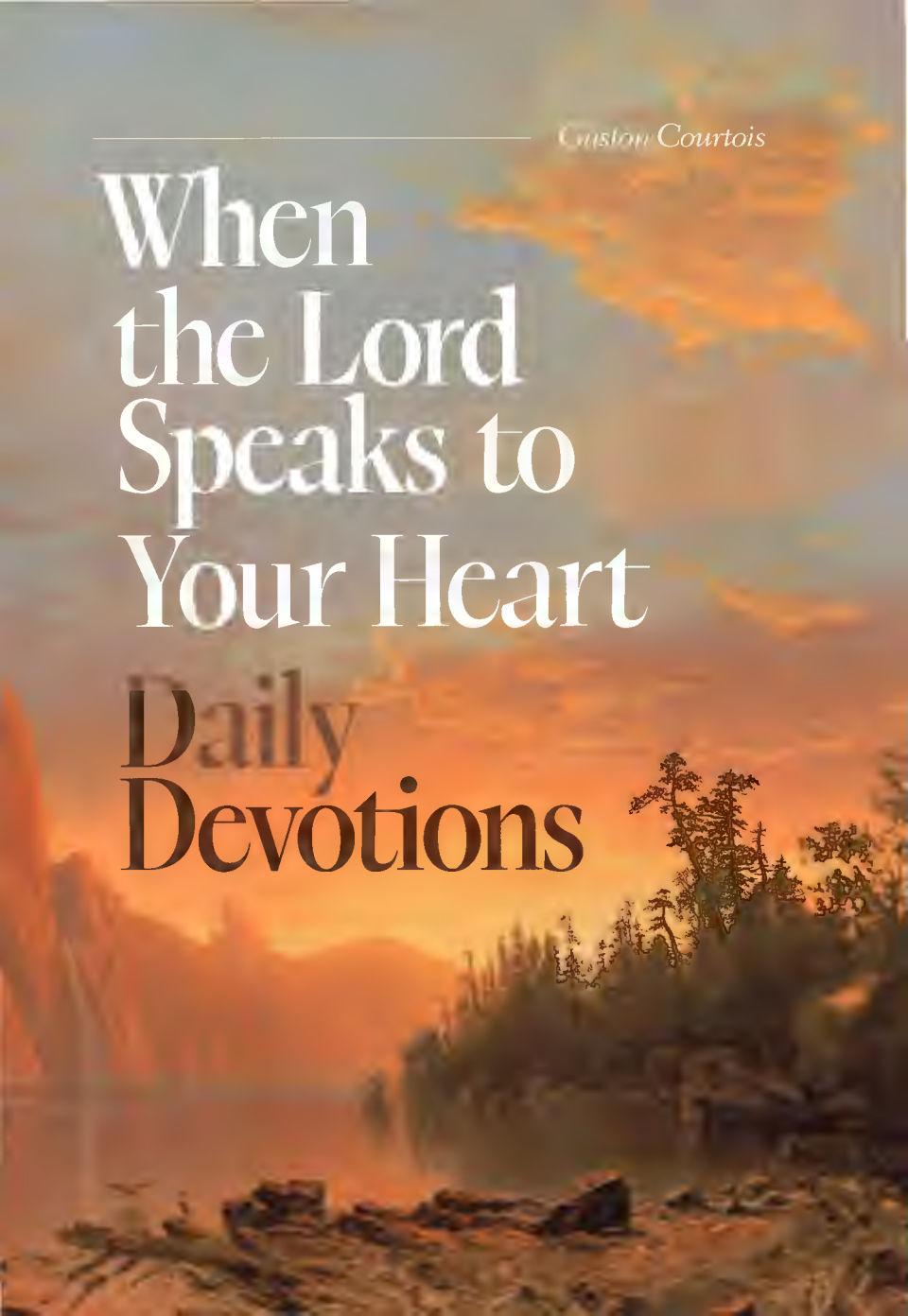

Gustav Courtois

When the Lord Speaks to Your Heart

Daily Devotions



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By Gaston Courtois

Translated by Aloysius Owen, SJ

Foreword by James R. Mattaliano, SJ



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Translated by Aloysius Owen, SJ

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Foreword

At the very beginning of his autobiography, *Confessions*, Saint Augustine, addressing and praising the Lord in prayer, acknowledges, “You have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they find rest in you” (bk. 1, chap. 1). In expressing this, Augustine recognizes the reality of our human existence as being completely dependent upon God who is the fulfillment of all our hopes and desires. Centuries before, King David expressed a similar sentiment when composing Psalm 62: “For God alone my soul waits in silence; / from him comes my salvation” (62:1). Saint Ignatius of Loyola likewise states in the “Principle and Foundation” of the *Spiritual Exercises* that “man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save his soul.” All of these attest to the great longing of the human heart to be in relationship with God who is the source of our life and our hope.

