

INTRODUCTION TO THE DEVOUT LIFE

AUTHOR – ST. FRANCIS DE SALES – HIS DEVOUT LIFE

Life

- 1567 Born in Thorens, Savoy
- 1577 First Communion and Confirmation
- 1578 Tonsured
- 1591 Doctorate in Civil and Church Law
- 1593 Ordained to priesthood
- 1594 Began missionary work in Chablais, Savoy
- 1602 Bishop of Geneva
- 1622 Death in Lyons, France

He was born of noble parent, the oldest of thirteen children. He received an excellent education and, as early as 11 years of age, decided to be a priest. After receiving his doctorates in Civil and Canon Law, his father wanted a secular career for Francis. Francis chose the priesthood.

A year later, he and his cousin volunteered to preach in the Chablais state of the Savoy. In this difficult work, Francis adopted a new tactic. Each week, he wrote short articles explaining the Catholic faith and defending it against Protestant teachers.

Francis' holiness and personality won many people. He frequently engaged in public debates which led to many converts. Some priests were sent to help him.

After four years of this work, Francis asked Duke Charles Emmanuel to act in favor of the Catholic religion, to restore churches and found a school.

In 1602, he founded a group of secular priests to combat Protestantism and the majority of the people returned to Catholicism. Later in the same year, he was consecrated Bishop of Geneva. Having no seminary, he himself formed his new priests and wrote instructions for those already ordained. He established lay groups to teach catechism in all the parishes, which he visited for all the sacraments. He was bishop for twenty years.

Writings

He has two groups of writings:

1. Those books which explain Catholic doctrine and to refute Protestant teachings.
2. Those books on spirituality.

He preached 4,000 homilies (only a few are preserved).

His two masterpieces are Introduction to a Devout Life and the Treatise on the Love of God.

Life of St. Francis de Sales

Introduction was seen immediately as a classic in trying to describe a spirituality that is compatible with any walk of life. It has led many to devotion and, as literature, has contributed to the French language.

Love of God was originally modeled to follow the ten commandments, but Francis changed this to the birth and perfection of charity in the soul.

Introduction was written for lay people. Love of God was written for St. Jane de Chantal and the Visitation nuns.

Visitation Sisters

In 1064, he met Jane Frances de Chantal and eventually revealed his desire to form a group of women with religious vows who would also engage in works of mercy. In 1610, the first convent was opened. At the bishop's request the external works were stopped, and the group became cloistered. Pope Paul V made the group a religious order (1618).

Other Orders

Many religious orders, especially the Salesians of Don Bosco, are founded under his patronage.

The Love of God

This work has 12 books and certainly the reader is best prepared if he has read Introduction to a Devout Life. However, St. Francis says clearly that the first four books of this treatise cover the same material. Only the last 8 books focus directly on Divine love.

He also deliberately makes his chapters very short to encourage the reader to continue.

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Preface

Arranging the Flowers

A flower girl was so skilled in producing varieties of bouquets that she bested a painter who could not vary his paintings much as she varied her bouquets. In the same way, the Holy Spirit has an endless variety of teachings even though the doctrine remains the same.

In this book, I desire only to write what has been written by others. I offer the same flowers, but hopefully in a different arrangement. Others have written for those souls who have left the world for Religious life. I write for those who live in towns and in households. Because their calling demands an external social life, these people might think that a devout life is impossible because they are too immersed in temporal affairs.

For Everyone

Do not fish live in the sea without absorbing one drop of salt water? Does not the moth hover near flames and not burn her wings? So, a devout soul can live in the world without being tainted by it. She can hover above the flames of worldly lust without being burnt. This is not easy. So, I write this book to help everyone to undertake this noble work.

Book's Origin

I do not write this book from my own choice. What happened is this. A virtuous soul aspiring to a devout life wanted my help. Since she had a remarkable capacity, I took pains to teach her and to lead her through some spiritual exercises. She kept written records which she gave to a devout religious. This religious, seeing their value, urged me to publish the notes. He succeeded. His friendship had great influence and his judgment overcame mine.

I reviewed the papers and added some material. Since I did not have much time, these chapters have little precision. The instructions are well-intentioned and in clear words but not in a polished style.

Five Parts

This book has five parts.

1. By suggestions and spiritual exercises, I seek to change the soul's mere desire for perfection into a strong resolution. This begins with a general confession followed by Holy Communion in which she gives herself to His Divine Majesty.
2. I show the two great means of union with God – the sacraments and mental prayer.
3. I describe those virtues which are suitable for advancement.
4. I show the enemy's snares and how to avoid them.
5. I lead the soul to refreshment so she can go on with renewed strength.

Guiding Souls

Some would say that to write this book I should not take this time from my important duties of a bishop. However, of all the bishop's tasks, leading souls to perfection is the most important. The bishops in the Early Church while reaping the world-wide harvest accepted the task of guiding individual souls.

Paul guided Timothy, Titus, Philemon and others. The second letter of John was sent to the "elect lady" (1:1).

Guiding individual souls is a labor but it refreshes and comforts the worker. Hunters who have stolen young tigers will leave one behind to delay the mother. However, the tigress easily picks up the one and continues her pursuit. How much more, a spiritual father will carry a soul craving perfection and still continue his other labors.

Since only a paternal heart can do this, the apostles called their disciples, “little children”. Another point, I who write this book am certainly not devout myself, but I wish to be so. This encourages me because the best way to learn is to teach the subject.

Falling in Love

Alexander loved the beautiful Campaspe so he asked Apelles to paint her portrait. Apelles fell in love, and Alexander allowed her to become his wife. As I try to paint the picture of Wisdom in your heart, I hope that I myself will fall in love with her and the Father will give her to me in eternal marriage.

Because the chaste Rebecca watered Isaac’s camels (Gen 24:19), she received his golden earrings. Hopefully, as I lead God’s lambs to the fountain of devotion, He will take my soul as His bride and give me the earrings of Love. To God’s Church I submit all my writings and actions. St. Magdalen’s Day, 1608

PART 1 – FROM DESIRE TO FIRM RESOLUTION

1.1 – What is True Devotion?

Need for Clarity

You desire a devout life because this would please God. Since small errors at the beginning of any undertaking get greater and sometimes become irreparable, you should thoroughly understand this grace of true devotion. Otherwise, you could waste your time pursuing an idle resemblance.

We can shape our religious devotion according to our disposition. One man values fasting. So, he does not moisten his lips with wine, but he drinks his neighbor’s blood by slander. Another prays much, but thinks little about his angry speech. One will forgive enemies but not pay his debts. Some people appear to be devout but are really not. In the Bible, King David’s wife, Michal, deceived Saul’s servants into believing that a lifeless statue (covered in bed) was really David (1Sam 19:11-17). So, people can believe that someone is spiritual just because they have the garments of devotion.

Perfection of Charity

True devotion is a real love for God. That love in our soul is called grace. Love that strengthens us to do good is called charity. When charity attains perfection and we act diligently it is called devotion. Consider the ostrich (which never flies), the hen (which acquires brief flight) and the dove (which soars high). These three represent sinners (who do not rise to God), well-meaning people (who rise only slowly and heavily) and really devout people (who rise frequently).

Devotion is a spiritual activity by which Divine Love causes us to work briskly. Someone who neglects the commandments is neither good nor devout. A good person keeps the commandments. A devout person keeps them readily. A truly devout person keeps all the commandments and does many good works that are not commanded.

Just as a man recovering from illness walks only as far as necessary, so the converted sinner journeys slowly until he becomes devout. When devout, he hastens along the path of heaven's inspirations. Love is a spiritual fire and devotion is that fire fanned into flame. Devotion makes the person eager to go beyond the commandments and fulfill the Counsels.

1.2 – Excellence of Devotion

Attracted by Devotion

Some scouts tried to discourage the Israelites from entering the Promised Land. They said that the inhabitants would devour them (Num. 13:32). Likewise, people speak against true devotion. They claim that religion makes people dismal and unpleasant.

Joshua and Caleb did not agree with the scouts. They said that the Land was pleasant and easy to conquer. The Spirit and Our Lord say the same thing. They describe it as sweet, happy and loveable.

People see the devout person doing difficult things like praying, helping others, subduing their passions and denying themselves. They do not see the inner, heartfelt devotion which makes these actions pleasant. The bee gathers bitter juices but changes them into honey. So, the devout soul changes the bitter works into sweetness.

Because of devotion, martyrs considered their sufferings a bouquet of roses. If devotion can sweeten death, how much charm can it give to daily life? Devotion is the sugar by which we sweeten unripe fruit. Devotion sweetens mortifications, cures sadness, moderates presumption, removes desolation, tempers insolence, and prevents dissipation. It is warmth in winter and refreshment in summer. It can prosper in poverty and profit from contempt. It accepts both gladness and sadness.

Effects of Devotion

Consider Jacob's ladder (Gen 28:10-15). The two rungs of the ladder are prayer and the sacraments. The steps are the degrees of love. The soul descends the steps to help others. She ascends them to gain union with God. Those on the ladder are men with angel's hearts. They seem youthful with the vigor of spiritual activity. They have wings to fly to God and feet to walk with men. Their uncovered heads and limbs show that they seek only to please God. They have a shining garment because they use the world's things purely and honestly.

Believe me, devotion is the sweet of sweets, the queen of virtues, the perfection of love. If Love is the milk, the plant, and the balm, devotion is the cream, the fruit and the perfume.

1.3 - Suitable to Every Profession

Each tree brings forth its own fruit. In the devout life, the noble, the servant, the single person and the married person bring forth different fruits of devotion. The father of a family cannot live like a monk and workers cannot spend all day in Church like a religious. This would be a ridiculous devotion. Yet, this mistake is often made and causes people to find fault with devotion.

True devotion hinders no profession. Whatever hinders your daily tasks is spurious devotion. The bee sucks honey without damaging the flower. True devotion does even better. It adorns and beautifies

all professions. As precious stones placed in honey grow more brilliant in color, anyone practicing devotion fulfills their calling much better.

All Life Styles

Family duties are lighter. Married love is truer. Service is more faithful. Every occupation s better performed when the person is truly devout.

Devotion must not be banished from the lives of the soldier, the mechanic or anyone. Certainly, these workers cannot practice the contemplative devotion of religious, but there are secular paths to perfection. The Old Testament shows Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and many others. The New Testament has Joseph in his trade and Martha and Mary in their home. St. Sebastian was a soldier. St. Helena, St. Louis and St. Edward were royalty. Sometimes solitude destroys devotion. Lot was devout in the city but fell into drunkenness in mountain solitude. (Gen.19:30-38)

1.4 Need For a Guide

Tobit told his son, Tobiah, to take a guide for his journey (Tob.5:3). In the same way, anyone beginning a devout life must have a guide. Teresa of Avila says, “This is the precept of precepts because the soul finds God’s Will by humble obedience.” Teresa wanted to perform penances like St. Catherine of Cordoba. Her confessor forbade her. God said, “You are on a good and safe road because I esteem obedience as a greater virtue than penance.” She so loved obedience that she even took a vow of obedience to a pious priest. This proved an inexpressible help. Before and after her, many devout souls submit to a director so they can submit to God.

A Good Friend

St. Louis told his son “Confess often. Choose a single-minded, fair confessor who will teach you what is needed”. Scripture says, “A faithful friend is a strong defense. Whoever finds one has found a treasure” (Sir. 6:14) and “A faithful friend is the medicine of life” (5:16). These words refer mainly to eternal life. The guide guards us against the Evil one. He will be a storehouse of wisdom and healing balm. He will shield us from evil, confirm us in good and raise us up when we fall.

Who can find such a friend? “He that fears the Lord” (Sir. 6:17). This is the truly humble soul who wants only to advance. So, pray for a guide after God’s own heart and He will send you an angel like He did for Tobias.

Various Helps

Your guide should be as a heavenly-sent angel. When you find him, do not trust in his wisdom as an ordinary man. You must look to God Who will speak to you through this man by putting into his mouth the words you need to hear. See him as an angel sent from heaven. Deal with him in sincerity and with an open heart. Manifest all that is good and evil about yourself. Your good will be strengthened and your evil removed. You will be soothed in affliction and moderated in prosperity.

Have both confidence and reverence. Trust him as a daughter trusts her father and a son trusts his mother. The friendship should be strong, sacred and spiritual. St. Teresa says a good guide is fewer than one in a thousand. I say “one in ten thousand.” There are fewer than you would think. He needs three qualities – love, wisdom and discretion. There is danger if one of these is missing. When you have found your guide, you are safe to make the journey.

1.5 First Step – Purifying the Soul

“The flowers appear on the earth. The time of pruning the vines has come” (Song 2:12). These flowers are our good desires and they must be pruned as soon as they appear. A non-Israelite woman, who wished to marry an Israelite, had to set aside her garments, shave her head and cut her nails. (Dt. 21:12). A soul which wants to be Christ’s spouse must forsake sin and remove every impediment to God’s love. The soul must remove all sinful desires. St. Paul, St. Mary Magdalene, St. Catherine of Genoa received this grace immediately but their purgation was extraordinary. We must not seek it. The ordinary purgation is both gradual and painful.

A Gradual Rising

The angels on Jacob’s ladder had wings but they had to use their feet to ascend and descend. The soul rising from sin to the devout life is like the sun which only gradually banishes the darkness. The best cure is the gradual one.

Spiritual illnesses arrive by horseback and depart slowly on foot. So, my daughter, be patient. Some souls grow disheartened and fall back into despair when they commit imperfections. The other extreme is for the soul to imagine that they are already purified. They are full-grown before they are even born! They fly before they have wings! They will fall back because they left the physician too soon. Only the Lord can make us prosper. “Unless the Lord build a house they labor in vain who build.” (Ps 127:1)

The soul’s purification must continue all her life. Do not be disheartened. Perfection lies in fighting against our imperfections. To fight them we must see them. To overcome them, we must meet them face to face. Victory does not lie in being ignorant of our imperfections but in not consenting to them.

To gain humility, we must sometimes even lose this battle. If we never lose our courage, we will never be conquered. Only mortal sin (not imperfections or venial sins) loses our spiritual life. David asked for a heart to overcome all cowardice. We will certainly win if we are willing to fight.

1.6 – First Purification – From Mortal Sin

The sacrament of Penance is the first means of purification. Seek a good confessor and use a book to examine your conscience. Examine yourself from the age of reason to the present time. If you mistrust your memory, write down your sins. Detest them and seek contrition for them. Remember the four results of sin:

- 1) You have lost God’s grace.
- 2) You have rejected your heavenly inheritance.
- 3) You have accepted hell’s pains.
- 4) You have renounced God’s love.

Value of General Confession

I strongly suggest a general confession. This is not always necessary, but I advise it. Often, we do not prepare well for our regular confessions and we have little contrition. The soul really intends to continue the same sins and the same occasions of sin. To steady herself, the soul requires a general

confession. Such a confession gives greater self-knowledge, awakens a wholesome shame, leads to thanks for God's mercy, refreshes the spirit, allows the priest to give good advice and makes future confessions more fruitful. Begin your devout life with a general confession.

1.7 – The Second Purification – All Sinful Desires and Affections

Some Israelites left Egypt only reluctantly. They still hungered for Egyptian food. Also, some penitents only reluctantly leave their sins behind and forsake sinful acts. They retain their desires for sin.

Like Lot's wife, they want to look backward to their Sodom. They are like sick men. Although forbidden by their doctor to eat certain foods, they still long for what they cannot have.

Lingering Desires

Cowardly penitents abstain from sin for a while, but retain a lingering taste for their deeds. They even envy those who still indulge. They wish that they could sin and still avoid hell.

For example, a man thinking of revenge confesses the sin but inwardly he complains about God's rules of forgiving others. While committing no sin, this poor man is still burned by his desires. He has come out of Egypt but he still wants its food.

Another example, a woman gives up her life of sin but still wants to be admired and sought by men. She remains in great peril.

To lead a devout life, you must forsake sin and cleanse your heart of all affections for sin. Keeping these desires might cause a relapse, and will certainly clog your mind. You will not be diligent in good works, (the heart of devotion). Souls who retain their sinful desires are like persons who look sickly, have no appetite, sleep without refreshment and drag themselves through life, (even though they are not sick). These souls lose all the grace of their good deeds (which are probably few).

1.8 - Bringing about This Second Purification

The soul must do two things. They must gain a keen perception of the evils coming from sin and they must acquire a deep contrition. A slight contrition united to the sacraments brings cleansing. A strong contrition will purge all the desires for sin.

A moderate hatred gets a person to avoid another. A violent hatred makes them totally shun the other. They want nothing to do with them.

Magdalene's Secret

When contrition is weak, the person will resolve to avoid overt acts but not inward tendencies. When sorrow is strong, the soul will hate every connection and tendency to sin. So, daughter, stir up your repentance as much as possible. This was Magdalene's secret. She lost all taste for her past sins and never looked back. David declared that he hated every path to sin, "Fill your days with good and your youth will be renewed like an eagle" (103:5).

To root out both sin and the desire for sin, use the following meditations. Use them in order, just one a day. Meditate as early as possible in the morning (the best time for spiritual exercises). Then you can think of them all day. Instructions on how to meditate are in Part Two.

1.9 – First Meditation

Your Creation

Place yourself in God’s presence and ask for His inspiration.

Consider:

1. A few years ago, you were not born. Your soul did not exist. There was no sign of you.
2. Because of His goodness, God created you and made you who you are.
3. The human person is the greatest creation in the visible universe. You are made to live eternally in union with God.

Affections and Resolutions:

1. Humble yourself before God. “Who am I that You should be mindful of me?” “O God I was nothing until You called me forth.”
2. Give thanks. “O Creator, what do I not owe you? You made me from nothing. How can I give due thanks?”
3. Confess your shame. “O Creator, instead of thanking You, I have rebelled by my unruly desires and by giving myself to sin. I ignored You as if You did not create me.”
4. Prostrate yourself before God. “O my soul, He is the Lord God. He made you. You are the work of His hands. What have you to glory in?”
5. Your resolution: “I will alter my ways. I will follow my Creator. I am honored to be His. I will do His will by following the advice of my confessor.”

Concluding Prayers

1. Thank God. “Bless the Lord, O my soul.”
2. Offer yourself. I consecrate my heart to You.
3. Pray. O God, strengthen my desires and resolutions. Our Father.

At the end, spend time to gather up your thoughts, so you can reflect on them during the day.

1.10 – Second Meditation

The Purpose of Our Creation

Place yourself in God’s presence and ask for His inspirations.

1. God did not create you because He needed you. He wanted to manifest His goodness by giving you grace and glory.
2. To do this, He gave you an intellect to know Him, a memory to remember Him, a will to love Him, an imagination to realize
3. His mercies, eyes to see His wonders and speech to praise Him.
4. Since this is why you were created, you must reject what is idle and superfluous.
5. Consider the unhappiness of those who do not think of these things. They seek to amass riches and amuse themselves with trifles.

Affections and Resolutions

1. Humble yourself that you have thought so little of your divine purpose. “O God, what did I think of and what did I love when I did not think of You or love You? Instead of feeding on the truth, I served the world (which should serve me).
2. Hate your past life. Detest your useless thoughts, hateful memories, worthless friendships, profitless efforts and self-indulgence.
3. Turn to God. “Oh God, I will think only of You. I will seek nothing that displeases You. From now on, You will be the delight of my heart. I leave behind vain pleasures and empty pursuits which absorb my time. I loosen whatever binds my heart.”

Concluding Prayers

1. Thank God Who made you for such a purpose. “You have made me for Your eternal glory”.
 2. Offer. “I offer You all my affections.”
 3. Pray. “O God, accept my longings and enable me to fulfill them.” Our Father.
- Gather your thoughts so you can recall them during the day.

1.11 – Third Meditation

God’s Gifts

Prepare: Place yourself in God’s presence and seek His inspiration.

Considerations

1. Consider God’s material gifts – your body, your health, your friends and God’s many helps. Other people more deserving than you, experience sickness, troubles and poverty. Why are you better off?
2. Consider God’s mental gifts. You are not ignorant. You have had a suitable education. Why are others in ignorance?
3. Consider God’s spiritual gifts. You are a child of the Church and educated in the faith. He has given you sacraments and inner light. How often He has forgiven your sins? How often delivered you from evil? Dwell on the opportunities He has given you.

Affections and Resolutions

1. Marvel at His goodness – How abundant God has been in mercy to you! Be forever recalling of His goodness.
2. Marvel at your ingratitude – You have trodden upon His mercy and abused His grace. The depth of your ingratitude compares only with the depth of God’s favor.
3. Kindle your gratitude – “My soul, be disloyal to your Benefactor no longer! Should not my whole soul serve the Lord!”
4. Let your body now refrain from indulgence and your soul begin to use spiritual practices. Be constant in prayer. Use the sacraments. Hear God’s Word. Obey His inspirations.

Concluding Prayers

1. Thank God for clearer knowledge.
 2. Offer your resolutions to Him.
 3. Ask His strength to fulfill your resolution
 4. Our Father
- Gather your thoughts so you can recall them during the day.

1.12 – Fourth Meditation - Sin

Prepare: Place yourself in God’s Presence and seek His inspiration.

Consider:

1. Think of when you first committed sin and how sin has multiplied in your heart. Every day you have added to your sins in thought, word and deed against God, yourself and neighbor.
2. Examine your evil tendencies. You will see that your sins are more numerous than the hairs of your head.
3. Think of your ingratitude toward God. The gifts you received but have used against God; the inspirations you have neglected; the sacraments you have received with few results. Realize that God sought to save you but you have fled and rushed to destruction.

Affections and Resolutions

1. Humble yourself. “How dare I come before you, O God? I have been disloyal. Every sense has been stained by sin. Every day has contained some sin. Was this a fitting return for the Redeemer’s blood?”
2. Ask Pardon. Be like Magdalene. Throw yourself at the Savior’s feet. “Fountain of Mercy; have pity on me who am so unworthy.”
3. Resolve. “Never again will I give myself to sin. I have loved it. Now I will hate it.”
4. Be brave. Accuse yourself of everything. Bring every sinful act into the light.
5. Resolve to tear up the roots, especially of the sin that troubles you the most.
6. Resolve to follow the advice you will receive. Never think you have done enough to atone.

Concluding Prayers:

1. Thank God for His patience and for now giving you these good intentions.
2. Promise you will carry out these intentions
3. Pray for strength.

Gather your thoughts so you can recall them during the day.

1.13 – Fifth Meditation - Death

Prepare: Place yourself in God’s presence and seek His inspirations.

Consider:

1. One day your soul will leave your body. When? In winter or summer? Day or night? With or without warning? Will you have time for confession? Really we know nothing. We know only that we shall die – probably sooner than we expect.
2. The world, for you, will end. The pleasures, worldly joys and empty delights will be over. Woe is me. I chose them and offended God. At the moment of death, these worldly things will seem as nothing and acts of devotion will seem so important. The sins will seem big and devotion will seem small. Why did I make those choices?
3. You will leave behind your riches, friends, amusements, family and all things created. You will say farewell to your own body and it will decay.
4. Your survivors will bury your body in the earth and scarcely give it a thought. (Like you have thought little of others). “God rest his soul”, they will say. Death is pitiless.
5. Your soul will come before Jesus. You will go either to His right or to His left. To which side will it go? To the same side that you chose voluntarily in this world.

Affections and Resolutions

1. Throw yourself in God's arms! "O Lord, the day of my death, be with me. No matter what trials I have, may that day be blessed."
2. Despise the world! Since I don't know when I must leave the world, I will not grow fond of it. Why should I cling to something and then have the ties broken?
3. I will prepare for my death. I will examine my conscience and put everything in order.

