

# **The Diary of a Country Priest Study Guide**

**The Diary of a Country Priest by Georges Bernanos**

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# Plot Summary

The Diary of a Country Priest by Georges Bernanos is a story of injustice and faith that passes the barriers of time. In the novel, a young, unhealthy priest keeps a journal during the time he serves in his first parish. Although his parishioners treat him unkindly, gossip about him and misinterpret his actions, the priest remains faithful to God and serves the parish to the best of his ability. In the end of the story, the priest dies of stomach cancer. Before his death, however, the priest learns the mysteries of grace and loving oneself.

The priest, who is never given a name, begins his appointment to the parish of Ambricourt, France with high hopes for both himself and his parishioners. He plans to visit his parishioners at least once every three months, start a young man's sporting guild and teach the children of the parish the catechism as well as performing his other priestly duties.

Soon, the reality of life in the French countryside sets in for the priest. The priest feels tricked when a grocer offers to send him three bottles of wine, and then charges the priest for them. A member of the community commits suicide. Although the priest hopes the children's catechism class will be a comfort to him, even that is marred by one child who delights in entertaining the rest of the children by doing and saying things to embarrass the priest. In addition to these challenges, the priest's health is not good. He has lost weight drastically and finds he can eat nothing but bread soaked in wine without upsetting his stomach.

Soon, a drama involving the most prestigious family in the neighborhood begins to unfold before the priest. Mlle Louise, the governess at the Château asks the priest to approach her employers about sending Mlle Chantal, the oldest daughter, to a finishing school. The priest feels he shouldn't become involved in the family's personal life, but after he is visited by Mlle Chantal, he feels he has no choice. The priest approaches Mme la Comtesse about the problems her daughter spoke to him about and accuses the lady of not loving her daughter. The priest then learns that Mme la Comtesse once had a son who died at the age of 18 months. She has mourned the boy ever since his death. Also following the death of the infant, her husband and daughter became inseparable. The town largely ignored Mme la Comtesse and her wishes. Even worse, Mme la Comtesse admits she is aware that her husband has been unfaithful to her. All of these factors have worked together to make Mme la Comtesse very hardened and callous to towards God.

The priest helps Mme la Comtesse work through her problems and following his visit, Mme la Comtesse writes the priest a letter stating she now feels at peace with God and is grateful for his assistance. Unfortunately, Mme la Comtesse dies later that night from an apparent heart problem. Her death leaves many unanswered questions about her encounter with the priest especially since Mlle Chantal eavesdropped on the conversation through an open window and is now spreading rumors that the priest's actions brought on her mother's death. Although things seem as bad as they could

possibly be for the young priest, he hangs onto his faith and continues to serve his parish as best he can.

As a result of his worsening stomach problems, the priest makes an appointment to see a doctor in Lille. Before he leaves, he makes a sort of peace with both the child who tormented him in catechism class as well as Mlle Chantal. In Lille, the doctor diagnoses the priest with stomach cancer. Not sure where to go after this stunning diagnosis, the priest decides to visit an old friend from seminary. After the two talk awhile, the priest isn't feeling well so he accepts an offer to stay at the friend's home for the evening. The priest dies that night. Although a priest can not be found quickly enough to give the priest his last rites, the priest's dying words are, "Does it matter? Grace is everywhere."



# Chapter 1

## Chapter 1 Summary

The Diary of a Country Priest by Georges Bernanos is a story of injustice and faith that passes the barriers of time. In the novel, a young, unhealthy priest keeps a journal during the time he serves in his first parish. Although his parishioners treat him unkindly, gossip about him and misinterpret his actions, the priest remains faithful to God and serves the parish to the best of his ability. In the end of the story, the priest dies of stomach cancer. Before his death, however, the priest learns the mystery of grace and loving oneself.

The narrator, a young priest, begins the novel by describing his parish, a place and a people that he says is bored stiff. The priest has the sense the people of the parish are full of loneliness and are waiting for a master to lead them to safety and shelter. He believes people have overcome their constant sense of boredom only by their constant busyness. The priest feels unable to communicate these thoughts to others and feels the elder priests do not actually believe in the things they preach to their people.

While writing about his parish, the priest interrupts himself to reconsider why he is starting a diary. Although he believes he has thoroughly planned his reasons for writing the journal, he thinks even his reasoning may be covering an ulterior motive. In a later entry, the priest shares his decision not to continue writing in the journal past the point of one year.

Aunt Philomène responds to the priest's letter with a gift of two hundred-francs. The priest wonders at the way money goes so quickly. On the topic of money, he relates an experience he had with the local grocer, M. Pamyre. During the incident, the grocer offers to send the priest three bottles of elderberry wine. Believing it is to be a gift, the priest agrees to the offer thinking the grocer isn't going to charge. As the story circulates town, the people react differently to it. One fellow priest enjoys the story, joking about it often. The grocer, however, is upset the priest thought he was going to give away his wares for free.

After an unpleasant encounter with Dumouchel in the sacristy, the priest has a meeting with the Curé de Torcy, an older fellow priest. The Curé de Torcy lectures the priest for not throwing the troublemaker out of the building and then goes on to insist that priests should be hard working, real men and not just overly studious boys. The Curé de Torcy says he believes that today's priests don't realize what the role of the bride of Christ, or the Church, is. This role is to work hard, but realize one's limitations. The priest injects that perhaps the Curé de Torcy is incorrect in his views of the Church; however, the Curé de Torcy insists that modern priests want only an easy job, not the real work that is involved in being a priest. He says a priest should not so much seek to be loved as to be honored and respected. The world needs discipline, The Curé de Torcy says, in order to overthrow the devil.

After their talk, the Curé de Torcy takes the priest to see the Curé de Torcy's bedroom and oratory. The priest views the bedroom, with its mahogany furniture and upholstered chairs, as being luxurious. The oratory, however, is dominated by an oleograph of the Baby Jesus that the priest describes as "hideous." The Curé de Torcy talks about his family and the time he spent in Saint-Sulpice, a school for priests. He admits to a large amount of Tomfoolery on his part at the school and says that in the end, he was sent home with no hope of becoming a priest. It was at this point that the Curé de Torcy says he considered taking his own life because his one dream in life was to be a priest. Later, he was sent to another seminary where his dream was realized. After this experience, the Curé de Torcy decided to become serious about his calling. The Curé de Torcy says that during his lifetime he has come to the belief that Jesus is not as happy with monks, who sequester themselves and only sing and look toward heaven, as those who are will to do the work His people need done.

Continuing in his discussion of the difference between monks and priests, the Curé de Torcy explains that monks do not have to deal with people the way priests do. Priests must take an active role in their communities and try to lead and teach the people as best they know how. The Curé de Torcy believes the world would be a better place if the Church were the head of it. Men would then know the true meaning of life and would experience the miracle of being Sons of God. Later, as the priest thinks back over the Curé de Torcy's words, he considers how people are much more complex and their problems more difficult than those of ordinary barnyard animals. The priest believes much of this complexity is because of the perhaps unforgivable dislike most people have for themselves.

In order to cut down on expenses, the priest writes that has decided to not hire a cleaning lady. Apparently, the decision has been misunderstood by his parishioners, especially since the former cleaning lady's husband was hired as the gamekeeper at the Château, the home of the wealthiest parishioners in the area. The priest fears this decision was foolish, along with his decision to start a diary. He holds high expectations for his writing, hoping it will serve as a form of prayer. While writing, the lonely priest feels as though he is conversing with a friend.

## **Chapter 1 Analysis**

In the first section of this chapter, the priest compares himself and his parish to a small boy leading cattle out of the cold drizzly night into a barn, a symbol of warmth and safety. Also, note the priest's reference to the cancerous growth of boredom. Comparisons continue through out the chapter with the Curé de Torcy using the story of a nun who worked herself to death cleaning a church to illustrate the priest's role in the community. The cleaning nun represents the priest while the church building represents the parish. The dirt the nun tries to clean away represents the sin and ungodliness in any parish. Although the Curé de Torcy criticizes the nun for cleaning herself to death, he indicates she had more gumption than modern priests who shy away from hard work, wanting only to be loved and cared for.

Another of these comparison style illustrations occurs when the priest and the Curé de Torcy discuss a picture of the Baby Jesus. Again, the Curé de Torcy uses this picture to illustrate the role of the priesthood. He insists that the baby in the picture, who represents Jesus, is not as interested in workers who will sing as the monks do, but would rather have workers who are willing to give the ox fresh straw and the donkey a rub. In this example, the animals represent all of mankind. A good priest is one who is willing and able to find ways to meet these needs.

One of the themes addressed in the first chapter is that of the spiritual journey. The priest is at the beginning of his journey with high hopes and expectations. The Curé de Torcy, an older, wiser priest, tries to mentor the young priest by sharing the knowledge he has learned during his journey. The older priest has traveled from a point where he was so low he wanted to kill himself to a point where he evidences a look and stature of inner joy and peace. Although the younger priest finds he disagrees with much of what the Curé de Torcy has to say, he listens respectfully. He has devised his own plan for his priesthood.

Another theme, which is touched on briefly in the first chapter, is the idea of poverty. The priest admits he is not wise to the ways of money and is often surprised at how quickly money is spent. The priest feels the common man puts too much emphasis on the acquisition of money. He also indicates he feels money is the means to an end, not an end in itself. Also, there is a sense that the priest feels he is not honest with money, an idea that seems ironic. The priest also notes in his diary two instances in which he has caused a stir in the community as the result of a misunderstanding concerning money. These include the instance of the grocer and the bottles of wine as well as the priest's decision not to hire a cleaning lady.