Humanity was created for relationship. We were all created to be in relationship with God as he is in relationship with himself and with us. Further, we were all created to be in relationship with one another. It is only from living out of this relationship that we find fulfillment and life everlasting. *When the Lord Speaks to Your*

Heart by Father Gaston Courtois is precisely about this relationship and God's invitation to enter into and grow in intimate friendship with him.

In my theological studies in preparation for ordination to the priesthood, one of my professors posited that when God created us in his image and likeness, we were created immediately in his image, but creation in his likeness would be a lifelong process. It is the most fundamental and important pursuit of our lives as we continually conform our lives to his, our words and actions to his, our wills to his, and our hearts to his. Saint Augustine experienced this deep longing in his heart as he sought the Lord to fulfill this yearning. We are all called to rest our hearts in the heart of the Lord. Our hearts ache for this relationship, even if we are unaware of it.

Do we desire this? Do we cry out to God, seeking him with the deep longing and thirst that are depicted in Psalms 63 and 42? Are we willing to enter into a deeper and more intimate relationship with the Lord who constantly beckons us to draw closer? If our response is like that of Augustine, David, Ignatius, and so many others, the question then arises as to how this can be achieved. How can we grow into that deeper, more intimate, and ever richer relationship with the Lord?

First and foremost, we must listen. We must quiet ourselves in order to go within our hearts to where the Lord speaks—quietly, softly, tenderly, and with much love. We must attend to the “still small voice” (see 1 Kings 19:12) where deep calls to deep (Ps 42:7) so that heart can speak to heart. To grow deeper in intimacy with

God is to allow ourselves to hunger and thirst for his word while ever longing to seek his presence.

His thoughts must become our thoughts. Thoughts enkindle desires; desires motivate and move us to action. Before a word or action comes into being it exists first as a thought. Words and actions are the perfections of thought. Our thoughts will either nurture our hearts to draw closer to God and the good, or harden our hearts and withdraw them from God, moving them toward evil. We must therefore open our hearts to seek God's Spirit who will speak to them. As the Apostle James encourages us in his letter (4:8), "draw near to God and he will draw near to you."

The very rich reflections that are contained within Father Gaston Courtois' classic book *When the Lord Speaks to Your Heart* provide much food for thought and meditation for the soul seeking to deepen his or her relationship with the Lord. These uplifting reflections are filled with hope, healing, comfort, encouragement, love, and friendship. The thoughts contained within these pages can be seen as his extended hand reaching out to yours to bring you ever further along the journey of going both higher and deeper. They will inspire your heart to join itself ever more fully with the Lord's heart in living a life of love: his love. I have long kept a copy of this book on my nightstand and I frequently take it with me on retreat. In its use, may it bring you an abundance of grace and blessings.

JAMES R. MATTALIANO, SJ
President of the Pope Leo XIII Institute

Preface

Father Gaston Courtois was drawn to a life of intimacy with God. This intimacy grew over the years, and the many tasks this man of action carried out never affected his inclination for profound prayer, one of his most notable characteristics. On the contrary, his interior life—comprised of listening to the Lord, of heart-to-heart talks and face-to-face moments with Jesus—motivated his entire pastoral activity. In the silence of prayer, he received not only ideas that filled his mind but also the ability and means to carry them out.

