Elizabeth’s Spirituality and Locutions

The background of her life is contained in the book itself. Just how she prayed in her early years is not clear. She was deeply devout. After twice trying to enter religious life, she met her husband in the parish choir.

A description of her spirituality begins the diary. At this point, she has lost interest in religious practice. However, this is very deceiving. She had made great progress in devotion and was experiencing some mystical darkness which God gives to favored souls.

In the Dark Night, God comes to the soul with his greatest lights. However, the soul’s faculties are overwhelmed and the person experiences only darkness. As the soul remains faithful to prayer, her capacity for this light grows and God leads her into a level of prayer far greater than before. This is where Elizabeth is in her spiritual journey in the first pages (1964). She regains her taste for devotion and the experience of God’s closeness.

Mystical Experiences

Throughout her book, she describes many religious experiences. Each of these has a name (given by Theresa of Avila, John of the Cross, St. Frances de Sales) and anyone trained could easily identify each gift. Therefore, her diary is totally consistent with the Church’s mystical tradition.

Two Sets of Spiritual Gifts

The Holy Spirit pours out two sets of gifts — sanctifying and charismatic. Sanctifying gifts make the person holy. Charismatic gifts serve other people. Elizabeth is very good at describing her religious experiences which are both sanctifying (for her holiness) and charismatic (for our holiness).

The Charism of Revelation

Reading about her personal sanctifying experiences stirs us to greater holiness. However, the charismatic experiences form the foundation for the Flame of Love Movement. These charisms are the revelations by which we learn so much about Mary’s Immaculate Heart. We discover that the Flame of Love exists as a gift won for us by Mary, that Mary wants to pour out this flame upon the whole world and that it will blind Satan. We are taught prayers to say and are promised that souls will not be lost if someone is beseeching Mary to pour out this Flame.

The Flame of Love devotion comes from all the divine revelation given to Elizabeth through the charism of locutions. Teaching Two explains sanctifying and charismatic gifts.
TEACHING #2: SANCTIFYING AND CHARISMATIC GIFTS

This talk assures people that the Flame of Love is a solid road to come to Jesus through Mary. The Holy Spirit pours out sanctifying gifts and charismatic gifts.

Sanctifying Gifts

When you were confirmed, you received the seven sanctifying gifts of the Spirit – Wisdom, Knowledge, Understanding, Fortitude, Piety, Counsel, and Fear of the Lord. These powers of the Spirit are for your own benefit. By growing in these gifts, you become holy and get to heaven.

Charismatic Gifts

Charismatic gifts are different. The Spirit gives these to you to help other people to get to heaven.

During his earthly ministry, Jesus constantly used charisms to minister to the people. He healed, prophesied, worked miracles and preached with Wisdom. At Pentecost, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit upon his apostles and disciples who also used charisms to spread the gospel. The apostles received these charismatic powers to spread Jesus’ Kingdom.

St. Paul lists 9 charismatic gifts, (there are many others), Word of Wisdom, Word of Knowledge, Faith, Healing, Miracles, Prophecy, Discernment of spirits, Speaking in tongues and Interpretation of tongues. (1 Cor 12:8-10) These gifts vary in their importance. Paul writes, “Strive to have all these gifts, above all that you might prophesy.” i.e., the prophetic gift has greater power than others.

Gift of Locutions

God gave Elizabeth a very special prophetic gift called Locutions, which reveal God’s thoughts.

Spiritual writers list many ways by which God can reveal his thoughts. Sometimes, God gives visions. People see Jesus or Mary. St. Faustina saw Jesus, who gave her the Divine Mercy Devotion. St. Bernadette saw Our Blessed Lady who revealed the healing waters at Lourdes. The three children saw Our Lady who gave them the Fatima manifestations and the three secrets.

Elizabeth never claims that she experienced any visions. She wrote often that she did not see Jesus or Mary. She was not a visionary. She did claim that Jesus and Mary communicated with her by inner locutions.

Many times in her diary, Elizabeth describes her experiences. Therefore, we know both the messages and Elizabeth’s religious experiences that gave her the messages.

Church’s Statement

In approving this devotion, Cardinal Erdo is clear. He established a study committee, not to examine Elizabeth’s religious experiences, but to investigate the results of those experiences,
that is, the messages that resulted from God’s locutions. The committee found these messages to be doctrinally sound and in keeping with Church teaching.

Our Certitude

In practicing this Flame of Love devotion, we enjoy a double certitude. Locutions are accepted by spiritual writers as a valid form of God revealing his thoughts. Cardinal Erdo says that the content of these locutions accord with Church teaching.
Christian spirituality is a path to the Father through Jesus. Jesus said to Thomas, “I am the way. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (Jn 14:6) Jesus is not some external road. He is not just a companion, guiding us on the journey. By Baptism, Jesus lives in us by sanctifying grace. Paul writes, “I live, now not I, but Jesus lives in me.” This Flame of Love prayer perfectly understands that sentence.

In every human person, Jesus has another opportunity to continue his life on earth in praise of the Father. A saint has totally allowed Jesus to take over everything.

The prayer says:

- May our feet journey together.
- May our hands gather in unity.
- May our hearts beat in unison.
- May our souls be in harmony.
- May our thoughts be as one.
- May our ears listen to the silence together.
- May our glances profoundly penetrate each other.
- May our lips pray together to gain mercy from the Eternal Father. Amen

The prayer includes every aspect of the human person, caught up by Jesus, to fulfill the Father’s plan.

True spirituality is not just you trying to do God’s will, but you allowing Jesus, living in you by grace, to do God’s will.

A Shortcut

This prayer is a shortcut. It reveals at the beginning, what many saints only discovered at the end. Jesus wants the joy of obeying His Father again. He asks you to allow him this gift. That is what the prayer says.

The soul is caught up in Jesus doing the Father’s will, even in the feelings, the desires, the hopes, “Let our hearts beat in unison.”

Jesus can do the Father’s work again. “Let our hands gather in unity.”

You must say the prayer all day long to receive its Spirit (the Holy Spirit). Soon, you will be absorbed by its power.

This prayer seeks a perfect union with Jesus, who always does the will of the Father. Contained in this prayer is the deepest, most modern and authentic Catholic Spirituality. The prayer, when made part of your inner self, will immerse you in Jesus, who is the core of holiness. No need to take the wrong path, or even to take the right path under your own
power. Why work for what has already been gained? Why fight in battle that has already been won? Just let your hands, heart, feet, feelings be taken over by Jesus.

