

GOOD COURAGE

INSPIRATION FOR THE EVENING OF LIFE

Thomas van der Horst

Gozalov Books
The Hague

By Thomas van der Horst
Editor: Joya Stevenson
Translator: Guram Kochi MSc

© Thomas van der Horst & Gozalov Books,
The Hague, 2025
Tel.: +31 (0)6 149 88 056
E-mail: g.kochi27@gmail.com
Website: www.hetsmallepad.nl

ISBN: 9789079889846; 978-90-79889-84-6

Unless otherwise indicated, all biblical texts are cited from the NRSV Catholic Edition.

New Revised Standard Version Bible: Catholic Edition, copyright © 1989, 1993 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Illustrations: Thomas van der Horst

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced and/or published by means of printing, photocopying, microfilm or in any other way stored in an automated database without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Contents

Foreword by the author	5
The sun rises happily!.....	8
Autumn in life	11
Being old means	13
Advent Quartet: Four weeks on the way to Christmas	22
The Christmas Story: An Invitation to Us All.....	33
Angels	40
Walking and wondering	45
Conserving and Preserving	47
Psalm 121	55
Experiencing loss	56
Ascending to the Light.....	63
Prayer for a blessed death	72
Pain	74
Flowers and those who love them	80
Loneliness.....	85
What do you live for?	91
Spring, Lent and Easter	95

Wind – Water – Light	102
‘Our mother’	105
Was everything created?.....	112
Mary, the Mother of the Lord	122
The Hail Mary	130
Pentecost: Baptized in Fire	133
Pigeon story 1	149
Your soul	152
Finding a foothold in prayer	154
Remembering and commemorating	164
Sacred by nature	168
Redemption	174
Gifts for the Redeemer.	
Christmas meditation	176
The King’s Children	182
New Year’s Eve news	187
That one day	190
Love as the fullness of life	193
Thou	196

Foreword by the author

Could it be that deep inside every person a small pilot light is burning? Spirituality generally has to do with life questions. You will find a variety of subjects in this book, which can stand on their own and be read separately.

The order followed in this book is more or less that of the church year, which partly overlaps the calendar year, from the end of November to the end of November in consecutive years. The book has separate thematic sections. If you wish, you can browse through them at random.

The book title Good Courage is inspired by the Limburg wish for a prosperous New Year: ‘Goeie roetsj’, they say in Limburg on December 31. With that wish in mind, Good Courage sounds clear and uplifting. “Yes, we need that these days,” I hear many people say.

Many elderly people enjoy reading. At an older age, however, reading does not always go as smoothly as it used to. Technical difficulties may arise in reading small print within long blocks of text.

In addition, there is little reading material available explicitly for elderly people as a target group. That is a loss. Hence this book, which has been extensively read, considered, and evaluated by elderly people in Heerlen. My late father, who lived in The Hague, was himself, at his advanced age, a critical and expert reader. I owe him a lot. This book regularly quotes the Bible. Hopefully, that won’t put you off if you’re not used to dealing with the Bible.

It is the living God Who speaks to you when you open the Bible. So, you never read the Bible alone, but always together with our God, the Living Word Himself! To read the Bible is like taking a walk with God in order to get to know each other.

My first writings appeared at the beginning of the corona virus period in March 2020. Quite a lot of writing followed after that. And in this volume, you will find a number of my writings edited and bundled, with great thanks to family and friends who have read previous versions carefully.

I wish you much joy and inspiration while reading.

Thomas van der Horst

About the Author

Thomas van der Horst is a Roman-Catholic theologian and spiritual counselor (retired Januari 2025) in Heerlen, Netherlands. He completed his full training at the Major Seminary Rolduc in Kerkrade, Netherlands, and a doctorate at the Catholic Theological University Utrecht-Amsterdam. Van der



Horst has obtained specialized training in spiritual care for the elderly. This training includes the following professional certificates: the Elderly Care (NCOI) Certificate, the Certificate of Elderly Advisor (Christian University of Applied Sciences, Ede, Netherlands), and the Certificate of Discussion Leader in Moral Consultation (Utrecht University, Netherlands). Van der Horst has also studied intensively at the Study House of the Church Fathers

(Gent, Belgium). His publications include a translation of various texts, by and about the orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann, entitled *The Holy Week in Orthodoxy*. A liturgical explanation of the Holy Week, published in 2023 by Gozalov Books, The Hague. Van der Horst, who is not an ordained priest, is married with two children.



The sun rises happily!

The sun rises radiantly, every new day, at least that is how people experience it. In fact, the sun never rises or sets, it has been shining continuously for billions of years. As soon as the sun appears, a feeling of joy arises.

In the evening, we can trust that the sun will continue to shine behind the horizon while we sleep. And just when we have had enough rest, the sun appears again. Its light wakes us up and brings us to life. This daily pattern, this masterful attunement, has something wonderful about it.

Those who wake up just before sunrise taste the silence of the early morning, and they have time to wonder, again, what day it is. Some even reflect that this new day is a gift from God. So, it is time for the first prayer: “Sweet Lord, thank you for this wonderful day,” prays a 102-year-old who learned this prayer from her mother. At this moment, there comes a certainty of divine joy, for you know that God is present in every beginning and lets His loving light shine. The miracle is too great for the hu-

man heart. Human beings hope that this new day, once again, will offer unsuspected openings. After all, every day begins new.