# Chapter 2

## Chapter 2 Summary

At the start of this chapter, the priest meets with Mlle Louise, the governess at the Château. Although this young lady intended to become a Poor Clare, or a nun of St. Clare, she instead nursed her invalid mother and become a governess. While the Mme la Comtesse is pleased with Mlle Louise, the daughter, Mlle Chantal does not like Mlle Louise at all. Also, the priest writes in his diary that he has learned those at the Château do not snub him for choosing not to have a live-in maid. They do, however, feel he should have a housekeeper come in once or twice a week. The priest admits he has no problem with being poor and having to do his own laundry, but wishes the elders of the church would decide whether priests should appear poor, or well-to-do.

In the shadow of trying to keep up appearances, the priest hopes to find some consolation in teaching the children of the parish their catechism. However, he finds even the children seem to have lost their innocence and have become hardened by the world. The priest believes there is hope in one child a particular, a girl by the name of Seraphita Dumouchel, who seems to pay closer attention than any of the other children in the class. When the priest approaches Seraphita with the idea of the love of Christ, he finds her attention has only been the butt of a joke among the children. After this encounter, the priest finds the young girl deliberately doing things to get his attention and embarrass him. He wonders what he has done to deserve such punishment.

The priest reminds himself in his diary it has been only three months since he was appointed to the parish of Ambricourt. He feels it will be both his first and last parish. As he thinks about the parish and its people, he prays to God to open his eyes and ears and let him see the face and hear the voice of his parish. The priest feels so moved by the emotion that this thought brings that he tries to use the example in his sermon, but is stopped short by what he considers disapproval in his flock.

Despite his former decision not to have a cleaning lady, the priest writes that he has agreed to have a cleaning lady come in a few days a week. The priest notes that in an attempt to help with the expense, the Mme la Comtesse has agreed to pay the cleaning lady one day's wages. However, the priest is still responsible for feeding the lady a noon meal. The priest also feels embarrassed at the idea of having a strange lady clean his old under things, so he goes out and buys new ones, another expense he feels he can't afford.

The priest expresses a feeling that he is not accomplishing anything with his work. He writes of a plan he has in mind, but always keeps delaying putting it into action. He notes that Mlle Louise is the only one who attends the daily mass. He also continues to be plagued by Seraphita's attention. To make matters worse, the housekeeper is not happy with her wages, so the priest offers her more money, money he does not have to





start with. He finds the woman unfriendly, but takes the blame for it upon himself, believing it is because he gave her the extra wages clumsily.

After the area priests' monthly conference and lecture, the priest brings up his plan to see what the other priests think of his ideas. The other priests seem convinced the plan, which the priest never outlines in detail, is far too time consuming and requires more energy than what the young priest possesses. The conversation quickly turns to a savings bank, and the priest feels lost in the talk of money and savings. He remembers his poor background and wonders if he will ever possess anything. The priest does, however, feel he should study up on the subjects of crops and farming, which are the sources of livelihood for his parishioners. Sports is another subject he sets his mind to study since he believes that although he may not be able to play sports with the boys, he may become closer to them if he is able to discuss sports with them.

The priest writes of feeling proud that he has been invited to lunch at the Château. Although he is aware he should not become dependent upon these wealthy people, he is also aware of the great gulf of difference that exists between the people he came from and the people they came from. The priest admits to feeling preoccupied by his coming visit to the Château. He is concerned about the appearance of his clothes and does not want to appear poor. Also, he often experiences pains in his stomach that keep him from eating properly. However, as he considers the substance of these things, he decides he can deal with them. After the lunch, the priest writes that all goes well and that the Comte and Comtesse put him at ease right away. Although the priest wishes the Comte had shown more interest in the sports guild the priest is trying to start, the priest is uplifted by the meeting.

During the course of this chapter, the priest receives two letters from Louis Dupréty, an old friend from seminary. In the first, the friend requests that the priest come see him as soon as possible. Although Dupréty does not mention anything is wrong, the priest is troubled by the tone and context of the letter. In the second letter, the friend indicates he is in poor health and again requests the priest come quickly to see him. The priest feels the cry is like that of a child and vows to see the friend soon.

M le Comte has paid the priest a visit. He warns the priest not to move in too quickly among the people of the parish as they still bear wounds from the war. The Comte believes the priest should let the people come to him first instead of approaching them directly. Despite the nature of the meeting, the priest feels comfortable in the Comte's presence and wonders if he might be able to consider him a friend. The Curé de Torcy, however, does not like the Comte at all and often makes fun of him. Although the Curé de Torcy does not believe the Comte loves money, he does know the Comte doesn't like spending it. The priest writes in his diary that as soon as he mentions Mlle Chantal, the Curé de Torcy changes the subject.

The priest writes in his diary an entry about slavery, injustice, and the destruction of the institution of slavery, which he gives to the Curé de Torcy to read without telling him the entry was written by the priest. Although he feels the entry is over thought, the Curé de Torcy does not believe the reasoning in them is incorrect. Next, the priest turns the



attention of his journal to the Russians, a people with whom he feels he can relate. Growing up in poverty as a child, the priest remembers a time when his father had died and his mother was in the hospital after having a tumor removed. The priest, then a young boy, spent his time crouching behind the bar at his aunt's pub reading. During this time, he read the writing of Maxim Gorki. Although a poor Russian, this man grew to have a great deal of money, a thought the priest found comforting at that point in his life especially since he had prayed for the man daily.

In another discussion with the Curé de Torcy, the elder priest encourages the young priest to keep up his good work, and to never slack off. He says the young priest is the type of person who will come under injustice and hardships simply because of the type of person that he is. The Curé de Torcy encourages the young priest to never surrender to these injustices.

## Chapter 2 Analysis

The theme of the poor is addressed in this chapter. It is said that the world has always been trying to get rid of this class of people, yet the harder the world tries, the more there are of them. The poor bear witness of Jesus Christ. The Curé de Torcy warns the younger priest he should not be wary of those who have few material possessions as much as he should fear those who are poor in heart and spirit. The topic of the poor is one the young priest feels very strongly about because he came from a poor background. He remembers reading the childhood memories of Maxim Gorki and feels the Russian people as a whole are companions in his own misery. The priest prays for Gorki daily and is happy to learn Gorki ends up making a lot of money and living in luxury in the Mediterranean.

Also adding to the theme of poverty and the poor, the priest is annoyed by the Church's confusing stance on the poverty of the priests. For instance, the priest is expected to hire a live in housekeeper even though he feels he can't afford a maid and that this service is not necessary. The priest sees no dishonor in washing his own clothes, but knows the Church will frown upon the action, thinking he is trying to make a show of it.

In this chapter, the tone of the diary becomes slightly distressed as the priest meets with his first few challenges in his new parish. He is greatly disturbed by both the lack of innocence in the children as well as the shrewdness of the businessmen in the area. Although he feels people take advantage of him because of his naiveté, the Curé de Torcy tells him it is because the young priest is the type of person injustice searches out. As a way of foreshadowing the remainder of the story, the Curé de Torcy warns the priest to be on his guard against the injustices of the world.

# Chapter 3

## Chapter 3 Summary

The priest writes in his journal that the Dean of Blangermont chides him for allowing himself to come under debt. It seems the townspeople have been gossiping about the priest and Mme Pamyre, the grocer's wife, has taken it upon herself to share these complaints with the dean. After the incident with the three bottles of wine, the priest decided to no longer trade with the Pamyres but instead do business at another store, another fact that has riled Mme Pamyre.

The dean goes on to lecture the priest concerning an outburst of the priest's against business and business owners. The dean explains the young priest has no right to voice such opinions and should simply follow the opinions of his elders even if it means ignoring injustice. However, the dean adds that the topic should be addressed if it is brought up in confession. The priest speaks out against the dean stating that few people confess of "cooking accounts." The priest blames what he feels is an ill temper on his increasing stomach pains, but continues to look the dean straight in the face without backing down. The dean softens and attributes the priest's opinions to his youth, he then goes on to explain how the priest should view the Pamyres and other business people.

Later in his diary, the priest describes the dean as being one known for trying to humiliate Democratic priests. The priest believes the dean must have mistaken him for one; however, he goes on to explain that the mere worship of a rich man because he has money seems ridiculous. The priest feels men must earn the right to have such honor and respect, not get it just because they are rich.

In the next entry, Mlle Louise speaks to the priest about Mlle Chantal. Mlle Louise says the girl is becoming more and more difficult and she should be sent to a finishing school. Mlle Louise asks the priest to approach Mme la Comtesse about this at dinner the next week. The priest has the feeling that Mlle Louise is not telling all she knows about the situation with Mlle Chantal. He is also suspicious of Mlle Louise's reasons for sharing this information with him and feels he should not become involved in these private family matters.

The priest receives a third letter from Dupréty this time asking the priest to put off his visit. L'Abbé Dupréty informs the priest he is no longer serving as a priest, but instead earns his living doing other work. The priest finds himself irritated by the bragging and prideful tone of the letter. This is especially so since he finds nothing in an ordinary job and life to brag about.

The priest writes that he is suddenly aware he is very ill. He states he has not been able to eat normally for nearly six months. He eats only bread soaked in wine. Although the



priest realizes he has lost a great deal of weight, he believes he feels stronger and better on this fast than he did when he was still trying to eat.

On the lines of his illness, the priest visits Dr. Delbende, an old general practitioner in the area. The doctor examines the priest, and then asks him to come back in two weeks when he will set up an appointment with Dr. Lavigne in Lille, France. The doctor takes an immediate liking to the young priest. He declares that the priest, Torcy and he are of the same queer sort. Dr. Delbende admits he does not believe in God and has become rather hardened against God and religion. Dr Delbende defends his stance by speaking of the injustice and pride that have taken over the world. He also feels the Church doesn't care for the poor, as it should. The priest listens and feels there is no answer he can give the doctor that would heal the spiritual pain he sense the doctor feels. The priest concludes that the only real peace is found in Jesus Christ.