Sanctifying Grace

When you were baptized, Jesus began to live in you. God placed an entire spiritual organism in your spirit. He wants to take over your life. Let Jesus live again through you. Such is the deep spirituality of the Flame of Love.

TEACHING #4: BLINDING SATAN

1. Premises
   Through her flame of Love, Our Lady promises to blind Satan. Elizabeth records some experiences of seeing Satan blinded. On one occasion, she commanded him to listen to her (a painful experience for him). Even more, on another occasion, she saw all the little devils unable to act because they were receiving no orders. Their blinded leader had nothing to say.

   This little talk tries to explain what it means to blind Satan and how important this is.

2. Jesus Drives Out Satan
   The gospels constantly state that Jesus visited many towns, driving out Satan and preaching the Kingdom. The two activities are deeply connected. If Satan holds someone in his power, Jesus’ words have no effect. It is like showing a movie to a blind man.

   This “blinding of Satan” frees souls so they can respond to God’s graces. Because the world is filled with evil, people are unable to respond to God’s grace. People’s thoughts and feelings are blocked by Satan. When he is blinded, he loses his powers and the person experiences a freedom to say “yes” to God.

3. How Does Satan Gain His Power?
   Satan needs an entrance, some door or window that has been opened to him. This happens primarily by sin. By each sin, the person falls more into Satan’s grasp. By each confession of sins, the person moves out of Satan’s control. (Sins involving the occult put people more directly under Satan’s power.)

   Today, our culture and society are filled with the demonic. People are not free to respond to God’s grace. The “Blinding of Satan”, through this devotion is extremely important.

4. Widespread Unbelief
   Decades ago, everybody believed. Now, large masses of people (especially the young who have been subjected to this darkness), have little faith in the world of Jesus.

   Large numbers no longer see the need for Sunday mass. Every commandment is challenged and broken. People have no personal inclination for the supernatural. All of this is Satan’s
work. Satan has covered over Jesus’ world. When he is blinded, people will see again and be free to respond.

5. Evangelism Efforts
   Our efforts at evangelization yield little fruit because Satan makes people deaf to the gospel.

   Satan places an invisible wall around people’s minds and hearts. The gospel cannot penetrate. God’s graces become like water off a duck’s back. They never enter the heart because Satan is not blinded. When Satan is blinded and he loses his powers, the gospel will penetrate again.

6. The Denial of Satan
   Satan’s greatest ploy is to get people to deny that he exists or that he plays a very small role in human life. But Satan is everywhere. Wherever there is an addiction, Satan is there. Wherever there is great suffering in relationships, Satan is there. When a person goes off the track and walks away from God, Satan is there. His fingerprints are everywhere and “blinding Satan” is a great gift, won for the Church and the world by the Flame of Love devotion.

TEACHING 5: WHY HEAVEN REVEALS ITS ACTIONS

Earth (mankind) cannot save itself. Man is saved eternally only because heaven acts. Heaven alone can save earth and heaven always wants man to know what it is doing. The bible stories reveal God’s saving actions. St. Paul writes, “Then comes the end, when Christ hands over the Kingdom to his God and Father, when everything has been subjected... so that God may be all in all.” (1 Cor 15:24-28). At that moment, earth will be fully saved by heaven. Until then, heaven is always acting upon earth, (unfortunately with mixed results because we are not listening).

God reveals how heaven is acting, so we can better cooperate.

Content

In the diary, Jesus and Mary reveal some actions of heaven that we would not know. I would like to outline the main points.

1. The merits of Jesus have moved the Father to place this flame of Love in Mary’s Immaculate Heart.
2. Jesus and Mary chose Elizabeth Kindelmann as their instrument to reveal this gift. (Just as Jesus chose St. Faustina to reveal his Divine mercy, by saying, “You are the Secretary of Mercy”).
3. This Flame of Love went forth from Mary’s heart to Elizabeth’s.
4. This Flame is meant to be passed on to every heart in the world.
5. This Flame is an extraordinary help to save the person and to save the world.
What is the Flame

The Diary says explicitly that the Flame of Love is Jesus Christ. Through the Flame, Mary gives to her children the divine life and the divine powers of Jesus.

Conclusion

What has happened is this. Mary has revealed what has taken place in heaven. The Flame of Love is the Father’s extraordinary gift, gained by Jesus and placed in Mary. To help us receive the Flame, we have Elizabeth’s Spiritual Diary.

TEACHING #6: DO NOT DELAY

Elizabeth was certainly fervent in trying to establish the Flame of Love devotion. However, at times, even her zeal was not enough. With all her attempts, Our Lady would still tell Elizabeth to make greater efforts.

Lack of Cooperation

Our Lady was much more upset with others, including priests, who offered excuses for not moving ahead. Sometimes these good priests even directly opposed (in good faith) what Our Lady had told Elizabeth.

The Diary is filled with Our Lady’s frustration that the Movement was not making progress, that time was being lost and that souls were deprived of the Flame of Love which the Father had given to Mary. At times, even the fervent Elizabeth did not do all that was expected. Others cooperated but too slowly and too little. Some even rejected the role that Mary had planned for them and others actually placed obstacles.

Our Own Delays

What are we to learn from this drama, so clearly portrayed in the Diary? Let these clear examples shake up our world. We often see ourselves as devout and truly interested in the Flame of Love. In truth, we have many self-interests which clog up our day. So much of our time and our attention is already committed. We always say, “I will have to find time.”

No Time to Lose

If you have cancer, don’t you find time to go to the doctor? Even better. If there is a fire, don’t you find time to get out of the building? A fire doesn’t wait and neither does the Flame of Love. This is Mary’s fire, which burns in her heart and causes her suffering until the fire goes forth, (until the “flame is passed along.”)

A Train Behind Schedule
Mary kept complaining that the Flame of Love was already behind schedule. If this was true while the fervent Elizabeth was alive and stirring up everyone, how much more true it is today.

Do not delay. There is a fire and it must not wait. Whatever you do for the Flame of Love today, know that it is not all that Mary wants. She has great plans for you, great works for you to accomplish for her. You have a call, a heavenly invitation. Whatever you do, do not delay! Do everything yesterday!

**TEACHING #7 – SOCIAL ACTION**

**Social Action**

Some might criticize Flame of Love Devotion because it centers on Eucharistic Adoration and does not speak much of works of charity or attempts to make the world a better place. (Often called Catholic Social action).

**A Personal Story**

I would like to describe the story of Holly Benner who has accomplished great works by building many water wells in Africa.

Attracted deeply by Jesus’ Real Presence in the Eucharist, Holly converted to Catholicism in 1998. After her baptism, she made a daily Holy Hour of adoration. During these hours of prayer, God kept putting Africa in her heart. She read all she could about Africa.