Conclusion

1. Thank God for these resolutions. Ask Him for a happy death. Our Father.
2. Gather your thoughts.

1.14– Sixth Meditation - Judgment

Prepare: Place yourself in God's presence and seek His inspirations.

Consider

1. At a given time, the whole earth will end and human history will be completed.
2. All men will rise from the dead. Some will be shining and glorious. Others will be horrible and ghastly.
3. Jesus, the Sovereign Judge, will come in majesty with all His angels. His cross (shining brighter than the sun), will be a sign of grace to the good and a sign of terror to the evil.
4. By one word, this Sovereign Judge will separate the good on His right and the evil on His left. This will be an eternal separation. They will never meet again.
5. The Book of Life will be opened for everyone. All will see the evil of the wicked who disowned God and the repentance of the good. Nothing will be hidden. The evil will be confused. The good will rejoice. Jesus will say "Depart" and the evil ones must go forever from His presence. Jesus will call them "Accursed". This curse involves all evils, and is irrevocable for time and eternity. These souls are condemned to everlasting fire. Think what that suffering includes.
6. Consider that Jesus says to the good soul, "Come". What a blessed word! God receives us. "Blessed of my Father", He calls us. The blessing is above all blessings. "Inherit the Kingdom", He tells us. He made this for us at the beginning and it has no end.

Affections and Resolutions.

1. Tremble. Who will support you when all the earth is shaking?
2. Abhor your sins. They alone can cause you to be lost. If I judge myself now, I will not be judged on that day. If I condemn myself now the Judge will not condemn me in eternity. I will confess my faults and follow the priest's advice.

Concluding Prayers

1. Thank God who has given you the time and the desire to prepare for that terrible Day of Judgment.
2. Our Father.

Gather your thoughts so you can recall them during the day.

1.15– Seventh Meditation - Hell

Prepare

1. Place yourself in God’s Presence
2. Humble yourself.
3. Picture a dark city filled with fire and brimstone, which is inhabited by citizens who cannot escape.

Consider

1. The lost are plunged in an eternal abyss of indescribable torture. Every part of their body and soul suffers because they used their body and soul to sin. The eyes (which delighted in impure and vicious sights) now see devils. Their ears (that rejoiced in unholy words) now hear yells of despair. All the senses suffer in like manner.
2. Far greater than all these sufferings is the loss of God’s glory. The soul is unable to see God. Absalom wanted to see the face of his father, King David (2 Sam 14:32). How much more the soul desires to see its heavenly Father.
3. Consider how insufferable are the pains of hell. They will last forever. If a fever makes the night seem long, how long is the endless night of eternity where there is only despair?

Affections and Resolutions

1. Isaiah says, “Who of us can live with the consuming fire? Who of us can live with the everlasting flames? (33:14). Can you accept these? Can you live forever without God?”
2. Realize that you have repeatedly deserved hell. Resolve on definite actions to avoid sin and eternal death.
3. Give thanks. Our Father
Gather your thoughts so you can recall them during the day.

1.16– Eighth Meditation - Heaven

Prepare

Place yourself in God’s presence and seek His help.

Consider

1. Imagine a lovely night with innumerable bright stars. Then imagine a glorious summer’s day in which the sun does not obscure the stars. All this falls short of the glory of heaven, which is a blessed and precious country.
2. Consider that millions of angels and all the saints who live in heaven. Each one surpasses all the glories of this world. What is it like to see them all and to sing with them? Their joy and happiness last forever. Their delights are unchangeable.
3. Consider that God Himself fills each one with the richness of His Vision, which is an ocean of delight. They are always united with Him. Each soul, without any jealousy, vies in singing God’s praises. The soul sings “Blessed is that Redeemer Who gives us His glory forever.” Jesus says, “You who have served me faithfully are now mine forever.”

Affections and Resolutions

1. Rejoice in your heavenly country.

2. Reprove the coldness of your heart which thought so little of your glorious home. “Why have I been so indifferent to eternal happiness? Because of earthly things, I have forgotten heavenly delights. How could I neglect these real treasures for earthly riches?”
3. Seek earnestly your heavenly home. Go forth. Leave Egypt and begin your journey to the Promised Land. Why should you linger in Egypt?
4. Resolve to give up whatever hinders your journey.
5. Give thanks.
6. Our Father

Gather your thoughts so you can recall them during the day.

1.17 – Ninth Meditation Your Decision

Prepare

Place yourself in God’s presence and seek His inspiration.

Consider

1. You are with your guardian angel in an open plain. Suppose the angel placed before you heaven with all its delights, and hell with all its torments. Contemplate both because right now you are truly standing between heaven and hell. Both are open and waiting to receive you. You alone can make the choice.
2. The choice you make in this life will last forever in the next.
3. God can give you hell by His justice or heaven by His mercy. However, He totally desires that you choose heaven. Your guardian angel urges you to the same decision and offers you countless helps to do so.
4. Consider that Jesus looking down from heaven says, “Come to Me and enjoy blessedness forever”. Mary, with maternal tenderness says, “Take courage. Do not despise my Son’s goodness or my prayers for your salvation”. The saints and millions of souls long for you. They want you to join their song of praise. Your loved ones say “Press on boldly. Consider the path which brought us here. The journey was filled with delights which the world did not know.”

Make Your Choice

1. “O Hell, I hate you – I hate your torments and your endless sufferings. O Heaven, I choose you as my eternal home. O God, I thank you for giving me the power to choose. Of Jesus, I thank you for my home in heaven.”
2. Think of the example given by the Virgin Mary and the saints and follow what they show you.
3. Give yourself anew to your guardian angel so he can lead you.
4. Our Father

Gather your thoughts so you can recall them during the day.

1.18– Tenth Meditation Choosing the Devout Life

Prepare

Place yourself in God’s presence and ask for His Help.

Consider

1. Once again, imagine yourself with your Guardian Angel in an open plain. On your left, is the Devil. He sits on a throne, surrounded by a vast crowd of worldly people who do him homage by their sins. Look at their faces. See their hatred, envy, and passion. They crave only wealth and worthless pleasure. All are restless and wild. They despise one another and love only themselves.
2. Look on your right. Jesus Christ crucified calls His followers to come to Him. Gathered with Jesus are all the angels and the devout souls. These include husbands and wives who love each other. It includes devout souls who embrace their interior and exterior duties. Look at their faces. See them listening attentively to their Lord Whom they enthrone in their heart. These devout souls rejoice peacefully and love purely. They have sorrows but are not disheartened. When they grieve, the Savior comforts them because they seek Him alone.
3. You have certainly renounced Satan and his followers but you have not fully chosen Jesus as your King. You have not yet joined His holy people. You stand between the two.
4. The Blessed Virgin, St. Joseph and thousands who formerly lived in the world now encourage you.
5. The Crucified King calls you by name, "Come and let me crown you."

Make your Choice

1. O world, I have left behind your deceptions. O Evil one, I renounce you and your kingdom.
2. O Jesus, I cling to You with all of my powers. I choose You with all my heart forever. I offer you my irrevocable service and submit myself to Your commandments.
3. O Blessed Mother, I will follow you.
4. O my Guardian Angel, do not leave me until I reach the heavenly company. Then, I will sing, "Glory be to Jesus, my Lord." Our Father
Gather your thoughts so you may recall them during the day.

1.19 – Making a General Confession

After you have made these meditations, proceed to your general confession. However, do not be troubled by fear. The snake's bite is poisonous but his own oil is the best remedy. Sin is shameful but confessing it saves us.

Contrition and confession are sweet. They remove the bad taste of sin. The Pharisee said that Mary Magdalene was a sinner but Jesus spoke only of her ointment and her great love. If we are humble, our sins will be infinitely displeasing to us because they offend God. Accusing ourselves is sweet. This honors God. The physician wants to hear the details of our pains.

In Confession

As you kneel before the priest, imagine yourself at the cross with Christ's blood falling upon you and cleansing you. In confession, Jesus sprinkles the merits of His blood over the penitent. Open your heart fully and pour out your sins. As they flow out, the Precious Blood will flow in with all its blessings.

Tell everything simply and fully. This will satisfy your conscience. Listen to the priest's advice. "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening". Concerning the priest, Jesus said, "Whoever hears you, hears me" (LK 10:16).

1.20 – A Profession to Confirm the Soul’s Resolution

Take the following statement as a summary of your contrition. Meditate on it and read it with an earnest intention.

1. I, the undersigned, in the presence of God and the heavenly company, have considered God’s mercy to me. I am an unworthy creature whom He has preserved in so many dangers and has filled with blessings. I have considered how, in my sinfulness, He waited patiently and led me to repentance until this year of my life. He did this in spite of my ingratitude which caused me to delay in turning to Him.
2. Although solemnly dedicated in Baptism, I have profaned this baptismal gift and turned against God. Prostrate before His throne, I acknowledge that I am convicted of treason and am guilty of Jesus Christ’s passion and death. Because of my sins, I deserve eternal damnation.
3. However, I turn to His Mercy. I detest all my past sins and ask pardon, grace and absolution in the power of Christ’s death, my only hope.
4. I renew my baptismal vows. I renounce the devil, the world and the flesh, now and for all eternity. I resolve to serve the living God with all my soul’s faculties, all my heart’s affections and all my body’s senses. I will not use any part of myself to oppose God’s will. I vow always to be His faithful servant.
5. If I should ever fail in my resolution, I resolve, by the Spirit’s grace, to rise immediately and to seek His mercy again. This is my irrevocable resolution which I confirm before God, the Church triumphant and the Church militant. He accepts my declaration through her representative. Be pleased All-loving God, Father, Son and Spirit, to confirm my resolution. You inspired me to make this. Give me the strength to keep it. I acknowledge you as the God of my heart, soul and spirit. Glory be to Jesus, Amen.

1.21 – Conclusion of The First Purification

Having made this resolution, keep the ears of your heart open to hear the absolution which the Lord will speak in heaven while the priest absolves you on earth. The company of saints rejoices with you. They embrace you and accept you as cleansed and sanctified.

This is a blessed bargain. When you give yourself to the Lord you will gain Him and eternal life. Just take your pen and sign your statement. Take it to the altar where God will sign and seal your absolution, giving Himself as a sacred seal in the sacrament.

Your soul will be cleansed from sin and sinful desires. These can easily be rekindled because sinful desires are never totally extinguished. Therefore, I will give you advice on how to avoid mortal sin and the desires for sin. This will help you gain a greater perfection. I want to speak first of that absolute perfection which I want you to have.

1.22 – Purging All Tendencies to Venial Sin

As daylight comes, we can see ourselves more clearly in the mirror. As the Spirit enlightens our conscience, we see those sins and inclinations which hinder devotion. This light also gives us a desire to

be cleansed from sin. Besides mortal sins, you will begin to see your venial sins. One is quite different from the other.

We can never be free from venial sins until we have persevered for a long time in purity of heart. However, we can be free from desires for venial sins. Saying something untrue out of carelessness is quite different from a habitual practice of lying.

You must be purified of all inclination to venial sin, and have no deliberate intention to commit any venial sin. To have any will to offend displeases Him. Even small venial sin displeases God although not as much as mortal sin (which involves eternal condemnation). Any clinging to mortal sin is a resolution to offend God and a rightly disposed soul would take no pleasure in this.

Corrupting Devotion

Inclinations to mortal sin are opposed to love. Inclinations to venial sin are opposed to devotion. They weaken mental prayer, hinder consolations and lead to temptations. They don't destroy the soul but can bring serious disease. "Dead flies cause the ointment to give a bad odor" (Sir 10:1). Flies that taste the ointment leave it intact. Flies that die and fall into it corrupt the ointment. Venial sins that just happen to a devout soul do no harm. If these sins are cherished, they destroy devotion.

Spoiling the Honey

The spider cannot kill bees but he can spoil their honey. Venial sin (if received with delight) cannot kill the soul but it can ruin its devotion. These sins burden the faculties with evil inclinations and destroy the soul's cheerful readiness, which is the essence of true devotion.

Small sinful actions are not important if they are swept out like spiritual cobwebs. If permitted to linger or are indulged in, they spoil our honey and damage our conscience. I ask again. How can a generous heart delight in anything that displeases God? It cannot.

1.23 – Removing all Useless and Dangerous Attractions

Entertainment, dances and parties are not evil. They are indifferent and can be good or evil. Still, they can be dangerous. To be entertained, to dance and to go to plays is lawful, but if you become addicted, they will hinder your devotion and become dangerous. The harm lies in the degree you desire them. What a pity! These vain tastes take up soil meant for cultivating better things and finer dispositions.

The Nazarites abstained not only from intoxicating liquors, but also from fresh or dried grapes. These were not intoxicating but might excite the desire for fermented wine.

Avoiding Excessive Delight

I do not forbid these dangerous pleasures. However excessive delight will ruin your devotion. A deer which has grown fat must stay hidden because he had no speed to run away. So, when the human heart is heavy with useless and dangerous attractions, it cannot easily follow God.

Children run after butterflies because they are children. However, it is ridiculous to see adults seeking these worldly amusements which disturb their spiritual life. Please cleanse your heart of these desires which are not incompatible with a devout life but can certainly harm that life if delighted in.

1.24 – Purging All Evil Inclinations

We also have natural inclinations which are not strictly mortal or venial sins. These are imperfections. They are shown in our failings and deficiencies. St. Paula had a tendency to excessive sorrow. When her husband and children died, she almost died of grief.

This was not a sin but an imperfection. It did not depend on her will. Some people are naturally gentle. Others just the opposite. Some are always angry. Others are affectionate. In everyone, some imperfections exist.

Cultivate the Opposite

By cultivating the opposite tendency the soul can correct these natural and instinctive imperfections. This has to be done. Gardeners graft sweet fruit onto the bitter almond tree. Why should we not infuse good habits into our bad inclinations? Vicious habits can destroy even the best natural disposition and even the most perverse disposition can be changed by the person's diligent endeavor aided by God's grace.

In Part Two, I will give you advice and some practices. These will purify your soul of dangerous imperfections and tendencies to venial sins. By these practices, you will be strengthened against mortal sins. May God give you the grace.

PART 2 COUNSELS TO LIFT THE SOUL TO GOD

2.1– Need for Prayer

Prayer opens our mind to God's light and our will to His love. It purifies the mind of its ignorance and the will of evil desires. Its healing water causes our good desires to send forth new roots, washes away imperfections, and removes the thirst of passions. I urge mental prayer, especially on Our Lord's passion. If your soul is filled with Him by mental prayer, you will be molded by His actions. You will be enlightened by the Light of the world, find rest in the Tree of Life, and wash away your sins in Jacob's Well.

The Only Door to God

Children learn to talk by imitating their mother. If we listen to God's words by mental prayer, we will learn to speak and act like Him. Mental prayer is the only door to God. The glass in the mirror needs the metal behind it to reflect the images. We can see God's image only in Our Saviour's sacred humanity. His life and death are the best subjects for our mental prayer.

Jesus calls Himself the Bread come down from heaven. Just as we eat bread with other foods, we must feed upon Our Lord in every prayer and action.

Daily Meditation

Give an hour a day to meditation. If possible, let it be in the morning when your mind is fresh from rest. Do not spend more time unless your director advises it. This prayer is best done in Church, because you probably will not find a free hour at home. No family member should object to this hour.

Begin all mental and vocal prayer by seeking the Presence of God. You will see how useful this is.

Some Advice

Say the Creed, the Our Father and the Hail Mary. Don't say them many times but say each one devoutly and think about their meaning. The Rosary is a useful devotion. Although books contain vocal prayers, if you have the gift of mental prayer, let that always have first place. If business affairs prevent vocal prayer, be satisfied with your Our Father, Hail Mary and Creed after meditation.

If you are saying vocal prayer and are led to mental prayer, put aside the vocal prayers. The mental prayer is more pleasing to God and more profitable for you.

If business or other causes (which you should try to prevent) do not allow you time for morning meditation, make it up in the afternoon but not after a meal (when you would be sleepy). If you cannot make it up at all, remedy the situation by vocal prayer or spiritual reading. Join this to a firm resolution to do better tomorrow.

2.2 – A Short Method of Meditation (God's Presence and Preparation)

Because of great neglect, many today do not know how to meditate. I will provide an easy method until you become proficient by practice.

Begin by placing yourself in God's presence. I give four suggestions to do this:

1. Realize that God is everywhere. No place is devoid of His holy presence. Go where we will, He is there. All know this but are not aware of its importance.
2. If a blind man is told that he is in the King's presence, he will show reverence. However, people tend to forget what they do not see. Faith alerts us that God is present. Without faith, we tend to forget and act as if He was far away.
3. We know that God is everywhere but because we don't think about it. To begin to pray, we must stir ourselves to recall God's presence. David said, "If I climb to heaven, You are there. If I go down to hell, You are there" (Ps 139:7).
4. After having his vision of the heavenly ladder, Jacob said, "The Lord is here and I knew it not" (Gen 28:16). He never had thought about it. To be ready to pray, say, "God is truly here."

God's Presence Within

Recall that God is not just where you are. He is especially within you. He enkindles His presence when His Spirit touches your spirit. As the soul animates the whole body, so God animates your thoughts and your desires. Paul wrote "In Him, we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Think about this truth until your heart is enkindled by His presence.

Jesus Watching From Heaven

Think of Jesus Who has ascended into heaven and now looks down on all the world. He gazes especially upon Christians. They are His children and He watches over them all, especially those who pray. This is not our imagination. He truly looks down upon us. St. Stephen, in his martyrdom, said "I see the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God" (Acts 7:56). The Bride says, "My lover gazes through the windows and peers through the lattices" (Song 2:9).

Jesus Beside You

This is the easiest part. Just use your imagination to picture Jesus standing beside you, just as a friend does. When the Blessed Sacrament is present, this Presence is very real. In the Sacrament, the Lord sees us although we cannot see Him.

Use one of these methods before you pray. Don't try to use all four. Use one at a time and briefly.

2.3 – The Invocation

Having realized the presence of God, you prostrate in reverence before Him and acknowledge your unworthiness. He wants you to come to Him, so ask the grace to serve Him. You can quote various psalms. “Cast me not from Your presence.” “Take not Your Spirit from me.” “Show me your ways”, “Grant me understanding.”

Think also of the saints, like the Virgin Mary, the beloved disciple, or Mary Magdalene who might be part of the story you are meditating on. Share in their devout feelings.

2.4 – Imagining the Mystery

The third point is called the presentation or the interior picture. You must relive the mystery in your imagination, as if it were taking place now. For example, if you meditate on Christ's death, imagine that you are at Calvary. See and hear all the events described in the gospels.

In the ten meditations I have prepared (cf Chapters 1.9 to 1.18) you can imagine your death, judgment, hell, heaven etc. Sometimes when meditating on intangibles (as God's greatness) you cannot use the imagination as much. In these, you compare God to creatures.

Using the Imagination

I don't want to weary your mind. Just use a simple method. The imagination should focus the mind on the event and prevent our thoughts from wandering (as when you shut a bird in its cage). Beginners need to use their imagination because thoughts without images are too difficult for them. Until God calls you to higher prayer, just abide in the lowly valley of your imagination.

2.5 – The Considerations

After settling the imagination, the soul must consider certain truths with the understanding. These considerations have a definite purpose. They raise your desires to God and heavenly things.

Beyond Study and Thought

Meditation is not study. It is also not a method of thought. By meditation, the soul seeks to grow in holiness, not to acquire learning. By focusing your imagination on some sacred event, you limit your mind. Now, you must reflect (as I have outlined in the ten meditations). If your mind finds enough matter and light in one consideration, do not move on. A bee hovers over one flower while it still gains honey. If you do not find much, go to the next consideration. Be quiet and simple. Do not hurry or be eager.

2.6 – Affections and Resolutions

Meditation should excite good desires in the soul's sensitive part. These desires include a love for God or for neighbor, a craving for heaven, a zeal for others, fear of Judgment, thanksgiving, trust in God, hatred of sin, etc. Let these affections pour out of your soul. Don't stop them. If you need help, read the Imitation of Christ.

Don't stop short in these affections. Turn them into good resolutions. By meditating on Jesus' words "Father, forgive them. They know not what they do" (LK 23-343), you will want to forgive your enemies. This is not enough. You must have a practical resolution, such as "I won't let myself be angered by so and so", "I won't be upset by words spoken against me." "I will try to conciliate problems." In this way, you will soon correct your faults. General resolutions are too slow and uncertain.

2.7 – The Conclusion and Final Thoughts

End with three acts made in humility:

1. Thank God Who has inspired the considerations and resolutions in the mystery you considered.
2. Offer your resolutions to God in union with Christ's death.
3. Ask to share in His Son's merits so you can put your resolutions into practice.

After this, pray for the Church, your family and others, using the Our Father.

Gather a Bouquet. When people walk in a garden they gather a few flowers and enjoy their scent through the day. Because your mind has been exploring some mystery, you should gather the points that caught your interest and will help you during the day. Do this before ending your meditation.

2.8 – Useful Hints on Meditation

Always hold onto the thoughts and resolutions of your morning meditation so you can practice them during the day. This is the real profit. To think about virtues (as if we had them) and not practice them is harmful. We think we are what we have resolved to be.

The resolutions must be practiced. Seek every opportunity (great or small) to practice the virtue during the day. For example, if you are resolved to practice gentleness, try to meet those who test your kindness.

Advice for After Prayer Time

After you finish your morning prayer, keep your heart at peace. Maintain silence for a while, and transfer your thoughts from prayer to business only gradually. Keep alive the affections as long as possible. Someone carrying a vessel filled with costly liquid is careful not to spill the liquid. So, after prayer, keep your eyes straight ahead. If you must attend to other matters, try to lose as little fruit as possible. Accustom yourself to move easily from prayer to work.

After prayer, a lawyer must go to his courtroom, a trademan to his profession, a housewife to her duties calmly so that they are not disturbed. In both prayer and work you fulfill God's will. In both you can have a devout heart.

Allow Affections to Flow

If, at the very beginning of meditation, your heart goes immediately to God, let it go. Forget the method. Usually the affections and religious feelings follow the considerations. However, when the Holy Spirit moves you immediately into affections, do not use the method that is meant to bring you there. You have already arrived!

In short, when the affections are enkindled, give them first place. I place the affections after the considerations to make the different parts clear. However, when affections arise, they are never to be checked. I encourage a free flow of devout acts. This applies to all the acts (thanksgiving, petition, etc.) Do not restrain them. Also, repeat them at the end.

Final Parts

Resolutions are at the end and deal with the practical subjects. If introduced earlier, they would hinder the affections.

Also use little speeches. Speak to the Lord, to your Guardian angel, to the gospel personalities, and to the saints. Speak even to creation urging it to praise the Lord.

2.9 – Dryness in Meditation

If at times you receive no consolation in meditation, do not be troubled. Tell the Lord you are unworthy. Use Jacob's words to the angel. "I will not let you go until you bless me" or the Caananite woman's words, "Even the dogs eat from the master's table." (Mk 7:28)

One solution is to read a book until your mind is calmed. Then return quickly to mental prayer. If you are alone, you can use external actions (like folding your hands on your breast or prostrating).

The King's Messengers

If the dryness continues, do not be disturbed. Persevere in your devout attitude before God. Messengers appear hundreds of times at the palace without receiving a word from the King. They come to do him homage and be seen. Practicing mental prayer testifies to your loyalty. If God pleases to speak with you and give you inward consolations, this is a great honor.

