

CLASSIC WISDOM COLLECTION

# Inner Peace

WISDOM FROM

Jean-Pierre de Caussade

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*With gratitude to  
Harold and Adelaide Steffes  
and Mary and Jack Schuler  
for teaching me  
the beauty of a life  
lived in peace*





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## Foreword

Jean-Pierre de Caussade found me when I was 23. Twenty-four months before, I had been visited by a stroke. In the space of a day, my early adult years, so full of promise, were filled with dark and confusing cloud formations that cast their long shadows across my mind and heart. One day I could do whatever I set my mind to, the next I needed help with everything. One day I could express myself clearly with a broad vocabulary, the next I could only mumble and couldn't recall even the most basic words. One day I was in charge, the next . . . I guess that was the main question: Was anyone in charge? Did anyone really know what was happening to me? Did anyone care? Was this all a punishment? Would I recover? What would the rest of my life be like?

Questions, worries, and fears swept away the balmy days following my religious profession a year before. In the middle of the storm that raged in my thoughts and desires came the voice of calm and promise, the voice of Jean-Pierre de Caussade. Next to me, as I write these words is my first copy of his book *Abandonment to Divine Providence*.<sup>1</sup> It still looks almost brand new, so carefully have I preserved this book, which became a lifeline for me. Only the frayed edges along the backbone and the \$3.50 price marked on the top right-hand corner betray its almost thirty years of age. Those were the days of simple covers, so nothing spectacular would have drawn me to pick up the book. I can explain the attraction only as Caussade seeking me out and God reaching down to me in my confusion and tears.

I remember those first months after my discovery. How I treasured this book. The sentence at the end of the first section was for me like the first rays of sun streaming through the thunder clouds after an angry storm: “[Mary’s] spirit, transported with joy, looked upon all that she had to do or to suffer at each moment as the gift of him who fills with good things the hearts of those who hunger and thirst for him alone, and have no desire for created things.”<sup>2</sup> *Transported with joy . . . gifts . . . good things. . . .* Every morning before I went to chapel I stopped and read another paragraph, and for the past

twenty odd years I haven't stopped sitting before this man, who has become my mentor.

The stroke was neither the first nor the last "gift" I have received in my life that I have found difficult to call "good." There have been others, as there are in every adult life. When my mind is swirling with plans, worries, analyses, discouragement—in a word, non-peace—I always look on my bookshelf for this little book by Caussade. It has also led others with whom I have shared his teaching to great peace of mind.

I must confess that problems and pains still catch me off guard; world and ecclesial situations disappoint and disillusion me, and I become stressed and exhausted. At these times, I lose my peace of mind. However, I know where to go to restore my inner peace. I pick up my copy of *Abandonment* and touch once again the abyss of peace and contentment with God, whose divine action I can see revealed everywhere in me and around me.



Who was Jean-Pierre de Caussade? He was born in 1675 and died in 1751. We know he entered the Jesuit novitiate in 1693. We know from that point on where he was assigned as a Jesuit, but his personal story remains shrouded in history. There were many great spiritual

writers of that period. He was not one of them. However, his writings gained popularity in the twentieth century. In fact, he never knew he wrote the book *Abandonment to Divine Providence*.

In 1729, Caussade arrived in Nancy, in the Lorraine province of France, and became director of the Visitation nuns. He remained there just a year, and then returned there in 1733 for a nearly six-year stay before being transferred again. The superiors of the Visitation monastery carefully preserved the letters and conferences that he gave the nuns at Nancy. In the 1800s, they gave these letters to a learned French Jesuit, Father Henri Ramière, who, in 1861, edited them and published a small volume. The book at once found many readers, and with each new edition Ramière incorporated new material. It has been translated into many languages and published in many editions under different names.

