

OVERCOMING Lukewarmness

HEALING YOUR SOUL'S SADNESS

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Foreword

Every book has a small history. This one was born of a meditation during a few days of spiritual retreat. It appeared later, enlarged, with the title *Lukewarmness*. That was in 1978. Since then, the original Spanish edition has reached its fourteenth printing.

Now, having wholly updated it with the experience of more than a few years, it appears with a new title: *Overcoming Lukewarmness: Healing Your Soul's Sadness*. Lukewarmness is a pathology of love that puts the ideals of the Christian to sleep. It can be found, hidden, close to and constantly stalking the life of our *first surrender*, the joyful following of Jesus, that it tries to destroy or at least hinder.

Lukewarmness is, precisely, the great hidden enemy of that love, aging and destroying it, though that may be difficult to notice, particularly at the beginning. It is like those silent diseases that little by little extend into the whole organism, while the infected man barely notices his condition until it is pervasive. To lukewarmness we can apply words of an Italian poet describing a mortally wounded soldier: *andava camminando ed era morto*—he was walking and was dead.

In these pages I have attempted to depict clearly the incomparable joy—there is nothing like it—of following Christ together with the sadness of a heart asleep that has forgotten, or is near to forgetting, how to love. In the end, this disease of love can be cured, for we have a good physician, Jesus Christ himself, who is always prepared to come to our help.

Created for Happiness

The substitutes

The wedding is over. A man and a woman have committed themselves to each other for life. The priest has sent off the newlyweds with these words or others like them: “May the Lord be always with you, so that you may be very happy.” It is the same wish, after all: to be with the Lord and to be happy are the same things. “Anguish and sorrow are completely opposed to the very essence of God, who is the maximum happiness,” St. Josemaría Escrivá said. And he offered this advice: “If you are tired, tell the Lord; if you find serious difficulties, leave them in the hands of the Lord. You must avoid giving someone the impression by your personal attitude that the Master’s yoke is not gentle, is not a yoke of love.”¹ That would be deceiving the other party by one’s loveless demeanor.

Happiness is one of those things people always wish one another. “Best wishes,” and “May you be very happy” are expressions that are found in all languages and all regions.

1. Cf. J. Echevarría, *Memoria del Beato Josemaría* (Madrid: Rialp, 2000), 22.

They express a deep and worthy wish for something essential to the person.

And yet few things are so rarely achieved, even though one employs all the means one thinks necessary—health, money, love, success, popularity. Despite all that, if we are careless, the happiness our heart really desires gets put off to some indefinite future, farther and farther down the road, and eludes us as the years go by.

And so we imagine that words like happiness, joy, and peace refer to realities that are something like rare coins: of great value but hard to find. How much would we give for a month, a day, or just one evening of true joy, of authentic love corresponding to the longing of our heart.

It is said that after the death of the caliph Abderraman III in 961, a note was found in which he said: "I have had everything that a man may wish in this world. I have lived 75 years. I have been king for 50. . . I have been happy for nine days."

So deep and intense is the human desire for happiness that it cannot be fully satisfied on earth: "It is of divine origin. God has sown it in the person with the purpose of attracting us to him, the only one who can satisfy it."² St. Augustine's words are well known: "You made us for yourself, and our hearts find no peace until they rest in you."³ Nothing else can do it. All men and women seek happiness in one way or another, though they often follow the wrong road.

Many people have become skeptics and doubt whether there is anything that will fulfill the desires of their hearts. So they invent *substitutes*, something like artificial flavorings, alleged equivalents that don't nearly match. "Tranquility" is called

2. Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (hereafter CCC), 1718.

3. St. Augustine, *Confessions*, I, I, I

“peace,” “boisterous laughter” is termed “joy,” “fleeting pleasure” becomes “happiness.” And meanwhile the happiness our hearts crave is deemed nearly impossible, even though it really exists and is within the reach of every person of good will. Many never attain it, no matter how long they live, because, like people hunting for gems in a grocery, they look for it in the wrong place—in comfort, money, power, pleasure.

An interviewer once asked a prominent, elderly man of letters if he believed in *progress*. He had lived in the countryside for years. From his window, he said, he could see a combine, a tractor, and other farm machines. “How could I not believe in progress,” he asked, “when I see that the grain which once took so much effort to harvest is now harvested easily in a short time?” But then he added: “Progress like this warms and fills the stomach, but *it leaves the heart cold and empty.*” Authentic human progress is the integral fulfillment of the person in all aspects of his reality. Technical progress may make things easier, but without interior progress, it will not be able to enrich the soul.

True happiness leads us, first, “to purify our hearts of bad instincts and to seek the love of God above all else. It teaches us that true happiness is not found in riches or well-being, in human fame or power, or in any human achievement—however beneficial it may be—such as science, technology, and art, or indeed in any creature, but in God alone, the source of every good and of all love.”⁴ Only in him.

Cardinal Newman called money the idol of his age, but it’s the idol of every age. “Wealth is that to which the multitude of men pay an instinctive homage. They measure happiness by wealth; and by wealth they measure respectability. . . . It is a homage resulting from a profound faith . . . that with

4. CCC 1723.