When a priest from Africa came to her parish in Bethlehem, she asked what she could do. “We need water wells”, he said. She collected $16,000 and hopped on a plane to go to Africa. The priest’s father took her to his village where the water well was built immediately. She received more requests, formed Needs for Africa, and has built water wells worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. All this personal social action flowed from Eucharistic adoration.

**A Total Commitment**

When you come before Our Lord, place your whole life in his hands. Let your heart be quiet. Take time to listen. God wants to speak to you, to guide your desires and to fill your imagination.

**The Boy Samuel** (1Samuel Chap 3)

Samuel’s devout parents consecrated their son to God and brought him to live with the priest, Eli, in the temple. One night, God called to Samuel three times. The third time, Samuel said “Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.” God revealed to Samuel that he would become the great prophet in Israel. (Two books in the Bible bear his name.) God said, “I am about to do something in Israel that will cause the ears of everyone who hears about it to ring.” (3:11) Thus began the great work of Samuel.
During your Holy Hour, say “Speak, Lord, your servant is listening”. God will gladly speak (after all, somebody is finally listening). He will place many little ideas (and sometimes, a great big idea) in your heart. This will be your social action.

Keep listening. Talk with others. Make little attempts. See what doors open. Do not grow discouraged. God gives us little tasks, and if we are faithful, bigger ones.

**TEACHING #8 - FASTING**

**Fasting**

The diary mentions three days on which we are asked to fast on bread and water – Monday (until 6:00 PM), Thursday, (until 6:00PM) and Friday (until 3:00 PM). These directions are clear and need no further explanation. At Medjugorge, the visionaries clearly say that the sick should not fast.

**Diets and Fasts**

Some people like to go on diets. A diet and a fast are not at all the same. (Padre Pio once went on a strict fast and gained weight). A diet has a secular goal that pleases the person. Fasting has a religious goal – greater fidelity to God’s will.

Food is something we both enjoy and need. A fast deprives us of the physical pleasure of eating and drinking. More important, it removes something we need. In fasting, the person will experience some physical weakness and loss of energy. This deepens our dependency on God.

**Fasting as a Gift – A True Story**

A person very much wanted to keep the Medjugorge fast (Wednesday and Friday). They went to a priest who kept that fast. After he had mentioned his desire, the priest said, “Fasting is a gift. Do you want the gift?” The two just prayed together for the gift. After that, the person was able to fast. To begin, ask God for the gift to fast.

**The Blessings of Fasting**

A pattern of fasting brings many blessings.

1. God claims your heart and you belong to him.
2. The physical weakness brings about humility. You realize how dependent you are on food.
3. You see other pleasures and luxuries that you can do without.
4. You become zealous for God’s plan and use every opportunity to speak about Jesus and Mary.

**Some Hints**

1. Ask Our Lady for the gift to keep the Flame of Love Fast.
2. Always keep Our Lady’s request before your mind.
3. Start by doing what you can. It is better to be faithful to small practices than to be inconsistent in greater fastings.

4. A gigantic obstacle to fasting is mental. The mind jumps ahead. It takes time to stay calm and realize that you can have an ordinary day while fasting.

5. You will get used to a weekly pattern – some days fasting and some days eating.

6. On non-fast days, eat as a healthy a diet as possible – lots of fruit and vegetables.

Always remember, many others are joining you in these fasts. You are not alone.

Final Encouragement

After a while, your mind and your body adjust to a weekly pattern that involves some fasting (a special joy comes when the fasting is accomplished). By fasting from food, you will also begin to fast from money (not buying as much), from television (not watching as much) and from sin (being more zealous to live devoutly).

You will pray better, love your neighbor more, and serve God with all your heart. Don’t delay. Start fasting now in little ways. Fast with others and be encouraged.

TEACHING #9: SOULS IN PURGATORY

Many of Our Lady’s promises for Flame of Love deal with helping the souls in purgatory. The following teaching is based upon the writings of St. Catherine of Genoa’s (1447-1510), a married laywoman who enjoyed many revelations.

Coming Before God

After death, the soul comes into God’s presence and sees the holiness of God. The soul also understands its own spiritual state. If the soul possesses no love for God, it wants to depart from Him. Hell is really an act of God’s mercy. (A soul without love would suffer even more if it stayed in God’s holy presence. It wants to get away).

If the soul does love God but sees that some aspects must be purified, it gladly accepts Purgatory. Having seen the all-holy God, it wants to be perfectly like him.

St. Catherine explains that purgatory is not at all the same as earth. The suffering is totally different (and more painful) but the soul enjoys perfect peace because it is fulfilling God’s will.

The Waiting

The soul in purgatory begins far away from God (because it needs much purifying). Each moment it comes closer to God’s holiness. Strangely enough, this causes greater suffering. The soul, by coming into a stronger light, sees what it is missing even more. Its desires to possess God enlarge, yet it must still wait. The greatest suffering is the moment right before entering
heaven. At this point, the soul’s desires for God are gigantic. The soul sees the moment of possessing God is right at hand. Yet, the full beatific vision is still held back.

Heaven

Suddenly, all is complete. The soul is purified and with perfect joy can be forever in God’s all-holy presence without any suffering.

The goal of Flame of Love is to release these souls so they can become our intercessors in heaven. They are called “Suffering Souls” but a far better name is “friendly souls”. They are true friends, totally unable to help themselves but very capable of helping us, especially those who speed their road to heaven.

Praying to the Holy Souls

We also should pray to these “friendly souls” who are part of the Communion of Saints. They are already guaranteed eternal life, and zealous to make sure that we, too, save our souls. The Flame of Love devotion will seal our friendship with them.

TEACHING #10 – IMPORTANCE OF EUCHARISTIC ADORATION

The Eucharist is both a sacrifice and a sacrament. The sacrifice happens only during the mass. The sacrament perdures as long as the consecrated host is present.

The Church has two Eucharistic feasts. Holy Thursday (so closely associated with Good Friday) stresses the Eucharist as sacrifice. Corpus Christi, a feast personally instituted by Jesus, stresses the Eucharist as Real Presence (sacrament).

Early Church

Immediately after Pentecost, the early believers celebrated the Eucharist. “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ instructions, and the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and the prayers.” (Acts 2:42)

The Eucharist was clearly sacrificial. Paul writes, “Every time, then, that you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes.” (1 Cor 11:26).

The First Churches

When the Roman persecutions stopped, churches could be built. The Eucharist was preserved so Holy Communion could be available to the sick and the dying, outside of mass. Only slowly, did the church realize that the Eucharist should be adored. In fact, Jesus himself, had to take the initiative.