If He gives no such favors and pretends that He doesn't even see you, stay devoutly before Him. He will accept your patient waiting and bless your perseverance at another time. Then he will give you all the consolations and sweetness of meditation. If not, you can still be satisfied with being in His Presence and being seen by Him.

OTHER SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

2.10 – Morning Prayer

Besides systematic meditation and vocal prayer, five other things assist devotion. The most important is morning prayer. This prepares you for the day's work. Make it in four ways:

1. Thank God Who has kept you during the night. If you offended Him, seek His forgiveness.

2. Recall that the day is given so you can work for eternity. Resolve to use the day for that goal.
3. Consider the duties and situations that will enable you to serve God. See what temptations you will face. Make a fervent resolution to serve God, to strengthen your devotion, and to resist what would hinder your salvation.
Don't just resolve. Prepare to carry out your resolutions. If you will meet an angry person, consider what gentle words you can use. If you will meet a sick person, how will you comfort them?

Humble yourself. Tell God that you cannot avoid evil or do good. Take your heart in your hands. Ask God to strengthen you, "Lord, I give you my weak heart. I am unable to put my good desires into effect unless you bless them." Make these acts briefly before you leave your room and your day's work will be blessed by God. Never omit this prayer.

2.11 – Evening Prayer and Examination of Conscience

Evening Prayer

Before your evening meal, recollect yourself in the presence of the Crucified Christ (setting Him before your imagination). Renew the warmth of your morning meditation by lifting your soul to the Saviour and repeat the meditation thoughts.

Examination of Conscience

1. Thank God for keeping you this day.
2. Examine the events of the day and whom you were with.
3. Thank God for any good deeds. Ask His pardon for what you have done wrong. Resolve to bring these to confession.
4. Ask the saints and angels to watch over you.

Never omit the morning prayer which opens the windows of your soul to God nor your evening prayer which closes these windows to the power of hell.

2.12 – On Spiritual Recollection

The following practice is the surest means of spiritual progress. During the day, strive as often as possible to be in God's presence. I suggest two means:

1. Look at God and realize that His eyes are always on you. "Oh God, why cannot I always look to You as You look at me?"
2. Choose a place where you escape from the world. In his wounds? On Calvary? In some scene close to Him? There must be some scene where you go to be refreshed and to be protected (like a fortress). Blessed is the soul which can say, "Lord, You are my refuge, my shelter in the storm and in the day's heat."

When externally occupied with business, you must retire within the solitude of your heart. Even crowds around you should not hinder this solitude. They surround only your body. Your soul can stay in God's presence. The Psalms say, "Lord, I am ever with you" and "The Lord is always at my right side", and "My eyes look toward God."

St. Catherine's Solution

Few social duties prevent you from going into the solitude of your heart. When her parents deprived St. Catherine of Sienna of her prayer time, she made a chapel in the interior of her mind where she enjoyed a holy solitude. The world never upset her. She found comfort in her Bridegroom Who was within and she advised her spiritual daughters to do the same.

Hidden in a Gospel Scene

Enter your heart and lay it open before God. David said that he sat like “a pelican in the wilderness, an owl in the desert, and a sparrow sitting alone upon the housetops”. These are three excellent examples of where you can find a spiritual solitude. The pelican, (who uses her blood to feed her children) symbolizes Jesus on Calvary. The owl symbolizes Jesus at His birth, alone in the stable. The sparrow, (which rises above all), symbolizes Jesus in His Ascension. Use these events – (the death, the birth, the Ascension) – as inner scenes to find Christ in your own heart. A wife sent a messenger to her saintly husband from whom she was separated. He responded, “Seek me in the wounded side of Jesus for that is my dwelling place.” He was a true Christian.

2.13 – Aspirations and Holy Thoughts

We go into solitude because we want to be alone with God. Desiring Him and seeking to be alone with Him enkindle one another. Both spring from holy thoughts. Desire Him frequently by lifting your thoughts to Him. You can do this in many ways. Choose what you are led to.

1. Put yourself at the foot of the Cross.
2. Offer yourself a thousand times to Him.
3. Stretch out your hands like a child to his Father.
4. Hold Him close to your breast.
5. Fix your inward gaze upon Him.
- 6.

Use every possible act to enkindle your passionate desire for the Bridegroom. St. Augustine urged us to say aspiration. By seeking such closeness, you will imbibe the perfume of His virtues.

Duties

This practice is easily interwoven with your duties. Seeking Him in solitude and inward upliftings will enhance what you are doing. Do you not stop to sip some wine? The brief delay shortens and lightens the journey. You pause so you can go on further.

In natural love, the person's heart overflows with tenderness and their lips praise their beloved. So, true lovers of God cannot go long without thinking of Him, longing for Him and speaking to Him. They would engrave the Holy Name on every heart.

Prayer Flowing From Creation

The waves bring small things to the shore but another wave carries it back out. Large rocks, however, cannot be moved by the waves. The small things are feeble souls, easily separated from God. The rocks are sturdy souls.

Examples

St. Fulgentius, upon seeing the splendor of Rome exclaimed, “O God, how glorious must the heavenly Jerusalem be if earthly Rome is like this!” If earth gratifies earthly lovers, what is in store for those who love heaven? If the lower works of creation are so beautiful, how glorious are the mansions of the redeemed!”

St. Anselm was on a horse when a rabbit took refuge under the horse’s feet. The hounds dared not attack. He said, “The rabbit is like a sinful soul who, at the hour of death, finds so many enemies to devour it. Terrified, it does not know where to seek refuge.” St. Francis saw a wolf destroying a lamb and said, “Poor little one, you are for me a symbol of Christ’s death.” St. Francis Borgia said, “A falcon returns to its owner’s wrist and allows him to cover its eyes with a hood, but men refuse to accept God’s call.” St. Basil the Great found a lesson in the rose among thorns. “All joy in life is mingled with some sadness. Marriage is followed by widowhood. Children bring anxiety. Glory can turn to shame. The rose reminds us that the earth brings forth thorns.” One devout soul, upon seeing the stars, recalled that when he is in heaven the stars will be beneath his feet. St. Francis of Assisi saw a hen gathering her young and cried out, “Keep me, O Lord, in the shadow of Your wings.”

So, good thoughts can be drawn from seeing God’s creation. Three times blessed is the soul that uses creation to glorify the Creator.

Two Important Practices

Devotion has two great practices: (1) It seeks God’s presence at all times. (2) It raises our minds from creature to Creator. These two supply all deficiencies in our prayers but they themselves cannot be made up. They are absolutely needed for a contemplative life. The active life will be imperfect if the soul omits these. Without these two spiritual practices, to rest is laziness and to labor is weariness. Never let go of these practices.

2.14 – Devout Reception of Holy Communion

So far, I have said nothing of the very center of all devotion. This is the Eucharist by which God gives Himself and conveys all His graces. Prayer in union with the divine Sacrifice has untold power. The soul leans on her Beloved and says , “Who is this Who comes with all the powders of the merchant!” (Song 3:6)

Daily Mass

Go to Mass every day! Angels crowd around in adoration (St. John Chrysostom). We can certainly be blessed by such a society. At Mass, the whole Church gains favor and mercy.

If you are hindered from attending, then partake spiritually. If you cannot go to Church, choose a morning hour to unite with the whole Catholic world. Make the same interior acts as if you were there.

To hear Mass well, do the following:

1. Confess your unworthiness and seek forgiveness.
2. During the readings, reflect on Our Lord’s life.
3. After the Gospel, remember Our Lord’s teaching.
4. Fix you heart on Christ’s passion and death (which the Sacrifice sets forth essentially.)
5. Until Communion, offer your heart.
6. After Communion, thank God for the mysteries in the Eucharist.

Instead of the above acts you might just want to continue the thoughts of your meditation. If so, just dispose yourself to worship.

2.15 – Other Public Prayers of the Church

If you can assist at other public prayers, you will increase the fervor of your devotion. In the early days of his conversion, Augustine wept during the Divine Office. Take part in any Confraternities in your area which seem to be fruitful. God always wants you to join with others. Participating in public religious services is a good example to your neighbor.

2.16 – United With the Saints

The souls in paradise are like, “angels in heaven” (Mk. 12:25) and we should join our voices with theirs. Does not a little nightingale learn to sing from the older birds? By speaking with the saints we learn the praises of the Lord.

Above all, we must venerate the Blessed Virgin Mary with a special love. Let us have confidence in her and imitate her graces.

Knowing the Angels

Be familiar with the angels. There are guardian angels for dioceses, churches, your friends and yourself. Speak with them frequently and seek their spiritual and earthly protection.

Fr. Peter Faber S.J., passed through Switzerland on his way to Germany. He described the great comfort he had in speaking with the guardian angels of places that had ceased to be Catholic. They often kept him from danger.

Choose to study and imitate an individual saint. The saint of your Baptismal name would be a natural choice.

2.17 – Receiving God’s Word

Cultivate a devotion to God’s word, both in public and in private. Be attentive. Let the seed fall into your heart not onto rocky ground. Imitate the Blessed Virgin who “Kept all these things in her heart” (Lk.2:51). If we receive His word in great joy, Our Lord receives our words in prayer with great joy.

Always have devout books at hand and read some small portion every day. Read the lives of the saints. Imitate them according to your circumstances.

2.18 – Inspirations of Grace

Inspirations are the leadings, feelings, interior lights and intuitions by which God moves us. He awakens, excites, urges and attracts us to goodness. All God’s inspirations lead to our eternal welfare. In the Song of Songs, the Bridegroom knocks at the door, awakens His beloved, calls upon her, seeks her out, and lets her hear his voice.

Three Steps

In contracting a marriage, the couple does three things. The groom proposes. The bride thinks about the proposal. The bride gives her consent. The same is true of inspirations. God suggests a good deed. Then we consider it and finally consent to it. Sin also has these three steps – temptation, delectation and consent. Virtue's three steps are inspiration, delectation and consent.

Rejecting Inspirations

Receiving inspirations and not consenting to them offends God. The Israelites grieved God for forty years, refusing to hear His voice. So God swore, "They shall not enter into my rest" (Ps 94:10-11). A man who has given much time to his girlfriend, would be deeply hurt if she refused his marriage proposal.

Although delight in inspirations is not the same as consent, it shows a strong tendency. Taking pleasure in hearing God's Word is a good sign. It is even better to take delight in interior inspirations. The Bride said, "My soul melted away when my Beloved spoke" (Song 5:6). God is like the earthly lover who delights that his beloved finds pleasure in his words.

Need for Consent

Taking delight is not enough. Consent alone perfects this action. If God inspires us and we take pleasure yet withhold our consent, we offend Him. Although the Bride heard the groom's voice, she made excuses and delayed opening the door. As a result, he "was gone" (Song 5:6). A man who seems acceptable to a woman but then is sent away has more reason to complain than one who was never favorably received.

Resolve to accept all of God's inspirations. They are as ambassadors of your heavenly King Who seeks union with you. Listen to them. Let your love be fostered. Cherish your holy Guest. Give Him a full, loving and steadfast consent. God sees your affection as a favor done to Him.

Extraordinary Inspirations

Do not immediately accept inspirations which deal with important or extraordinary matters. To avoid self-deception, speak first with your spiritual director and let him examine the inspiration. When the devil sees a soul ready to accept inspirations, he sends false inspirations to deceive. To avoid this, just obey your guide.

Once you consent, follow through to the intended results. Otherwise, you plant the vine but do not intend any fruit. Being fruitful requires fidelity to the morning exercises and to the practice of God's presence.

2.19 – On Confession

Why Not Seek Forgiveness?

Our Saviour gave the Church the Sacrament of Confession so that our sins, (whenever and however committed), could be purged. Daughter, never allow your heart to be heavy with sin because a remedy is at hand. A lioness purifies herself of the smell of any other animal to be pleasing to her mate. So a soul (who has consented to sin), should seek purification to please God Who always sees her. Why die a spiritual death when the remedy is available?

Weekly Confession

Even if you are not conscious of mortal sin, confess every week and always before Communion. You will receive both forgiveness of venial sins and great strength to avoid them. You will gain clear light to see your failings and much grace to make up for what you have lost. In confession, you practice humility, obedience and simplicity. By your act of Confession you practice more virtue than by any other means.

Always have a true sorrow (no matter how small the sins). Always resolve to correct your sins. Some confess venial sins with no real intention to repent and they lose much spiritual good. It is an abuse to confess any sin, mortal or venial, and not intend to put it aside entirely. That is the very purpose of confession.

The Correct Way to Confess

Avoid self-accusations that are meaningless, like, “I haven’t loved God” or “I haven’t loved a neighbor as I should”, or “I haven’t received the sacraments with enough reverence.” These are useless. All the saints in heaven could say the same. Examine closely the special reasons you have for committing these sins. When you discover this, accuse yourself of that fault.

For example, you have not loved your neighbor as you should by failing to help someone in need. Confess by saying, “I did not help a needy person”. Concerning prayer, you should say “I have given way to voluntary distractions” or “I have not chosen the proper place to pray.” Do not speak in generalities.

The Cause and The Duration

Do not just accuse yourself of the venial sins but of the cause which led to them. If you told a lie, mention why. For example, to win praise or to avoid blame, etc. If you talked too much, say why.

Mention also if you continued in the sin for a long time or was it just a passing act. Vain thoughts for a few minutes are quite different than the same thoughts for days. Mention the nature and duration of these thoughts.

A Full Disclosure

Technically, we do not need to be so precise or even confess venial sins at all. However, to purify your soul and to gain a devout life, you should want to show all of your spiritual illnesses to the spiritual physician. Do not spare yourself. Tell the reason why you lost your temper or led others into wrongdoing. Doing this reveals your inclinations which are the roots of sin. The priest can better understand your heart and what remedies you need. Keep careful watch over the great variety of sins which can spring up and flourish without your knowledge. Confess them and put them away.

Once you have chosen your confessor, do not easily change. Give him an account at the regular times. Tell him your faults very simply. Every month or two give him a general picture of your inclinations, even when nothing is wrong. Tell him whether you are cheerful or depressed. Mention if you feel ambitious for advancement or desirous of money, etc.

2.20 – Frequent Communion

So that we might live forever, Our Saviour instituted the Eucharist containing His Body and Blood. Whoever receives it frequently and devoutly strengthens his soul and cannot be poisoned by evil desires.

If we are fed by that living Flesh, we will not cling to the affections of death. Adam and Eve could not die in Paradise because of the tree of life. So, this sacrament of Life makes spiritual death impossible.

Preserving From Death

The most easily spoiled fruits (cherries and strawberries) can be preserved all year round if placed in honey. Our hearts can be kept from the corruption of sin when preserved in the sweetness of the incorruptible Body and Blood of God's Son.

If Christians are lost, they will have no excuse because it was easy for them to preserve their health by eating His Body. Jesus will say, "You died when you had the opportunity to receive the Bread of Life."

Sunday and Daily Communion

As long as you are not attached to sin, I exhort you to receive Communion every Sunday. Concerning daily Communion, I leave that to your spiritual guide because the needed dispositions are too delicate for indiscriminate advice. The dispositions needed for daily Communion can be found in many devout souls so it is not good to discourage them.

St. Catherine of Sienna, blamed for her frequent communions, replied, "St. Augustine does not condemn it, so neither should you". Augustine certainly exhorted all to receive every Sunday. Anyone not attached to mortal or venial sins should communicate frequently. (St. Frances de Sales wrote in the 16th Century, long before the 20th Century practice of daily Communion.)

What Others Think

If you are discreet, no one (father, mother, spouse) will object to your frequent Communion. On days when you receive, you must be kind and do all you can to please. Others will not hinder what also helps them, too. Nothing in married life hinders frequent Communion. The early Christians communicated daily, married or single.

For weekly Communion, the person must be free from mortal sin and attachment to venial sin. They also must have a great desire for Communion. For daily Communion, the person should have conquered their inclinations to evil.

2.21 – How to Receive Communion

Begin to prepare the night before. Go to bed earlier and rise earlier. If you awaken during the night, praise the Bridegroom Who is going to come to you. Go with the fullest trust (and humility) that the Heavenly Food will give you eternal life. Open your mouth with the fullness of faith and receive Him Whom you hope in and love. As a bee carries earth's sweetest juices to its hive, so the priest feeds you the sweet Bread of Life.

Grow in Love

After receiving, let your heart be enkindled. Realize that the King of Salvation is within you. Tell Him your personal matters. Give Him the best reception possible. If you cannot receive actual Communion, then communicate by your ardent desire for the Life-giving Body. Your main intention must be to grow in the love of God. For Love's sake receive what Love alone can give. The tender Saviour gives Himself as our food to unite Himself to His faithful ones.

Why So Frequently?

If people ask why you receive Communion so frequently, tell them it is to love God, to be cleansed of imperfections, to be comforted and to be strengthened in weakness. All types of people need frequent Communion. The strong, so they don't become weak, and the weak so they can become strong. The sick to be healed and the well so they do not grow ill. Those who do not labor, because they have leisure. Those heavily pressed by business, so they receive the needed help.

You receive Communion so you can learn to receive it better. A person does poorly what he does seldom. So, communicate often. Mountain rabbits turn white in winter as they live among the snow. So, by adoring Beauty in this sacrament, you will become lovely and holy.

PART 3 – CONCERNING THE PRACTICE OF VIRTUE

3.1 – Selecting a Virtue

Charity and Universal Virtues

When the queen bee takes flight, all her subjects surround her. So, when love enters the heart, it brings all the other virtues. Love uses them like a captain employs his soldiers. Love does not put them all to work at once or in the same place. "Like a tree planted by the water, she brings forth fruit in due season". (Ps 1:3) Love brings forth its fruit in season. Although joyful music is not welcome at a time of mourning, certain persons attempt to practice the same virtue on all occasions. This is a mistake. Paul writes, "Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep." (Rom 12:15)

General and Universal Virtues

Charity is kind, prudent and indulgent. Other virtues are also universal and should spread their influence everywhere. Gentleness, temperance, modesty and humility should affect all we do. They are always required in daily life. Sugar is better than salt but we use salt more often. The devout soul must have a good supply of charity and these general virtues.

Choosing Your Virtues

We must choose virtues according to our duty rather than our taste. St. Jerome said that St. Paula was wrong in her use of mortifications. Instead, she should have practiced obedience to her bishop. The Apostles realized that they should preach the word and not work at tables (Acts 6:2).

Every calling demands special virtues. However, the virtues of the bishop, the prince, the wife and the widow are quite different. All should possess every virtue but not exercise them equally. Each should cultivate what is essential to their way of life.

Concerning virtues that are not part of your duties, choose the most excellent, not the most evident. Comets seem larger than stars only because they are closer to us. Some people prefer the wrong virtues. They value almsgiving over spiritual practices. They think highly of fasting and bodily mortification. They do not esteem meekness, cheerfulness and interior mortifications which are far better. Choose, my daughter, the best virtues, not the most esteemed; the truest, not the most visible.

Everyone should choose a virtue while not neglecting the others. They must have one as a clear goal.

Example of Virtues

St. John of Alexandria saw a vision of a lovely maiden who said, “I am the King’s eldest daughter. Have me for a friend and you will see His face”. Knowing that this was Lady Poverty, he totally devoted himself to the poor.

Eulogius of Alexandria, not wanting to be a hermit or to enter a monastery, chose to take a lowly beggar into his house. After a while, both were tempted to separate. Instead, they went to St. Anthony. He said, “Both of you are close to death. Do not separate. If the angel does not find you together, you are in danger of losing your crowns.”

St. Louis the King visited hospitals to personally care for the sick. St. Francis loved poverty. St. Dominic was called to preach. Tobit buried the dead.

Various Vocations

God’s servants devote themselves to nursing, teaching, reclaiming the fallen etc. They are like embroiderers who work with all kinds of materials. Devout souls are led to a particular work which frames all their other graces. It is the thread that runs through all their actions.

Virtue That Overcomes the Predominant Vice

If you have a particular vice, you must seek the opposite virtue. Beset by anger, I must cultivate gentleness. Beset by pride, I must practice humility. A wild boar sharpens his tusks by grinding them against its other teeth. So a good man perfects his virtue, by practicing the other virtues.

Job was confirmed in total holiness by practicing patience in his trials. A soul can attain great holiness by practicing one virtue with great perfection. Rahab, who hid the Israelite spies, gained glory by her one act of hospitality. Obviously, this action must be performed with an exceeding degree of fervour.

3.2 – Practicing Virtues

Beginners often commit faults which fall short of perfection. However, these faults are praiseworthy because they foreshadow excellent goodness. For example, a beginner’s fear of God often leads to scrupulosity. At this early stage, scrupulosity is commendable because it foreshadows a future purity of conscience. For an advanced soul, such fear would be blameworthy. At that stage love should reign and fear be cast out.

Virtuous Faults of Beginners

In his early days, St. Bernard was severe with those he directed, telling them to put aside the body. In confession, he treated even small faults with severity. He urged his penitents onwards but by his pressing demands he actually kept them back. They lost heart because he drove them up a steep hill.

Daughter, you see that the saint’s ardent zeal led him to act this way. However, his zeal needed some limits. God accomplished this by a vision. He filled St. Bernard with such a gentle spirit that he changed altogether and blamed himself for being so severe. He became indulgent, all things to all men.

St. Paula was excessive both in her bodily mortifications and in her grief over the death of her husband. When St. Jerome wrote her biography, he did not excuse these faults, “I am just writing her history.” These actions, which are imperfect in the perfect, are virtues in the imperfect souls. At the end of a sickness the legs swell. This is a sign that strength is returning. The swelling of legs would be a bad sign in a healthy person.

We must value virtues even when practiced imperfectly. However, we must also follow the guides whom God has given you.

Extraordinary Experiences

I want to speak about ecstasies, trances and extraordinary transformations which some books describe. These promise to raise the soul to a purely intellectual contemplation and to a life of pre-eminent excellence. I want you to see that these experiences are not virtues. They are rewards and foretastes of everlasting joy. They are occasionally given to souls to enkindle a desire for Paradise (where these joys exist fully).

You must not seek these experiences because they are not necessary to love and serve God. Indeed, the soul cannot acquire these graces by their own work. They are experiences we receive, not acts we perform. They are not created by us. Our task is to become good and devout.

The Lowly Virtues

If God would give us the highest perfection, we would accept it. However, in the meantime, let us practice the lowly virtues of patience, cheerfulness, obedience, poverty, chastity, kindness and holy fervor. Leave the higher regions to lofty souls. Don't take a high rank in God's service. Be content to be lowly servants in the household. He alone calls souls into His council chamber. The King of Glory does not reward souls according to their position, but according to their humility and love.

The Safer Path

Look at Scripture. Saul became the king when he searched for his father's donkeys. Rebecca watered the camels and became Isaac's wife. Ruth gleaned in the fields of Boaz who became her future husband.

Those aiming at extraordinary graces are liable to delusions. People who try to be angels are sometimes not even good human beings. Their goodness lies in words, not in deeds. Do not condemn anything. Thank God for the lofty soul. However, you must take the lower and safer path. This is more suitable to your lowliness. Walk steadily and God will lift you higher.

3.3 - Patience

“You need patience to do God's will and receive what He has promised” (Heb 10:36). “In your patience, you will possess your souls” (LK 21:19). To possess our souls is the greatest happiness. The more patient we are, the more we will possess them.