Next, the priest speaks again of his program or plan. He writes that it is half finished. It seems the priest's goal is to visit every family in his parish at least once every three months. While his fellow priests feel this is extreme, the priest wonders if he is really doing enough and if he is where God wants him to be. The priest also arranges a meeting for those interested in his sports guild. The priest is disappointed to find the field he wants to use must be rented instead of borrowed. He feels that M le Comte, who owns the field, is trying to discourage his project with this stipulation. Only four men show up at the priests meeting and they decide only to be a study circle that will meet in the library.

Meanwhile, M Pergiot announces she has decided to resign her position as housekeeper. She says she would rather not continue getting paid for doing so little work. M Pergiot also alludes to people she'd rather not meet at the priest's home, a statement which the priest finds confusing. The priest describes the lady as having fury in her eyes and disgust in her face as she spoke to him that day.

Mlle Louise comes to the priest for confession even though he is not her regular confessor. The priest considers the ritual of confession, whether adults really ever confess what is on their minds or merely scrape the surface of their sins. After this meeting with Mlle Louise, the priest has a bad night and is hardly able to sleep at all. He wakes and finds that as soon as he fixes his mind on something, he feels as peace, but thinks this constant stress to keep himself in check wears on his more than anything else. The next morning he yawns so badly for human pity that he finds himself crying on the shoulder of one of the children from his catechism class.

The priest meets the Curé de Torcy on the road and the two have another talk at the priest's home. The young priest has the feeling that the Curé de Torcy has something he wants to talk about, but has decided to keep to himself. The Curé de Torcy finally speaks out and says he cannot give the priest advice on how to handle his parish, only the priest can decide that. However, he encourages the priest to go on as he is currently doing. The priest is shocked at this saying, and feels as though he has no self-confidence, only many good intentions which he believes people see as such. He feels dismay when he thinks that the people of his parish have already made up their minds



about what type of person he is. After this visit, the priest suffers another bad night, this time falling asleep on a bench in the church.

The priest admits that his meeting with the Curé de Torcy has made him hesitant to approach his parishioners and that he now asks fewer questions of them. However, he notices that as soon as he seems to be making some headway with the people and he mentions God, they close up and their faces cloud over.

## Chapter 3 Analysis

As the priest becomes more aware that his parishioners are unhappy with him, the tone of the novel becomes more and more dismal. It is in this chapter that the priest begins to learn that his parishioners are gossiping maliciously about him. Through a conversation with the Dean of Blangermont and another with the Curé de Torcy, the priest starts to feel unsure of himself and work in the parish. Adding to this feeling, the priest is approached by Mlle Louise with a request to suggest that Mlle Chantal be sent to boarding school. The priest feels he should not be drawn into this family decision and is suspicious of Mlle Louise's reasons for coming to him.

During this chapter, Bernanos develops the theme of the Church being ruled by the world instead of the word of God. The Dean of Blangermont lectures the priest for running up debts and speaking badly of the affairs of certain businessmen in the area. The dean insists the priest not treat local businessmen this way because the Church is dependent upon these men for its livelihood. He adds the priest has no business meddling in the accounts of businesses unless their discrepancies are brought to the confessional.

Pride is another theme that is touched on in this chapter. Dr. Delbende speaks of the pride of a person who won't die peacefully. A sense that even in death, some people will still not do what is needed to put their souls at rest. Also, the priest speaks of the pride he feels in the letter from his friend, a pride that he feels is misplaced. The priest feels the friend should have been more prideful of his place in seminary than an ordinary job and ordinary worldly life.

# Chapter 4

## Chapter 4 Summary

The priest reports that he is feeling better. He now sugars his wine. Sulpice Mitonnet has been helping with some work that needs to be done around the presbytery, an act that has brought on disdain from his fellow villagers. The priest suggests the boy try to go out and find some gainful employment.

Mme Dumouchel pays a visit to the priest. She is unhappy that her daughter did not do well on the catechism exam. The girl, Seraphita, has concerned the priest for some time with her flirtatious ways. The priest feels she is too intelligent to have done badly on the exam and decides to speak to her mother regarding the girl's behavior. The priest hesitantly suggests that Seraphita is far advanced for her age and that her mother might consider keeping her under observation for a couple of weeks. The priest also indicates Seraphita's manners are rather coquettish, a characteristic that he believes her mother really ought to take notice of. Mme Dumouchel becomes infuriated at this suggestion and shames the priest for thinking such a way about a young girl. Through a crack in the door of the room, the priest can hear Seraphita's classmates giggling at the confrontation. When Seraphita's mother leaves, the child cries wildly at being accused of such things. After this meeting, the priest reconsiders his role in teaching the catechism. What he had hoped would be a comfort to him has turned out to be anything but. He decides he must study longer and depend less on inspiration when preparing the children's lessons.

After a bad trip to the Château where the priest finds himself unable to visit because of his illness, the priest receives an unsigned letter requesting that he resign his position of priest. Judging by the handwriting, the priest believes Madame Pégriot may have been the one who sent the letter. The priest is upset by the letter. He struggles to pray but finds he is unable to do so. He wishes God would come to him, but feels that God does not do so. The priest considers that even the saints in their times of trouble were never abandoned by God. He finds he can feel no compassion for the people of the parish and no pity for himself. The priest wonders if he will ever love again. He feels as if he has just lost all of the progress he made on his spiritual journey and is now just a small burning ember, about to go out. After a few torn out pages, the priest records in his diary that Dr. Delbende has been found dead of a gunshot wound. It is believed his gun accidentally went off when he was trying to untangle it from some branches.

After mass, the priest finds Mlle Louise's prayer book lying in the aisle of the church. In the process of picking it up, he finds that her handwriting inside the book is the same as the handwriting on the letter asking him to leave the parish. This discovery puzzles him.

Later, the priest goes to Dr. Delbende's funeral. He is surprised at how composed the Curé de Torcy appears even under the circumstances. After the funeral is complete, the priest waits at the train station with the Curé de Torcy until his train arrives. During the



time, the two converse about the doctor's death. Like others, the Curé de Torcy fears Dr. Delbende killed himself. Apparently, although the doctor had made rather good money while he was practicing, he had a tendency to give his money away quickly. Soon newer physicians began taking business away from him and because he was unwilling to change his ways, he no longer had the number of patients he once did. The doctor had apparently been counting on receiving a large inheritance from an aunt who at the last minute left the money in the hands of a businessman. The Curé de Torcy also mentions that the doctor had been suffering with a case of severe depression and that the combination of the depression and the loss of the inheritance possibly triggered his suicide.

M. le Comte visits the priest to warn him of the reputation Sulpice Mitonnet has begun to have in the town. He reports gossip has it that the boy has been engaging in loose behavior. The priest writes in his journal he didn't like M. le Comte's way of looking about the room. The priest also felt the man expected some protest from the priest at the slander of his friend, Mitonnet, but that the priest offered him none. When the boy comes to the presbytery that evening, the priest considers speaking to him, but instead decides to take a walk. When the priest re-enters the house, Mitonnet looks up at him with a look on his face that the priest describes as the will to lie, and then leaves the priest's home. The priest wonders if the boy was aware the priest knew what was being said about him. Again, the priest finds he is unable to sleep that night.

Next in his diary, the priest relates a meeting with Mlle Chantal, a circumstance and day that he regards as horrible. The girl meets the priest at the church as he is finishing morning mass. Her eyes are full of hate and shamelessness. Mlle Chantal speaks to him about killing someone or killing herself, and then she continues to rant until she notices the priest is praying. She stamps her feet in disgust. The priest takes her hand and tries to make her bow in prayer. Mlle Chantal continues to rant and the priest leads her to the confessional, the only place he says he can hear her.

Apparently, Mlle Chantal has learned a secret and is now about to be sent to a boarding school in an attempt to keep that secret covered. Mlle Chantal tells the priest that because of what she knows, she no longer loves her father and wishes to run away and disgrace herself and in this way punish her father for his actions. Twice during their discussion, the priest recounts a supernatural force that seems to lead him. Once, he sees the face of Mlle Chantal plainly, even though he was in the confessional where he can see no one's face plainly. The second time, he asks Mlle Chantal for a letter from her bag, a letter of which he has no prior knowledge.

After he takes the letter, Mlle Chantal leaves the church. The priest follows her out of the church through the cemetery and eventually has to ask her to slow down so he can keep up with her. The pain in his stomach has returned. The priest tells Mlle Chantal that although he heard her out, he does not accept her challenge. He explains how in her lack of love she has actually united herself with the woman who hurt her so badly. She leaves the priest without a response. The priest finds no desire for mercy in the hardened girl.

## Chapter 4 Analysis

In this chapter, Bernanos develops his theme of injustice through the story of Dr. Delbende. Although the doctor is treated unjustly by the public, his aunt and even the people whom he tries to help, he continues to try to help them. He feels he cannot do much against injustice, only size it up and attack it if it is his size and stature. Ultimately, the doctor responds to the injustice in the world by killing himself.

Also in this chapter, the unfair treatment of the priest continues. He receives an anonymous letter he believes is from Mlle Louise asking him to resign his position in the parish. The priest also continues to be tormented by the children in his catechism class. Although he had hoped this class and the innocence of the children in it would be a comfort to him, it has become anything but.