In 1209, Juliana of Liege (1191-1258), had a vision of the moon with a dark spot. Jesus explained that the Church lacked a devotion. Holy Thursday was a feast of the Eucharist as sacrifice. He wanted the Church to establish Corpus Christi as a Eucharistic feast highlighting the Real Presence.
Juliana zealously championed this feast which the bishop of Liege sanctioned. (1247) She also told James Panteleon (later, Pope Urban IV) of Jesus’ request. After he became pope, James did not act until a Eucharistic miracle happened. In 1263, when Father Peter of Prague, beset with many doubts about the Real Presence, said the words of consecration, blood seeped from the consecrated host, trickled over his hands and onto the altar and the cloth.

Prompted by this miracle, Pope Urban asked St. Thomas Aquinas to compose a liturgy. In 1264, he extended the feast of Corpus Christi to the whole Church (1264).

Soon, people celebrated the feast by a procession. This required a monstrance by which everyone could see the host. (The procession was in imitation of the Holy Thursday procession taking the host to the altar of repose). Enthusiasm, however, became so great that the procession went outdoors and even included multiple benedictions (possibly for a good harvest). The people even wanted the monstrance to be always on their altars. The bishops, wisely, asked that a tabernacle be constructed to protect the host.

This history shows that Jesus, himself, wanted the church to see the importance of Eucharistic Adoration as a continuation of the Sacrifice of the Mass.

**TEACHING #11: SIMPLICITY OF LIFE STYLE**

As her diary begins, Elizabeth is living in her own home with her youngest son. When her married children, (with the grandchildren), moved back in, she gave them her four bedroom house and moved into the children’s bedroom (which was filled with peace.)

**Giving Up Her Home**

Then, her youngest son got married and she gave this new couple her bedroom, too. She even placed her daughter in complete charge of the house and distributed all she owned among her children. Having disposed of everything, she moved into a small dwelling in her garden.

Her youngest daughter announced that she needed to look for work, so Elizabeth gave up her good-paying job to act as baby-sitter for her two grandchildren. All of this happened quickly.

Yet, Jesus went further saying, “Renounce even yourself.” This, of course, is the work of a lifetime.

**What Did Elizabeth Have?**

In these years (from 1961 to 1985), Hungary was under Communist rule. The economy was not booming and even what Elizabeth calls “a good—paying job” must have been frugal, although sufficient. The above description gives us a small picture of the great simplicity of our model’s lifestyle.

**What a Contrast**
Need I dare contrast this picture with our own affluent American lifestyle? It would be stark and any attempt to copy Elizabeth’s level of detachment is beyond most of us.

However, we must look at our lifestyles. Then, we must look at them again and again. We must begin to pull away from so many things that we do not need. After doing this, we will even wonder how we thought we needed all those things.

Our credit card bill will shrink drastically and our desires will not overwhelm us.

Every Aspect

Although this talk focuses on things and on spending, detachment (simplicity of lifestyle) refers to every aspect of our life. Detachment is not a work of one week or one month. It must be done each day, step by step, for the rest of your life (because things will always claw their way back in).

You need a Flame of Love Community in which you gain a communal wisdom. You also need a good friend and advisor, to talk about your decisions.

Just start taking one step in the direction of simplicity. Think of three things that you do not need to keep buying.

TEACHING #12: DETACHMENT FROM THE WORLD

Jesus always told Elizabeth that he wanted her totally for himself. We cannot say that this request only pertains to her. Jesus wants every person totally for himself. That is our greatest privilege – to belong totally to Jesus and for him to jealously desire our every thought and feeling.

Some Examples

On a couple of occasions (seemingly small in our eyes), Elizabeth strayed from this total abnegation (self-surrender). Once, her religious friend was listening to music and invited Elizabeth to put on the headset. On another occasion, Elizabeth was caught up in reading an interesting article. On both occasions, Jesus spoke. If he was not everything for her, she should not be taken away from him.

The two little incidents reflect what the saints teach about “inner recollection” and detachment. Jesus wants us to think about him and speak to him all during the day (called “informal prayer”).

Formal and Informal Prayer

When we pray before the Blessed Sacrament (formal prayer), we try not to be distracted and to keep all our thoughts and desires on Jesus. By this, we learn to practice “The presence of God.” Even when we leave Church, we are still in Jesus’ presence. We must train our minds to informal prayer, taking Jesus along with us to our daily life and trying to pray throughout the day.
Certainly, the Flame of Love burns brightly while we kneel in adoration. When we leave church, we need to “shut the windows” of our hearts to the world’s winds (not easy in an electronic, mass media culture that spends advertising dollars to always claim your attention). However, the Flame of Love challenges you to be detached from the world.

The Virgin Mary constantly lights our inner flame. She asks that you protect it and let it burn brightly all day long. In this way, you return to formal prayer, the flame can quickly leap up in gigantic adoration.

**Lots of Helps**

To accomplish this full Flame of Love requires great cooperation with Mary’s leadings. The Movement provides teachings to motivate you and other people to give good example. By living the Flame fully, you are a light also.

**What To Do**

At this stage, just realize what goes on in your mind, how hungry you are for news and how thirsty for entertainment. Make some efforts to limit these and substitute prayer, reading or just good conversation. In other words, live a new simplicity, and be out from the cultural mass media. Even notice how difficult this is and how far you need to change. That is a good beginning, leading you to a greater Flame of Love in your heart. Don’t forget. Keep the flame alive!

**TEACHING #13 – THE FLAME OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES**

Mary said that the Flame of Love did not need miracles to prove that it truly was received. Each person, within their own heart, would know that the Flame had been passed on. These inner proofs are called Religious Experiences.

**Inner Experiences**

Every day people have thousands of experiences. They see, hear, and taste. They also have internal experiences. People feel emotions like love, joy, heartbreak or sorrow. They conceive thoughts and experience desires.

The world of advertising tries to dominate people’s experiences so they purchase their product. Television programming wants your attention so its market share (ratings) is higher than their competitors.

Every moment, from morning to night, you experience something. Then comes your sleep, and even then you dream (even if you don’t remember).

**Formed By Experiences**
Experiences form us. Parents send their children to the best schools and tell them to stay away from certain other children. Good parents watch carefully what their children hear and see.

Adolescents gain more freedom and greater choices in their experiences (good or bad). All of life is an interaction between the human person (gifted with free will) and the experiences that mold him.