All Trials

Christ saved us by patient endurance and we must seek that salvation by patience in sufferings. We must bear all insults and troubles with gentleness. Do not limit your patience to one kind of trial. Let it extend to all that God sends you. Some people only accept trials which bring them a certain dignity (as

being persecuted for religious beliefs). In a sense, they do not love tribulation but the honor which comes from these trials.

A really patient soul will accept inglorious trials, like slander and false accusations. They will even accept injustice from good people and friends. I deeply appreciate the patience of St. Charles Borromeo who endured public reproaches from a Dominican preacher. Just as a bee sting hurts more than a fly, so the injuries from good people are harder to bear than others. Even two worthy well-intentioned men can persecute each other grievously.

All Circumstances

Be patient with the trial and also with the accidental inconveniences that accompany the trial. Some seem ready to accept a trial but not its consequences. A man says, "I would accept poverty if I could bring up my children well". A man is ready to patiently bear slander if no one believes it. Some accept illness but worry about getting the right advice or being an inconvenience to their friends. We must patiently accept whatever sickness God chooses and the circumstances that He decides.

If troubles come, use the remedies which God supplies. To do otherwise is to tempt Him. However, once you have used these remedies, then resign yourself to God's Will. If the evil is remedied, thank Him. If the evil grows, patiently bless His Name.

How to Respond

If you are blamed for a fault you committed, confess that you deserve the blame. If the accusation is false, quietly defend yourself and deny the charges. This respects truth and helps your neighbor. If after your legitimate defense, you still stand accused, do not be troubled nor press your defense. You have been faithful. Now be humble. In this way you will care for your good name and also retain your peace and gentleness.

Don't complain of injustices done to you. Complaining is a sin and magnifies our injuries. Especially, do not complain to people who easily grow angry. If you need to complain to gain some comfort, let it be to a gentle spirit who loves God. Otherwise, your friend will provoke you to greater disturbance. He will drive the thorn in farther instead of removing it.

False and True Patience

When ill or injured by others, some people can restrain their complaints. However, they manage to get others to pity them and are seen as courageous. This is a spurious patience, a very subtle form of ambition and vanity. "He has reason to boast but not in the sight of God."

A patient man neither complains nor seeks pity. He will speak simply of his troubles. If others pity him, he will accept their compassion. If they pity him for what is not true, he will say the truth. He will combat his grief and not complain about it.

Birth Pangs

You must also bear patiently the many trials involved in a devout life. Jesus said, "A woman in labor is in anguish because her hour has come, but when she delivers the child, she forgets the anguish, because of her joy that a child has been born" (Jn 16:21).

You have conceived Jesus Christ in your soul and you will experience travail until He is born. Be of good cheer. When He is perfected in your heart and in your actions, He will truly be born.

When you are sick, obey your doctor. Take all your medicines and food. Desire your recovery so you can serve Him. Accept your weakness and be ready to die if He wills it.

A bee, while making honey, lives on bitter food. So, while eating the bread of bitterness and enduring hardships, we gather the honey of gentleness, patience and other virtues. The best honey is made from a bitter herb (thyme). That virtue is greatest which is practiced amid bitterness.

Comparing Suffering

In your sufferings, gaze inwardly at Jesus crucified. He was falsely accused, forsaken, and overwhelmed with every grief. Nothing you suffer carries any weight compared with what he bore for you. Remember the martyrs. Think of how many people right now suffer far beyond what you are suffering. Realize that your torments are like roses compared to lives which are without solace or consolation. Their grief is ten times what you experience.

3.4 - Humility

Elisha told the widow to borrow empty vessels so they could be filled with the oil coming from the miraculous jug (2Kg 4:3-4). Notice that they had to be empty (not filled with self esteem).

Because the swallow's sharp cries drive away birds of prey, other birds stay close to it. Humility drives away satan and all the saints stayed close to humility. They esteemed this above all other virtues.

Vainglory

Vain-glory is when a man takes to himself what is not his own. Some are proud of their birth and others of their popularity. However, noble birth comes from our forefathers and popularity comes from the opinions of others. Some are conceited because they ride a fine horse or are well-dressed. Really, the one to be proud should be the horse or the tailor. People pride themselves on their hair, their singing or their dancing. What frivolous matters! Some have acquired some learning and want their neighbor's respect. Others think they are admired because of great beauty. This taking of value to self is vain.

Tests of Genuineness

True balm is distilled in water. When it goes to the bottom, all know that it is pure and precious. To know if a man is truly generous or noble, if his life is molded by humility and modesty, see if he takes the lowest place. If he seeks the bottom, his gifts are genuine. If his gifts are showy, they will be as unreal as their pretentiousness. Some pearls have only an outward shell and nothing within. When a man feeds his good qualities with boasting, he has only empty show without substance.

Beauty only attracts when it is free from self-consciousness. Puffed-up learning makes a man a pedant. Those who are fond of precedence are open to criticism. Freely given praise has value. Honors which are sought are worthless. Many flowers are beautiful while growing but they wither when collected. Honors are pleasant to those who only taste them only in passing. Honors which are sought become dangerous to feed upon.

What Do You Seek?

The first step to goodness is to seek virtue. The first step toward shame is to seek honor. A well-trained mind does not waste its time seeking outward trifles. One seeking pearls doesn't value shells and a truly devout soul does not seek the outer tokens.

If a person accepts his rightful position in a simple manner he is still humble. Ships loaded with gold and silver also bring parrots, because they do not add to the cargo's weight. So, devout souls can take their rightful place as long as they are not engrossed in honors or filled with anxiety over them. I am not speaking of public office or special personal dignity. Each must live in his own world with prudence and charity.

3.5 – Interior Humility

I want to teach you a deeper humility. Some people wrongly believe that they should not think of the graces that God has given them. St. Thomas Aquinas teaches the opposite. We come to love God by considering what He has done for us. Individual gifts mean more than general gifts. God's gifts to us humble us before His mercy, just as our sins humble us before His Justice.

Lead to Thanksgiving

Consider all He has done for you. We have already reviewed our sins in detail. Now let us review God's graces. Perceiving what He gave you will not puff you up because what you have does not come from yourself. Paul writes, "What do you have that you have not received? If you have received, why do you glory in it?" (1Cor 4:7).

Appreciating what you receive leads to gratitude. If you experience pride in seeing your gifts just remember how ungrateful and imperfect you are. Consider what you did without God and you will see that all merit and glory belong to God. The Blessed Virgin said God had done "great things". In this way, she humbled herself and magnified the Lord. (Lk 1:46-49)

True Humility

We like to speak of ourselves as nothing. However, we don't want anyone to believe us. We hide ourselves so others will seek us out. We take the lowest place hoping to be called up higher. True humility is different. It does not display itself. It hides its virtues and itself. If it were lawful to tell lies, humility would do so to hide itself totally.

Daughter, do not use any expressions of humility. Make sure your outward words correspond to your inner thoughts. If you cast down your eyes, also humble your heart. Do not pretend to want to be last unless you really mean it. This rule has no exception.

Sometimes a speaker uses excessive words in putting another forward. There is no harm. He really intends respect according to society's norms, although I wish such expressions could be deleted. A humble man would rather be called worthless than say it himself. If someone humbles him, respond because this is his own opinion of himself.

Examples of False Humility

People say that they leave mental prayer to those who are more perfect. Also, they do not openly profess their religion, fearing that they would disgrace it by their weaknesses. They don't use their talents for God lest they become proud. Helping others, they might lose their own soul. All of this is unreal. It is a spurious and vicious humility which secretly condemns God's gifts and exalts self-love and self-sufficiency.

Using God's Gifts

King Ahaz said he would not tempt God by asking for a sign (Is 7:11-12). He pretends to show reverence for God, but refuses the very gift which God offered. It is pride to reject such a gift. True humility only exists in obedience to God's Will. God wants us to imitate His powers. The proud man undertakes nothing. The humble man knows his helplessness but has courage because he trusts. God delights to show His power. So, venture upon whatever your spiritual guide considers profitable for you.

It is foolish to pretend we know something when we are really ignorant. However, I bring forth my knowledge when charity demands. Give your neighbor what he needs to know. Humility hides its gifts but gladly brings them forth when charity asks. This only increases their perfections.

Role of Charity

Beautiful blossoms close at night and open with the rising sun. Humility hides our virtues but opens them to view when the sun of charity asks. Humility that hinders charity is false.

Do not pretend to be either wise or foolish. The first violates humility. The second violates simplicity. Some saints have acted foolishly to be despised by the world. Marvel at this but do not imitate them. They had extraordinary reasons for doing extraordinary actions. David danced before the Ark with extraordinary gladness. Although his wife reproved him, he did not mind being "lowly in his own sight" for God's sake. If you are despised for genuine acts of devotion, you can rejoice. You did not cause the problem.

3.6 – Rejoicing in Lowliness

Daughter, I ask you to go one step further and rejoice in your lowliness. Mary said that God looked upon the lowliness of His handmaid. This means that she accepted her lowliness.

There is a difference between humility and lowliness. Lowliness is the poverty which exists within us without our realizing it. Humility implies our knowing this poverty. The highest degree of humility is not just to know our lowliness. We must rejoice in it, give glory to God, and esteem our neighbor.

Two Trials

There are two kinds of trials, honorable and abject. Most will accept the honorable but reject the abject. Everybody honors a hermit in worn-out garb but despises a gentleman dressed that way. In this case, the poverty is abject. A religious receives a rebuke from the Superior or a child from a parent. When they accept this meekly, all call this obedience. But if a man or a woman accepts a rebuke from another for love of God, they are called a coward. A person with cancer in the arm experiences pain. Someone with cancer in the face has both pain and rejection.

Rejoicing in Abjection

Don't just rejoice in your difficulties. This is patience. Rejoice also in any lowliness and abjection. The world likes valor and liberality. It despises patience and gentleness. Almsgiving and forgiveness are both acts of charity. The world esteems the first and looks down on the second. A young man or woman might refuse to join in the amusements or gossip of others. When their self-restraint is criticized, let them rejoice in this lowliness. It is good to visit the sick. When you visit someone who is abject, rejoice because your merit is greater.

Some of our faults are foolish and result in people laughing at us. We must not be disturbed. If, out of anger, I have used unseemly words, I must repent heartily and repair the offense. In the meantime, I must accept the disgrace that follows. If I could separate the two, I would reject the sin and cling to the disgrace.

Although rejoicing in abjection, we must correct the evil. If I have sores on my face, I must seek the medicine. If I did something foolish which hurt no one, I will not make excuses because the only result was my own disgrace. If I have hurt someone, however, I must make an apology.

Choice

What are the abjections most acceptable to God and profitable to my soul? They are those which come accidentally, which we did not choose. We simply accepted God's choice.

If you must choose, choose the greatest abjections, those that most oppose your own inclinations. Otherwise, selfishness will mar many graces. David said "I would rather be a door-keeper in God's house than dwell in the tents of the ungodly" (Ps 84:10). I have said many hard things but they will become sweet as honey when you put them into practice.

3.7 – A Good Reputation With Humility

We bestow praise and honor upon others because of their extraordinary virtue. By praise, we want others to esteem them. By honor we show our personal esteem.

A Good Reputation

Humility forbids us to seek praise and honor. However, it allows us to pay attention to our good name, which safeguards our personal integrity. Humility could make us indifferent to our good name but charity will not. A good name is the basis of society. Without it, we become harmful because of the scandal we cause. Therefore, charity requires and humility allows us to maintain a good reputation.

The fruit on a tree is protected by its leaves. So, a good reputation is very useful in protecting our virtues. This is especially true for weak souls who must live up to their good reputation. This reputation provides a strong and gentle motive which affects their actions.

Excessive Worry

Practicing virtue to please God is our chief aim. However, keeping our good reputation has its own effects. To conserve fruits, men place them in suitable containers. Virtues contained in a good reputation are better preserved. Some people are oversensitive to their need for medicine. They take so many medicines that they destroy their health. Do not be so overly concerned about your good name that you lose it entirely.

Usually indifference to slander is more effective than resentment or vengeance. When met with indifference, slander melts away. Resentment however, seems to imply that there is truth in the accusations. Slander seems to persist only against people who are disturbed by it.

Fear of Reputation

Excessive fear shows a mistrust, as if their good life had poor foundations. A town with wooden bridges grows uneasy in a storm. A town with stone bridges worries not at all. A soul built on Christian

foundations can weather any storm but those who are weak become disturbed by slander. Whoever wants to be thought well of by everyone will be esteemed by no one. Whoever wants to be esteemed by evil men, really desires to be despised.

Reputation is just a sign saying that virtue dwells here. It is better to desire virtue than the sign. You will be called a hypocrite (if devout), and a coward (if you forgive). Despise all these accusations, do not give up what is right. Prefer the fruit to the foliage. The inner gain is greater than external praise. Don't try to please evil men.

A man's glory is his beard and a woman's glory is her hair. If these be cut, they will grow back again, even thicker. If your reputation is cut by slander, do not be disturbed. It will grow back. However, if you lose it by your own evil deeds, you have plucked it out by its roots. Virtue is the root of a good name which will always spring up afresh if virtue is present.

Preserving a Good Name

If your good name suffers from some useless habit or from an unworthy friendship, you must renounce them. A good name is worth much more than self-indulgence. However, if you are blamed for your prayerfulness, your devout life or your efforts to gain heaven, do not object to the slander. Your good name will survive. Their words will just prune your vine and more fruit will come forth.

Serve Christ. Keep your eyes on Him and He will care for your reputation. If He lets you lose your reputation, He will give you an ounce of humility which is greater than a thousand pounds of honor. Let us meet calumny with truth. If calumny continues, then persevere in humility. Our soul is best sheltered by the hand of God, whom we serve in all reports (good or evil).

Sometimes, we can be accused of certain grievous crimes. About these we cannot remain silent. Reparation must be demanded to restore justice.

3.8 – Gentleness Toward Others

The Holy Chrism used in Confirmation contains olive oil and balm. These symbolize Our Lord's two virtues, humility and meekness. Humility makes us acceptable to God. Meekness makes us acceptable to others. Balm, (which always sinks to the bottom,) symbolizes humility. Olive oil (which floats on the top) symbolizes cheerfulness and a rising above all things. To come to perfection, love must be both patient and cheerful.

Avoiding Anger

So, daughter, keep this mystic chrism of humility and meekness deep in your heart. The devil wants people to think they are gentle and humble. Yet, they are easily stirred to pride or anger. St. Paul was bitten by a viper but did not swell up. A truly humble and meek soul will avert swelling even when bitten by criticism. If slander causes us to swell with anger, then our humility and gentleness are artificial. Joseph sent his brothers back to Canaan with the words, "Let there be no recriminations on the way" (Gen 45:24). On our way to the Kingdom, let us go together, gently and peacefully.

I say this clearly. If possible, never fall out with anyone and never let your heart suffer the passion of anger. James writes, "The wrath of man does not accomplish the righteousness of God" (1:20). Certainly, we must firmly oppose the faults of those for whom we are responsible, but we must do this

gently and quietly. Correction given in anger never has the effects of correction given without anger. Anger subjects a rational soul to passion. This is tyranny. Reason subjected to passion is odious and its rule is obnoxious.

A King pleases his people by a peaceful visit. However, when he takes his army, he is not welcome. Inevitably the people will suffer from the soldiers. Everyone approves a strict correction given with a calm spirit. If reason is clothed in anger, fear results, and reason will be resisted. Do not allow even just anger to enter. Once it enters, it remains and takes hold (St. Augustine). If anger remains after the sun sets there is no way of getting rid of it. Anger feeds upon its own imaginings. Does not every man feel that his anger is just?

It is easier to live without anger than to think you can control it. Set anger aside immediately. Otherwise, it will become your master. Anger is a serpent which controls anywhere it can place its head. When you first feel angry, get hold of yourself gently, (not violently). People make a mistake in using great noise to hush a crowd. By violently restraining your temper, you will lose all self control.

Overcoming Anger

The Psalmist said, “My eye is consumed with anger” but he continued, “O Lord, have mercy on me” (Ps 101:9). When stirred to anger, seek God’s help. In the middle of the storm, God will say, “Peace, be still”. Even your prayers against anger should be gentle. Remember this in every remedy against anger. When you become aware of anger, perform an act of meekness toward the other. If you have lied, you must admit that you spoke falsely. To undo an angry deed, perform an opposite act of meekness. Fresh wounds are the quickest to be healed.

When nothing stirs you to anger, store up meekness. Speak and act as gently as possible. The Bride is described as “dripping with honey” and also having honey “under her tongue” (Song 4:11), that is, in her heart. We must not just speak gently to others. We must also be filled with gentleness. We must have the sweetness of milk to our own household and not be “Angels outside but devils at home”.

3.9 – Gentleness Toward Ourselves

You must never grow upset about yourself or your imperfections. You can be displeased but never bitter or angry. People become angry because they have been angry. They stay in a chronic state of upset. This adds to the evil and prepares for fresh evils. This anger fosters pride and springs from self-love. About our faults, we must have a quiet displeasure. A judge is most effective when he gives his verdict calmly. We purify ourselves best by a steadfast repentance which is proportioned to the weight of our faults, not to the strength of our inclinations.

False Evaluations

A person can be quite upset by a small fault against purity and consider some gross slander as unimportant. A person might worry about a slight exaggeration and overlook a serious sin against purity. This happens when the person judges according to passion and not by reason. A parent’s gentle correction has more power than an angry sternness. So, when you judge your heart guilty, treat it gently. Use pity not anger. If you encourage amendment, your repentance will be much deeper.

Gentle Self Correction

Suppose I fall into a sin of vanity which I am trying to correct. I shouldn't take myself to task and call myself disloyal. I should just say to myself "Rise again bravely and fall no more. Walk the road of humility and be more on guard". This is the surest way. Also take some external means and seek advice. If this gentle rebuke doesn't work, use a sterner approach but always with a loving trust of God. "Why are you so vexed my soul? Put your trust in God" (Ps 42:11 + 15).

When you fall, lift up your heart in quietness. Do not wonder that you fell. Weakness is weak. Just lament your offense and begin anew with a bold, brave heart.

3.10 – Attending to Business Duties

Care for our business responsibilities is quite different from anxiety. The angels care for our salvation but they are free from any anxiety. Diligence and calmness should go hand in hand.

Setting Aside Restlessness

Be diligent in all your duties because God wants you to give them your best attention. However, do not be restless about them. Don't give way to anxiety in what you do. Over-eagerness affects judgment and hinders a right performance.

Our Lord rebuked Martha, "You are anxious and troubled about many things" (Lk 10:41). If she had just been diligent, she would not have been troubled. Gentle rivers carry large ships of merchandise and gracious rains fertilize large fields. However, overflowing rivers destroy commerce and violent storms devastate a country. Sirach says, "Make haste slowly" and "One may struggle but fall short all the more" (11:11).

The bumble bee is more restless than the honey bee but it produces only wax, not honey. So, the restless worker never does much or well. Flies harass us by their numbers and so does a multitude of small tasks. Accept your duties one by one. Attempting to do all at once will confuse you and nothing will be accomplished. Lean on God's Providence. This is the only sure means of success. Work quietly and then rest satisfied. You will always gain the right measure of success, even if you do not see it that way.

While holding on to his father, a little child can gather fruit. You must gather this world's goods with one hand while having the other in God's hand. If you let go and think that you can do more with two hands, you will fall to the ground. Always be sure that God is satisfied with your work.

If your work is not engrossing, keep your heart on God. If your work requires undivided attention, turn to Him from time to time. To get to safe harbor, navigators always look up to the stars, not down to the sea. Keep your eyes on God, and He will work in you. All will be blessed.

3.11– Obedience

Only love leads to perfection. However, love is acquired by obedience, chastity and poverty. Obedience consecrates the heart. Chastity consecrates the body. Poverty consecrates the person to God's service. These three are a spiritual cross which must be erected on the foundation of humility.

I will not speak of these three as vows because vows are not necessary for gaining perfection. Just observing these virtues will bring the soul to perfection. Although not called to the religious life, you can gain perfection in any vocation by practicing these three virtues.

Necessary Obedience

There are two kinds of obedience, necessary and voluntary. Necessary obedience is given to religious and civil superiors, as well as to parents (domestic superiors). We cannot free ourselves from this obedience because God has set them over us. Obey their commands. Follow their counsels. Even do their wishes from charity.

Obey even in little things, for there is great harm in disobedience. Obey in small things (like coming and going) and in hard things. In this lies perfect obedience. Obey quietly, (without questioning), promptly (without delay) and cheerfully, (without reluctance). Imitate the Saviour Who was obedient even to the Cross.

To acquire ready obedience to your superiors, give way to your equals. Adapt yourself to your inferiors and do not use stern authority if they do evil. Some believe they could obey a religious superior when they cannot willingly obey even a natural superior.

Voluntary Obedience

We undertake voluntary obedience by our own choice. We choose to obey our chosen confessor. With a vow (like St. Theresa of Avila had concerning Father Gratian) or without a vow, a soul can resolve to obey their chosen spiritual guide. When you seek the direction of this guide, you will have double grace. One comes from devotion and the other comes from obedience. Blessed are the obedient. God will never let them stray.

3.12 - Purity

Purity is the lily among virtues by which men live like the angels. All beauty demands purity. We call chastity, human purity. Losing purity is corruption.

No unlawful pleasures are compatible with chastity. The pure heart is closed to every attraction except what matrimony sanctifies. Close your heart to every questionable tenderness. Guard against what is not profitable. Avoid undue attachment even to what is right and good.

Preserving Purity

Everyone needs this virtue. The widow must resist the memories of her past which was filled with a happy married life. Youths need purity. (Augustine praised his friend who had set aside the carnal desires of his youth.) Whole fruit can easily be stored securely. Damaged fruit needs honey to be preserved. Intact purity can be kept all during life. Lost purity can be regained and made secure only by the honey of devotion.

Single or Married

The single person needs a sensitive purity which drives away curious thoughts and despises sensual satisfactions. Young people imagine sexual pleasures to be wondrously sweet. As the moth perishes by attraction to the light, so the young perish by an unwise approach to forbidden pleasures.

Married people need a watchful purity. They must keep God always before their eyes, remembering that He has sanctified matrimony and has made it a symbol of His union with the Church.

Without purity, no one can see God. No one can dwell in heaven unless he leads an uncorrupt life. Our Lord said, “Blessed are the pure of heart. They shall see God” (Mt. 5:8).

3.13 – Maintaining Purity

Turn away immediately from whatever leads to impurity. This evil approaches stealthily and small beginnings grow rapidly. It is easier to run away from these evils than to cure them.

Human bodies are like glasses. Any collision risks breaking them. Allow no one to take foolish liberty with you. Even without an evil intention, purity can be injured.

Need for Modesty

Purity has its source in the heart but its shape in the body. Therefore, purity can be lost both by exterior senses and interior acts (of thoughts and desires). Lack of modesty in hearing, seeing, speaking or touching is impurity, especially when the heart delights. Paul says that these things are “not even to be named” among Christians. (Eph 5:4).

In the Canticle, the Bride has “hands filled with myrrh” (a preservative against corruption), lips like “a thread of scarlet” (modest words), and eyes “of a dove” (clean and soft). (Song 7:4) Every part of her body is pure and transparent.

Actions which are not totally impure can blemish perfect purity. All evil thoughts and acts of levity which lessen sensitiveness are steps toward breaches of chastity.

Advice

Avoid impure people especially if they are bold (as they usually are). When corrupt people (whether men or women) speak, they damage the other’s purity. Even their glance has venom. Seek out good and pure men. Read the Word of God. It is pure and will make you pure. Stay close to the crucified Christ in mental prayer and in Holy Communion. Rest your head upon the pure heart of the Lamb and you will find your body and heart purified of all stain.