For many years, Father Courtois carried notebooks in his pocket in which he wrote as if taking down the Lord's dictation. These notebooks (in addition to Courtois' many other works, most of them unfortunately out of print) contain his more personal interactions with the One who was his all. Father Courtois did not withhold from others what he thought came from God. When someone would say to him, with a touch of envy, "You are lucky that the Lord speaks to you this way," he would reply that he did not hear any "voice": "I only express in my own words what I think he wants me to say." At times he questioned the authenticity of these notes, as he

once testified at the end of a retreat in 1959. Jesus responded to him: “What are you afraid of? An illusion? If my words sound like those in the Gospel, if they help you to be more humble, more obedient, more detached, more generous, more charitable, and more united to me, what have you to fear? My words are *spirit* and *life*. A tree is judged by its fruit. As for you, live in an attitude of conversation with me. This will be the best conclusion of your retreat.”

And another time he heard the Lord tell him: “Look at me. Speak to me. Listen to me most lovingly, so that you may become more like me. I will take care of the rest. Haven’t you learned that I can cast light in minutes, a light that the most scholarly books cannot cast—or, if they can, is it not because they were prayed over before being written and are the extension or echo of my own word? So, ask me questions. I will reply in my own way when I think best, but you will have an answer—a clear and forceful answer.”

Some years later Jesus told him that these intimate conversations might be useful for others as well. “You must grasp the ideas I give you and express them in your own words shortly after I give them to you. Otherwise, they will disappear in the mist of oblivion. If I cause them to well up in your mind, first of all it is for your sake, since they will help you think as I do, see things as I see them, and interpret signs as I want them to be understood in the light and shadow of faith. Then they are for all your brothers and sisters in the world. Each one needs the light I give you, just as you yourself absorb the light I reflect in their words, in their writings, in their conduct. My inspiration will sustain not only your prayers but also

your preaching by word or pen—*contemplata aliis tradere*” (“give the fruit of contemplation to others”).

Father Courtois’ first title for his notebooks was *At the Master’s Feet*. In the last notebook, written between 1967 and 1968, he wrote this title on the flyleaf: *When the Lord Speaks to the Heart*. He chose this as the title for his notes to be published, believing it more in keeping with his purpose.

Father Courtois wanted and sought only to love the Lord as much as possible and to strive with all his might to make him loved. May this posthumous message continue the mission of his entire life.

AGNÈS RICHOMME

Biographer of Father Gaston Courtois

How to Use This Book

When the Lord Speaks to Your Heart is an English adaptation of the book *Quand le Seigneur parle au coeur*. As explained above, it contains the messages that Father Gaston Courtois received from the Lord Jesus. The thoughts are phrased in such a way that it is evident that Jesus is the one speaking.

In this edition, we have divided the material to cover each day of the year. The thoughts for each day, though short, contain profound material for reflection. To gain the most from it, you may wish to spend a few moments in prayer before reading it, and then reflect on it for a while and conclude with a prayer. If you read a passage in the morning, the reading can set the tone for your day and help you live it in union with Jesus. If you read it in the evening, you can recall it in the morning as you go about your daily work.

You may wish to use this prayer to the Holy Spirit:

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful.

And kindle in them the fire of your love.

Send forth your spirit, and they shall be created.
And you shall renew the face of the earth.

Let us pray.

O God, you instructed the hearts of the faithful by the light of the Holy Spirit; grant us in the same Spirit to be truly wise, and ever to rejoice in his consolation. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Note: The parentheses following each quote refer to the corresponding reference numbers in the French edition.

January





January 1

Therefore, I will now allure her,
and bring her into the wilderness,
and speak tenderly to her.

HOSEA 2:14

Listen. Understand. Ponder. Absorb. Put into practice. I know it is difficult to listen to me when other sounds fill your head. There must be silence, an experience of the desert. You are shocked by the aridity of the void. Yet if you are faithful, if you persevere, then your well-Beloved will make his voice heard. Your heart will burn, and this inner ardor will bring you peace and fruitfulness. Then you will relish just how gracious your Lord is, how light is his burden. You will experience, even beyond the time you devote exclusively to me, the reality of *dilectus meus mihi et ego illi* (“my beloved is mine and I am his,” see Song 2:16). (1)

Which of these invitations do you find most challenging: listen, understand, ponder, absorb, put into practice? Bring this to Jesus. Listen for his counsel.



January 2

Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light to my path.

PSALM 119:105

Despite obstacles, feelings of aversion, or temptations to faintheartedness, the more you seek me and desire to listen, the more you will perceive my response. My Spirit will animate you and suggest not only what I ask you to say, but what I propose that you do. Then what you say and do will be fruitful.