God and Experiences

God does not want to be left out. He wants to intrude by the gift of religious experiences. These are both important and yet unknown (to most Catholics). You cannot come close to God unless you receive his religious experiences. That is the next talk.

TEACHING #14 – RECEIVING RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES

Religious experiences have two important phases — receiving them and holding onto them. Without realizing it, many people have received religious experiences. I’ll ask a few questions. Did you ever:

1. feel God close to you
2. experience peace after Holy Communion
3. find yourself crying in Church
4. enjoy a retreat
5. feel relief after a good confession
6. discover some inner desire to pray
7. get touched by some excellent homily
8. felt lifted up by a hymn that you like
9. found joy in a spiritual book

These are all religious experiences. They give good emotions caused by something religious (Communion, Confession, a quiet Church, etc.) You might even feel comfortable or familiar with this world of religious experiences. That is an excellent beginning.

Holding On to These Experiences

Holding on to these experiences is the daily gift which requires great fidelity. I’ll ask a few deeper questions.

1. Do you pray every day
2. Do you like to pray
3. Do you have a taste for religious devotion
4. Do you sense God always near to you
5. Can you pray mentally, (on your own without a prayer book)
6. In Holy Communion do you experience Jesus
7. Do you enjoy the mysteries of the rosary

If you experience the above, you are “holding on to religious experiences.”

God’s Strategy

God is real and the world he created is real. However, what we consider as real depends on our experiences. What people experience regularly, they judge as important (like sports or television). What they don’t experience regularly, they judge as unimportant (like Jesus’ presence in the Eucharist).

So, God has a strategy. He gives religious experiences, every day. Without those experiences, we cannot value His Kingdom. When we have experiences of God, we easily value His Kingdom.

Next talk – How to Experience God.

TEACHING #15 – HOW TO EXPERIENCE GOD

God made it easy for us to experience him. He chose Mary to be his mother. Then, He took flesh and lived among us. Jesus and Mary are both body and soul in heaven. They also have appeared to saints, so we know (as best we can) what they look like. All of that is a good beginning.

We also know what Jesus and Mary said and did. To some degree, we know exactly how they thought and felt. For example, Jesus had compassion on the crowd. In a real sense, we know their personalities, their values, their goals, and most important, their love for us.

As Catholics, we have lots of chances to experience God. In fact, we have 20 excellent opportunities, called the mysteries of the rosary. To experience God, in the greatest of religious experiences, you only need to immerse yourself in these gospel stories. St. Francis of Assisi, the great mystic, was the first to popularize the Christmas crib. To experience God, he only needed the baby Jesus.

The Unique Power of These Mysteries
These 20 events (and all the others in the gospel) are called mysteries because they contain God’s power. They are totally different from worldly events (like George Washington winning the revolution or Abraham Lincoln freeing the slaves).

They contain God’s power because Jesus and Mary are now in heaven, united to the Trinity. The Father has given them to us to get us to heaven.

Whenever you think of Jesus praying in the garden or Mary saying “yes” to the Angel Gabriel, God’s power goes out to you. God does some action in your soul. The heavenly Father uses the humanity of Jesus and the humanity of Mary as his instrument in changing you.

Various Powers

Each story has its own unique power. As you listen to Mary say “Let it be done according to your word” God will pour obedience into your heart. As you listen to Jesus saying, “It is finished. Into your hands I commend my spirit”, you receive God’s power of persevering until death.

To experience these mysteries, you must use mental prayer, which will lift your holy hour to its highest experience. That is the next talk.

TEACHING #16 – LEARNING MENTAL PRAYER

Contrast

The contrast between vocal and mental prayer is like a child who cannot swim (and therefore, must stay in the shallow waters) and a swimmer who can enjoy the whole pool. By learning mental prayer, the Catholic can enjoy all of God’s blessings. The person experiences God’s presence and the Holy Spirit touches all of the inner faculties.

Another image

Vocal prayer is linear, the person reads or says words to God. Mental prayer is three dimensional because all the faculties participate.

St. Ignatius of Loyola

A monk, absorbed in the silence of his monastery, can pray mentally with little effort. However, what about people immersed in the world? Our great helper is St. Ignatius of Loyola who wanted his Jesuits to pray mentally and still work in the world.

These talks will describe the mental prayer method which St. Ignatius provided to those first Jesuits. This has become the most popular method of mental prayer.
All the faculties

In mental prayer, a person deliberately brings all their faculties under the touch of the Holy Spirit. This seems small at first, but the Spirit will ignite these powers with his divine fire. (We do not really know which one. Each person is different and God uses different doors to religious experiences.)

The important faculties are the imagination, the memory, the intellect and the will. These four faculties must focus on the gospel events (such as the mysteries of the Rosary). Each will be described in the next talk.

TEACHING #17 – THE IMAGINATION, MEMORY, INTELLECT AND WILL

Vocal prayer involves words, (written or memorized) and demands only a minimum of concentration.

Mental prayer requires the person to use all of their powers. The Ignatian method explains their use.

Imagination – The person pictures some story in the gospel. These images can be very simple or more elaborate (according to each person). Using the imagination drives away distractions and settles the soul into a holy scene.

Memory – The person recalls all that they know about this story. (Spiritual reading, done at other times, will create many memories).

Intellect – The person deliberately considers aspects of the story – e.g. Jesus’ compassion when he saw the hunger of the people; the person’s gratitude when Jesus fed them, and the disciples’ feelings in sharing in this miracle.

Will – The person chooses to speak to Jesus (or Mary) from his own heart. If the other steps have been done, these feelings, called affections, flow naturally.

Two final parts of the Ignatian method is to make a good resolution and to review quickly how well you prayed.

Formal and Informal – Mental prayer has two forms:

1. Formal Mental Prayer takes place in Church or in a quiet spot.
2. Informal Mental Prayer takes place all day long.

The value of using mental prayer in the morning is that the person thinks of the gospel scene all day and repeats the affections. (informal mental prayer)

DO NOT WAIT

All of this seems complicated but the method is easy and natural. Don’t wait until you learn everything about the method. Just start using it as best you can.
How to Make Progress

Start with one mystery of the rosary (even without saying the Hail Marys). Read the story from the bible. Picture the scene. Consider some aspects. Then, pour out your heart (affections) to Jesus and Mary.

You will get better at this. What was difficult to do in the beginning for even five minutes, slowly becomes easy to do for ten or fifteen minutes.

After this formal mental prayer, the person rejoices that their mind was occupied, filled-up, taken in by the mystery and not distracted. Don’t forget to use informal mental prayer during the day.