3.14 – Poverty of Spirit

“Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven” (Mt 5:3). If this is so, then logically, I must say, “Woe to the rich in spirit, for theirs is the bitterness of hell”.

Open Only to Heaven

He is poor in spirit whose mind and heart are not filled with riches. Engrossed and buried in riches, the halcyon builds a nest like a ball with one tiny opening. Then it can float secure and impenetrable on the sea. This should be your heart – open only to heaven and impenetrable to earthly treasures. In the midst of riches, you must live as though you had none. Do not let your immortal soul cling to earthly riches. Be raised above them, not sunk into them.

There is a difference between having poison and being poisoned. All drugstores have poisons but the poison is only in the store, not in the druggist. So, you may have riches but they must only be in

your purse, not in your heart. It is a Christian's privilege to be rich in material things and poor in attachment to them, using riches on earth while meriting (as if poor) in heaven.

Self-Delusion

In truth, no one considers themselves avaricious. They say they are providing for their children or they are being prudent. They never have too much and they always have reasons to accumulate more.

Avaricious men always believe they are not avaricious. Avarice is a fever. The more it rages, the less it is felt. Moses saw the bush burning without being consumed. Avarice is the opposite. It consumes the miser but doesn't burn. In its most intense heat, the man thinks he is deliciously cool and thinks his insatiable thirst is natural.

Signs of Avarice

A man seeking desperately to drink water shows he is thirsty. So, if you persistently seek what you do not have, you are avaricious, (even if you do not seek it unfairly).

It is certainly unlawful to want another man's possessions. Why should we desire what is his? We would not want others to desire what is ours. King Ahab sinned by wanting Nathan's vineyard. By coveting it continually, he displeased God. Do not want what your neighbor has until he wishes to part with it. Do not add to your possessions by strict justice but only from charity.

If you cleave to your possessions, you will set your heart on them and anxiously fear they might get lost. You are feverish and will drink water with an over-eagerness. You cannot take great pleasure in something and not be attached. If you grieve at the loss of something, you were attached. The sorrow at the loss proves your affection for the object.

Do not seek to own what you do not have. Do not rest your heart in what you do have. Do not grieve over a loss. If you fulfill these then you can believe that you are poor in spirit and the Kingdom is yours.

3.15 – Real Poverty Amid Riches

A painter drew an imaginative portrait of the citizens of Athens, ascribing to them exactly diverse qualities. So I would like to see opposite virtues in your heart. You should have a great care for earthly things and a great contempt of them.

The King's Possessions

Do not the King's gardeners take better care of his gardens than their own? Why? Because they belong to the King. So, our possessions are not our own. God has given them to us to cultivate. By doing this, we please Him.

Love for God is peaceful, and the work done for Him should be done in trust and quiet. Let us try to preserve (and even increase), our temporal goods according to our position. This is acceptable to God.

Be careful however of self-love (which so easily counterfeits true love). Don't allow your desires for riches to degenerate into avarice amid riches. You must practice real poverty.

Almsgiving

To do this, always give generously to the poor. God will restore it to you, not just in heavenly reward. Almsgiving leads even temporal prosperity. In the meantime, you will be poorer in earthly goods. This is the holy poverty which comes from almsgiving.

Love both the poor and poverty. In this way you will be truly poor. We actually become what we love. “Who is weak and I am not weak?” (2 Cor 11:29) Love the poor and you will be poor like them.

In loving the poor, seek them out. Bring them to your home. Go to their home. Talk freely with them, in Church and elsewhere. As you talk with them, let your tongue be poor and your hands rich. Give to them from your abundance.

Saintly Examples

Can you go further? Can you become poorer than the poor? Be like the Lord. Be a servant to the poor. Tend to them in their illness. Cook their meals. Such service is more glorious than royalty. St. Louis the King served the poor in their homes and had three poor people eat with him each day. He went to hospitals to serve those with the worst diseases (ulcers and cancers). He would kneel and tend to them bare-headed, with a tender mother’s love. St. Elizabeth of Hungary moved freely with the poor and even dressed in homely garments among the rich.

On Judgment Day, the King of both prince and peasant will say, “I was hungry and you gave me to eat. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you” (MT 25:34-36).

All find themselves in need on some occasions. Even rich people have the wine in the cellar turn sour. Or, they are in the country, where room and food are lacking. Accept such happenings cheerfully.

Accepting Losses

You might be impoverished by floods or fire or theft or lawsuit. Accept the loss quietly and adjust to the new circumstances. Both Jacob and Esau approached their father with hairy hands, but the hair on Jacob’s hands could easily be removed. Esau would have resisted its being torn off. If possessions are close to our hearts, we will lament when they are removed. But, if we cling to riches only by God’s will, they can be removed without destroying our peace. This is the difference between a beast’s clothing and man’s. The man can easily set aside his garments.

3.16 – A Rich Spirit Amid Real Poverty

If you are really poor, make a virtue out of necessity and be poor in spirit. Poverty will then be a precious stone, even though the world does not see its brilliance.

Accepting Poverty

Consider your company. The Lord, Our Lady, St. Joseph, the Apostles and numberless saints were all poor. Many saints have sought poverty. They took pains to gain poverty. For you, it has come unsought. You have met poverty without seeking it. Now, embrace it as a friend of Jesus Christ.

Your poverty has a great privilege. God chose it for you. So we accept it as His will. This is pleasing in His sight. A simple heart and acceptance of His will purifies every suffering.

No Complaints

Do not complain of your poverty. To complain shows that you do not welcome poverty and are rich in spirit. Don't be upset by needing assistance. Many want to be poor but not to suffer the inconveniences of poverty. They want the credit of poverty and the conveniences of riches.

Do not be ashamed of being poor or of asking for alms. Receive humbly what is given you and accept meekly any refusal to give. Recall frequently the poverty of the Holy Family in their flight into Egypt. Then, you will be rich amid your poverty.

3.17 – Evil and Frivolous Friendships

Love is first among the soul's affections. It rules all the heart's motions and makes us what we love. If you harbor evil love, you will become evil. Among affections, friendship is the most dangerous. Because it requires personal communication, you will inevitably share in the qualities of whoever is your friend.

False and True Friendship

All love is not friendship. A person can love without receiving love. True friendship is always mutual and reciprocal. To have a solid friendship, something must be communicated. If vain and false things are shared, the friendship is vain and false. If the good and true things are shared, the friendship is good and true. The better the bond, the better the friendship. Honey from the choicest flowers is best and friendship from the purest sharings is the best. However, friendship based on unreal or evil grounds is hollow and worthless.

Marriage

True married love must involve a full participation of life and unalterable fidelity. A true marriage is a very holy friendship. Merely having sexual intercourse is not friendship.

External Attractions

Whatever is founded in sensuality or frivolity should not be called friendship. A sweet voice or external beauty are purely external attractions. However, young people often decide someone is admirable just because he is good-looking or dances well or talks nicely. All these are purely sensual qualities. Friendships built on them will be frivolous and trifling. This happens mostly among young people who are easily fascinated by personal attractions, good clothing or well-kept hairdo. In these, the tailor and the hairdresser have the chief parts, not the person. These friendships will melt away like the snow in the sun!

3.18 – Frivolous Attachments

Foolish attachments between a man and a woman who have no intention of marrying are just phantoms of friendship. Unfortunately, these frivolous contemptible attractions often snare the hearts of men and women. They easily end up in sin even though they did not intend this. They felt they were just playing with toys and wanted to indulge a passing inclination.

Others take pleasure in captivating people's hearts. These friendships are evil. They often lead to sinful deeds which draw the heart away from God and from their spouse. They are hollow, without any root. They are vain and bring no honor or satisfaction. They result in loss of time, mistrust, jealousy and unreasoning excitement.

Good Advice

St. Gregory wrote, "Your natural beauty suffices for your husband, but if you spread it like a net before birds, what will happen? Looks and glances will be exchanged. There will be smiles and tender words, said quickly and received boldly. I will not describe the end. Young people act perilously because one act leads to another, like a chain."

"They feel they will only amuse themselves and not go too far, but they end up falling into a trap. The tiny spark bursts into a flame, overpowers their heart, reduces their resolutions to ashes and their reputation to smoke."

In your folly, do you think you can handle love lightly? Trifle with it and it will sting you cruelly. All will laugh at you for allowing a venomous snake into your bosom, which ruins your honor and your soul. This is fatal blindness.

Love for God

God wants us for himself for our own good. We do not have enough love to both love God and to lavish it on creatures. In return for all He has given us, God asks only for our love. He will demand a strict account of how we have senselessly thrown it away. If he accounts idle words, how much more idle friendships.

No Fruitfulness

A walnut tree ruins a field. It absorbs the minerals and its foliage keeps out the sun. It attracts people who trample the crops. These foolish love affairs are like walnut trees. They engross the soul and bring forth no fruit. The flirtations absorb profitable time. They lead to temptations and suspicions. The heart gets crushed and spoiled. Such follies banish heavenly love, drive out fear of God and weaken the mind. They are the playthings of the social scene and also the plagues of the heart.

3.19 – Real Friendship

Love everyone with charity, but have a friendship only with the good and true person. The purer your bonding, the higher the friendship. Conversations based on learning are good. Those based on devotion and Christian perfection are better. God knows how precious a friendship is! It comes from God and tends toward God and will last forever in Him. To love on earth is a blessed thing!

Forming A Special Friendship

I am not speaking here of charity toward all. I am speaking of a spiritual friendship which binds souls together and leads them to share spiritual interests. "How good it is for brethren to dwell as one" (PS 103:1). The "precious ointment" of friendship trickles continually from the one heart to the other. All other friendships are just a shadow of this one.

Form no other friendships. I say "form" because you cannot neglect the natural bonds of family and neighbors. The following rules apply to those friendships which you deliberately form.

Need For Friendship

Some would tell you to avoid all special affection because this captivates the heart and distracts the mind. These writers cause confusion. They are thinking of special friendships in the convent that hinder religious life. In the convent, all are aiming at perfection and a special friend might exceed due limits. It is not the same in the world.

Those living in the world need to be united with others by a holy friendship which stimulates and encourages them in doing good. Men walking on level ground need no help but those climbing a mountain must hold on to each other. So, those living in the world require companions amid their difficulties.

We need to seek out devout friends because not everyone in the world aims at devotion. Will not Jesus separate the sheep from the goats, the good from the evil? Christ loved John, Lazarus, Martha, and Magdalene. St. Paul had his companions. St. Ambrose loved St. Monica for her virtues and she loved him as God's angel.

St. Gregory Nazianzen boasted of his friendship with St. Basil. "Although two bodies, we had one soul. We were two in one and one in two. Our object was to grow in holiness and to mold the present for future hopes."

The Virtue of Friendship

Why confirm such an unquestionable fact? Many saints had special friendships and this did not hinder their perfection. Paul says evil men are "without natural affection" (Rom 1:31). That is, without friendship. St. Thomas says friendship is a virtue that and we can have perfect friendships only with a few. The highest grace does not mean to lack friendship but to have a friendship which is holy and true.

3.20 – True and False Friendships

Be careful of forming friendships especially with those of the opposite sex. Satan tries to delude those who love one another. A friendship can begin with virtuous affection. However, if discretion is lacking, it soon becomes frivolity. Then sensuality enters and finally carnal love.

People must watch for dangers even in spiritual love. In these cases, Satan tries to introduce impurity almost imperceptibly.

Clear Differences

See clearly the differences between worldly friendship and holy friendship. Worldly friendship has honeyed words, passionate endearments and sensual charms. True friendship speaks an honest language.

False friendship upsets the mind and gets the victim to falter in the ways of purity and devotion. It includes affected looks, sensual caresses, complaints of not being loved, questionable familiarities and embraces which are precursors of evil. True friendship is modest in every glance, pure in caresses, seeks only heaven and complains only that God is not loved enough.

Worldly friendship confuses judgment. Men do evil while thinking that they are doing right. Excuses are seen as valid reasoning. These friends fear light and love darkness. True friendship is clear-sighted and hides nothing.

False friendship leads to evil desires, slander, deceit, sorrow and jealousy. It often ends in downright sin. True friendship is always the same, modest and courteous. The friends grow in union, a type of the friendships in heaven.

When young people indulge in words, looks and actions which they would not like their parents or their spouse to witness, it is a sure sign that these actions are damaging their conscience. Our Lady was troubled because the angel appeared in human form and she was alone. If purity fears an angel in human form, how much more should our purity fear those who speak earthly and sensual words.

3.21 – Remediating Evil Friendships

How can you overcome this swarm of foolish attachments and undesirable inclinations? You must turn them away, renounce them and fly to the Cross. Do not enter into a treaty with the enemy. Do not listen to him and think you can reject him. Be firm on all occasions. You cannot stop a downward stream, and you cannot stop words that have already entered the ear to flow down to your heart.

Guarding the Ears

The heart breathes through the ears and exhales its thoughts by its words. So, guard your ears against evil words which infect the heart. Reject all indiscrete conversations, even if you seem rude in doing so. You have dedicated your heart to God and you must not deny Him even one particle. Entrench yourself in the fortress of your resolutions. Cry out to God and He will protect you.

Being set free is difficult if you are already entangled in unreal affections. Come before God. Acknowledge your weakness. Arrest the budding evil. Abjure your false promises. Reject what you have received. Resolve not to indulge in these matters again.

Getting Away

Get away from the other person. Someone bitten by false love cannot shake it off in the presence of the other. A change of scene quiets the restlessness of sorrow. A young man had moved away. When he returned and met his former love, she said, “Do you not know me? I am still myself”. He answered, “That is true but I am no longer myself.” He had changed by being away.

Other Remedies

If you cannot get away, stop all conversation, all glances and all communication. If you must speak, say clearly that you have renounced the friendship. I speak to all entangled in such worthless love affairs, “Cut the knot. Do not play with it or try to untie it. Tear it asunder. Dallying with such an attachment ruins your love of God.”

You ask, “After breaking the chains, will not my feet have scars, that is, wounded affections?” Not at all. You will have only a horror of your unworthy affections. Only true love for God will remain.

If evil inclinations remain, just seek that inner solitude I have already explained. Renounce your evil by repeated efforts. Read devout books. Go more frequently to Confession and to Communion. Tell

the priest your temptations. Seek advice from good friends. If you are steadfast, never doubt that God will set you free from evil passions.

Good Results

You might believe you are being unkind by breaking off the relationship. Really, you confer great benefits on the other person. You break his chains as well as yours. At the moment, he might not appreciate it. Later, he will join you in thanksgiving. “O God, I will thank you, for you have broken my bonds” (PS 116:14).

3.22 – Advice Concerning Intimacies

To take root, friendship demands close communication. As information is shared, a mutual giving and receiving of emotions takes place. This happens especially when we greatly love the other person. When hearts are fully opened, we are influenced greatly, for good or evil. Our Lord told the parable about investing our money. We must make a good exchange and not receive both good money and bad money. No one is free from imperfections. In a friendship, because no one is free from imperfections, we will be receiving both good and evil. We need not accept the person’s faults with his friendship.

Our Friend’s Imperfections

Certainly, we must love him with his faults, but friendship is an exchange of good, not evil. Do not fishermen throw the worthless fish back into the ocean? So, imperfections must be rejected. People who have great love can acquire the other person’s foolish ways. This should not be. We must neither imitate nor tolerate them. We have enough imperfections without acquiring others. True friendship helps us to get rid of our imperfections.

Sin Destroys Friendship

Concerning sins, we neither imitate nor tolerate. Only a sad friendship allows the other to lose his soul. True friendship cannot thrive amid sin because sin destroys friendship.

Friendship can survive an infrequent sin. However, a friendship will die from persistent sin. True friendship never leads into sin. A friend who sins becomes our enemy and deserves to lose our friendship. Friendship professed between evil-doers is hollow. If we love a vicious friend, it will be a vicious friendship.

False and True Foundations

Those who bond together for money, form no true friendship. They love not each other but financial gain. Build your friendship on two sayings: “Whoever fears the Lord shall direct his friendship correctly.” (Sir 6:7) and “Friendship with the world is enmity to God.” (Jas 4:4).

3.23 - Bodily Mortification

Reformation of life must always begin in the heart. “My son, give me your heart” (Pr.23:26). All actions spring from the heart and whoever has Jesus Christ in his heart will show it in all his actions. I want to write Jesus on your heart so your every act will carry His name. You will say with St. Paul, “I live, not I, but Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20). Whoever wins the heart, wins the whole person.

However, I make the following suggestion, every heart needs external training to manifest devotion and discretion correctly.

Fasting

If you can fast, do so even beyond the days required by the Church. Fasting subdues the flesh, raises the mind and gains a heavenly reward. It also controls greediness and keeps the sensual appetites subject to the Spirit. The enemy stands in awe of those who can fast. The Early Church chose Wednesday, Friday and Saturday as days of abstinence.

I disapprove of long and immoderate fasting, especially for the young. When a colt grows weary, it turns aside. When young people become weak by excessive fasting, they take to self indulgence. We are in peril when the body is underfed or overfed. One causes indulgence and the other causes depression.

Excessive fasting and austerity has made many people useless in serving God. St. Bernard realized his early fasts were excessive austerity. The question of fasting should be answered according to each person's life.

Burden of Work

Both fasting and work subdue the body. I would rather see you accept the burden of work than that of fasting. This is the mind of the Church. Some find it hard to fast. Others find it hard to preach, hear confessions, visit the sick or pray. Prayer is better than fasting for it subdues the flesh and brings forth fruit. Preserving more bodily strength is better than damaging bodily strength. We can always lower bodily strength. We cannot always restore it.

Simplicity

Jesus said, "Eat what is set before you". It is better to eat what you receive because this involves a submission of your will. It is great austerity to submit your likings to whatever happens. This type of mortification makes no show and inconveniences no one.

To discard one dish and make a fuss over food implies too much thought over food. The words "Eat what is set before you", ask you to be indifferent to food and drink. A constant, habitual moderation is better than occasional, excessive fasting which is often followed by indulgence.

Other mortifications include the discipline (a small cord) which can rouse a taste for devotion if used moderately. The body is subdued by the hair shirt but this is not fit for ordinary people, married persons or those of delicate health. It can be used in penitential days with the permission of a wise confessor.

Sleep

All must get a night's sleep. The morning is called the most profitable time. Our Lord is called the Sun and Our Lady is the Daystar. It is wise to sleep early at night and to waken early. These are the freshest hour of the day. Early rising promotes health and holiness.

False Penances

In the Old Testament, the prophet Balaam was not right in God's sight. On his way to meet King Baalak, his donkey saw an angel and could not move. Three times he beat the animal until it miraculously spoke, "What have I done for you to beat me three times?" Then Balaam saw the angel

and realized that he was wrong. We, too, make the mistake of disciplining our body (the donkey) when our heart needs the correction.

A man falls into fleshly sins and his conscience reproves him. The man takes vengeance on his flesh by severe discipline. The body should ask, “Why beat me? You, O soul are guilty. You use my senses for your sins. Instead you should guard your thoughts and converse with good people. If so, I will not experience lust. You throw me into the flames and say, Do not get burned.”

God wants you to deal with your heart. That is the chief offender. We must mortify the flesh to purge our vices. However, it is more important to purify the affections. Never undertake bodily austerities without permission of your guide.

3.24 – Solitude and Society

Do not shun society. That shows a contempt for your neighbor. Also, do not seek society. That shows an idleness. We must love both our neighbor and ourself. We cannot love our neighbor if we avoid him. We cannot love ourself if we are not happy being alive. “Think first of yourself and then of others” (St. Bernard). If nothing obliges you to mix with society, then stay within yourself. However, if friends come to you or there is reason to go to others, then join your neighbor with a cheerful heart.

Some Advice

To be with those who are evil, vicious or sinful is bad society. Turn aside from them like a bee from a dunghill. These associations are perilous, especially to those still weak in devotion.

Some recreation refreshes us after serious labor and there is no harm in enjoying this. Some social meetings are mutual visits. Do not despise these. However, do not become a slave to them. Just do your part quietly.

Finally, there is friendship with devout people who are always good to be with. Vines growing amid olive trees bring forth rich grapes. By associating with good people your own devout life will prosper.

Cheerfulness

Desire simplicity and modesty. People full of affectation annoy everybody. The artificial person spoils the society. Your aim must be a quiet cheerfulness. St. Anthony, with his great asceticism, always had a cheerful face and kind words. St. Paul said, “Rejoice with those who rejoice” (Rom 12:15) and “Rejoice in the Lord always. Let your kindness be known to all” (Phil 4:4-5).

Your rejoicing must be in worthy things. Some things are lawful but not worthy of your rejoicing. Avoid whatever is out of order. Don’t depreciate a person or slander him or lead him into foolishness. These might be amusing but they are not worthy of you.

Exterior Solitude

Besides the inner solitude (already mentioned), you must seek a real, material solitude. I don’t ask you to be a hermit in the desert, but you should have a place (your own room or garden) where you can recollect your mind, gather holy thoughts and do devout reading. St. Gregory wrote “To lay aside my daily labors I was accustomed to walk alone at sunset by the waters.” St. Augustine would visit St.

Ambrose's room. Because Ambrose would be absorbed in reading and refreshing his mind, Augustine would not interrupt. Jesus said to the disciples "Come apart and rest awhile" (Mk. 6:30).

3.25 – Modesty in Dress

St. Paul writes, "Women should dress with modesty" (1 Tim 2:9). He certainly meant men to do likewise. Modesty includes cleanliness, therefore, our clothing should not be soiled. External cleanliness shows inner order. For example, God wants his priests at the altar to have personal cleanliness.

A Variety of Circumstances

Modesty in fashion depends upon various circumstances. People dress more for a festival. In Lent, we put aside certain apparel. There is proper dress for weddings and funerals. A wife dresses well for her husband. If she dresses well in his absence, for whom is she dressing? Some latitude is given to young women who lawfully deserve to attract men, but only with a view to holy matrimony.

I do not blame widows who hope to remarry for dressing well. If a widow does not wish to remarry then she should not dress to attract. Those who don't want to entertain guests should take down the sign. Everyone laughs at an older woman who dresses as if she were young.

Some Advice

Always be neat. Permit no untidiness. It is disrespect to dress slovenly. Avoid all vanity. Simple dress is the best adornment for beauty and the best excuse for ugliness.

St. Peter tells women not to be too fussy in fixing their hair. A man who does so is seen as effeminate. A woman shouldn't be smothered in trinkets. Women say that they mean no harm but the devil will find harm. I would want my devout soul to be the best dressed with the least splendid clothing. They should be adorned with "a meek and quiet spirit" (1Pet.3:3). St. Louis said that all should dress according to their position. We do not want good people to say we are over-dressed or evil ones to say we are under-dressed.

3.26 – Conversation: How to Speak of God

By looking at our tongue, doctors know much about our physical health. Jesus said, "By your words you will be justified and by your words will you be condemned" (Mt.12:37). The tongue points quickly to what we love.

If you love God, you will speak of Him often. "The mouth of the good person speaks wisdom" (Ps.38:30). Blessing God should be like honey on your lips. When Francis of Assisi said the Lord's name, he seemed to have a sweetness on his lips and could not let go of the words.

When Speaking of God

Speak of God with devotion but not with affectation. Do not preach to others. Instead, speak with humility. When you speak of God, also pray that the words will seep into your hearer's minds like heavenly dew. Always do this angelic task lovingly, not reproving others but winning them. A gentle manner attracts and wins hearts.

