God by prayer, you have got into the centre of the wheel, where the revolving does not matter. We can't get rid of the worries of this world, or of the questionings of the intellect; but we can laugh at and despise them so far as they are worries.

Ever yours affectly,  
H. John Chapman