Bernanos has been building his main plot in this novel through the first half of the book. In this chapter, the priest is given the idea there is something very wrong going on with the family that lives in the Château. Although he had hoped these people would become friends with him, it appears they have their own agenda. Mlle Louise has already approached the priest about problems between herself and Mlle Chantal. In the fourth chapter, Mlle Chantal approaches the priest about the same situation. Her manner is wild and uncontrolled like that of a wild animal. She rants and rages at the priest about deception and murder. Mlle Chantal refuses to pray or show any respect to God, an attitude that seems to disturb the priest more than her other actions.



# Chapter 5

## Chapter 5 Summary

The priest suffers with uncertainty following his encounter with Mlle Chantal. He wonders if he did the right thing by letting her go without questioning her further about the situation that had upset her so. The priest feels tormented by his inability to pray and believes he ought to surrender his parish and deem himself no longer able to lead a parish. Later, the priest throws the letter he took from Mlle Chantal into the fire.

At his earliest convenience, the priest pays a visit to the Château. Although he still feels unsure of himself, he decides to talk to Mme la Comte about her daughter. After a brief discussion of whether or not the priest has the right to speak to Mme la Comtesse about her daughter, the priest accuses the lady of not loving her daughter. Mme la Comtesse says the girl is simply jealous of her governess and, for that reason, is being sent away. The priest begs her not to send the girl away in despair.

Finally, Mme la Comtesse breaks down and tells the priest the secrets of her heart. How even at the young age of five, Mlle Chantal was the same demanding person she is today. She then goes on to tell the priest of the son she once had. That Mlle Chantal had hated the boy from the first. At the age of 18 months this little boy died. Ever since that time, Mlle Chantal became the lady of the house and had basically pushed her mother aside. Mme la Comtesse also admits that she is aware her husband has had many affairs. She says it is Mlle Chantal and not herself that has been deceived. She adds that she would not feel right turning Mlle Louise out without a job simply because Mlle Chantal does not like her, therefore, Mlle Chantal will be going to a finishing school. The priest begs Mme la Comtesse not to let the girl go without talking to her. He tells her he fears the girl may try to harm herself.

In her defense, Mme la Comtesse claims she does not criticize her husband or daughter for not understanding her, but feels she has gotten accustomed to the lack of love. In the matter of Mlle Chantal, Mme la Comtesse feels she has done nothing wrong since no one realizes she and her daughter aren't close. Mme la Comtesse also claims she should not be held responsible for the affair with the governess since she has only followed her husband's orders. The priest warns Mme la Comtesse that God will break her. He will break down her hard heart. If not, the priest claims that she and her son will no longer know each other. The priest forces the woman to come face to face with the God she has ignored for so long. In the course of the discussion, Mme la Comtesse pulls a medallion from around her neck that holds a lock of her son's hair. The priest pleads with her to give everything to God. She describes to the priest the way in which her son died. How good he was even during his death. The priest then explains to her that the reality of hell occurs when one does not love anymore.

After she contemplates these words, Mme la Comtesse attempts to surrender to the priest. She claims that without his assistance, she would have died with hatred toward



God in her heart. In an impetuous moment, the Mme la Comtesse throws the medallion containing her son's hair into the fire. The priest reaches after it singeing his sleeve up to the elbow and blistering his fingers, but it is too late to save the memento. As Mme la Comtesse bandages his fingers, the priest feels a distinct sense of peace settle over them.

As he returns home, the priest receives a letter from Mme la Comtesse stating she is at last at peace and happy with her life. In a twist of fate, Mme la Comtesse dies later that night. She had been suffering with vague pains for quite a while which the doctor had though were not dangerous. As the priest tries to help the family deal with the death, M. le Comte acts frigidly toward the priest and Mlle Chantal seems to ignore his presence. Later, as the priest leaves the Chateau after viewing the body, he gets the disturbing feeling the mourners are talking maliciously about him.

## Chapter 5 Analysis

This chapter where the priest confronts the Mme la Comtesse is the climax of the novel. It is in this chapter that the priest learns of the true state of Mme la Comtesse's heart. Like the priest, she has suffered her own share of injustice. Instead of allowing the injustice to make her a better person, however, Mme la Comtesse has become bitter because of her trials. The priest confronts the woman in hopes that she will not send her daughter away without first making things right between the two of them. He soon realizes things have not been right between the mother and daughter for a long time. However, at the end of their discussion, Mme la Comtesse receives the peace of God into her heart and repairs her relationship with Him. She throws the medallion containing a lock of her son's hair into the fire. While impetuous, this act symbolizes her act of casting off all of her disappointments and bitterness and giving them to Christ.

At the conclusion of the chapter, Mme la Comtesse dies. As the priest tries to deal with the suddenness of her death, he cannot help but notice the frigidity of M. le Comte and Mlle Chantal toward him. The priest also gets the impression that others in the parish are talking badly of him, an action he does not understand.

# Chapter 6

## Chapter 6 Summary

As the priest arranges for Mme la Comtesse's funeral, he continues to notice M. le Comte avoids him and the once friendly servants at the Château seem to behave coldly toward him. To add to his troubles, the priest also notes in his diary that his short-term memory is getting very bad. The only way for him to keep track of recent events is to record them in his diary. The priest wonders if he is spending too much time at this task.

Next, the priest meets with the canon to arrange for Mme la Comtesse's funeral. During this visit, the canon informs the priest M. le Comte wants to meet with the priest in private. He also warns the priest of the wicked ways of Mlle Chantal and lets him know she is telling others a very different story of her meetings with the priest than what the priest tells. As the two talk, the canon sees a half empty bottle of wine on the priest's kitchen table and warns the priest of the dangers of this type of eating habit. The priest tries to explain that he has been having stomach troubles, but the canon doesn't seem to consider this.

Changing his tone, the canon speaks to the priest about power and warns the priest against misusing his. He then requests the priest write down his version of the meeting with Mme la Comtesse which he says will be much more useful to the priest than trying to explain the conversation in person. Also, the canon warns the priest not to be swayed by M. le Comte's name or title while speaking with him, that he is just a man like any other.

Even after his meeting with M. le Comte, the priest still does not understand what the family holds against him. During the meeting, the two speak of the funeral plans. Then as the priest is searching for a form that needs to be filled out, he accidentally scatters papers on the floor. He hears M. le Comte gasp and turns around to find him holding Mme la Comtesse's letter. The priest takes the letter from him, but senses fear in the man.

After this stressful meeting, the priest spends a sleepless night trying to pray and writing in his diary. He voices what is almost a sense of relief when he feels an emptiness so strong he thinks he will die. His thoughts then return to his health issues. The priest writes that he realizes he is making a serious mistake by not going to see the doctor in Lille as Dr. Delbende requested.

The following day, the priest is supposed to meet with M. le Comte at the Château but instead arrives to find only Mlle Chantal there. Although he does not want to have another episode with her, she pulls him into the drawing room and tries to make him see what she calls the real her. Mlle Chantal expresses joy that her mother, whom she said never loved her, is dead and that the governess is being forced to leave. She admits to



being hateful and hurtful. The priest tells her God is the one who will judge her for all her actions. After this, the girl finally lets the priest leave the room.

After the encounter with Mlle Chantal, the priest waits for M. le Comte who arrives late for his meeting with the priest. He says Mlle Chantal should have given the priest some papers detailing how he wishes the funeral to be carried out. The priest informs him that the girl has given him no papers. At this point, Mlle Chantal appears and tells her father the priest should be given a free hand in the funeral. She also orders her father to write the governess her final check, as she will be leaving soon. The priest senses uneasiness between the two. M. le Comte suggests everyone will think it is strange if Mlle Louise does not attend the funeral, but Mlle Chantal contends everyone wants to see her go.

The father and daughter continue to have a not very pleasant conversation about the governess and her wages while the priest listens in. He has the feeling Mlle Chantal is in some way goading her father, making him feel badly for some transgression. After Mlle Chantal leaves the room, M. le Comte tells the priest that the priest has been the cause of the recent upheaval in his home. He adds that he does not want the priest to have any more contact with his daughter and that he feels the priest is a danger to the parish in general.

Later that day, as the priest is working in the church, getting it ready for Mme la Comtesse's funeral, he asks the sacristan what the general parish thinks of him. The sacristan replies that the people don't think he eats enough, that he tells stories in his catechism classes and that he meddles in affairs that he has no business meddling in. Like many others, the sacristan feels the priest should wait until people approach him for help instead of vice versa. The man's hardened attitude toward God and religion causes the priest to leave the man, claiming to feel sick.

Again in his diary, the priest second-guesses his actions toward M. le Comte and Mlle Chantal. He wonders at the sadness in their spirits. As he thinks back over the horrible occurrences of the last few days, he reads Mme la Comtesse's letter again. He wonders if the weight of the burden he helped lift from her has been transferred to him in the form of the troubles within his parish.

After several torn out portions, the diary resumes in the middle of a conversation between the priest and the Curé de Torcy. The conversation takes place in a shed outside the Château. The Curé de Torcy lectures the younger priest on his habit of thinking through things too much as well as his appearance. He insists the priest should eat better and that if he did this, he would not have the stomach pains of which he complains. The Curé de Torcy also addresses the priest's inability to pray, saying he should at least go through the motions until the spirit and feeling returns to him. As the older priest continues his lecture and speaks about each priest receiving his calling at a different place and time, the young priest suddenly gets the revelation that his calling must have been in the Garden of Gethsemane, the place where Christ suffered the agony of knowing He had to go to the cross and be killed. This revelation makes the priest cry, an action which irritates the Curé de Torcy who believes the young priest is



letting his mind wander away from the conversation. The priest, however, does not dare share his revelation with his mentor, feeling it is too grand an appointment to be understood by anyone else.