Never speak of God in just a formal way, by using pious words and sayings. Instead, speak with earnestness and devotion. Sometimes, people use pious words believing that this makes them pious.

3.27 – Conversation – Unseemly Words *(“If any man does not offend in word, he is perfect” (Jas.3:2).*

Never use an unseemly expression because many might take an evil meaning. Never use impure words because they can fill some minds with an infinite number of temptations. Material poison enters the body through the mouth. Spiritual poison enters the soul through the ear. With your tongue, you are a murderer, slaying another’s heart. Jesus said “From the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks” (Mt.12:34). Satan will use our words as a sword against our neighbor. A pure soul always speaks modestly. St. Paul says that some words, “should not be mentioned among you” (Eph.5:3) and “Bad company corrupts good morals” (1 Cor. 15:33).

Impure words said cleverly are the most harmful. The sharper a dart the deeper it will penetrate. So, an impure word cleverly said will go much deeper. The speaker tries to show he is intelligent. However, instead of being a bee that gathers honey, he becomes a wasp feeding on corruption. If someone speaks to you with impure language, show you are displeased by turning away.

Ridicule

The person who turns all to ridicule is truly evil. God hates this and has sometimes openly punished the offender. Contempt for neighbor is against charity and devotion. Ridicule is the greatest sin against our neighbor because we despise him in our heart.

Kindly Fun

There is light-hearted talk. In this we can find kindly amusement in human imperfections. Just be careful of not letting the laughter go too far and become ridicule. Poking fun must always be enclosed in a kindness that never wounds. At meals, St. Louis the King would sometimes discourage serious conversations saying “It is a time for cheerful recreation”. Daughter, let all your recreations be used to win eternity through devotion.

3.28 – Hasty Judgments

“Judge not and you will not be judged. Condemn not and you will not be condemned.” (Lk.6:37).

St. Paul adds, “Do not judge before the Lord comes.” (1Cor 4:5). Hasty judgments displease God and men’s judgments are always hasty. By judging others, we usurp the Lord’s office. True evil always lies in the person’s intention (which we really never know). We have enough to do in judging ourselves without trying to judge others.

Paul writes “If we judged ourselves, we would not be under judgment” (1Cor.11:31). We, unfortunately, reverse these commands. We judge our neighbor (this is forbidden) and we do not judge ourselves (which is commanded).

Bitter Hearts & Pride

To rectify rash judgments, we must begin in our heart. Some hearts are so bitter that everything they touch turns to bitterness. This bitterness is so natural and hard to cure. These need a wise spiritual physician. Bitterness is also very dangerous, leading to rash judgments and slander in the heart.

Others are guilty of rash judgments from pride. They exalt themselves by criticizing others. These self-sufficient people are filled with conceit and see others as worthless. "I am not as other men" said the Pharisee (Lk.18:11).

Other Sins

Others are not so open about their pride. They experience a secret satisfaction in seeing what is wrong with others so they can appreciate their own superiority. These people need to be shown their pride because this imperceptible satisfaction can be discovered only by clear sight.

Others excuse their own conscience by assuming that others are also guilty. They imagine that their sin is less because it is committed by many. Others analyze their neighbor's personality so they can judge them. When they are correct their desire to criticize increases even more.

False Judgments

Some judge others by their own inclinations. They approve those whom they like and disapprove those whom they don't. Another problem occurs when excessive love results in a false judgment. The jealous person has a diseased and reckless affection. They even accuse others of adultery with no basis. The other emotions (fear, ambition etc.) can also produce false judgments.

The Remedy of Love

What is the remedy? Whoever drinks of pride, envy, ambition or hatred will see evil in everyone. To cure their bad judgments, they must drink of the sacred wine of love. Love does not want to meet evil. When she does, she closes her eyes and claims that she has seen only a shadow of evil.

If love is forced to see, she tries to forget quickly. Love heals all evil, but especially rash judgments. People with jaundice see everyone as yellow. Criticism is a spiritual jaundice which makes everyone else look bad. The remedy must be applied to the heart. If your affections are warm and tender, your judgments will not be harsh.

Three Scriptural Examples

Scripture gives three examples of kind judgments. Isaac told the King of Gerar that Rebecca was his sister. However, when he saw their familiar affections, he took the most charitable view and concluded that she was his wife. (Gen.26) Our neighbor's actions are many-sided and we must choose the best view possible.

When St. Joseph found that Mary was with child, he could have condemned her because of the evidence. He is called a "just man", and he left all to God's judgment.

Our Saviour could not ignore the sin of those who crucified Him. However, he found the excuse of ignorance and said, "Father, forgive them. They know not what they are doing. When we cannot excuse a sin, let us attribute the least damaging motive, like ignorance or weakness.

Are we never to judge our neighbor? Never! God brings criminals before judges. They must give God's punishment. If they go beyond this, they will be judged. No man must judge another.

To be conscious of something wrong is not a rash judgment. Rash judgments condemn when all is not clear. We can have doubts about our neighbor. Jacob kissed Rachel at the well (Gen.29:11) and Rebecca accepted jewels. (Gen.24:22). A stranger could have falsely accused them. It is a rash suspicion to imagine that an indifferent act is evil. Unless there is strong circumstantial evidence, we should not draw conclusions from a blameless act.

How to Act

A person who guards his conscience will not make rash judgments. At the sight of clouds, bees go into their hive. So, good people avoid the clouds of their neighbor's questionable actions. They do not meddle but spend their energy on their own good reputations.

To spend time investigating other people's lives shows an unprofitable life. Exceptions are made for those whose duty it is to watch other others. Let them fulfill their duty, always within its limits.

3.29 - Slander

Rash judgments bring about mistrust, contempt and self-sufficiency. However, the worse effect is slander (the pest of society). I would like to purge people's lips by the live coal taken from God's altar to purge Isaiah's tongue (6:6). Whoever can purge the world of slander would remove great sinfulness.

Like Murder

Ruining a neighbor's reputation also is a great sin and must be repaired. No one can enter heaven with stolen goods and a man's name is his most precious treasure. Slander is a kind of murder. Our life in society requires a good reputation. Sin kills the soul. Death kills the body. Slander kills our life in society.

The slanderer commits three murders with their words. He kills his own soul. He kills the soul of anyone who believes him. He causes the civil death of the person slandered. "The devil owns the slanderer's tongue and the listener's ear" (St. Bernard). "The serpent's poison is under their lips" (Ps.141:3). The slanderer is like a serpent. He has a two-edged tongue. He poisons the ear of the listener and the reputation of the person.

Actions to Avoid

Daughter, never speak evil, either directly or indirectly. Do not unjustly impute sin to your neighbor. Do not disclose your neighbor's faults. Do not attribute wrong motives. Do not conceal the good in others or deprecate it in conversations. You must especially avoid false accusation which uses lies to do its harm.

The worst evil is the slanderer who pretends to be a friend. They say "He is an excellent man but truth must be told" or "She usually is virtuous but in this occasion etc." You can see the deceit in this. A man draws an arrow close to his body so it flies more powerfully. Slanderers draw their object close to their heart so it goes deeper in the listener's mind.

Witty slanderers are the most evil because their words are mixed with wine. The slander made with amusing comments remains longer in the listener's brain.

How to Respond

If you have seen someone drunk, don't call him a drunkard. Don't call someone an adulterer even though you have seen him in an adulterous situation. One act does not stamp a person forever. Noah was drunk once. Lot was guilty of incest. Yet, neither was habitually guilty.

Even St. Paul blasphemed and shed innocent blood before his conversion. A man deserves to be stigmatized only from a habit of sin. Simon called Magdalene a sinner, but this was not true. She was a saintly penitent and the Lord Himself defended her.

The Pharisee was mistaken in seeing the Publican as a great sinner. Really he was justified by his prayer. God's mercy saves us. How do we know that yesterday's sinner is not today's saint? All will be judged on the Last Day. We always run a risk by calling a man evil. We might know that he had led an evil life at such and such a time but we cannot deduce from yesterday what he is today. Even less, can we speak of the future?

Call Evil "Evil"

The other extreme is when people sometimes speak well, even of vice. Do not call a slanderer "free-spoken". Do not call a vain person, "elegant". Do not call disobedience, "zeal". Do not call arrogance, "frankness." Do not call evil intimacies, "friendship". We have no desire to slander but we must call evil, evil and sin, sin.

Always abide by the following rules:

1. Condemn a neighbor's sin only when you know it is for his good or another's good. If someone speaks to young people in a way that injures their purity, you cannot pass over it. You are bound to condemn it, so they do not imitate it. Do this openly and at once (unless your words would be more profitable at a future time).
2. Be sure you are the right person to speak and that your silence would condone the sin. You might be the least important person present.
3. Do not speak a word too much or too little. If you condemn the intimacies of some people, you must hold the scale exactly and not exaggerate anything. If there is only a slight appearance of evil or some imprudence, just say that. If there is even less, say nothing because you might slander the other person. Your tongue is like a surgeon's knife. Use it carefully. When you must blame sin, spare the sinner.

Other Advice

You can speak of public persons who have sinned, but not with arrogance. Do not take pleasure in their fall. You can also speak against those who teach against the Church. You must point out the wolf to protect the flock.

Some speak against leaders (of Church and State) and against other nationalities. This displeases God and leads to disputes. When you hear of evil, always doubt the accusations. Sometimes, you cannot refute the charges. Just show compassion and remind everyone that the upright stand only by God's grace. Limit the scandal bearer. If you know something favorable about the person, mention it.

3.30 – Sincere Words

Let your words always be frank, sincere and true. Avoid all duplicity. Some things, even if true, should not be said. When words oppose the truth, counteract them.

Never say anything which is not true, whether to accuse or to excuse. If accidentally, you said what is not true, correct yourself by explaining. A straightforward excuse has greater power than any lie.

Deceit and Duplicity

When needed for God's glory, sometimes truth can be concealed or disguised. Otherwise, these deceptions are dangerous. The Holy Spirit does not remain with the double-minded person. Simplicity is both profitable and successful. The worldly uses deception. God's children walk in single-heartedness. Deceit and duplicity are signs of a vicious mind.

True Speech

In his "Confessions", Augustine spoke of being as close with a friend "as one soul". Seeing that this statement was unreal, he retracted it. His mind was sensitive to unreality. Honesty in speech is a great beauty to the Christian life. "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth." (Ps.142:3)

St. Louis taught that we should contradict no one unless there would be harm in keeping quiet. When asserting your own opinion, do so gently and without irritation. We gain nothing by sharpness.

The saints recommend a silence. This means not using useless words. Look more to the quality than the quantity of words. Our aim is to avoid both extremes. An excessive reserve which stands aloof from familiar conversation shows pride. Incessant chatter and not giving others a chance to talk is troublesome.

St. Louis objected to whispering at table as if scandal was being repeated. "If you have something pleasant to say, let all enjoy it. If it is important, let it wait until after supper."

3.31 – Allowable Pastimes

We need to relax both our mind and body. An archer saw St. John the Evangelist caressing a bird on his arm. The man asked him how he could find time for this. He replied, "If your bow is always bent, it will lose its spring. I slacken my mental efforts for a time so I can return more vigorously to contemplation." Don't deny recreation to yourself or to others.

Walking, field sports, and instrumental music are totally lawful and need no rules. Just keep all within due limits of time and degree. The same is true of exercise like tennis or jogging. You can also enjoy mental games like chess.

Avoiding Excess

Avoid pastimes that are excessive. Too much time given to recreation makes it an occupation. Hours of chess do not rest the mind and hours of tennis lead to physical exhaustion. Gambling for high stakes creates anxiety.

Above all, beware of setting your heart even upon lawful amusements. To surrender your heart is always wrong. I want you to enjoy relaxation, otherwise it is not recreation. However, do not become engrossed.

3.32 – Forbidden Pastimes

Gambling

Gambling (dice and cards) are not merely dangerous (like dancing) but they are bad and harmful. They are unreasonable. The winner has no skill. All the players know the rules but victory results from chance not from skill.

Instead of being recreations, they become intense occupations. The mind is kept in alert with endless anxieties. Is not a gambler's attention painful? No one can speak, laugh or even cough. The only enjoyment is to win. This is always done at the expense of the loser. King Louis, hearing that his brother was gambling, entered the room and threw the dice and money out the window.

3.33 - Of Dances and Other Lawful but Dangerous Pastimes

Dances are not evil in themselves but they are surrounded by evil circumstances and can become full of temptations. First, they are usually at night when people's nerves are most open to evil impressions. They also last long. The person then sleeps late and loses the important morning hours of God's service. It is senseless to turn night into day and day into night. This exchanges good works for useless ones. Those who frequent dances are often led to unholy desires and dangerous attachments.

Advice

Dances are like mushrooms. If you have to eat them, then eat them in moderation and make sure they are well-cooked. If you must attend a dance, then let the night be seasoned with moderation and good intentions. Avoid an excess that is harmful. Dance but little, lest you grow overly fond of the amusement.

Dances attract all kinds of people. As a result, quarrels, envy and indiscreet tendencies fill a ballroom. Dancing opens the heart to foolish words of impurity which easily penetrate the heart. These amusements are for the most part dangerous. They ruin devotion, limit charity and arouse many evil inclinations. So, I would have you be reticent in their use.

Some Thoughts

After an evening of dancing, you should drink the good wine of devotion by considering:

1. While you were dancing, souls were suffering in hell from sins committed when dancing.
2. At the same time, how many devout souls were praising God. Was not their time better spent?
3. While you were dancing, how many souls have died and how many others lie in sick beds? Can you not pity them?
4. Our Lord, Our Lady and the saints witnessed your dance. Is your heart not capable of better things?

5. While you were dancing, death came closer. All of life is a dance with death and all will pass from time to eternity.

Think over these matters quietly and God will suggest thoughts that will strengthen your heart.

3.34 – Using Pastimes Rightly

See dancing and questionable games as recreation, not as a full time pursuit. Engage in them briefly and seldom, not from a constant habit. Indulge in these out of a courteous consideration for others and always subject them to discretion. Consideration for others turns indifferent or dangerous things into good pursuits and removes the evil from them.

Games of chance become acts of courtesy. St. Charles Borromeo, to please the Swiss, joined in things he usually avoided. St. Elizabeth of Hungary both played and danced occasionally when in society.

Great fires are fanned by the wind, but little fires without a shelter are soon extinguished. A holy person filled with the great fire of God can grow in holiness by these diversions. A beginner with his little fire might lose devotion altogether.

3.35 – Faithful in Great and Small Things

The Bride ravished the Bridegroom with “one of her eyes and one lock of her hair” (Song 4:9).

The eye is very important to the body but a hair is very unimportant. These words show that God accepts both the great works and the lowly deeds of devout souls. Someone serving God must pay attention to the high and the low, to the great deeds and to the little ones.

Resolve to bear great afflictions, even martyrdom. Resolve to give Him everything, even your very life. Be ready for anything. If God does not send you these afflictions, then give Him your small annoyances and unimportant losses which happen every day. By freely accepting these small matters, you give God your heart.

These include the headache, the toothache, the loss of something, the tiresome personality of a spouse, the criticism of a neighbor or going to bed early so you can rise for prayer. All of these are pleasing to God. He promised an ocean of happiness in exchange for a cup of cold water. These occasions arise everywhere and are a fertile field for gathering spiritual riches.

A Saintly Example

After reading the life of St. Catherine of Sienna, I know she ravished her Bridegroom with the eye of contemplation. However, I delight equally in her cooking the dinner in her father’s kitchen. She did menial tasks in a loving spirit which looked straight at God. I prize her lively meditations as much as her ecstasies. These were a reward for her lowliness. She imagined that all she cooked for her father was cooked for the Lord (as Martha did). Her mother symbolized Our Lady and her brothers, the Apostles. She filled her daily tasks with God’s sweetness.

Learn from this, my daughter, to dedicate all to God's service. Imitate the woman in Proverbs who puts her hand to the spindle. Seek the higher things, (the sacraments, prayers, and good works) but do not avoid the menial tasks. Cultivate the lowly virtues. Minister to the poor and the sick. Care for family needs and practical diligence. Amid all these, be like St. Catherine with your mind always on God.

Great occasions to serve God come seldom. Little ones surround us every day. "He who is faithful in little deeds will be faithful in greater ones" (L.16:10). Eat, drink, sleep, amuse yourself, do family duties – all in God's name. Then, they will be well done.

3.36 – A Well Balanced, Reasonable Mind

Although reason is a special power of man, it is rare to find a reasonable man. Self-love hinders reason and leads us into unjust and lying actions. Because these seem small, people pay no attention. Because they are so numerous, they cause great harm. I will give some examples.

Excellent Examples

We find small faults in others and overlook large faults in ourselves. We buy at a low price and sell at a high one. We give out justice but expect mercy. We expect people to believe our words when we don't believe theirs. We want to buy something and are upset when our neighbor won't sell. If we catch someone in error then he always seems to be wrong in our eyes. Yet those who please us always seem to be right. Even parents show favoritism to a talented child. We place the rich before the poor and give preference to well-dressed people. We exact our rights but want our neighbor to yield his. We complain of others and don't want them to complain about us. What we do seems right. What others do seems wrong. We have two scales. One weighs our deeds and the other weighs our neighbor's. We have one measure to receive and another to give.

How To Act

Be just and fair in all you do. Sell as you would buy. Buy as you would sell. Then you will be honest. Dishonesties seem unimportant but they sin against justice and charity. You will never lose by being generous and courteous. Therefore, examine how your heart is toward your neighbor. Even Trajan said, "Should I not be an emperor to my subjects as I would want the emperor to be to me?"

3.37 - Wishes

Everybody knows to guard against desires for evil things. I want you to guard your desires even for dangerous things, like dances, offices, honors, visions or ecstasies. Do not desire things distant in time. This is a dangerous distraction. A young man should not long for a job that is far distant. A married woman should not want to be a religious. When I am sick, I should not desire to do what requires great strength. These are useless wishes. It is better to be obedient and patient.

What Not to Desire

Someone whose vocation is clear should not wish for a different one. This wastes time and makes them slack in doing their daily work. People should not even wish for more intelligence. They should improve the intelligence which they have.

Do not seek to serve God in ways that are not open to you. Desire to serve Him where you are. I am speaking now of truly earnest desires. Do not desire more crosses unless you have accepted patiently

the ones you have. Some people desire martyrdom and cannot even accept an insult. Satan often gives ardent desires for unattainable things. People fight great monsters in their imagination but let weak foes conquer them in reality. Do not desire temptations. Just prepare to meet them bravely.

Be Selective

To overload the stomach with too much food is bad. So, do not overload the soul with too many desires, (worldly or spiritual). When purged of sin, the soul hungers for spiritual things – prayer, mortification, and devotion. This appetite is a good sign but only accept what you can digest.

Select from among your desires. Be guided by your confessor. Then use these desires as perfectly as possible. God will send you more at the right time. Do not lose your good desires. Deal with them methodically. Put some aside until the right time. This advice is for both worldly and spiritual people. Otherwise you cannot avoid anxiety.

3.38 – Advice to Married People

Marriage is a great sacrament. Its origin, purposes and substance are all holy. It is the nursery of Christianity by which earth is peopled and the number of elect is perfected.

Scriptural Examples

Jesus should be invited to all weddings as He was at Cana. The wine of blessings would not be lacking! Unfortunately, instead of Jesus and Mary, couples invite Adonis and Venus. If couples do not ponder the dignity of the Sacrament, the wedding becomes just feasting and disorder.

I want couples to have the mutual love taught in the Bible. This is more than human love (which even pagans have). “Husbands love your wives as Christ loves His Church. Wives submit to your husbands as to the Lord”. (Eph 5:22-25) God brought Eve to Adam and it is God who binds you in marriage’s sacred bonds. Cherish one another with holy, heavenly love.

Three Effects

Marriage is an indissoluble union. God unites husband and wife so closely in Himself, that it should be easier to separate soul from body than husband from wife. This union is primarily of the heart and affections, and secondly of the body.

The second quality is inviolable fidelity to each other. Originally, the ring on the finger was used to seal documents. The Church blesses the man’s ring so that the sacrament seals his heart and he has no thought of another woman. The woman’s ring reminds her to give her affections to no other man.

The third goal is the birth and raising of children. In this, you are blessed. God wants to multiply souls to praise Him for all eternity. He lets you share in His work. You produce the bodies. He infuses the souls.

Husband’s Love

Husbands, preserve a tender love for your wives. Eve came from Adam’s side, nearest to his heart. God wanted her to be heartily loved. Any failings or infirmities in your wife should excite compassion. God has made her depend on you. She is bound to defer and obey you. She is your helpmate. You are her head.

Wife's Love

Wives love your husbands with a confiding love. God has made the man stronger, so he can have predominance. God wants the woman to depend on him. She is bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. All Scripture asks you to accept this subjection (which is not grievous). At the same time, Scripture tells your husband to use his superiority with gentleness. "Husbands, live with your wives in understanding. Show honor to the weaker, female sex" (1 Pet 3:7).

Jealous Love and True Love

Be careful that your love not turn into a jealousy which will defile loving hearts. If jealousy is allowed to take root, it will produce quarrels and separation. Jealousy does not exist when love is based on truth. Mistrust and inconstancy are clear signs of a false sensual love. People think jealousy shows a strong, hot friendship. Really it is a sign of a poor relationship. True love has absolute trust. Jealousy implies uncertainty.

Fidelity

Husbands, if you want your wives to be faithful, be faithful yourself. St. Gregory says, "If you live an impure life, how can you require what you do not give?" St. Paul wants you to possess your vessel in holiness. Women, your honor is inseparable from your purity. Preserve it jealously and let nothing mar your reputation.

Flattery By Others

Suspect anyone who flatters your beauty. When men praise goods which they cannot buy, they often steal them. If any man speaks against your husband, you can be sure that he wants your love. Isaac sent earrings as his first gift to chaste Rebecca. Earrings signify a husband's first claim over his wife. She must keep her ears for him alone. They must hear only pure words. Hearts are poisoned through words that enter the ear.

Importance of Tenderness

Marital love and familiarity lead to tender caresses. By such caresses, Isaac and Rebecca convinced King Abemelech that they were husband and wife. St. Louis the King was strict toward himself but had tender caresses for his wife. He deserves praise for paying attention to the little details of his married life. Minor things draw spouses together and promote mutual happiness.

Parents and Children

Monica offered Augustine repeatedly to God. This shows how Christian women must offer the fruit of their womb. St. Bernard's mother offered her new-born babes to Jesus Christ. All seven became saints. Parents should fill their children with a devout fear of God. The mother of St. Louis often said, "Son, I would rather see you dead than be guilty of one mortal sin." The saint said that these words sank so deeply into his heart that he recalled them every day.

The Household

Spouses should not accumulate goods but should raise children in ways of holiness. To gain this, spare no labor. Children are the crown of their parents. St. Monica overcame Augustine's evil desires. She followed him across sea and land. In his spiritual conversion, he became the child of her prayers more than the son of her giving birth. St. Paul says the woman cares for the household. The family often depends more upon the wife because the husband might be away. The Book of Proverbs (C31) highlights this household care of the virtuous woman.

Prayerfulness

“Isaac entreated the Lord for his wife who was sterile”. (Gen 25:21) The Lord heard his prayer and Rebecca became pregnant. The happiest marriage of husband and wife is based on prayer. They should mutually encourage one another to prayer. A man without religion is rude and rough. A woman without religion is frail and lacks strength.