My word and the light it casts help everything find its true place within my immense love. (2–3)

Express to God how you want to respond to his promise to cast light on your path through his word today.



January 3

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

JOHN 14:6–7

Look at me. Speak to me. Listen to me. I am not only the witness to truth but Truth itself. I am not only the way of life but Life itself. I am not only a ray of light but Light itself.

The one who communicates with me communicates with Truth. The one who receives me receives Life. The one who follows me walks along the pathway of light, and my light grows in that person.

Speak to me spontaneously about everything that troubles you. I allow plenty of room for your initiative. Do not think that I am indifferent to what troubles you, for you are mine. It is essential that you be mindful of me, and speak to me with the fullness of love and with all the confidence you can muster. (5–6)

What would today look like if you kept up a running conversation with God throughout the day?



January 4

O that today you would listen to his voice!
Do not harden your hearts.

PSALM 95:7-8

I speak within the inmost depths of your soul, where your mind is enriched through communion with me. You do not need to immediately discern what I say to you. What is important is to fill your mind with my thoughts. Afterward you will be able to interpret and express them.

Those who never hear me and who regrettably harden their hearts are to be pitied. Ah! If only they would come to me with the soul of a child. “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants” (Mt 11:25). If anyone feels thirsty, let him or her come to me and drink. Yes, let all drink the milk of my way of thinking. (7-8)

Ask the Lord to open your mind and heart to hear and respond to his voice today.



January 5

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him.

COLOSSIANS 2:6

Always be on the alert. It is I who can give you the light you so urgently need. My light will fortify your spirit and clarify your thoughts, so that you may find solutions for the problems you face.

I would like to act through you more and more, so never stop directing your will toward me. Strip yourself of yourself. Take upon yourself the attitude of a member of my Body, having only me as your reason for living and the goal of your life.

Call upon me for help, gently, calmly, and lovingly. Do not think I am insensitive to the tenderness of affection. Yes, tell me you love me, but prove it to me even more. (9–11)

Think about the day ahead of you. Are there any likely challenges you will face? Pick one interaction, appointment, or other event and bring it to Jesus. Listen for his counsel.



January 6

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever.

EPHESIANS 3:20–21

Tell me how you spent the day. I know already, of course, but I love hearing it from you, just as a mother loves to hear the chatter of her child coming home from school. Let me know about your desires, your projects, your boredom, your difficulties. Can't I help you overcome them?

Speak to me about my Church, the bishops, your colleagues, the missions, nuns, vocations, the sick, sinners, the poor, and workers. Yes, speak to me especially of this working class that has too many virtues not to be Christian, at least in desire. Is it not among oppressed workers, often crushed by cares and woes, that profound generosity is found? Do they not have a greater tendency to answer "yes" to my appeals? (12)

Express to Jesus what this past day has been for you. Ask him to show you what these events and persons are like from his perspective.



January 7

“And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”

JOHN 12:32

Speak to me of all those who suffer in their mind, in their flesh, in their heart, and in their dignity. Speak to me of all those who have died, all those who know they are going to die and are frightened or peaceful, and all those who are going to die and do not know when it will happen.

Speak to me of my extension in the world; of what I work out within the innermost depths of hearts; and of what I also bring about in heaven to the glory of my Father, of Mary, and of the blessed. (13–14)

Spend some time in intercessory prayer for the needs of the world and the needs close to your heart.



January 8

When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, “What are you looking for?” They said to him, “Rabbi” (which translated means Teacher), “where are you staying?”

JOHN 1:38

Do you have any questions to ask me? Do not hesitate. I am the key to all problems. I may not give you the answer right away, but if your question comes from a loving heart, the response will come, either through the intervention of the Spirit or through the events that transpire in your life.

Do you want to tell me what you desire for yourself, for others, for me? Do not be afraid to ask me for a lot. By doing so, you hasten, in an undeniable yet invisible way, the hour when all humanity will be assumed into me. You will cause the level of love to rise and will extend my presence in the hearts of men and women. (15–16)

Ask Jesus a question you have or tell him about something you hope he will give you. You can never ask too much of him.