

Father John Catoir

'First Fervor'

Early in the life of prayer we experience a special delight in God; His will is sweet to us and religion seems full of wisdom and love. We are at peace with ourselves and full of spiritual ambition. Then we learn that the very same spirit of love which flooded our consciousness with fresh energy at the start, continues in new and ever relentless ways, transforming our day life into something we didn't expect. Life makes many demands on us, some of them not



so nice; the demands of love are inconvenient and frequently distasteful.

— Evelyn Underhill.

Have you ever heard the expression "first fervor"? First fervor is passionate, euphoric, religious devotion; but like a wild horse, it needs to be harnessed. A wise spiritual director will try to channel the powerful energies of the beginner when he or she strikes out on extreme fasts and severe penances. That's why a spirit of obedience is so important in religious life.

It isn't long before the euphoria recedes, and that same Spirit of Love begins to ask for faithful perseverance and long-suffering. A period of purification begins as the Holy Spirit gently reveals the limitations of our nature, teaching us what it means to depend on God's strength alone. Inordinate spiritual ambition is burned away in the heat of reality and grace.

The life of Jesus is a model for the spiritual journey. Early in His public ministry He was lifted up in joy of the Transfiguration. His face shone as the sun in His communion with the Father. But afterward when His work began He was gradually plagued with disappointment, monotonous drudgery and rejection. His mission often wearied and exasperated Him. The Holy Spirit led Him to the cross, the ultimate humiliation. As He uttered these words, "It is consummated," Jesus became one with the most despised, the most despairing of human beings. He touched the depths of human suffering to liberate all who are caught in the web of pain and misery.

The joy of first fervor is only a beginning. Being able to say with Jesus, "It is consummated," I have finished the job God has given me to do: that is the supreme joy.

In spite of conflicts, weakness, sufferings and sins, which are all part of spiritual maturing process, we are joyful always, praying continually and thankful in all circumstances for "That is what God wants of us in our life in Christ"