TEACHING #18 – DESCRIBING FERVOR

Fervor is a fire, a Flame of Love, that comes down from heaven. Fervor is a special moment when we know that God has touched us. At other moments, we try to reach heaven by our prayers. Fervor is the opposite – heaven has reached down to us. God has touched us, even for just a short while.

All the saints speak about this special period of fervor, which they protected. St. Francis of Assisi left behind his father’s business to go into his hermitage. St. Teresa of Avila founded a new order to insure solitude. Because so many people came for advice, St. Simon Stylites built a 20 foot high pillar to guarantee his solitude. (After that, everybody knew where to find him, but at least he had quiet).

Fervor has three parts. First, the person prepares by daily mental prayer. Second, a moment comes, a very special moment, when Mary bestows fervor, her Flame of Love. Third, in joy, we go and sell all to retain the gift. This “selling” is all the changes we need to make so the flame is kept safe. That is the next talk.

TEACHING #19 - KEEPING THE FLAME ALIVE

I will use two images. A flame is very delicate and easy to extinguish by the slightest breeze. Also, a house might be very warm and cozy in the winter, but if someone opens all the windows, the temperature will drop quickly.

When the flame of fervor comes, we have to surround this fire with protection from the winds of our own selfishness. Also, we have to close all the windows to the cold of our culture (the world).
In the diary, Elizabeth describes what she had to do to preserve Mary’s Flame. By her fidelity to the fasting and to the hours of adoration, she curbed her own tendencies.

She also closed her windows to what seemed like innocent, worldly amusements – the newspapers and the fine music.

Please, do not be overwhelmed. Our Lady takes you step by step. She doesn’t burden. She always invites. However, a flame burns brightly only if it feeds upon fuel. If we want her Flame (and this is God’s greatest gift), then we cannot expect to hold on to everything. The more we fuel the Flame of fervor, the greater will be the inner fire.

Understand two things. The Holy Spirit will give you wisdom about how to respond. Also, you must be with others who are trying to receive the Flame. Do not walk this road alone.

**TEACHING # 20 – DO NOT WALK THIS ROAD ALONE**

As Catholics, we know that we must attend mass. Staying home and praying is not enough. We must worship God with others. That Catholic mentality extends also to the Flame of Love.

Our Lady speaks about “passing the Flame to each other.” So, being with others is needed from the very beginning. The whole structure of our Movement is to have a group (a community) of people dedicated to a communal hour of adoration.

This is just the beginning. Tobit told his son, “Take a companion for your journey”. Fortunately, Tobiah found the Archangel Raphael, who guided him home safely.

We need others. Some will guide us. Others will be “good friends” along the way. Others will join us in prayer. Still others, we will help. We didn’t get to earth by ourselves (we needed parents) and we certainly cannot get to heaven by ourselves.
Flame of Love is not a “do it yourself” but “We do this together with Our Lady”. So, always keep your heart open. Where can I join with others in the Flame of Love? Our Lord and Our Lady love to see us joined together in their Flame.

**TEACHING #21 – GOD SEARCHES FOR YOU**

No one receives the Flame of Love by accident. You do not just wake up some day and find this gift in your heart. You have to search. Really, God is searching for you and you are running away. So, he pulls a few tricks so you start looking for Him. The following are some of his favorites.

1. He gets you to feel dissatisfied with your present life.
2. He places desires in your heart that you do not understand.
3. You stumble upon others who are seeking God.
4. Even better, you find some group that seeks God.
5. Your whole life collapses. (Unfortunately, this is very effective and God uses it quite often).

God uses many means, all with one purpose. He wants to wake you up and to awaken you to the spiritual side of your personality. As you awake, you say, “I’m going to give time to seek God.” Now, he really has you and you are on the journey of a lifetime.

Welcome to the Flame of Love!

**TEACHING #22 – THE SAINTS AND SOLITUDE**

All the saints experienced fervor, a gift of God’s closeness. They understood that they had to protect this little flame. So, each one made a decision.

St. Ignatius of Loyola received fervor on his sick bed. When he got well, he did not return to his soldier’s life, but went off to Manresa, Spain for two years of solitude.

St. Philip Neri found a family who would give him an upstairs room. In return, he tutored the children. After 2 years, he began studying for the priesthood.

St. Rose of Lima resisted her parents’ attempt to get her to marry. She had her favorite place in the garden, where she found her solitude.

Elizabeth Kindelmann also had her little home in the garden. She had given her house over to her children.

St. Catherine of Sienna, after experiencing fervor as a little girl, spent 13 years in a devout life of prayer. After this, God sent her to mix with her friends. This was a constant pattern. Before giving her a new task, God made her withdraw for solitude.

Although our lives are different, we must withdraw every day so the Flame of Love can be fed and burn brightly. You can do this in many ways – daily mass, a quiet rosary, taking a walk instead of watching television. Try to find 3 periods every day – morning, afternoon and
evening – to be still for prayer. That is a beginning. (Also, you can turn off your car radio and talk to Our Lady).

TEACHING # 23 – ARE WE SERVING OTHERS?

The Flame of Love Movement stresses adoration, fasting and detachment from the world. People could criticize this focus by saying that we should be helping the world. Certainly, we should help people but we need also to see the intrinsic value of prayer, even before it leads us to exterior works.

The Little Flower (1873 – 1897) entered Carmel at 15 and died at 24. She never went out from her monastery. She wrote one book “Story of a Soul”. Her life still blesses the whole world.

St. Faustina (1905 – 1938) also entered the convent (Jesus interrupted her dancing and told her to go to Warsaw). She blessed the world with her diary and the image of Jesus showing His mercy.

St. Teresa of Avila (1515 – 1872) was in a convent that got too much involved with the world. Her great reform was to establish a new Carmelite convent in which the sisters had little contact with the world. Thanks to her, we have the Little Flower.

These three saints help us to realize that a person totally dedicated to a life of prayer does not need to make any apologies for not doing great external works.

Quotes

St. Teresa writes: “Life is not time for child’s play, but for God’s works.”

Fr. DeCausade writes: “Listen to God’s words for you. Then, you will fulfill God’s mission.

TEACHING #24 – GOD’S INTERIOR CASTLE

As Catholics, we believe that Jesus is really present in the Blessed Sacrament. We also believe that at the moment of Holy Communion, Jesus is fully present within you. Catholicism has yet another truth, which is even more basic. By your Baptism and the state of grace, the three Divine Persons live every moment within you.

Jesus said, “Whoever loves me, my Father will love him and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him.” (Jn 14:34). The entire life of man with God is based on this divine indwelling.
Mental Prayer

St. Teresa of Avila describes this Divine Indwelling as an interior castle, with God living in the deepest and most central of the castle’s rooms. Too often, the soul is outside the castle, caught up in the world. A great grace comes when the person begins to enter their own soul, in search of and drawn by God’s inner presence.