The Curé de Torcy then speaks to the priest about the encounter he had with Mme la Comtesse. Not knowing that the priest has not been told that Mlle Chantal was eavesdropping on the conversation, the Curé de Torcy lets this fact slip. He scolds the priest for having the woman throw her last memento of her son into the fire. The Curé de Torcy also tells the priest he should not have threatened the woman with eternal separation from her son. He adds that Mlle Chantal claims that her mother fought the priest to the end. The only accusation the priest speaks to is the claim that the mother never found peace. To the other claims, he says nothing except that he sees the events of the conversation in a completely different light.

After this meeting with the Curé de Torcy, the priest walks home alone. He feels relieved, as if a great burden has been lifted off of him now that this first round of questioning is past him. The priest is about to sit down to a meal of baked apples and wine when the Curé de Torcy walks into the priest's home. The priest is so surprised he accidentally knocks over the bottle of wine, breaking it on the floor. When the Curé de Torcy discovers how bad and sour the wine has become, he tells the priest he is poisoning himself with the stuff.

After the initial shock of the visit, a feeling of dread creeps over the priest as the Curé de Torcy sits down to have a talk with him. Apparently, he considers the priest to be an alcoholic and insists that he must stop this habit right away. Then, Curé de Torcy's attitude softens and he advises the priest to go on with the small tasks of keeping his parish in order until the ordeal has passed and rest has come. He encourages the priest to continue to pray, to the angels and to Mary as well as to Jesus. While the Curé de Torcy is talking to the priest about these matters, the priest begins to have horrible stomach pains that hurt so badly he can think of nothing to do but thank the Curé de Torcy for the information and ask for a blessing. The Curé de Torcy responds it is the priest who must bless him. After this ritual is finished, the Curé de Torcy leaves, but the priest notices he walks bowed over instead of with his usual straight posture.

The priest thinks to himself after the Curé de Torcy leaves that the reason the matter with Mlle Chantal bothers him so much is because he believes himself to be innocent and that his only mistake was that of being unwise. He admits to himself that the stress of his conversation with Mme la Comtesse might have hastened her death. The priest wonders if it was indeed his overwhelming success in school that has made his real life as a priest seem so mediocre. He also wonders at the public opinion of his drinking, and feels it is no worse than greediness, if that bad. Besides, he reasons, it is all his stomach will tolerate.

After two days of not writing in his diary, the priest writes an entry detailing his worsening illness. The priest writes that he had been going about his duties, which included visiting a dying man and then anointing the man with Holy Oils after his death. He admits to drinking a glass of coffee and gin that caused his stomach to hurt badly,



but he wanted to get through his list of visits, so he tried to bear the pain and press on. The priest remembers he was near the Dumouchel's home when he fainted the first time. He writes that he recovered slightly and walked on, but found that he was no longer on the road but walking through grass and bushes. The priest remembers coughing up a warm substance with a salty taste. He states that he reached the lane, but fell and passed out again. The priest then remembers waking to find a lantern placed near his head. At this point, he writes that he sat up and found himself face to face with Seraphita. She was holding a bowl of water and rag to help clean the priest up. As she cleaned, she admitted to the priest she has been telling awful tales of him because she is jealous. He writes that the child warned him to be careful of the others in the town also, referring to them as a "slimy lot." Seraphita ran off when her father called her, but first told the priest to go home and go straight to bed. The priest writes that when he returned home, he washed out his clothes and found the water turned red. It was then he knew he had been vomiting blood.

## Chapter 6 Analysis

It is during this chapter that some of the priest's questions about the way his parishioners are treating him begin to be answered. Through his conversation with the Curé de Torcy, he learns that Mlle Chantal listened in on the conversation between the priest and her mother and is now telling others an account of the exchange that is very different from what actually happened. Because of his role as a priest, however, the priest is unable and unwilling to betray Mme la Comtesse's confidence and defend himself. The priest also learns there is talk around town that the priest is an alcoholic.

The opinions of the priest as voiced by the other characters in this chapter give an idea that the parishioners believe the Church should not meddle in people's affairs. Both M. le Comte and the sacristan tell the priest they believe he has meddled in areas that he should have left alone. In fact, M. le Comte goes so far as to blame the upheaval in his home on the priest when in reality, the priest was not the cause of the troubles at all. He was only pulled into the drama by the request of both Mlle Louise and Mlle Chantal. The priest also learns that public opinion has it that he was the cause of Mme la Comtesse's death. While the priest admits the stress of the conversation might have triggered her death, she is actually better off because she is now at peace with God.

At the end of the chapter, the priest pushes himself to continue his work even though he knows he is very sick and should go home and rest. Although he does not feel well, he puts the needs of others above himself and has faith that God will take care of him. As the priest wakes from where he has passed out on the road near Seraphita's home, he has a conversation with the girl. Although she thinks he is drunk and does not realize he is seriously ill, she carefully cleans him up and sends him home. These actions show there is still love and compassion in the little girl's hardened heart.



# Chapter 7

## Chapter 7 Summary

The priest wakes the next morning feeling much better, but still arranges to see a doctor in Lille. While arranging for another priest to care for his parish while he is away, the priest meets with Mlle Louise who is in an awful state of dishevel. She comes to the priest because she has not yet been paid her final wages. The priest begs her to have pride in herself and move to another part of the country instead of continuing to hang around this area of France. Mlle Louise warns the priest of Mlle Chantal's hatred toward him. She tells him that Mlle Chantal even knows of the priest's sickness and his encounter with Seraphita in the lane.

Next in his diary, the priest records that Seraphita comes in late to the priest's last catechism class. He notices she is limping. The child leaves before the priest finishes the final prayer, but accidentally leaves her handkerchief behind. The priest knows she will return soon for it. When she does come back, the two have a brief conversation, which Seraphita begins by telling the priest that she was responsible for telling Mlle Chantal about her encounter with priest in the lane. The girl sums up her actions as being bad and says she is sad because she believe this makes up for her sin. She asks the priest why he is so sad and he tells her it is because people do not love God enough. As Seraphita moves away, the priest asks her why she is limping. Although she does not want to tell him, the priest discovers there is a string tied around her leg so tightly her flesh had turned purple. Seraphita explains it is her way of punishing herself for telling Mlle Chantal of the priest's sickness. The priest tells her to cut the string off and not harm herself again. As she leaves, the priest prays God will watch over her.

The priest's has set up an appointment with the doctor in Lille. He reports in his journal he has abandoned wine and is now drinking only coffee. Also, he states he has had another slight hemorrhage and has spit up more blood. He fears his troubles come from his lungs and not his stomach as he had thought before. He wonders if he has consumption and if so, why it has become so bad so quickly.

On one of his last days in the parish of Ambricourt, the priest reports in his diary that he has met a man which he refers to as a friend. The meeting occurs as the priest is walking to Mezargues when he hears a motorbike. The priest recognizes the sound as the bike belonging to M. Olivier, the nephew of Mme la Comtesse. The young man rides up to the priest and offers him a ride, which the priest accepts. The priest says for the first time in his life, while riding the bike, he feels the joy of youth. After they reach the priest's home, the two have a conversation. Although M. Olivier hears the way the priest is spoken of at the Château, he tells the priest he believes the two of them could be friends. The two go on to discuss the soldier's view of the Church and vice versa.

Next, the priest writes he has made up his mind for sure to go to Lille. Along with this decision comes the idea that he might actually get well and cast off the burden of



sickness that has kept him down for so long. The priest tries to go to bed early the day before he is to leave to see the doctor, but finds he is unable to sleep. Because of this sleeplessness, he gets up and writes in his diary. While writing, the priest recalls a visit he had that evening as he was packing. He says Mlle Chantal walked into his home and sat down in the kitchen. She first asked the priest if her cousin, M. Olivier, had been talking about her to the priest. During the conversation, Mlle Chantal tries to bring up the subject of the priest drinking. Instead of humoring her, the priest addresses her roughly and asks her to help him clean the house. Although she helps the priest clean as she is bided, she appears to be working herself into a fury. After they finish cleaning, she seems angry that she has done what the priest asked of her and again tries to explain her view of herself to the priest. The priest, on the other hand, tries to explain to her his view of her and her kind. This diary entry appears to stop mid-conversation.

## Chapter 7 Analysis

As the priest prepares to travel to Lille for his doctor's appointment, he chances upon the three people who have caused him the most problems during his career as a priest. He first meets with Mlle Louise who has walked from Arches to meet with the priest. She is in a state of disarray and seems to be feeling sorry for herself. She tells the priest she has not yet gotten her final wages and asks if he can help her. He agrees to help her get her pay, but tells her to have some pride and go on with her life. It is an interesting twist that in most cases, the common man does not want the Church to be involved in their lives unless it holds benefit for them. What the common man does not realize is that the benefits of the Church are long-term, and not the short-term benefits the world desires. So it is with Mlle Louise. She seems to want worldly revenge instead of holding out for long-term blessings.

Next, the priest encounters Seraphita in his catechism class. Although he could have let her go without speaking to her, he waits for her to return for her belongings, and then treats her kindly. She has tied a string around her leg in an attempt to punish herself for talking about the priest to Mlle Chantal. The priest orders her to cut it off, not wishing the child to be hurt. Despite the rumors this child has spread about him and the damage she has done to his reputation, he still has the Godliness to overlook her transgressions and treat her kindly.

Finally, the priest has an encounter with Mlle Chantal. Although her father has ordered the priest to have no further contact with his daughter, the priest receives her and speaks with her. When Mlle Chantal tries to address the issue of the priest's drinking, the priest changes the subject and asks her to help him clean. Almost surprisingly, she does so. It is obvious, however, that Mlle Chantal has learned nothing from the drama her childlike tantrum against the governess brought about and that she still doesn't feel she has done anything wrong. Although there appears to be no real change in any of these three people, Mlle Louise, Seraphita or Mlle Chantal, Bernanos gives the sense that the priest has found peace with these people and his relationship with them.