Caussade's spiritual doctrine is so simple, and so clear is his vision of God's activity in his life, you can summarize it in only a few words: *trustful surrender in every duty and event, for in them God is secretly at work for your good*. To every doubt, trouble, desolation, and trial the nuns at Nancy shared with him, he applied this same solution but with perfect tact to the needs and state of each of them. What a treasure is ours to leaf through the letters and read the practical yet profound way he leads each person

to inner peace and complete trust in God. Step by step, he guides each person to the most heroic abandonment and intimate union with God. In the letters, he also tells us about himself. When he left the quiet life as spiritual director at the Visitation monastery, his superiors reassigned him to an administrative role in which he had to deal with business he knew nothing about—finances, negotiations, conflict resolution. Although he loved silence and solitude, he found that God came to his aid and helped him to find peace in the midst of all he had been asked to do.

Though Caussade held many important posts in the Society of Jesus, his letters reveal that he was a simple man. What mattered most to him were the necessity of loving God and surrendering to him completely, moment by moment. We need not fret over the past nor worry about the future. We are given only the sacrament of the present moment in which God reveals himself to us in the midst of our daily duty and daily events. We need not do anything extraordinary. All we must do is our Christian duty. Attention to even the smallest of trivialities as a sacrament of God's revelation will bring us complete inner peace and lead us as close to God as is possible.

The selections in this book are from the volume edited by Father Henri Ramière, the theoretical presentation of Caussade's teaching, and the original letters he wrote. The letters, which are his sensitive and practical application of

this teaching to individuals, reveal the way he himself lived this doctrine.



*Abandonment to Divine Providence* found me again in my middle adult years. Like other adults, responsibility, deadlines, and expectations stretch and stress me. I have had my share of heartaches, reversals, disillusionments, bitter blows, and failure. A couple of years ago, I became terribly disillusioned over a situation. As I struggled for months regarding a decision, I stumbled again upon the key teaching of *Abandonment*. I didn't read it in the pages of the book. I unearthed it from deep within my own heart, which has been shaped by Caussade's teaching for almost thirty years. "God," I prayed, "if you do not wish this project to go ahead, then let me know. I will no longer carry it forward. I sincerely believed that this is what you wanted. But if that is not so, then I am willing to set it aside without another word." I immediately felt such profound peace of soul. My angry thoughts were stilled. My fears of failure and humiliation were quieted. The burden was lifted, and I was freed.

Stress comes from this wrestling match, often unconscious, between what we are pursuing and what simply is



unfolding from the heart of God. Once we bring these elements into realignment, our minds find peace.

As you embark on this wonderful journey of faith with such an able guide as Father de Caussade, keep in mind a few simple principles:

- ❖ Abandonment is the center of a solid peace.
- ❖ Leave all to God, and all will go well.
- ❖ Do not imagine problems where they don't exist.
- ❖ Want things to be exactly as they are.
- ❖ Do everything in your power, and leave the rest to God.
- ❖ God will direct you moment by moment through the ordinary events of your daily life. Be prepared to be surprised!

The secret of abandonment to Divine Providence is not that you must give up your own will to do what God wants. Instead, it is the wondrous discovery that we have the unspeakable privilege of being instruments in the hands of God, that God treats us with such dignity as his partners in creation. Our life has meaning as we work out God's hallowed designs, and, in doing so, we find that all our deepest desires are met. As the years pass we marvel at the synchronicity of events—both pleasant and difficult situations—that blend together in a might symphony of

joy. Ultimately, we find great peace of mind and soul because we have nothing to achieve or defend. We can carry out our daily duties quietly, without anxiety, without hurry, without uneasiness about the future because we have touched with our own hands the fatherly providence of God for us and learned that relying upon that providence is the best way to secure our lives both now and in the future.



## I

# Sanctity Found in Fidelity

God continues to speak today as he spoke in former times to our fathers when there were no directors as we have presently, nor any regular method of direction. At that time all spirituality was comprised in fidelity to the designs of God, for there was no detail, nor so many instructions, precepts, and examples as there are now. Doubtless our present difficulties render this direction necessary and straightforward. In earlier times, those who led a spiritual life found that each moment brought some duty to be faithfully accomplished. Their whole attention was thus directed like the hand of a clock that marks the hours. Their minds, incessantly animated by the inflowing

of divine grace, turned imperceptibly to each new duty that presented itself by the permission of God at different hours of the day.

