***(II) Lowering Our Standards***

*Step Two: Face the Darkness*

**Mistaken for the Gardener**

The politics of illusion, of death’s money,

possesses us. This is the Hell, this

the nightmare into which Christ descended

from the cross, from which also he woke

and rose, striding godly forth, so free

that He appeared to Mary Magdalene

to be only the gardener walking about

in the new day, among the flowers.

Wendell Berry

 *For his name is “Essence.”*

 *St. Ephrem*

 *Do whatever most kindles love in you.*

 *St. Teresa of Avila*

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What do you do in the monastery all day?

We fall and get up. We fall and get up. We fall and get up again.

 from the Desert Fathers

Dear Imperfections! They give us practice in humility!

 Francis De Sales

I need to overcome a sense of my own impotence, my own failure, and an impatience with others that goes with it. Such a sense of defeat comes from expecting too much of one’s self, also from a sense of pride. More and more I realize how good God is to me to send me discouragements, failures, antagonisms. The only way to proceed is to remember that God’s ways are not our ways. To bear our own burdens, to do our own work as best we can, and not fret because we cannot do more or do another’s work. Dorothy Day

from *Amoris Laetitia—The Joy of Love*

At times we have proposed a far too abstract and almost artificial theological ideal of marriage, far removed from the concrete situations and practical possibilities of real families. This excessive idealization, especially when we have failed to inspire trust in God’s grace, has not helped to make marriage more desirable and attractive, but quite the opposite. . . . We also find it hard to make room for the consciences of the faithful, who very often respond as best they can to the Gospel amid their limitations, and are capable of carrying out their own discernment in complex situations. We have been called to form consciences, not to replace them.

#36, 37

Being patient does not mean letting ourselves be constantly mistreated, tolerating physical aggression or allowing other people to use us. We encounter problems whenever we think that relationships or people ought to be perfect, or when we put ourselves as the centre and expect things to turn out our way. . . . Patience takes root when I recognize that other people also have a right to live in this world, just as they are. It does not matter if they hold me back, if they unsettle my plans, or annoy me by the way they act or think, or if they are not everything I want them to be. Love always has an aspect of deep compassion that leads to accepting the other person as part of this world, even when he or she acts differently than I would like. #92

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Mary was, from the first moment of her conception, by the singular grace and privilege of almighty God and in view of the merits of Jesus Christ the Savior of the human race, preserved free from the stain of original sin.

 Pope Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus,* December 8, 1854

The religious meaning of this dogma centers on the victory of God’s grace, freely given in Christ. . . . That God generously graces Mary, enabling her living union with God from her beginning even while not removing her from the sufferings of history . . . signifies the good news that for the Church and for every human being, grace is more original than sin.

 Elizabeth Johnson, *Encyclopedia of Catholicism*

Divine love meets us in the real world and nowhere else: in this moment; in this circumstance, painful and humiliating though it may be; in this person; in the daily unexciting round of seeming trivialities which afford no measure of self-glorification. Divine love meets us here in our flawed, suffering, human condition, and nowhere else.

Ruth Burrows, *The Essence of Prayer*

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I’m always amazed when people walk up and say, “I’m a Christian.” I always think, “Already? Got it? Goodness gracious. Lucky you.”

Maya Angelou

To enter into the mystery we need humility, the lowliness to abase ourselves, to come down from the pedestal of our “I” which is so proud, of our presumption; the humility not to take ourselves so seriously, recognizing who we really are: creatures with strengths and weaknesses, sinners in need of forgiveness. To enter into the mystery we need the lowliness that is powerlessness, the renunciation of our idols.

 Pope Francis

We never graduate from a state of being utterly dependent on God’s mercy and forgiveness. In fact, the more we advance along the spiritual path, the more aware we become of our impediments, of the many ways in which we are resistant to God’s love, and of the burdens we carry as a result of choices made in the past. We are not to ignore these liabilities; they also must join in our hymn of praise to the God of grace. The shadow is part of our reality, and so in a spirit of faith, we thank God for the darkness in our life, for the mistakes we have made.

 Michael Casey

Therefore, I will boast of the things that show my weakness . . . for when I am weak, then I am strong.

2 Corinthians 11:30;12:10

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 *Don’t have any standards outside the feeling you have as you write. Permit yourself to like what you are doing (if you feel any qualms, then veer towards what feels good—why oppose the only compass you have?)*

 *But along with initial receptivity, there is another readiness: you must be willing to fail. If you are to keep on writing, you cannot bother to insist on high standards. You must get into action and not let anything stop you, or even slow you much.*

 *One should lower his standards until there is no felt threshold to go over in writing.*

 *William Stafford*

*A Footnote*

Anytime you have a negative feeling toward anyone, you’re living in an illusion. There’s something seriously wrong with you. You’re not seeing reality. Something inside of you has to change.

 De Mello

People will do anything, no matter how absurd, in order to avoid facing their own souls.

 Carl Jung

Every day crowds of unknown people come to him, who feel as hard, as cold, as empty as the tomb. They come with the first light, before going to the day’s work, and with the grey mind of early morning, hardly able to concentrate at all on the mystery which they themselves are part of: impelled only by the persistent will of love, not by any sweetness of consolation, and it seems to them as if nothing happens at all. But Christ’s response to that dogged, devoted will of a multitude of insignificant people is his coming to life in them, his Resurrection in their souls. In the eyes of the world they are without importance, but in fact, because of them and their unemotional Communions, when the world seems to be finished, given up to hatred and pride, secretly, in unimaginable humility, Love comes to life again. There is resurrection everywhere.

 Caryll Houselander