# Chapter 8

## Chapter 8 Summary

After his visit to the doctor in Lille, the priest's first impulse is to catch a train to see the Curé de Torcy. However, he soon realizes this impulse is foolish. The priest thinks to himself that even if his appointment had gone well, he probably would have still gone to the same pub in which he finds himself now, and that he still would have written in his diary. Although the priest writes that he first looked for comfort in a church, he did not find what he was looking for. In wandering the city, he but finds himself in the back room of a small pub.

The priest finally works up the courage to write in his diary the particulars of his doctor's appointment. It seems that Dr. Lavigne meets with patients in his own home and on this particular day, the apartment is being cleaned so he examines the priest in his daughter's nursery. The doctor examines the priest for a long time not paying particular attention to the lungs, which the priest believes are what is causing his problems. The priest writes in his diary that he is surprised the doctor is so young. The doctor's arrogant attitude makes the priest feel nervous and ill at ease. After the doctor tells the priest to get dressed, he tells the priest that he needs an X-ray before giving a diagnosis. The priest asks if this is really necessary, and the doctor admits it would be merely a formality.

The doctor says the priest may return home where he should return quietly to his work. He suggests drinking only milk and water with a little sugar in it. The doctor advises the priest not try to eat anything he can't keep down. He also says he will give the priest a prescription medicine that will help with the pain. Finally, the doctor changes his mind and admits that he does want to priest to have an X-ray but doesn't want him to discuss it with the X-ray technician. The priest and doctor will talk it over, he says.

Finally, after seeming nervous, the doctor asks who sent the priest to him. The priest says Dr. Delbende recommended him. The doctor doesn't seem to recognize the name of Delbende, but doesn't seem to be too concerned. After setting up the X-ray appointment, the doctor hurries the priest out of the room. In the hallway, the priest realizes he has forgotten the prescription. The priest goes back hoping the room will be empty and he can just pick up the prescription slip and go, but he enters the room in time to see the doctor injecting himself with something. In frustration, the doctor again asks who sent the priest and why he keeps calling him by the name of Lavigne. In a twist of fate, it appears Dr. Lavigne has passed away and the priest mistakenly contacted a doctor by the name of Laville. The doctor admits that the priest is the first priest he has ever examined and that he is greatly intrigued by him. He says that when he first saw the priest it was rather like meeting himself. The doctor tells the priest that he had been injecting himself with morphine, the only thing that seemed to clear his mind and stop the pain. The doctor has diagnosed himself with a terminal illness and gives himself only six months at the most to live.

As the conversation continues, the doctor tells the priest that the priest is suffering with stomach cancer. He believes the case to be so widespread there is nothing that can be done about it. The priest writes that for that one moment when he learned he was dying, he actually lost touch with God, even forgetting His name. Finally, the priest realizes he is crying and the doctor is watching with a look of pity and surprise on his face.

That evening, the priest decides to pay a visit to Louis Dupréty, his friend from seminary. The two talk for awhile about the direction their lives have taken them since seminary. Dupréty says it was intellectual evolution that caused him to leave the priesthood. However, he also admits to the priest he has been seeing a woman whom he met while in the sanatorium. The priest becomes sick and vomits blood while his friend is talking. Seeing his friend so sick, Dupréty leaves the priest, and heads for the chemist to prepare the doctor's prescription. In the meantime, the girlfriend comes to check on the priest and speaks to the priest about the difficulty of their lives. She tells him of hard work and long hours without much pay. She admits that she and Dupréty aren't married and that it is because of her wishes. She adds that she is aware that Dupréty is dying and wishes that he would not push her so hard to become educated in the short time they have together. Dupréty returns, and he and the priest decide the priest should stay there for the evening.

While continuing to write in his diary during the long sleepless night he spends in Dupréty's apartment, the priest reports that he has learned about the gift of youth. He also records a realization that in his lifetime, no one has really treated him with injustice. He believes the seemed mistakes he made were only because he did not realize that he would die young. He contends the dean lectured him so severely because of what he could have become, not what he was at that time. Through the night, the priest continues to think of himself and his coming death. He says his rosary, and then wraps himself up to wait for daylight to come. His final writings include a realization of the meaning of true grace. He also writes that he realizes that the majority of people are so unhappy simply because they do not like themselves.

The book ends with a letter from Louis Dupréty to the Curé de Torcy reporting the last moments of the priest's life. Dupréty states that when he realized his friend was dying he sent for both a doctor and a priest, however neither were able to get to the priest before he passed away. He states in the letter that as the life left the young priest he uttered the words, "grace is everywhere."

## **Chapter 8 Analysis**

Although the priest does not record the outcome of his doctor's appointment right away, it is known by his words that the results were not good. When he does write that he has stomach cancer, the priest appears to approach his death just as any other common man would, with disbelief and fear.

The most interesting facet of this chapter is the priest's meeting with Dr. Laville. In a strange mix up, the priest has found his way to an unconventional, atheist doctor.

Despite the doctor's lack of a belief system, however, there is an immediate connection between the two. The doctor describes meeting the priest as feeling as if he had met himself. The priest, on the other hand, is somewhat repulsed by the worldly doctor. Dr. Laville is also suffering with a terminal illness, but is attempting to cope with it in the way of mortal man. The doctor is rather arrogant in his knowledge of medicine, but even this knowledge will not keep him from dying. The doctor speaks of suicide as if he thinks this action is a plausible answer for his health problems. When the doctor tells the priest he has stomach cancer and is dying, the priest responds with a mixture of shock and fear. The doctor watches the priest curiously as he cries when he finds out he will die. Although the priest is embarrassed by his show of emotion, it seems to make the doctor aware of the priest's humanity.

It is also important to note the priest writes in his diary that he believes he has suffered no real injustice in his life. Most ordinary people in his situation would look back on their lives and think they had suffered nothing but injustice. However, the faithful mindset of the priest does not allow him to think this way. Even in his death, he sees the good in life and in those around him.

# Characters

## The Priest

The priest is the main character of the novel and narrates the action of the story. The priest's opinion of himself is that he is thin-skinned and lacks courage. He is very self-conscious and often doubts if he is doing his best for God. The priest came from a very poor family and entered the seminary at the age of twelve, before he had a chance to learn the ways of the world. He credits most of his naiveté to this fact that he has so little worldly experience. Before entering the seminary, however, the priest spent some time with an aunt who ran a small pub. The priest has clear memories of the faces of the people he saw in the pub as he crouched behind the counter. He admits that he was afraid of these lustful people. The priest also spent this time at the pub reading. One of the books is the writings of Maxim Gorki that sparked an interest in the people of Russia, a people the priest feels he can relate to.

Early in his life, the priest says he was able to hear the voice of God. He has a pure and simple faith that the common person finds unnerving. It is with this faith in God that the priest compiles a plan to lead his first parish. This plan includes teaching the children the catechism, visiting each family regularly and starting a sports club for the young men of the community. Although he does not feel well and is unable to eat little but bread soaked in wine, the priest works diligently for the people of his parish.

As part of his plan, the priest records his daily activities and thoughts in a diary. The priest struggles with whether or not his writing is God sanctioned. Soon, the timid lonely priest begins to consider the journal as a friend. This odd friendship is especially important since the priest's parishioners consider him odd and unusual. The priest is eventually brought to the limits of his faith by the cruel behaviors of his parishioners. The priest dies shortly thereafter of stomach cancer. Despite what he has been through, the priest is still able to declare on his deathbed that grace and the love of God is everywhere.

## M. and Mme Pamyre

M. and Mme Pamyre are the grocer and his wife who run a local store. The priest considers the grocer to be a good fellow; however, there is a misunderstanding between the priest and grocer about some bottles of wine. The priest believes the grocer offered to send some bottles of wine to him as a gift, while the grocer was simply trying to make a sale. In the course of the novel, the grocer's wife shares with the Dean of Blangermont that the priest owes the store money for the bottles of elderberry wine. She also tells the dean of other debts the priest owes which she has learned of through neighborhood gossip.

## **Curé de Torcy**

Cure de Torcy is the parish priest of Torcy, France. This priest came from the depths of despair because of being dismissed from a seminary to become a great priest. He carries himself with an air of authority, faith and unending joy. This older priest acts as a mentor to the young priest, teaching him about how a parish should be run as well as the role of the priest. When times become hard, the Curé de Torcy tries to keep the young priest from being discouraged in his work as a priest. Although the older man seems hard on the younger priest at times, it is evident he respects the young man and feels he has a true calling for his work. He is also sympathetic to the trials of the young priest and tries to guide him as best he knows how. Although the young priest does not always agree with the teaching of the Curé de Torcy, he depends upon his mentor as a source of inspiration and strength.

## **Madame Pégriot**

Madame Pégriot is the priest's unfriendly housekeeper. She ultimately quits her job at the presbytery, saying she'd rather not go on getting paid for doing so little work. She also alludes to people she'd rather not meet there. Her attitude is one of hate and anger. The priest first suspects her of writing the anonymous letter he receives asking him to leave the parish.