Helping One Another

“The unbelieving husband is made holy by the believing wife and the unbelieving wife is made holy by the believing husband” (1 Cor 7:14). By the close ties, one spouse easily draws the other into good. How great are the blessings of spouses who strengthen one another in devotion!

They should bear with one another and never grow angry. The bee does not remain where there is great noise and God’s Spirit does not stay in a home where there is much quarreling.

Spouses should celebrate their anniversaries by going to Confession and Communion and renew their vows to promote the mutual love. From these practices, they will gather new strength to go on.

39. – The Holiness of the Marriage Bed

“Let the marriage bed be honored among all and the marriage bed be kept undefiled” (Heb.13:4). The marriage bed should be as pure as in Paradise, without unruly desires. God has a purpose for all earthly things. We must eat in order to preserve life. St. Paul writes, “The time is short. Let those having wives act as not having them. Those using the world as not using it fully.” (1Cor.7:30-31)

Let everyone use the world according to their vocation but let them not be entangled so they are free to serve God. “The great fault of men is to enjoy things which they should only use and to use what are meant only to be enjoyed” {St. Augustine). We should enjoy spiritual things and use material things. When we try to use material things for only enjoyment, the soul becomes degraded.

3.40 – Advice to Widows

“Honor widows who are truly widows” (1 Tim 5:3). Who is really a widow? A woman is a widow who has an unchangeable resolution to remain a widow. Someone waiting to get married is only a widow in externals. If the true widow wants to make a vow to seal her resolution she would be doubly sure. Remembering that breaking her vow would endanger heaven, she will watch over herself and avoid temptation. Augustine strongly recommends this vow. Origen goes further. He advises wives to take a vow of chastity if their husband dies so that, even while married, they share the merits of widowhood. Vows make actions more acceptable to God and consecrate the will to God.

Vow of Chastity

By practicing ordinary chastity we offer our bodies to God but always retain the power to return to sexual pleasure. By a vow, we make God an irrevocable gift and have no power to recall the gift. If persons are favored with the gift of chastity, I wish them to embrace this state by a vow. This should be made only after personal examination, heavenly guidance and the advice of a discreet and pious director.

Simple Heart Needed

All renunciation of a second marriage must be done with a simple heart and with desires totally fixed on God. If a widow retains her widowhood for her children (or any other worldly motive) she does not gain God's praise, because she does not do it for His sake. A true widow must give up all worldly delights. If she seeks to be followed and flattered, frequents dances, perfumes and adorns herself, she is a widow only in body. Sometimes a woman dressed in black (as true widows dressed in St. Francis' time) still endeavor to capture men. She lives in empty pleasure and mocks widowhood.

"The time of pruning the vines has come". (Song 2:12). The devout soul must prune away worldly attachments. This is especially true for the widow. When the widow Naomi returned to Bethlehem, people asked, "Is this Naomi?" She said, "Do not call me Naomi (meaning beautiful). Call me Mara (bitter) for the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me. I went out full but the Lord brought me home empty" (Ruth 1:20-21). The devout widow does not want to be called beautiful. She asks only to be lovely in God's eyes.

A Test of Virtues

When a person extinguishes a lamp fed with aromatic oil, it gives a sweet odor. So a devout woman whose husband has been extinguished by death gives out a stronger perfume of virtue and chastity. Loving a husband while he lives is common among women. Loving a husband deeply enough to refuse marriage after his death is a love unique to a true widow. Hoping in God while supported by a husband is common. Hoping in God when left alone is a very gracious thing. Widowhood is a test of the virtues shown by a woman during her married life.

Children and Secular Business

A widow with the care for children cannot in any way forsake them. "Whoever does not provide for relatives, especially family members has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever". (1 Tim 5:8). If the children do not need her care, she should devote herself to making progress in God's love.

If no secular matters need her attention, she should leave them alone and manage her affairs peacefully (even if this is not the most profitable). Are lawsuits worth the peace they disturb? Their fruit must indeed be large. Legal entanglements are distracting and sully the heart that should be devoted to God.

Prayer and Virtues

Prayer is the widow's chief occupation. She has love only for God and should have little to say except to God. During her husband's life, her heart could not rise totally to God. Now she is free to give herself totally. She cries out with the Bride, "Draw me. I will run after you." (Song 1:3-4).

A devout widow should cultivate modesty and seek no public honors. She should help the poor and the sick. She should lead the young to devotion and be a model of virtue for them. Let her have simplicity in her dress, charity in her actions, kindness in her words and purity in her eyes.

The widow must spread a perfume in the Church while concealing herself. She must dwell in a lowly place and keep her eyes from earthly longings which might dazzle her. Paul writes about widows, "She is more blessed, in my opinion, if she remains as she is and I think that I, too, have the Spirit of God" (1Cor.7:40).

St. Jerome wrote beautiful letters to widows who rejoiced in having him as their spiritual father. I must warn widows not to censure those who choose to remarry. Sometimes God wants this for His greater glory.

3.41 – A Word to Young Single Women

O young women, I have one word. If you wish to marry, guard your love for your husband. It seems a fraud to offer him a frittered away love instead of a true, whole-hearted love.

If you feel called to lifelong virginity, to be a chaste bride of heavenly nuptials, keep your purest love for your spiritual Bridegroom. Because He is all pure, He has a special love for purity. To Him are due the first-fruits of love. To enter this state requires obedience. So seek out a guide under whose direction you can dedicate yourself to God.

PART 4 – COUNSELS CONCERNING ORDINARY TEMPTATIONS

4.1 – Words Spoken Against You

When your worldly friends see that you are trying to be devout, they will misinterpret your actions. The more malicious friends will call you a hypocrite. They will say that you are becoming unacceptable to the world and that you will ruin your material prosperity. They will say that you must live as the world does and that you can be saved without all this nonsense.

Vain Talk

All this talk is vain. They have no love for your health or your prosperity. Jesus said, “The world loves its own. Because you are not of the world, the world hates you.” (Jn.15:19). People spend whole nights at chess or cards. What could be more unhealthy? Their friends say nothing. But rise an hour earlier to attend Mass and they will warn you of your health. They can dance on many nights but cannot keep watch in prayer even on Christmas Eve.

The World’s Reactions

The world is an unjust judge, kind to its own children and harsh to God’s children. Renounce the world’s approval because you can never satisfy its demands. John the Baptist came fasting, Jesus came eating and drinking. The world rejected both. (Lk 7:33-34) If we laugh and dance, the world will be scandalized. If we refuse to laugh and dance, the world will call us hypocrites. If we dress in fashion or in plain garb, the world will accuse us.

Our cheerfulness is called idleness. Our penances are called dullness. We can never please the world. It will always exaggerate our sins and publish them everywhere. If our actions are good, the world will impute bad motives to us. The wolf devours sheep whether they are white or black. The world wages war on us, spying on our every act. They are spiders trying to ruin the bee’s honey comb.

The Soul’s Response

Let the blind world make all the noise it wants to. Be firm and unchangeable in your good resolutions. Perseverance is proof of your surrender to God and your choice of a devout life.

The comet shines with only a passing blaze but while the brightness of the planets does not cease. Hypocrisy and devotion both look alike. However, hypocrisy does not last long. Real goodness is abiding. To endure these reproaches early is a sure foundation for the devout life. By doing this, we escape pride and vain glory. The Egyptian midwives saved the Israelite children but were reproved by Pharaoh. So, don't be surprised if the world criticizes you when you do God's Will.

4.2 – Need for Courage

Even though we crave the light, it hurts our eyes when we come out of darkness. Also, when we visit a foreign country, we feel uncomfortable even though the inhabitants are kind. So a changed life will bring some discomfort. You will feel some discouragement in saying "goodbye" to the world and its follies. Be patient. It will not last. The newness causes a disturbance but soon you will have many consolations.

Some Feelings of Loss

Although you will feel a loss over your worldly companions, why forfeit eternal life for their company? The empty pastimes will rise up in your imagination and try to win you back. Be bold and do not give up your eternity. Believe me. If you persevere you will have a satisfying sweetness. You will proclaim that a single day of the devout life is worth a thousand years of worldly life.

You fear that you cannot climb the high mountain of Christian perfections. Be of good cheer. Young bees cannot even hover over flowers but when they eat honey they put forth their wings and fly everywhere. We are just young bees in devotion, but if our desires and resolutions shape our wings, we will fly. Meanwhile, feed upon honey. This is the teaching of many holy writers. You will fly in this life and have an eternal resting place in the next.

4.3 – The Difference Between Experiencing and Consenting to Temptations

Picture a young wife who loves her husband. A man sends a messenger to test her fidelity. First, the messenger delivers the overtures. Second, the wife accepts or rejects them. Third, she consents or refuses to act.

Three Downward Steps

The world, the flesh and the devil are messengers who set temptations before the soul in three phases. First, sin is proposed. Second, these please or displease the soul. Third, the soul consents or rejects them. The three downward steps are temptation, delight and consent. Although not always clearly defined, they can be plainly traced in all great and serious sins.

Suffering in Temptation

If we experienced every possible temptation but did not consent, we would experience no harm. In temptation, we do not do evil. We just suffer it. St. Paul suffered many temptations of the flesh and he glorified God in them. St. Francis experienced violent temptations and threw himself into thorns or into snow to quench them. Grace increased in him.

Be courageous in temptation. You do not sin if it is not pleasing to you. Always remember the difference between experiencing and consenting. We can experience temptation and be displeased. We can never consent unless we are pleased.

Unwelcome Temptations

Let our enemies spread their snares. Let them knock at our door with endless proposals to sin. If we remain firm in our resolutions, we cannot offend God. Could the husband be displeased with his wife just because a messenger came to the door? There is one difference. The wife was able to drive away the messenger of evil. The soul cannot always refuse to experience temptation. However, it can refuse to consent. Any temptation, no matter how long, cannot harm us as long as it is unwelcome.

Lower and Higher

I must help you with a very important distinction. Our soul has two parts – lower and higher. Sometimes, the lower refuses to follow the higher. The result is this. The lower part takes pleasure in the temptation without any consent from the higher. In fact, the lower acts against what the higher part chooses. Paul called this the “law of my members warring against the law of my mind” and “the flesh lusting against the spirit” (Rom.7:23).

The Example of a Furnace

Watch a great furnace burning. When the fire is finished, everything is ashes. If you can find a lingering spark, you can rekindle the flames. Love is the spark that remains even in temptation. Temptations leave only a tiny spark of love hidden far down in the heart. It is even hard to find. Still, it is there. Although troubled in body and in mind, the soul firmly resolved not to sin. The interior spirit rejected the delectation given to the exterior man. The will was filled with temptation but was not conquered. The delectation was involuntary and not sinful.

4.4 – St. Catherine’s Temptation

St. Catherine of Sienna says that the devil had gained permission from God to tempt her against purity. He could not touch her but he filled her heart with every conceivable temptation of sight and sound. Nothing remained free but her superior will. After the long struggle, Our Lord appeared to her. She asked “Where were you when my heart was overcome by darkness?” He said, “I was within your heart”. “How could that be when it was filled with evil?” Jesus asked, “Did these evil thoughts give you pain or pleasure?” She answered, “They troubled me greatly.” He said, “Who do you think caused you to grieve? I was hidden in your heart and if I were not there, you would have been overpowered and your free will would have accepted them. I filled your heart with resistance because it experienced a vehement horror of the sin. These temptations became great merit for you.”

The temptations and delectations had entered the heart and surrounded the will, but she resisted with the Saviour’s help. Sometimes the soul that loves God doesn’t know whether He is present or not. They do not know whether divine love still burns or has been extinguished. Perfection demands that the soul fight without even knowing if they possess that Love for which they strive.

4.5 – Encouragement For the Tempted Soul

When God intends to lead a soul to the highest love, He permits grievous temptations. These temptations do not guarantee that they will attain the goal. Some, who had been steadfast under great

temptations have later yielded to trifling temptations. I give you this warning. If you experience great temptations, God is showing you His desire to exalt you. Yet, after this, you must remain humble and not overconfident. Just because you overcame greater temptations by God's power, do not believe you can conquer lesser temptations by your own power.

No matter what temptation or delectation has come, if your will refuses consent, have no fear. You have not offended God. A person may faint. However, when we find a heartbeat, we know that he is not dead. In the midst of temptation, the soul seems to faint away. To be sure, put your hand on your heart. If the heart still moves, (that is, the will refuses to consent), the soul still has life. Jesus, Our Saviour, is within, although hidden. The Devout Life is quickly restored by prayer, the sacraments, and confidence in God.

4.6 – Temptation and Delectation

The wife that we mentioned was not to blame because messengers came to her door inviting her to adultery. However, if she wanted to attract them, (even if withholding her consent), she deserved censure. Sometimes we cause temptations and this is a sin.

Avoiding Temptations

If a person knows that gambling leads to blasphemy, then to gamble is a sin for him. He is responsible for all the temptations that come to him at the gambling table. If a soul knows that certain friendships lead him into temptation, then he is responsible for those temptations. I am responsible for consenting to deliberate delectation depending on the amount of consent, great or small, brief or lasting.

Delight

If the wife enjoys hearing the messages then she has some guilt. If later, she takes delight in what she heard, she has more guilt (even though she does not intend to consent). To let the body or mind rest upon something unworthy is always wrong. Wrongdoing lies entirely in the heart's cooperation. When you are tempted, ask if you voluntarily exposed yourself or put yourself in a place of temptation. If so, you have done wrong. If not, you have done nothing wrong.

Not Taking Pleasure

Delectation always accompanies temptation. Only when it is accepted is there some guilt. The degree varies. If the wife is not willfully attracted, she does nothing wrong. If someone suggests a clever way for me to avenge an enemy, and I take no pleasure, I do not sin, even if I am attracted by the scheme's cleverness.

Sometimes delectation catches us off guard and takes us by surprise. This could only be a slight venial sin. If we dally with it, it becomes greater. If we deliberately seek the pleasure, then it becomes a great sin (if the attraction is unquestionably evil). For a person to dwell upon committing adultery (even without any intention of yielding) is a great sin.

4.7 – Remedies For Great Temptations

In temptations, be like little children. When they see a wolf, they run to their parents or cry out for help. So, you must run to God. Jesus said, “Pray that you not enter into temptation”. (Lk.22:40). If temptation persists, hurry in spirit to embrace the Cross. Make Christ present through your imagination. As long as the temptation lasts, protest against consenting. While protesting, do not look at the temptation but at the Lord. Looking at the temptation will only shake your courage. Divert your mind by some healthy occupation. These thoughts will possess your mind and drive away the powerful images.

Disclose Everything

One great remedy in all temptations is to disclose them fully to your director. The devil needs silence to seduce the person. An evil man seducing a woman does not want her to speak of him to her father or her husband. God wants us to make all our temptations known to our guides.

Other Help

Do not argue with the tempter. Use Jesus’ words, “Be gone, Satan. It is written ‘You shall worship the Lord, your God. Him alone shall you serve’”. (Mt.4:10).

Just as the wife should not even listen to the seducing messenger but should flee to her husband’s side, so the devout soul should never reply to any temptation but should run to Christ. He is her Bridegroom.

4.8 – Resisting Minor Temptations

Resisting great temptations with invincible courage is valuable. However, the soul profits more from victories over little temptations because they are more frequent. Wolves are more dangerous than flies but the latter test our patience more.

Easy to Avoid the Greater

To abstain from murder is not difficult. To avoid times of anger is very difficult. A person might easily abstain from adultery, but abstaining from impure words or glances is more difficult. It is easy not to steal, but difficult not to covet; easy to avoid getting drunk, but difficult to be totally sober; easy to avoid slander, but difficult to avoid contempt.

All minor temptations (anger, jealousy, duplicity, affectations, vanity etc.) are a perpetual trial to devout souls. Prepare well for this warfare. Every victory over these little foes is a precious stone. While getting ready to resist great temptations, be diligent against the weaker foes.

4.9 – Remedying Minor Temptations

These trifling temptations are like flies, and we cannot free ourselves totally. The best resistance is not to worry about them. If we firmly resolve to serve God, they do us no harm. Despite their many attacks, pay them no attention. Let them buzz around your ears. If they try to enter your heart, just remove them. Don’t argue with them. Act contrary to their suggestion.

No Major Struggle

Take my advice. Don't struggle by trying to practice the contrary virtue. This would be too difficult. Just make a simple interior act of the opposite virtue and kiss the feet of Jesus crucified. This is the best way. Love of God contains all the virtues. In all temptations, come to this safe place, the foot of the Cross. Do not begin a close investigation of the temptation. When troubled, turn to the Cross. This so offends the evil one that he discontinues his attacks.

Constantly examining your little, often-recurring temptations will confuse you to no purpose.

4.10 – Gaining Strength Against Temptation

Examine your soul's dominant passions. Once you learn them, mold your life, (as far as possible), to counteract them.

Advice Against Selfishness

If you are self-centered, reflect on the emptiness of earthly life and how earthly treasures are a burden at the hour of death. Don't let your words feed your selfishness. In the beginning, you will do this reluctantly, but try to do it with all your heart. By steady opposition, we can come to hate what we used to love. Do lowly deeds. At first, you will not do these willingly. However, you will form a habit of humility and will weaken your self-love.

Avarice

If your passion is avarice, try to remember that you will leave everything behind you when you die. Others will squander what you saved. Speak against covetousness. Give alms generously so you do not accumulate riches.

Sexual Attractions

If you trifle with amorous affections, realize that this is a dangerous amusement for you and others. These emotions are noble and should not be used as a pastime. Let your conversation be pure and let your actions avoid all affectation or flirting.

When you are not tempted, use that time to cultivate graces opposed to your natural difficulties. Seek opportunities to use the opposite virtue. In this way, you will strengthen yourself against future temptations.

4.11 – Anxiety of Mind

Anxiety of mind is not itself a temptation but it is a source of various temptations. Sadness is mental grief coming from involuntary problems. These problems can be exterior (poverty, illness, criticism, etc.) or interior (dryness, depression, temptation). When the soul is conscious of a problem, it becomes downcast. We must try to shake it off and find some remedy. It is natural to seek good and stay away from evil.

Being Too Eager

While trying to be freed of problems, a devout soul will be patient and gentle. They will trust God's Providence more than their own efforts. A soul driven by self-love will be too eager to be free, as if all

depended on them. When finding no answer, the soul will grow impatient which only makes matters worse. He then falls into anxiety and imagines there is no solution. You can see how a problem can lead to anxiety and then to a very dangerous distress.

This agitated anxiety is the soul's worse evil (except for sin). Civil unrest upsets the government and makes it weak in resisting its enemies. So, if the heart is disturbed, it loses graces and the strength needed to resist temptations. The evil one fishes in troubled waters.

A Calm Spirit

Anxiety comes from an unregulated desire to be set free from a present evil or to gain some good. This over eagerness enhances the evil and retards the good. So, if you want to be delivered from evil or gain some good, keep a calm spirit. Go quietly about your purpose. Take the needed means. Quietly does not mean carelessly. It means without anxiety. Otherwise, you will add to your problems. "My soul is always in my hand" (Ps.119:109). Is your soul in your hands or has some anxiety stolen it from you? Has it plunged your soul into some unruly love, hate, envy or lust? If your soul has strayed, then seek it out and bring it back to God's Presence. Once again, place your hopes in His holy will. A person who fears losing a precious possession holds it firmly. So always hold your soul "in your hand".

Not Capturing Your Heart

Do not allow wishes, even unimportant ones, to disturb you. Otherwise, more important matters will capture your heart even more.

If you see yourself becoming anxious about gaining a goal, give yourself to God. Resolve to do absolutely nothing to gain the needed result until you are quieted. If something must be done immediately moderate the inclination and act from reason and not from impulse.

You will find help by bringing your preoccupation to your spiritual guide or to a friend. Relief comes by telling others. St. Louis told his son, "If you have any uneasiness, tell it to your confessor or a devout person. He will give you comfort and you will carry it easily."

4.12 – Sadness and Sorrow

"God's sorrow produces a salutary repentance without regret but the world's sorrow produces death." (2Cor.7:10) Sorrow can be good or bad. However, more bad results come from sorrow than good ones. Sirach says, "Sorrow has killed many and there is no profit there" (30:25). There are only two good results (mercy and repentance) but there are six evil results – anguish, sloth, indignation, jealousy, envy and impatience.

The Devil's Tactics

The devil wants evil men to rejoice in their sins and he wants good men to be sorrowful in their devotions. He makes sin attractive to the evil man and makes devotion look disagreeable to the good one. The devil delights in sadness because he will be sad throughout eternity. The world's sorrow plunges the soul into anxiety, stirs up fears, discourages prayer, deprives the soul of wisdom and courage. Sadness makes life like a hard winter and deprives the soul of power in every faculty.

Advice

If attacked by the spirit of sadness, follow St. James' advice. "Is anyone among you sorrowful, he must pray" (Jas.5:13). Prayer is the greatest remedy, so lift your minds to God the Consoler. Use prayer words that show love and trust, "O sweet Saviour, my Joy, my Hope etc."

Resist all depression. Even if you seem to do everything indifferently, do not give in. By depression, the devil tries to make us weary. When he sees that we increase our efforts, he stops troubling us. Use spiritual songs. These frustrate the evil one. Often King Saul removed his depression by the harp. Occupy yourself with external works that divert the mind and cheer you up. Let your soul be enkindled with love because depression tends to dry us up.

Use acts of fervor (even when you have no feeling). Embrace the cross. Raise your eyes to heaven. Use prayerful thoughts like "When will you comfort me?" and "O Jesus, be my Saviour." Use moderate bodily exercise. This lifts up the mind. Frequent Communion is extremely helpful. The Bread of Life gladdens souls.

Explain all the thoughts and desires which lead to depression to your director. Seek the company of devout people while you are suffering. Resign yourself to God's will. Bear everything patiently and never doubt that God will deliver you when the trial is over.

4.13 – Spiritual and Sensible Consolations

In earthly life, day becomes night and summer becomes winter. No two days are alike because variety enhances the world's beauty.

Setting Our Compass

It is the same with man. He never remains long in one condition. He is like a mighty river, tossing with endless motion. He is raised high in hope and then plunged deep with sorrow. He is thrown to the right with rejoicing and then to the left with sorrows. No day or hour is exactly the same.

These changes should teach us to seek an abiding evenness of mind amid the uncertainty of events. While all else changes, we remain unmovable by always desiring God. Let the ship go east or west. Let the wind blow in any direction. Our compass is set on God.

Let our soul be sad or glad, at peace or troubled. Let the sun scorch us or the dew refresh us. In all events, our moral compass will be our heart, mind, and will and these will always point to our Creator.

God's Anchor

"If we live, we live for the Lord. If we die, we die for the Lord. Whether we live or die, we are the Lord's". (Rom.14:8) "Who can separate us from Christ?" (Rom.8:35) Nothing can separate us. Not tribulation, death, present or future sufferings, evil spirits, satisfactions, sorrows, tenderness, or desolation. Our resolution never to let go of His love is an anchor for our soul. We are changeless amid endless changes. Bees carry little pebbles to resist the storms. The soul must carry the pebbles of God's unchanging love, so it can remain unshaken in trials or consolations (spiritual or temporal).

Let me add details to this general teaching:

Devotion does not consist in consolations that move the soul to tears and brings a natural self-satisfaction. Consolations are not the same as devotion. Some people experience consolations and yet are evil minded, devoid of true love for God, and even devoid of true devotion.

In pursuing David, King Saul happened to enter a cave where David was hiding. David could easily have killed the King but he let him go. Saul wept and said his heart grew tender. Yet, he had not changed his mind and later persecuted David as before.

