

Confident Trust

BY LANI BOGART

“We are called to an impossible mission.
We, who are prone to sin, we who constantly
fail to love, are called to the heights of holiness.
And we have no hope of reaching those heights except
by abandoning ourselves completely to God’s mercy.”



“**Y**ES, ‘TIS SWEET TO TRUST IN JESUS, / just from sin and self to
cease, / just from Jesus simply taking / life and rest, and joy
and peace.”¹ These lyrics, sung repeatedly in my youth, planted in
my heart seeds of longing to trust Jesus, to hear his voice, to take
him at his word, to be confident that he speaks to me. So far, the
journey has consisted of trudging through miles of the mud of
my doubts and renewed resolves, punctuated by joyful epiphanies
and triumphs. I also look back on humiliating defeats from
which, paradoxically, my trust in God’s love and mercy grew more
confident than I once imagined possible.

¹ “‘Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus,” Louisa M. R. Stead (1882), full lyrics and music
available at https://hymnary.org/text/tis_so_sweet_to_trust_in_jesus_just_to.

I was still a child when I began to conceive of growth in holiness as something like a self-improvement project, with the



goal of eliminating vice and growing in virtue. If something went wrong, I'd ask myself where I messed up and make a resolve to do better next time. If I had a nightmare, I'd chastise myself for not praying before I went to sleep. This "be good, and God will bless you"

approach to my relationship with God kept me on the straight and narrow in my youth and followed me into adulthood.

Although I could quote Scripture, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you; it is the gift of God; it is not from works, so no one may boast" (Eph 2:8–9), shadows obscured my view of the heart of the Father. So, I tried repeatedly to prove my love for him. I worried whether I was pleasing God rather than simply receiving his love for me. Thankfully, Jesus, our Good Shepherd, comes to our aid even when we've lost our way (see Lk 15:3–7).

Sacramental Graces Aid Trust

Soon after becoming Catholic, I discovered that God is a communion of persons who created man and woman to image him, the Holy Trinity. He always takes the initiative in our relationship with him. At our baptism, Christ pours into us the supernatural virtues of faith, hope, and love. With each Holy Communion we are fortified, especially in the virtue of charity, which is the very essence of the Trinity, for "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8). Always ready to draw near, Jesus comes into our bodies and souls, strengthening our trust and confidence in him. "The principal fruit of receiving the Eucharist in Holy Communion

is an intimate union with Christ Jesus” (CCC 1391). How could such intimacy not increase trust? We naturally trust those with whom we are most intimate.

Conversely, when intimacy wanes, doubts and fears find a way into our minds and hearts, weakening our trust. The same is true in our relationship with God. We may withdraw from intimacy with him, perhaps by prioritizing other interests over Mass or adoration. Or maybe it’s more subtle. Where once we were quick to obey every little prompting of the Holy Spirit, we may ignore the “still small voice” (1 Kgs 19:12). Each little withdrawal erodes intimacy, damaging trust until we wonder if God really hears our prayers. The flame of intimacy that once burned strong is diminished.

But Christ gives us a sure remedy to rekindle our flame of intimacy, renewing our trust. Along with the Eucharist, the healing sacraments of Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick are guaranteed encounters with Christ in which trust is restored. As the words of absolution ring in our ears, we know Christ’s love anew and begin again on the path to holiness.

We naturally trust those with whom we are most intimate.

St. Thérèse’s Theology of Childlike Confidence

In his book *I Believe in Love*, Fr. Jean D’Elbée writes of St. Thérèse of Lisieux’s teaching that when we humbly turn to Jesus in our misery, weakness, and littleness, he cannot resist coming to our aid. “The elevator which must raise me to the heavens is Your arms, O Jesus! For that I do not need to grow; on the contrary I must necessarily remain small, become smaller and smaller.”² After extolling St. Thérèse’s theology, Fr. Jean adds, “What I cannot do myself Jesus will do. He will take me and lift me up to

² St. Thérèse of Lisieux, *Manuscripts autobiographiques*, 244, quoted in Jean C. J. D’Elbée, *I Believe in Love: A Personal Retreat Based on the Teaching of St. Thérèse of Lisieux*, trans. Marilyn Teichert and Madeleine Stebbins (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 2001), 28.

the summit of the mountain of perfection, to the summit of the mountain of love.”³ That is amazing trust! Thérèse believed God would make her a saint, and he did!