## **Mlle Louise**

Mlle Louise serves as governess at the Château. Although she is thought of highly by her employers, she is tormented by Mlle Chantal, the eldest child. Mlle Louise is often the only parishioner in the area who attends daily mass, but rarely stays long enough for the priest to speak to her. She is once seen crying during the mass service. Although it is not clearly stated in the novel, it is suspected there was an affair between Mlle Louise and M. le Comte that is discovered by Mlle Chantal. Mlle Louise approaches the priest in an attempt to have him speak to Mlle Chantal's parents about having her sent to a finishing school. In the end, Mlle Louise is dismissed from her job after Mme la Comtesse's death. After his dismissal, Mlle Louise comes to the priest one last time to ask him to see to it she gets her proper wages and to warn him of Mlle Chantal's attitude towards him.

## **Mlle Chantal**

Mlle Chantal is the daughter of M. le Comte and Mme la Comtesse. She is a very bitter young lady who makes those around her unhappy. According to Mlle Louise, Mlle Chantal has harbored a grudge against the priest since the first day she met him. Mlle Chantal mimics the way the priest talks and walks. She also bribes his catechism children with candy so they will tell her stories of the way the priest acts during classes. Mlle Chantal becomes enraged when she discovers her father is having a relationship



with her governess and comes to the priest threatening to either kill the woman or dishonor herself. When the priest confronts Mlle Chantal's mother about the girl's problems, Mlle Chantal eavesdrops on the conversation, then uses the bits and pieces she's heard to try to damage the priest's reputation. The priest admits in his journal he did not like the girl from the first time he met her because of her hard expression.

## **Seraphita Dumouchel**

Seraphita is a young girl in the priest's catechism class who seems to enjoy making the priest feel self-conscious by making eyes at him as well as other advances of a sexual nature. During a bout of illness, the priest wanders into the lane near Seraphita's house where he collapses. The child finds him, helps clean him up and even expresses sympathy that the priest has no one at home to help take care of him. Not understanding that he is sick and not drunk, the girl relates the story to Mlle Chantal, who uses the story to prove the priest is an alcoholic. In a later discussion between the priest and the child, Seraphita describes herself as being a bad girl and admits to spreading rumors and false stories about the priest.

## **Mme la Comtesse**

Mme la Comtesse is the mother of Mlle Chantal and the wife of M. le Comte. During their first visit, she reminds the priest of his mother. Mme la Comtesse was also the mother of a son who died at the age of 18 months. After the death of the boy, her husband and daughter became inseparable to the exclusion of the mother. Mme la Comtesse is also aware that her husband has been unfaithful to her. As a result of these tragedies and disappointments Mme la Comtesse has become hard hearted and turns from God. During a discussion with the priest about her daughter, the priest helps Mme la Comtesse regain her faith and put aside her inability to forgive. The evening after their discussion, Mme la Comtesse dies because of a heart condition. It is rumored among the parishioners that her death was brought about by her confrontation with the priest. This rumor is fueled by the fact Mlle Chantal had been eavesdropping on the conversation and has shared the pieces of conversation she heard with others. However, Mme la Comtesse wrote the priest a letter before her death stating she was finally at peace with God thanks to the priest's intervention.

## **Louis Dupréty**

Louis Dupréty is an old seminary friend of the priest who believes the priest is the only one who understands him. Unlike the priest, Dupréty has not pursued a career in the priesthood but rather decides to apply for a desk job and lead an ordinary life. Writes the priest two letters indicating he wishes the priest to come visit as quickly as possible, then a third requesting the priest to hold off on his visit. The priest senses a deep need as well as a sense of misplaced pride in all three of these letters. In the end of the

novel, it is at the home of Dupréty that the priest dies. He records the priest's final actions and words in a letter to the Curé de Torcy.

## **Dr. Delbende**

Dr. Delbende is a professed atheist although he once had dreams of becoming a missionary. These dreams were never founded not only because the doctor ran out of money for schooling but also because he suffered with bad health. Dr Delbende examines the priest at the request of the Curé de Torcy. The doctor tells the priest that he, the priest and the Curé de Torcy are the same sort of queer people. The doctor admits that he does not believe in God but the priest senses some deep spiritual hurt in the man. The doctor is later found dead of a gunshot wound to the head. While it is told the death was accidental, it is believed by the priest and the Curé de Torcy the doctor may have committed suicide because of depression combined with the loss of an aunt's inheritance. The doctor's motto is, "Face up to it."

# **Objects/Places**

## **The Diary**

The diary is a child's copy book that the priest uses to write down the happenings of his parish, conversations he has with others as well as his thoughts and feelings.

## **The Picture of the Baby Jesus**

This colored print, which the priest describes as "hideous," was a gift to the Curé de Torcy by his Flemish grandmother. The picture shows a rosy, chubby Baby Jesus lying between an ox and a donkey.

## **Three Bottles of Elderberry Wine**

The grocer, M. Pamyre, offers to send elderberry wine to the priest. In his naiveté, the priest believes the grocer offers the bottles as a gift and does not realize the man expects payment. Later, the grocer's wife brings the outstanding bill to the attention of the Dean of Blangermont in an attempt to get the priest into trouble.

## **The Château**

The Château is the home of the M. le Comte and Mme la Comtesse as well as their daughter Mlle Chantal. The Château is the nicest home in the parish. It is in the drawing room of this home that the priest confronts Mme la Comtesse.

## **The Gesvre Road**

The priest always likes to take Gesvre Road on his way home. From one point on this road, he can overlook the entire village of his parish. It was at this location the idea for his diary keeping was born.

## **The Medallion**

The medallion is a piece of jewelry worn by Mme la Comtesse that holds a lock of her infant son's hair. During her discussion with the priest, she throws the medallion into the fire.





## **Louis Dupréty's Home**

Louis Dupréty's home is in Lille, France and where the priest goes to spend the night after his doctor's appointment. It is here the priest dies of stomach cancer.

## **The Lane Outside the Dumouchel Home**

The lane outside the Dumouchel home is where the priest passes out during one of his bouts of stomach pain. Seraphita Dumouchel finds the priest, helps him clean up and then sends him home. This is the first time the child speaks truthfully to the priest about her actions toward him.

## **M. Olivier's Motorcycle**

During his last day in Ambricourt, the priest takes a ride on the back of M. Olivier's motorcycle. This ride makes him feel young and free, a feeling he has not often experienced.

## **A Thick Piece of String**

The priest discovers Seraphita has tied a thick piece of string tightly around her leg as a way to punish herself for spreading rumors about the priest. The priest asks her not to try to harm herself in this way again.

# Themes

## Injustice

Dr. Delbende describes injustice as the normal condition of man. He says the only difference is whether the person treated badly suffers with or submits to the injustice. In his final thoughts, the priest states that he is lucky that he has never suffered any true injustice, a statement that seems almost paradoxical. In fact, the priest may have suffered the worst injustice of all. Although he neglected his health to serve his parish, the people of the parish do nothing but treat him unfairly. Even in the act of helping a woman find peace in God, he is made out to be a cruel monster. As the priest embodies a faith and belief system, others find odd and even repulsive, his reputation is slandered and his job as a priest jeopardized. However, the priest is one who has submitted to injustice. He does not let it rule his life.

Besides the injustices done to the priest, the novel also deals with the injustices of a family and the way the resulting bitterness can trickle down to all members. Mme la Comtesse is bitter because her only son died at a very young age. At this same point in time, her daughter takes control of the house, leaving the mother to feel like a stranger in her own home. To top it off, Mme la Comtesse's husband is unfaithful to her. Over the years, Mme la Comtesse has learned to live with the injustices life has dealt her. She suffers in silence. When Mlle Chantal becomes aware her father is having an affair, she also feels deceived. This young lady's bitterness that results from her knowledge of the affair reaches out to hurt the priest, her father, her mother and everyone else around her. In this way, injustice hurts not only one person, but everyone involved in a particular situation. It can also be said that Mlle Chantal and Mme la Comtesse suffered with their injustice instead of submitting to it. In this way, they allowed it to make them bitter and hard.

## Faith

Perhaps the most striking theme in this novel is that of faith. It's the pure and simple faith of a man who has fully devoted his life to Christ. Although the priest struggles with his faith, struggles to pray and struggles to do the right things, he never loses his faith. Even when he is faced with the reality of death, the priest does not become faithless and turn away from God. Through all of his troubles, misunderstandings and hurts, the priest remains faithful to his God.

## The distinction between the Church and the rest of the world

It seems there are places in the novel where those around the priest try to teach him there is a line over which the Church should not cross and enter into worldly life. This is



seen most clearly in the Dean of Blangermont's lecture to the priest concerning the priest's debt. He encourages the priest not to speak out against bad business practices, because it is these same people who support the Church. The dean seems to think that although it is well known these businessmen are dealing unfairly with people, it is not the duty of the Church to deal with these people unless it is brought to the Church.

Again, several people from the community, including M. le Comte warn the priest not to actively try to reach his people for the Church. They want him to sit back and wait for the people to come to him. This viewpoint that the Church and the priest should not meddle in people's lives is abominable to the priest who believes he should actively try to help people live a better life with God.

## Pride

In this novel, pride is looked on both as a positive and negative characteristic. For instance, there are places where the priest accusingly states that one character or the other is suffering with pride. For example, there is one point in the novel where the Curé de Torcy is speaking to the young priest about the proper role of the priest. During this conversation, the young priest believes he sees in the Curé de Torcy a foundation of pride. In the way the priest mentions this prideful nature, it is sensed that the priest does not feel this is a positive characteristic. Dr. Delbende also talks of a pride that will not allow a person to die peacefully. Again, it is considered a negative characteristic to have so much pride that even in death a person will not let go of and forgive the things that keep him from obtaining peace.

In a complete change of context, however, during the priest's final meeting with Mlle Louise near the end of the novel, he tells her to have a little pride. In this case, pride is a characteristic that makes a person hold their head up and go on even if their circumstances are against them. This type of pride keeps them from living in the past with their mistakes and problems and helps them move on toward the future.