Such were the hidden springs from which sprung the conduct of Mary. Mary was the most simple of all creatures and the most closely united to God. Her answer to the angel when she said, “May it be done unto me according to your will”—“*Fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum*” (cf. Lk 1:38)—contained all the mystic theology of her ancestors reduced to the purest, simplest submission of the soul to the will of God, under whatever form it presented itself. This beautiful and exalted state, which was the basis of the spiritual life of Mary, shines conspicuously in these simple words, “*Fiat mihi.*” Take notice that they are in complete harmony with those which our Lord desires that we should have always on our lips and in our hearts: “Your will be done”—“*Fiat voluntas tua*” (Mt 6:10).

It is true that what was required of Mary at this great moment would result in her very great glory, but the magnificence of this glory would have made no impression on her if she had not seen the fulfillment of the will of God in it. In all things was she ruled by the divine will. Whether her occupations were ordinary, or of an elevated nature, they were to her the manifestation, at times obscure, at times clear, of the operations of the Most High. In all things she saw the glory of God. Her spirit, trans-

ported with joy, looked upon all that she had to do or to suffer at each moment as the gift of him who fills with good things the hearts of those who hunger and thirst for him alone and have no desire for created things.

— Excerpt from *Abandonment to Divine Providence*,  
Book 1: Chapter 1, Section 1.





## II

### A Hidden Treasure

“**T**he power of the Most High will overshadow you” (Lk 1:35), said the angel to Mary. This shadow under which the power of God hides for the purpose of bringing forth Jesus Christ in the soul, is the duty, the attraction, or the cross that is presented to us at each moment. These are, in reality, merely shadows like those in the order of nature which cover sensible objects like a veil and thus hide them from us. Therefore, in the moral and supernatural order, the duties of each moment conceal, under the semblance of dark shadows, the truth of their divine character on which alone we should fix our attention. It was in this light that Mary beheld them. Also

these shadows diffused over her faculties, far from creating illusion, served only to increase her faith in him who is unchanging and unchangeable. The archangel may depart. He has delivered his message, and his moment has passed. Mary, instead, advances without ceasing and is already far beyond him. The Holy Spirit, who comes to take possession of her under the shadow of the angel's word, will never abandon her.

There are remarkably few extraordinary characteristics in the outward events of the life of the most holy Virgin, at least there are none recorded in Holy Scripture. Her exterior life is represented as very ordinary and simple. She did and suffered the same things that anyone in a similar state of life might do or suffer. She goes to visit her cousin Elizabeth as her other relatives did. She took shelter in a stable because she was poor. She returned to Nazareth out of which she had been driven by the persecution of Herod and lived there with Jesus and Joseph. They supported themselves by the work of their hands. It was in this way that the holy family gained their daily bread. But what a divine nourishment Mary and Joseph received from this daily bread for the strengthening of their faith! It is like a sacrament to sanctify all their moments. What treasures of grace lie concealed in these moments filled, apparently, by the most ordinary events. That which is visible might have happened to anyone, but the invisible discerned by



faith is nothing less than God bringing about very great things. O Bread of Angels! Heavenly Manna! Pearl of the Gospel! Sacrament of the present moment! You give God under as lowly a form as the manger, the hay, or the straw. And to whom do you give him? “*Esurientes implevit bonis*”—“He has filled the hungry with good things . . .” (Lk 1:53). God reveals himself to the humble under the most lowly of forms, but the proud, who fix their gaze entirely on that which is extrinsic, never discover him hidden beneath, and are sent away empty.

— Excerpt from *Abandonment to Divine Providence*,  
Book 1: Chapter 1, Section 2.