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Considerations on the State of Things In the Streets of Heaven and on the Streets of Earth

All that dedicated City,
Dearly lov'd by God on high,
In exultant jubilation
Pours perpetual melody;
God the One, and God the Trinal,
Singing everlastingly.¹

As cries of anger echo these days through the streets of many a city in our world beneath the stars (especially in places where you cannot see them for the glare of artificial lights), the Angels of God serenely pursue their song of praise in honor of the Three Divine Persons, including the One, who, on the Tree of Life, that is to say the Cross, won the definitive victory over every form of sin--even human brutality and the plague of racism. It is not that those heavenly beings, in their joy, have no care for the injustices that continue to sadden and afflict the citizens of this world (God's saving action having not yet effectively reached all human hearts), but that those same inhabitants of a better place, purely and simply, contemplate and grasp directly the *answer* and the *remedy* that elude by and large our political leaders today as in the past.

For those of us still left upon the earth, pilgrims on our way (as we firmly hope) to the Heavenly Jerusalem, for those of us who have not yet attained to the vision of peace promised to those who persevere until the end in living faith taught by Our Lord, the one true Lord of History and of Peace, there remains an urgent question. Whatever are we to do in the face of the tremendous human misunderstandings and divisions—erupting now into violence--such as hold sway in all too many of our Western society? The angry voices are heard even over our monastic walls.

In an age of communications multiplied almost to infinity, when bloggers and journalists are legion, it would seem a waste for me just to add one more opinion. I shall try not to do that. Why bother? In fact, we already have the definitive and adequate reference point for human life and its problems in the God-Man, Jesus the Christ, in His teaching as transmitted by Holy Scripture and the authentic and living tradition of the Church. But I would like to add what I esteem could be a useful insight coming from monastic wisdom.

Among the duties that are incumbent upon man, there is one that has been more neglected in our day. And yet it is a very agreeable duty, a joyful obligation, one that lifts a man up as he performs it. It is the duty of praise.

Offer to God the sacrifice of praise, says the Psalmist, and pay thy vows to the Most High...The sacrifice of praise shall glorify me: and there is the way by which I will show him the salvation of God.²

¹ Liturgical hymn for the Dedication of a Church, *Urbs Jerusalem Beata*, trans. John Mason Neale. 6th stanza.

² Psalm 49: 14, 24. (following the Douay-Reims version).

We can be certain that in the exact measure to which proper praise, Eucharistic praise especially, but also the praise of veneration offered to the Blessed Virgin Mary and the other Saints, begins to rise up more frequently from the world, *to the same extent* the voices of violent anger and despair will be calmed. This is not to say that efforts to ensure justice on earth should cease—on the contrary—but that this pursuit of justice should once again become a truly human activity, an activity where passion is being led by reason and not the contrary. If we offer praise, Divine praise, in our lives we will be able again to discuss our differences honestly and for the enrichment of all.

Practically speaking, we can always take of the Holy Rosary as the perfect school of prayer and praise. Furthermore, there is the possibility of learning Gregorian chant or other forms of sacred music. May God show us again the ways of Christian culture, the ways of spiritual beauty that builds and strengthens. As the often-quoted Russian novelist wrote, “Beauty will save the world.”³

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³ Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*.