# Style

## Point of View

This story is told entirely from the first person point of view of the priest as he records his feelings and actions in his diary. The priest also acts as the narrator for the story. Because of this first person point of view, all of the action of the novel is screened through the priest. He knows and can record only what he has first hand knowledge of or has learned from another character in the novel. Therefore, the conversations the priest records in his diary are extremely important to the development of the story line. It is only through these conversations that the reader learns what is being said about the priest in the community as well as how others feel about what is going on in the novel. The bulk of this story is told mostly through dialogue as recorded by the priest in his journal. There are a few places where the priest simply tells how things happened, but mostly the priest uses the conversations he records between himself and other characters to tell the story for him.

## Setting

The majority of the action in the novel takes place in the parish of Ambricourt, located in northern France. Action takes place in locations throughout the parish such as the sacristy of the church, the presbytery and the Château. The parish consists of a small village as well as several widespread country homes. The priest usually travels to these homes on foot as riding his bicycle makes his stomach pains worse.

The final chapter of the novel is the only one not set in the parish of Ambricourt. In this chapter, the priest travels by train to the city of Lille, France. Lille is a city located in northern France near its border with Belgium. The priest travels to this town to see a doctor concerning his illness. While in Lille, the priest also visits the home of Louis Dupréty, an old friend from seminary. The priest dies of his stomach cancer while in his friend's home.

## Language and Meaning

The language of this novel is what one might expect of a highly educated young priest. The writing is grammatically correct with only a few places where the priest has departed from this correctness in an attempt to capture the unique quirks of a particular person's speech patterns. For instance, during his conversations with Seraphita, the priest writes the child's words in the form in which a child might have actually said them.

Although this is a diary, long portions of the novel are taken up by the priest's conversations with other people. Bernanos uses these passages of dialogue to introduce ideas into the novel that the priest would not necessarily have. For instance, the reader is given the view of death from an atheist's standpoint from Dr. Laville. More



large portions of the diary are filled with the priest's thoughts and reactions to what is going on around him in the world. Other portions of the diary simply record the happenings of the priest's days.

## Structure

The book is divided into eight chapters with each chapter being about forty pages long. The chapters are given no names. As the book represents a diary, the chapters are broken down into diary entries with some being only a few lines long and some being several pages. There are notes that indicate where the priest has torn pages or eradicated lines from his journal. As the book is supposed to represent a diary, it would almost seem the story would be broken down into daily entries; however, there is no such distinction.

Because of the complexity of the parish in which the priest serves, there are several subplots in the novel along with a main plot. The action of the main plot, which involves the relationship of the priest with his entire parish, builds through the first four chapters and then climaxes in the fifth chapter where the priest confronts Mme la Comtesse about her relationship with her daughter. Subplots include the priest's dealings with Seraphita Dumouchel as well as the priest's worsening health.

The book is a very enjoyable read; however, some of the conversations between the priest and other characters are quite deep, requiring the reader to think about and digest what he has read. Also, since there are portions of the diary that are torn out or incomplete, as well as places where the priest simply stops in the middle of a thought some parts of the novel can be hard to understand.

## Quotes

"He is a good priest, deeply kind and human, who at diocesan headquarters is even considered a bit of a freethinker, on the dangerous side. His outbursts fill his colleagues with glee, and he stresses them with a look meant to be fiery, but which gives me such a deep sensation of stale discouragement that it almost brings tears into my eyes." Chapter 1, pg. 1.

"What is the use of working out chances? There are no chances against God." Chapter 1, pg. 6.

"I would even go so far as to say that it is hard for us to be strictly honest in money matters. Better run no risk of meddling, were it ever so innocently, with what most laymen regard not as a means, but an end in itself." Chapter 1, pg. 6.

"When writing of oneself one should show no mercy. Yet why at the first attempt to discover one's own truth does all inner strength seem to melt away in floods of self-pity and tenderness and rising tears..." Chapter 1, pg. 8.

"The mistake she made wasn't to fight dirt, sure enough, but to try to and do away with it altogether. As if that were possible! A parish is bound to be dirty. A whole Christian society's a lot dirtier. You wait for the Judgment Day and see what the angels'll be sweeping out of even the most saintly monasteries. Some filth!" Chapter 1, pg. 11.

"Look: I'll define you a Christian people by the opposite. The opposite of a Christian people is a people grown sad and old." Chapter 1, pg. 18.

"I honestly don't think I care about being rich or poor, but I should be grateful if our superiors would decide the matter once and for all. This setting of well-to-do felicity which we are expected to live up to, is so out of keeping with out penury. Real poverty need mean no loss of dignity." Chapter 2, pg. 26.

"Every day I become more aware of my own ignorance in the most elementary details of everyday life, which everybody seems to know without having learnt them, by a sort of instinct." Chapter 2, pg. 33.

"If ever you glimpse the passing truth, take a good look at her, so as to be quite sure you'll know her again; but don't expect her to make eyes at you." Chapter 2, pg. 48.

"I dare not say I knew nothing of God when I was twelve years old, because mingled with so many other calls like thunder and rushing water sounding through my poor little head, already I could recognize His voice." Chapter 2, pg. 52.

"And yet I feel that such distress, distress that has forgotten even its name, that has ceased to reason or to hope, that lays its tortured head at random, will awaken one day on the shoulder of Jesus Christ." Chapter 2, pg. 53.



"But after all, though they may rob us, at least they respect us. That makes for a kind of social solidarity between ourselves and them - deplore it or not, it exists, and everything that exists should be used for some good purpose." Chapter 3, pg. 68.

"We pay a heavy, very heavy price for the super-human dignity of our calling. The ridiculous is always so near to the sublime. And the world, usually so indulgent to foibles, hates our instinctively." Chapter 3, pg. 74.

"When you're too fed up for words, you come round and see me. I wouldn't say that to anybody. But the Curé de Torcy has talked to me about you, and you've got the kind of eyes I like. Faithful eyes, dog's eyes. I've got dogs eyes too. It's rather rare. Torcy, you and I, we're the same sort, a queer sort." Chapter 3, pg. 78.

"Suffering injustice is the natural condition of mankind." Chapter 3, pg. 79.

"The fact remains that a poor man, a real poor man, an honest man, goes of his own accord to what he considers his proper place, the lowest in the house of the Lord." Chapter 3, pg. 82.

"His eyes, vague and shifty in their expression, have in them that look which moves me so deeply, of those born to be alone, never to be understood. Mademoiselle has much the same expression." Chapter 3, pg. 85.

"I have no self-confidence, and yet I have so much goodwill that I always fancy it must be obvious to all, and that people are bound to judge me by my intentions." Chapter 3, pg. 91.

"How hard it is to avoid offending somebody! And however hard you try, people seem less inclined to use goodwill to their advantage, than unconsciously eager to set one goodwill against each other." Chapter 4, pg. 102.

"I have decided to go on with this diary because one day I may find it useful to have kept a sincere, scrupulously exact account of what is happening to me in this time of trial." Chapter 4, pg. 111

"Our division into rich and poor must be based on some great law of the universe. In the eyes of the church the rich man is here to shield the poor, like his elder brother." Chapter 4, pg. 117.

"For I ought to be master of my parish, yet I give myself away to them for what I am - a pitiful beggar, going from door to door with outstretched hand, not even daring to knock." Chapter 5, pg. 141.

"'Father,' he began again, as though addressing an equal, almost with deference, 'we probably haven't one idea in common as to how a parish ought to be run, but you are master here, you have the right to speak, only you must be understood. I have obeyed too often in my time not to know real authority, no matter where I find it. Be discreet in



the use of yours. Your power over some souls must be great. I am an old priest. I know how the seminaries mould boys down to the same ordinary level, till often there's unfortunately nothing to choose between them. But they couldn't do anything with you. And the secret of your strength lies in the fact that you are unaware, or daren't realize, how different you are from others.'" Chapter 5, pg. 185.

"But I always think these worries, however much they may try us at the time, shouldn't warp our wisdom when the saving of a soul is at stake." Chapter 6, pg. 204.

"Your face - you don't mind if I tell you? - looks worn by prayer; it reminds me of a very old missal, or even one of those half-rubbed-away engravings on ancient tombstones." Chapter 7, pg. 242.

"However hard I try now, I know I shall never understand by what terrible mischance I was able at such a time even to forget the very name of God. I was alone, utterly alone, facing my death - and that death was a wiping out, and nothing more." Chapter 8, pg. 275.

"How easy it is to hate oneself! True grace is to forget. Yet if pride could die in us, the supreme grace would be to love oneself in all simplicity - as one would love any one of those who themselves have suffered and loved in Christ." Chapter 8, pg. 296.



## Topics for Discussion

Consider the Curé de Torcy's story about the nun who cleaned the church nonstop. The story is actually an allegory about life. In the story what role does the "filth" play? What about the nun and the church?

Why does Bernanos not give the priest, who narrates the novel, a name? What significance does this have?

Consider the difficulties the priest has in deciding whether or not his journal keeping is a good idea. Why is this decision so difficult for him?

Consider Dr. Delbende's death. Do you think the cause of death was an accident or suicide? Why?

After his meeting with Mlle Chantal, the priest confronts Mme la Comtesse concerning her daughter. Was the priest wrong in confronting Mme la Comtesse? Should the priest have handled the situation differently?

Discuss the ways in which poverty and wealth are portrayed in the novel.

Discuss the idea of being a martyr. Was the priest a martyr? Why or why not?

Consider the treatment of pride in the novel. For instance, although most often pride is seen as a negative characteristic, the priest tells Mlle Louise in their last discussion to have some pride. Explore the dual nature of this characteristic.