Growth in prayer allows you to go through various rooms in your inner castle, always drawing nearer to the center. The saints call this your Interior Life (which will be explained fully in these teachings).

You are called to do great works for God but, before you begin, you must enter your own heart, and meet God living within you. Then, you will do great works that can change the world.

St. Teresa writes:

“The door to the castle is prayer and this must be mental prayer.”

“O God, I sought you outside of myself, but you were within me.”
TEACHING #25 – FIDELITY AND FEELINGS

Often, as you kneel before the Blessed Sacrament, God pours out religious feelings. You experience God’s closeness, or your own smallness. You might be overcome by peace or be filled with tears. You correctly see these as special moments. God gives you consoling religious experiences which wipe away many burdens and spur you on to fidelity.

Feelings and fidelity are like twin sisters. They usually are seen together. When a person wanders from devotion and fidelity is not present, her twin-sister, (feelings), often leaves also.

Religious feelings come in many shapes and sizes. At times, the person enjoys a personal peace. Sometimes, a definite experience of God’s presence. Feelings even come like a summer thunderstorm and overwhelm.

Underneath all these feelings, is fidelity. The person prays and sacrifices every day. They are faithful to the communal Holy Hour and to daily moments of personal prayer.

Being faithful is our task. Pouring out religious feelings is God’s decision.

St. Teresa says:

1. “Giving up prayer is to lose your way entirely.”
2. “Learn about your own feelings.”

TEACHING #26 – TAKE A GUIDE FOR YOUR JOURNEY

By the Flame of Love, Our Lady takes our hand and invites us to come with her into the world of religious experiences, a new life with her and her Son. If we accept and remain faithful, we will be on this new road for the rest of our life.

Thankfully, the Saints who have walked this road provide us with great wisdom. All the saints say that we must have a guide.

As his son Tobiah, set out for the long journey to Media, Tobit gave him this advice, “My son, find yourself a trustworthy man who will make the journey with you.” (Tob 5:3) Fortunately, God provided the archangel, Raphael, (disguised as a relative), who brought Tobiah safely through his dangerous journey.

Because geography doesn’t change, we need only a map (or a GPS), to gain our destination. The road to perfection, however, is unique and personal. Books point out the path but everyone needs a confessor/guide “who will make the journey with you.”

St. Teresa of Avila:

1. “For 20 years I could find no guide. This harmed me greatly.”
2. “If the Lord told me one thing and the confessor told me another, I was to obey the confessor until the Lord changed his mind.”
TEACHING #27 – THE SAINTS AND THEIR SPIRITUAL GUIDES

Besides stressing the importance of a spiritual guide, the saints also leave us their personal struggles.

St. Theresa of Avila (1515 – 1582) had many confessor/guides. Some gave useless advice. Some gave harmful advice. Some gave excellent advice. Theresa obeyed them all, even when the priest told her something different than Jesus. Jesus would promise to change their mind.

St. Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647 – 1690)

For 18 months, Jesus appeared to her asking her to spread the new devotion to the Sacred Heart. However, her priest confessor did not believe her. Jesus told her not to worry. He would send his “perfect friend”. Soon, St. Claude de la Columbriere S.J. was assigned to her convent.

St. Faustina (1903-1938)

Her diary records all her “ups and downs” with priest guides. To some, she could not speak with ease. Others did not believe her. Some said things that greatly confused her. Finally, Jesus sent Father Sopocko and Father Andrasz, S.J. They worked together in guiding her.

These three saints span 400 years but their experiences are the same. They obeyed the priest but also evaluated his words. They knew when the words were not quite correct and when they brought great peace. They would always obey and go from there.

St. Theresa of Avila

1. “Choosing the correct confessor is extremely important.”
2. “God wants souls to be guided by others.”
3. “The devil knows that seeking spiritual advice is a great means of progress.”

TEACHING #28 – WHAT IS A SPIRITUAL GUIDE?

There is a difference between going to confession and having a spiritual guide. Since any priest can absolve you from your sins, most Catholics go to many different priests.

In choosing a guide, the person is more selective because the relationship will go far deeper than sacramental absolution. If you like to go to a particular priest for confession, then he might be the right guide. At least, he could be your regular confessor (which is a good step to take).

Over your lifetime, you will probably have different guides. Life changes. People move on. If possible, choose a guide who is older than you. He should be spiritual, educated and practical (3 essential qualities). Give each priest you choose an opportunity to help you. If you believe you have made the wrong choice, feel free to seek another. If you are receiving
confusing or troubling advice, feel free to withdraw. You are not rejecting the Catholic teaching. You just have not found the right guide.

The bottom line is this. To submit your questions, to seek advice and to obey what you are told, greatly pleases Jesus. He will bless your good will (even if the priest does not do a perfect job).

Saint Theresa: “I describe all my spiritual experiences to my confessor and I obey him. This is the perfect road.”

St. John of the Cross: “God wants souls to be guided by others.”

**TEACHING #29 – THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD FRIENDS**

In living the Flame of Love, you will often feel lonely and isolated. So, besides taking a guide for your journey, you also must have some good friends.

All of the Jewish prophets (including Jesus) faced tremendous opposition. How did they accomplish their mission? All used the same means. They surrounded themselves with their friends, (their disciples), who also recorded their sayings into the sacred books. The prophet and his disciples were dedicated to the same goals and shared the same feelings. Their hearts were joined.

Pay attention to Jesus. Before he began to preach, he gathered Peter, James, John and Andrew (MK 1:16-22). He never went alone. They were always with him. They often did not understand and made many mistakes. That didn’t matter. They were loyal friends. After preaching all day, he just enjoyed being with them. We often underestimate the great support that Jesus found in their company.

Your Flame of Love community offers you this special blessing. You will have friends to walk with you on your journey.

St. Theresa of Avila – “Those beginning to pray must cultivate holy friendship. We can help each other.”

“Someone who is sick from divine love gains a great gift when he finds another with the same disease.”

“In my trials, God always sent a friend to help me.”
Seminarians and religious houses have a rule of life that structures the day. The bell is God’s voice. The purpose of this schedule is clear. Time is precious and must be used well. More important, spiritual exercises (like prayer and devout reading) tend to be pushed aside for activity. The only way to use time well and to guarantee daily spiritual activity is to have a Rule of Life.