No Penetration of the Desires

Many people contemplate God and are filled with tears and thanksgiving. Their hearts seem to have true devotion. However, their devotion is like a passing shower in a hot summer. The large drops do not penetrate the soil. In the same way, these drops of consolation are totally fruitless. These people do not renounce their evil desires and will not suffer inconveniences for the Saviour (for Whom they wept in prayer).

Their pious emotions fall short of devotion. The evil one traps them. The soul stops short and is satisfied with feelings instead of having a resolute will to serve God.

Only Exterior

We weep when the lance pierces Our Saviour's heart, but we do not give Him our heart. We do not set aside our numberless attachments because they are sweet to our taste. We have only the fondness shown by children. We demonstrate love but it is weak. Devotion does not consist of an exterior display of tenderness. This can come from our own imagination or a snare of the evil one.

Sometimes these warm emotions are good and useful. They kindle the spiritual appetite, cheer the mind and infuse gladness. David said, "How sweet are your words to my mouth" (Ps.119:103).

Better Than the World's Consolations

The smallest comfort from devotion is better than all the world's delights. The bridegroom's heavenly milk is better than the world's wine, (which seems like gall to truly devout souls). When God gives the manna of interior consolations, the person has no desire for worldly consolations. These are a foretaste of heaven's blessedness, like an after-dinner drink to strengthen our resolve. Legend has it that Alexander the Great smelled perfumes carried by the winds from Arabia and this revived the courage of his comrades to continue to sail onward. On this stormy sea of life, heaven sends its sweetnesses, a foretaste of the heavenly home we seek.

Testing the Tree

Sensible consolations can be good and come from God. Others can be harmful. Some come from natural causes or from the Evil One. How can the devout soul distinguish them? There is a general rule concerning feelings. The test lies in their results, (their fruits). Our hearts are like trees. Our affections are their branches. Our deeds are the fruits. A good heart has good desires and brings forth good actions.

If our spiritual consolations make us patient, kindly, more ready to limit our inclinations and lusts, more diligent, more docile, and more simple, then undoubtedly they come from God. If, however, because of this sweetness we become bitter, impatient, proud, harsh toward others, if we see ourselves as

saints and are not docile to direction, then our consolations are spurious and harmful. A good tree has good fruit.

If we receive this sweetness, we must humble ourselves before God. We certainly must not cry out “How good I am!” Gifts don’t make us better and devotion doesn’t consist of prayer consolations. We should say, “How good God is”. A man with sugar in his mouth does not have a sweet mouth. It is the sugar that is sweet.

We receive these gifts because we are children who need milk. We are weak and need bribes to lead us to God’s will. These gifts come from God’s hand to fill your heart. A Mother gives sweets to her child. If a child were wise, he would value his mother’s love more than the candy. To have spiritual sweetness is great, but to know God’s loving hands is greater.

Day of Diligence

Diligently use these gifts for God’s purpose. Why does God give you sweetness? To make you more kind to others. After having received them from God, do His will, listen for His word and be faithful. A day marked by spiritual consolation should also be a day of greater diligence.

Seeking God Alone

Sometimes it is good to renounce them. We cherish them because they come from God and stir up His love but consolations are not our main goal. God is. The less we seek consolation, the more we will seek the Consoler. Having this mind, we can be steadfast in His love even if our devotional life were devoid of sweetness. We can say “It is good for us to be here”, even if we are on Calvary.

Finally, if you experience an unusual flow of consolations or emotions, speak with your director. “Have you found honey? Only eat what is sufficient.” (Pr.5:16).

4.14 – Spiritual Dryness

These bright days of spiritual consolations will not last forever. Sometimes, you will be so empty of spiritual feelings that your soul is a desert. You will find no way to God. No drops of spiritual waters soften the dryness which threatens to choke you. When this trouble presses heavily, the soul is to be pitied. There are tears, night and day. The evil one drives the soul to despair chiding, “Where is your God now?” The soul wonders how it will find God again.

We might be the cause of our own dryness. When we use consolations to feed our self-complacency, God withdraws them. David said, “It is good to be troubled. Before I was troubled, I went wrong.” (Ps.119:67,71).

Our Neglect

If we neglect to gather in God’s favors, He withdraws them. The Israelites had to gather the manna in the morning or it would all be melted. We can be like the Bride (Song of Songs) who lies on the bed of satisfaction. When the Bridegroom knocks, the bride is slow to leave her pleasures. So he withdraws. “I sought him and I could not find him.” (Song 5:2-7)

We deserve this because we choose the world's pleasures instead of God. We don't deserve the manna because we want Egyptian food. The Spirit's sweetness is incompatible with the world's artificial pleasures.

Being Honest

Any duplicity with your confessor will also lead to dryness. If you lie to the Holy Spirit He will not comfort you. If you are not simple as a child, you will lose the sweetness of the child.

Also, if you fill yourself with worldly delights, you will have no attraction for spiritual pleasures. Mary said, "He has filled the hungry with good things. The rich he sends away empty". Filled with material pleasures, the soul cannot appreciate the spiritual.

If you stored up your past consolations, you will receive more. The one who has, receives more. The one who is careless, loses what he does have. Rain can only refresh living plants, not dead ones.

Losing Our Consolations

We can lose our consolations in many ways. Therefore, it is good to examine yourself to see if the fault is yours. Don't do this with anxiety. To see the cause is half the solution. If you find no cause, do not waste your time. Just do the following:

1. Humble yourself. "O Lord, when left to myself I am just parched ground which needs the rain from heaven because the world's winds dry me up."
2. Call upon God, "O, give me Your comfort. Let your fruitful south wind blow on me."
3. Go to your confessor. Show him every corner of your soul. Take his advice. God loves obedience. He makes our confessor's advice more useful than it seems. God used Jordan's waters to heal Naaman the Syrian (who, at first, rejected Elijah's advice).
4. Do not desire to be set free. Certainly you can desire it, but not over-eagerly. Leave all to God's Providence. He will keep you safe in the trial. You can say, "Father, let this cup pass" but you must also say, "Thy will be done". When God saw Abraham ready to sacrifice Isaac, He comforted him. When God sees your willingness, He will comfort you, also.
5. Whenever you lose sensible devotion, just say, "The Lord gave the blessing. Let the Lord take it away. Praised be His Name." God will restore consolations to those who persevere.
6. Finally, never grow discouraged. Continue on steadily. Patiently wait for better things. Don't give up your devout practices. If possible, increase your good works. When we have only dried fruit to offer to Jesus, He is still pleased.

In good weather, bees make more honey but they neglect to multiply themselves. In cold weather, they make less honey but have a fuller hive. So, amid many consolations, the soul sometimes performs fewer good works. In dryness, when devotion is devoid of attractiveness, the soul multiplies its good works, abounding in patience and self-abnegation.

Faithful in War

Some people, especially women, feel that if they offer prayers without emotion, God does not accept them. Really, our prayers are like roses. They are beautiful when fresh but smell better when dry. Good works done in sweetness are pleasing to us, but in dryness they are pleasing to God. In dryness, our will becomes stronger. No one boasts of serving the King in the comfort of peace. The real proof is faithfulness in the trials of war.

When God is Pleased

“The best prayer is made in spite of ourselves when we seek only to please God”. (Blessed Angela de Foligini). In this, we triumph over our repugnance. The more contradictions we suffer in good works, the more pleasing they are. The less we are pleased with our works, the more Divine Love shines forth. Any child will kiss his mother when she gives him candy. Can he still love her when she reproves him?

4.15 – St. Bernard’s Example

Beginners often receive many consolations in prayer. However, when these consolations no longer come, they lose heart. Our human nature cannot bear a prolonged deprivation of some satisfaction (of heaven or earth). Souls which have tasted spiritual joys, readily renounce visible delights.

Withdrawal of Consolations

However, when spiritual joys are removed and they have already set aside earthly joys, they are not trained to patiently wait for the sunshine. They think there is no light and they are plunged into darkness. Like newly-weaned babies, they seek the breast of consolation and become a burden to themselves and others.

The Story

Geoffrey, a member of St. Bernard’s community, was on a journey when he fell into spiritual dryness. He then thought of all the worldly pleasures he had abandoned. He was so disturbed that a friend asked what was wrong. He replied “Never again in this life will I be happy.”

The friend told St. Bernard who realized the danger. He went to a Church to pray while Geoffrey fell asleep. When the prayer was over, both rose, Bernard from prayer and Geoffrey from sleep. He was so happy that he said to his Bernard, “I promise from now on never to be sad”. From this story I want you to notice:

Lessons From the Story

1. God gives consolations to attract beginners away from worldly delights.
2. In His wisdom this same God removes these consolations so we can eat the dry bread of vigorous devotion.
3. Sometimes, very serious temptations come from this dryness and the soul must resist them. The dryness comes from God, but the temptations do not.
4. We must not say “I will never be glad,” Nor must we ever say, “I will never grow sad”. “In the days of prosperity, remember the suffering.” (Sir.11:25) We need hope in trials and fear in prosperity.
5. The best remedy is to tell a friend.

God and Satan are at war. God uses these trials to bring about purity of heart. In trials, we set aside our self interest and self seeking. Satan has a different purpose. He uses our trials to discourage us, to turn us back to sensual pleasures and to ruin our devotion. If you follow my teaching, you will make great progress amid interior trials.

Caring For the Body

A final word. Sometimes this dryness comes from the body. Excessive prayers and fasting can produce heaviness. Bodily weariness interferes with the soul. When this happens, make acts with your superior will. Although your soul is sunk in weariness, God accepts your mental efforts. “I sleep, but my heart is awake” (Song 5:2). Where there is less enjoyment in prayer, there is more merit.

Try to reinvigorate the body by lawful recreation. St. Francis Assisi told his monks to moderate their labors to keep fervor alive. Once, even he could not hide a depression. Whether alone or with others he was sad. For two years he found no comfort in prayer. Suddenly, the Saviour restored him to peace. Even the saints go thru trials.

PART 5 – CONFIRMING THE SOUL IN DEVOTION

5.1 – Yearly Renewal of Good Resolutions

These chapters will explain ways to renew your good resolutions. First, you must see their importance. Our human nature is frail and easily falls away. Without vigorous resolutions, the flesh will drag down the spirit. A bird needs to flap its wings continually to stay aloft. You need to renew your resolutions regularly. Otherwise, you will fall to a lower condition. Spiritual falls take us lower than where we began.

Machines always need to be examined and renewed. So, we must examine the condition of our devotion. Every year we must look at our affections and passions and repair what is wrong. A mechanic applies oil to the machines so they function well. The soul must be lubricated by Confession and Holy Communion. These exercises will repair what has been worn down and cause God’s graces to flow afresh. Eastern Christians always renew their Christian profession on January 13th, the Baptism of Our Lord. So, choose a suitable time. Retire more into solitude and meditate a few times on the following.

5.2 – Meditation – The Benefit of Serving God

1. Consider the points of your resolutions:
 - a. You have renounced mortal sin forever
 - b. You have totally dedicated yourself to God
 - c. If you ever fall into sin, you rise immediately with God’s grace. Are these not noble resolutions?
2. Consider to whom you made these promises – to God, not to men. “I will not forget you.” (Ps 45:18).
3. Consider who your witnesses were – The Blessed Virgin, St. Joseph, your patron saint, all the angels and saints. Your promise made them rejoice. They will rejoice again at your renewal.
4. Consider how you were led to make these resolutions. God drew you by the Holy Spirit. Your boat was led by heavenly winds. God lured you by sweetness, the sacraments and good works. While you slept, God watched over you.
5. Consider when God led you. If you were young, it was in your early years, the flower of your life. Augustine was thirty when he sought devotion. He wrote, “O Beauty, too late have I loved you. You were with me but I was not with you.” You might think to yourself, “I wish

it were earlier". You were not worthy at an earlier age but God gave you the grace anyway, "Oh, God, you taught me from my youth." (Ps 72:15)

If you were older, think how God called you after you had wasted so many years. His mercy led you out of evil before the hour of death (which could have brought you eternal woe).

6. Consider the results of this call. You are changed for the better. What a blessing to know how to talk to God in prayer! How many passions have been removed? How many more Communion's you have received? All of these are eternal blessings. It is God's right hand which has done all this. "I shall not die. I shall live and tell the works of the Lord." (Ps.11:16-17).

Thinking of these will enkindle many feelings. Give thanks.

End with a prayer that they will have great fruits.

5.3 – Examining the Soul's Progress

This point is quite lengthy and you need not do it at one time. There are four points:

1. Your conduct towards God
2. All that concerns yourself
3. Your duties to your neighbor
4. Examining your passions

No need to be on your knees, (except at the beginning and the end). You can think of the points while walking, or even in bed (if you won't fall asleep.) But you must read the points carefully ahead of time. Take only three days and two nights for each point (at most). Don't let much time elapse. At each point, see where you failed and what is lacking. In this way, you can explain your difficulties and get advice.

You don't need total solitude but you should withdraw earlier in the evening so you have rest needed for thought. During the day, make frequent aspirations. Much is accomplished when the heart is filled with God's love.

BEGIN

1. Put yourself in God's presence.
2. Invoke the Holy Spirit, "Lord, teach me to know You and to know myself."
If you see progress resolve to have no self-satisfaction. If you see no progress (or have gone backward) do not be discouraged or grow cold in this pursuit. Take new efforts to begin again and conquer your faults. Consider how you have acted toward God, your neighbor and yourself.

5.4 – Your Condition Before God

1. How is your heart toward mortal sin? Are you firmly resolved never to commit it? Have you kept this from the beginning? This is the foundation of the spiritual life.
2. How are you concerning the Ten Commandments? Are they easy for you? A healthy person likes good food and turns away from what is bad.
3. How are you concerning venial sins? You commit some occasionally but do you have a tendency, or even worse, a clinging to some venial sin?

4. Concerning your spiritual exercises. Do you like and value them? Do they weary you? What do you like the most? What do you like the least? What are your feelings about meditation, Confession, Communion, speaking with God, and controlling your desires? If your heart dislikes anything, examine the causes.
5. About God Himself – Do you delight in thinking of Him? “I thought of Your judgments and received comfort” (PS 119:52). Are you inclined to His love? Do you take pleasure in His goodness and tenderness? When immersed in the world, do you welcome thoughts of God? Do you yearn for Him?
When a wife who has been separated from her husband, sees him coming back, she turns from all else to think of him. Souls who love God, no matter how engrossed, forget all else and think of Him. He is near. This is a good sign.
6. Is your heart drawn to Jesus Christ? Bees rejoice in honey and devout souls find their joy in Jesus. Careless souls delight in the world.
7. Do you love Our Lady, your Guardian Angel and the saints? Do you delight in their images?
8. Concerning your tongue – Do you like to speak of God and sing hymns to His glory?
9. Concerning actions – Do you do all you can to honor God? Do you give up things for His sake? Depriving self is a sign of love.

5.5 – Examination Concerning Yourself

1. How do you love yourself? Do you seek worldly benefits or do you have heavenly tendencies? Are you ready to go wherever the Lord pleases?
2. Is your love well-regulated? An inordinate love will destroy you. By a well-regulated love, you prize the soul over the body. You seek holiness first of all and value heavenly glory over earthly glory. True love asks “What will angels say if I do this”? Not “What will men say?”
3. When your heart is beset by temptations and desires, do you come to its aid right away?
4. How do you see yourself in God’s sight? To see yourself like a drop of water compared with the ocean is not enough. Humility goes much further. You must not esteem yourself compared with others and you must not seek the esteem of other.
5. In speech do you boast or flatter yourself?
6. In deed, do you harm your health by useless pleasures or unprofitable nighttime activities?

5.6 – Our Relationship to Others

We are bound to love family members, relatives and close friends. Besides those, how much do you love other people? Do you love them for God’s sake? To answer that, call to mind some disagreeable and annoying people. Even more, remember some people who have wronged you. Examine your heart. Do you speak against them? Do you act unkindly toward them? Some honesty will reveal the answers quickly.

5.7 - Examining the Soul’s Affections

After making good resolutions, we must see if we have carried them out. I am not speaking here of sins committed by people who do not want to make progress. I speak of inclinations and affections that can remain in devout souls. So I ask about your affections and tendencies.

1. Do you hate sin, in yourself and in others?
2. Do you fear a loss of this world's goods?
3. Do you hope too much in this world?
4. Are you sad over unimportant matters?
5. Are you happy over what is really worthless?

In other words, what are you attached to? What affections engross you? Only by testing our affections and passions, one by one, can we see our true spiritual state. A musician tests every string of his instrument, lowering or raising the tune. So, test your love, hate, fear, hope and joy. Then adjust each properly to provide a melody of God's praise.

5.8 – Affections After These Examinations

Excite certain feelings in your heart. Thank God for any way in which you have changed your life (however slight). Humble yourself. If your progress is small, see that it is your own fault for not following the inspirations.

Promise to praise God. He has led you (even against your will). Ask forgiveness for any disloyalty. Ask God alone to rule your heart. Ponder the examples of the saints.

5.9 – Renewing Good Resolutions

After this self-examination and speaking with your director, consider the following five topics, (one a day) in your meditation.

5.10 – The Value of Your Soul

Your soul is rational and capable of knowing both earth and heaven. You know that Almighty God exists and that an eternity is ahead of you. You know how to live in this world to gain fellowship with the angels and saints.

Your will is capable of loving God (to Whom your heart is irresistibly drawn). You can find no peace in creation. Remember the earthly goods that once filled your heart. Did you not have uneasiness, doubts and a troubled heart when you held on to them?

Everyone begins to seek creatures with great eagerness. When he obtains them, he is dissatisfied and seeks other creatures. God will not allow your heart to have peace away from Him. We are like a dove that must return to God's Ark. This is the heart's natural quest. Why force your heart to seek only creatures?

Say to your soul, "You long for God, why seek anything lower? You can live forever, why seek what perishes? Did not the Prodigal son grow sad when he remembered his father's table? O my soul, you are made for God. You are worthy of eternity. Take courage in your pursuit."

5.11 – The Excellence of Virtue

Only holiness and devotion can satisfy your soul. Compare each virtue with its opposite vice. Compare patience with vengeance; gentleness with anger; humility with pride; generosity with avarice; sobriety with drunkenness. Virtues give sweetness to the soul. Vice gives turmoil. Why not work for the sweetness?

The person touched with a little evil is not content. The person filled with much evil is very discontent. In contrast, the soul with some virtues is happy and the soul with many virtues is very happy.

Look carefully at the devout life. It softens sorrows and multiplies consolations. Without devotion, the good soul becomes evil. Pleasure becomes mixed with anxiety. Say with the Samaritan woman, “Lord, give me this water” (Jn 4:15). St. Theresa often said that aspiration.

5.17 – The Example of the Saints

Look at the great efforts of saints in leading a devout life. The martyrs have been invincible. Some died protecting their purity. Others died because they would not cease to preach or to serve God.

Remember the Confessors who confronted the world. Consider St. Monica who served God in her widowhood. If you keep the examples of saints before your eyes, you will achieve much. They are just like us. They serve the same God. Can we not do what they did, that is, carry out our good resolutions?

5.13 – Christ’s Love for You

Consider Christ’s love for you in His Agony in the garden and death on the cross. He gained for you the strength to keep your good resolutions. They are the fruit of His Passion. He died for your good resolutions, so you must not forget them.

While nailed to the cross, Christ saw you. He won everything for you. He called you by name before you were born. He made all things, (large and small), ready for you. Just as parents preparing for a birth get everything ready, so Christ on the cross prepared everything for your happiness. He provides all the graces and the inspirations needed for your perfection.

Say to yourself. “Jesus loved me so tenderly. He thought of every detail to draw me close to Himself. I should use all He gave me. He prepared endless means for my salvation. As the sun shines on every part of the world as if it were the only part, so Jesus cares for me as if no one else existed”. Let this be engraved on your soul. Your resolutions are precious to Jesus.

5.15 – God’s Eternal Love

Even before Jesus became man and died for you, God had designed your future existence. When did he begin to love you? He loved you from the beginning of eternity. That is why He got all the graces ready for you. “I have loved you with an everlasting love” (Jn.31:3). In His love, he led you to your good resolutions. How sacred are these resolutions. God foresaw them from all eternity! How precious

they should be to you. You should be ready to suffer for them. The whole world is not worth one soul, but a soul without resolutions is worth little.

5.15 – General Affections

O resolutions, you are a fruitful tree watered by Christ's blood. I would rather die than have you uprooted. Let not vanity, pleasure, wealth or sorrow overthrow you. O Lord, You planted this tree. How many souls have not received this favor? O resolutions, if I keep you, you will keep me. If you live in me, my soul will live. You were eternal in God. In me, you will bring forth eternal life.

Next, see what you need to keep your resolutions – the frequency of prayer, the Sacraments, good works, amending faults, removing occasions of sin, and following your director's advice. Be refreshed by renewing your resolutions. Take your heart in your hands and dedicate it to God. Vow never to take it back. After this, go to confession. Tell the sins you have committed since your first general confession. Then lose no time in receiving the Eucharist.

5.16 – Lasting Impressions

On the day of renewing your resolutions, repeat the words of many saints, "I am not mine. In life and death I am the Lord's. Indeed, we will not be ourselves any more. Our heart will be changed. We will deceive the world, which will think we are still Esau when we have become Jacob.

All devout exercises must sink into our heart. So, when we leave prayer and go into the world, we must go slowly and not spill the good wine. Let each period of prayer penetrate and soak every faculty.

5.17 – Two Objections

The world will say that these practices are so numerous that you cannot pay attention to anything else. The world lies. You only do these exercises from time to time, not every day. We have many laws, but they only apply from time to time.

God Gives the Time

King St. Louis, who was unrivalled in ruling France, heard two Masses every day. He meditated daily, said the Divine Office with the priest and went to Confession regularly. He visited the hospitals on Friday and attended spiritual conferences. His Court flourished more than his predecessors.

If you do these religious duties, God will give you time for your other duties. We always do enough when God works with us.

Second, the world will accuse me of teaching that every soul has the gift of mental prayer. This is true. I do believe that every person can pray mentally. Almost everyone can attain this gift, even the most unlearned. They must have two things - a good director and the effort to acquire mental prayer. If anyone is devoid of the gift of mental prayer (which is rare) a good director will teach them how to do spiritual reading or to use the meditations I have given.

5.18 – Three Important Counsels

1. On the first day of the month, renew your resolutions. If your spiritual condition deteriorates, get out your written statement and renew it. This will give you relief.
2. Make an open profession of your desire to be devout. Do not be ashamed of the actions needed to love God. Acknowledge that you try to meditate and that you would never commit a mortal sin,. Say that you use the sacraments and obey your director. Openly confess that you serve God and are not ashamed of Him or His cross. This will cut away the world's hindrances to devotion.

We must make our devotion known so we are allowed to practice it. If someone says you can be devout without following all these teaching, do not deny it. Just say that you are weak and you need the support that others do not.

3. I adjure you by all that is sacred in heaven or earth persevere in your undertaking of a devout life. Life passes quickly. Death is at hand. "The trumpet sound reminds us that Judgment is near." (St. Gregory). "My son, remember life eternal. Look to heaven. Life's brief course will soon be ended." (Mother of St. Symphorian)

I say, "Look to heaven. Do not lose it because of earth. Look to hell. Do not plunge there because of this passing life. Look to Jesus. Do not deny Him for the whole world. When the devout life seems hard, sing with St. Francis:

So great the joys I await
No earthly suffering seems so great.

All glory be to Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Amen