Having heard St. Thérèse’s elevator analogy before, it may be tempting to dismiss it with a cursory glance. “I know, I know,” we might say, “we must humble ourselves and ask for God’s help.” But this misses the point of what our saint friend, fondly known as the Little Flower, wants us to grasp. We are called to an impossible mission. We, who are prone to sin, we who constantly fail to love, are called to the heights of holiness. And we have no hope of reaching those heights except by abandoning ourselves completely to God’s mercy.

What if we go to Confession, yet return to the same sin again and again? What if we repeatedly fail to act on our resolutions? What if our will is weak or we’re not sure what we want? Maybe the struggle has not been weeks or months, but years or decades. We can be assured, even if hopelessness threatens, that God has not abandoned us. We can boldly trust that, if we confide in Christ, he will make us holy. There is no such thing as too much confidence in God’s love. Aware of the gravity of sins committed, along with the fact that St. Thérèse lived a life of exemplary holiness, some might object that God’s mercy was for her, but not for them. She foresaw such objections when she compared the worst possible sins to a drop of water in the furnace of God’s merciful love.⁴

Another Saint’s Insistence on Trust

Author Brennan Manning recounts the story of ethicist John Kavanaugh, who volunteered in Calcutta at the “house of the dying.” While he was there, he met Mother Teresa, who asked him what he would like her to pray for. When he said he wanted her prayers for clarity, she refused—saying his insistence on clarity

3 D’Elbée, *I Believe in Love*, 28.

4 Ibid.

was what he most needed to let go. Instead, she promised to pray for him to trust.⁵

Could God be Less Trustworthy than Earthly Parents?

When our 18-month-old granddaughter falls, her cries and outstretched arms melt the heart of her father, who rushes to her aid. If she refuses her father's consolations in favor of her mother, he is not offended in the slightest and places her safely and tenderly into her mother's arms. If, in another scenario, she cannot have what she wants and her cries escalate to a tantrum, one or both of her parents remain with her until she is calm and

There is no such thing as too much confidence in God's love.

ready to receive their love. It's unthinkable that God is less patient, kind, and loving toward us than a mother and

father are toward a small child. He will do whatever it takes to come to our aid and to provide everything we need to become the saints he created us to be. How he longs for us to trust him!

Acknowledging God's Indwelling Presence

We tend to forget that God is not far off but dwells inside us. A simple but powerful practice to strengthen our trust in God is to frequently call to mind that he is here with us. Our bodies are, according to St. Paul, temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19). Why is it that we are more likely to remember this when we feel ashamed of actions that may defile the temple? While admitting and confessing our sins is necessary, it's salutary to shift the focus away from a host of temptations and possible failures toward the truth that God himself is within us, empowering us to reject the bad and choose the good. We are not alone. He is with us.

5 Brennan Manning, *Ruthless Trust: The Ragamuffin's Path to God* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2000), 5.

What's more, "we have the mind of Christ" (1 Cor 2:16). When we remember this, we can confidently go forward, completely overcoming the lie that we are alone, unwanted, or estranged. A quick and easy way to acknowledge God's presence is to make a reverent Sign of the Cross, remembering that it's a sign of God's love for us. This practice has given me courage in some of life's most difficult situations. It's a practice worth cultivating.

Confident trust in Jesus frees us to be more fully present to those God sends our way. It allows us to detach from our own expectations and make space for the Holy Spirit to work in and through us moment by moment.

Lani Bogart (M.A. Theology) writes from Houston, TX, where she and her deacon/carpenter husband daily practice trusting Jesus with everything.

Art Credit: Pixabay.com by Andi Graf.