And just as every new day has never existed before, so every person is a new beginning. Every person is unique, having been given a proper name, just as every day has its own date. That makes the new day special. Every person may and can rejoice in it. With every new day, you add a new piece to the long history of God's dealings with man.

In this way, we help building His Kingdom. From that awareness comes a cheerful mood in the heart and an immense joy at the start of the day! Indeed, every day begins as a miracle. The sun that rises is a creature just as we are. Certainly, the sun is a great and radiant symbol of the Creator Who created heaven and earth. And yet, the sun is not the most perfect and greatest symbol of God. Though it radiates light, it cannot radiate love. There is another symbol of God's Love that is even greater and more radiant than the sun, namely the human being. The human is called to radiate God's Love from his own free choice. To be of value as a human being to my fellows means to let the Invisible Sun, Who is God, rise in the life of my neighbor.

No human being will live a day without the light of this Invisible Sun! To give light and love can be done in so many different ways: listening, being attentive, helping, or offering a joint prayer. Especially do all with humor, with a grain of salt that makes the heavy heart a little lighter. And the day becomes a little more bearable for those who find life to be unendurable.

Prayer in the silence of the early morning is like the song of the blackbird, perhaps even the crowing of the rooster, the call to Our Father in heaven. The first contact after waking up is like a "Good

morning,” because that is what God and man, so to speak, say to each other: “I am here for you and with you today!”



Autumn in life

In autumn, the colors seem to celebrate the passing away of life. As if there is nothing to be sad about. Or do the autumn leaves themselves mourn the short life that has been given to them? Have they perhaps put on their most colorful coats, knowing that their task is complete? They have served the tree, promoted its growth. Would the tree in turn say goodbye, with a heavy heart, to its leaves, which were so kind, which not only gave nourishment, but also splendor and beauty?

The branches and leaves have welcomed many guests since early spring: birds that built their nests, while whistling, and sheltered their little ones. The branches support the young as they grow big and fly away. They hear the daily concert of the songbirds with their song of songs, but perhaps also the noise of the traffic below and of squirrels jumping from branch to branch. The acorns and chestnuts fall first and then the leaves. And the branches and the tree itself may fear the autumn storms.

For centuries, trees could withstand the elements until a gust of wind, a fire, or a person with a saw determined their fate. Whatever the case, the days of every tree are numbered. Whether you are a believer or not, this is the hard law of every life and therefore also of human life.

Apparently, the vulnerability and fragility of all that is temporary is a characteristic of earthly life. This vulnerable tenderness raises the question of the meaning of life as a whole. What is it all about? People can put the question off for their whole life long. As we grow older, the moment inevitably comes when we must pose this question to ourselves.

It could, just as well, be the question of a friend who visits you for a pleasant and personal conversation: “What is important to you today?”



Being old means

“Getting old is nice, but being old is different,” we hear each other say so often. We know all too well what is meant. It therefore seems superfluous to stop and think about it. Should we try now? What does it mean to be old? It is a question that must be raised again and again. There are many possible answers and everyone has his or her own thoughts and feelings. At the same time, there are continuous themes and parallel experiences that we share with one another.

Here is a list of some of them.

retirement

There are people who retire at the age of 55 but who feel anything but old. They can still take on the whole world. There are even people who happily continue to work until they are 80, professionally

or as a volunteer. They do not feel old at all in the sense of being deficient.

The majority of people look forward to retirement. For example, raising the retirement age for the current sixty-somethings is quite a challenge. Now that I am getting a few grey hairs myself, someone recently said to me: “Do you know yet what you are going to do when the time comes?”

Perhaps you can still remember that moment. For many, the day of retirement is etched in their memory. At least as a milestone in their life.

having more time

Time is a somewhat fluid concept: what lasts far too long, for one person, may not last long enough for another. For one, having more time is perfect and long-awaited, and for another, it is a nightmare, like ‘suddenly I bump into myself’.

There’s a need to find new meanings and set new priorities. Within a marriage, the spouses will come up with new agreements and express their expectations, with regard to each other and to third parties. How are we going to use our time? On top of that, there’s a mixture of new feelings, such as that of having been written-off by society, or of no longer being acknowledged. One may miss previous conversation partners. Filling in time is like filling a treasure chest: what is still precious to me and what is not? May every choice certainly be very positive, then!

doing nice things

It seems like a carefree dream. To have all the time in the world to spend: travelling far or walking nearby, getting started with hobbies, making music or going dancing, reading or writing memoirs. There may be a much-needed catch-up with photo albums, looking after grandchildren, maintaining the garden, painting and renovating the house, at last installing a new kitchen, renovating the bathroom, and so on.

Above all, there are no more obligations, at least not such heavy ones, no more daily traffic jams, no sleepless nights, no deadlines, no endless meetings, no more difficult customers, no more incessant phone calls, no more hassle, no more having to get up before dawn.

We accept the inconveniences. "It's not always roses." Our main theme is to enjoy life, because "You only live once!" There's an often-heard sigh, "I've never been busier than since I retired."

becoming less vital

Most mortals, around the age of 60, will start to feel that they are 'no longer 18'—unfortunately. To walk up and down stairs takes a bit more energy and to remember names is no longer as easy. Glasses make their appearance, medication becomes a daily ritual. Those who reach a certain advanced age may describe themselves as extremely vital, and feel that way, but they nevertheless notice that their peers are increasingly dropping off, like leaves falling off the tree of life. Life, which once seemed eternal, presents itself in all its temporality and fi-