**Purposes**

Having a Rule of Life accomplishes many goals:

1. You curb your natural inclinations which waste gigantic amounts of time.
2. Surprisingly, you get quite a bit done.
3. You have clear goals for each day.
4. You are prepared to respond to unforeseen events because your day is in order.
5. You form habits that insure your perseverance in Flame of Love.
6. You make prayer a central part of your day.

**How to Write Your Rule of Life**

1. List your secular duties and responsibilities.
2. Write down the times of your Flame of Love devotions.
3. In the beginning, just list basic times for each activity (when you hope to accomplish it).
4. Get the advice of a spiritual guide or a friend on your journey. God blesses a project when “two agree.”

St. Catherine of Sienna: “By a Rule of Life the soul flees all the world’s traps, overcomes the devil and conquers the flesh.”

St. Francis de Sales: “We need a Rule of Life because man is pulled in many directions.

St. Margaret Mary: “I was wasting precious time.”
Having good friends can lead to the next step, forming a community, which is an excellent Catholic tradition. First, let’s look at the saints.

In 305, St. Anthony gathered his first disciples into a loose structure which was the first Christian monastery. He traveled widely, always attracting disciples and always organizing them into stable devout relationships.

St. Basil (in 358) did the same for his disciples and St. Benedict (in 530) began organizing the first monastery in the West at Monte Cassino, Italy. Each group was formed differently, according to the culture.

Later, St. Francis of Assisi (1209) and St. Dominic (1214) began to form their communities. St. Ignatius (1534) gathered his disciples into the Jesuits. Vincent de Paul (1633) conceived a different type of structure for religious women, which led to the modern congregations.

All the saints, although acting uniquely, knew that forming the disciples into a community was absolutely essential. The Church is like the human body. It is universal but its lifeblood flows in the cells of smaller groupings.

St. Therese of Avila

1. A soul which is not strong needs spiritual conversations.
2. Because of good friends, I am not in hell.

TEACHING #32 – THE VALUE OF COMMUNITIES

Studying these saints reveals one lesson. As people received the saint’s fire, they needed to stay together. The exact form of “staying together” varies, but the elements are fixed.

A Flame of Love community is:

1. a small group of people
2. with a great desire for devotion
3. willing to come together regularly
4. to help each other be devout
5. with a simple structure that helps the flame to stay alive and
6. to attract others

Once people start “putting their lives together”, then God can use them as his instrument (small or large).

**Serving the World**

When people receive the Flame of Love, they can easily lose it. If they see the need to gather with others, the flame will burn brightly. As a community, they will serve the world as a “corporate force”. A Flame of Love community is a leaving of the world to preserve the flame with the goal of returning to the world to spread the flame.

Our Lady will “form these communities”, like “monasteries without walls”. People will gather with no disruption of their daily duties.

St. Theresa of Avila

1. When a person seeks help from another, he gains much.
2. The greatest love is to desire that your friend gain heaven with you.

**TEACHING #33 – DESCRIBING A FLAME OF LOVE COMMUNITY**

The Church structure is based upon parish life. Supplementing the parish are the many movements (like Flame of Love) where people find help for their Catholic life. The following are some practical thoughts.

1. These communities form because people need support in their devout life.
2. The goal always focuses on devotion and helping each person to fulfill God’s purpose.
3. The communities can be of any size.
4. They can last for any length of time – a few months or many years.
5. The communities need people with leadership gifts (sometimes the very quiet person enjoys a great gift and is looked to for help).
6. There are three basic steps. Devote yourself faithfully to the Flame of Love. Start on your road to Mary’s love. Find others who will walk with you.

St. Theresa of Avila

1. The soul needs spiritual companionship until he is strong enough to stand on his own.
2. The Lord told me, “I want you to converse with angels, not men.” After that, I sought friendship only with those who loved God.
3. Conversations with good people did me a lot of good.
TEACHING #34 – STAYING CLOSE TO HOLY PERSONS

When Jesus lived, he called many to be his disciples. Peter accepted the call and left his nets. The rich man did not accept because of his many possessions. The young man “went away sad”. What a missed opportunity.

God has his special friends and he gives them many blessings, which are meant to flow out to others.

As you participate regularly in Flame of Love groups, you will meet many devout people and some will be good friends. However, a few might be that “holy person” whom God has sent to help you.

We all need companions on this journey, and if they are holy we will probably move along much further and much easier.

None of us has Peter’s chance to share a friendship with Jesus, but all of us have an opportunity to get close to a holy person. Don’t miss your opportunity.

The saints say:

St. Theresa of Avila:

1. Getting to know God’s friends is a good way of finding God. I know this by experience.

2. The soul walks in the right direction when they associate with God’s special friends.

TEACHING #35 – THE FOUR LAST THINGS

When parishes had the “old time mission”, people were sure to hear some good jokes and some powerful preaching on the four last things – death, judgment, heaven and hell. (Even Saint John Paul II lamented that preachers no longer used these four themes).

After the homily on death or judgment, people would line up to go to confession. (This sacrament is an earthly judgment that always ends with forgiveness and “Go in peace”).

Floating around America are the strangest teachings about life after death. Just go to the religion section of a secular book store and glance at the strange titles. In books about the after-life, you will never find judgment and hell in the table of contents.

This modern teaching deludes people. Life is not a battlefield where we must fight for our eternal salvation. It is a playground where we enjoy every possible delight and then wait to be “embraced by the light.”

All of these new books clash with the teachings of Jesus Christ concerning the four last things. In Flame of Love, Our Lady talks so much about the salvation of souls. These four last things are our foundational beliefs. The saints used these four truths as their great motivation to holiness.
The Saints say:

St. Catherine of Genoa says:

1. After death, the will is not free. At death, every soul is confirmed in its choice of good or evil.
2. God rescued me from death so I had time to see my errors and escape eternal damnation.

St. Francis de Sales

1. At death, our soul does not leave our body little by little. It leaves instantly.

TEACHING #36 – YOUR DEATH

Once, a priest was so close to death that his religious order printed up his funeral card. After he recovered, as he begins his homily on death, he shows his card to everyone. We all have our death cards printed, it is just that no date is attached.

A famous religion writer deliberately attended a support group for terminally ill cancer patients. He was struck by their love and their thoughtfulness. After a member died, all would commemorate their good qualities. However, after six months, he realized the great limitations of this group. No words were ever spoken about life after death or how to prepare for that time.

This group is like our modern world. Life after death is like the elephant in the room. Nobody talks about it. For the modern world, all reality ends at the deathbed.

For the saints, true reality would begin at their death. Death was their goal; what they lived for everyday. Secular man lives in denial. He prefers to drive around the block to avoid passing a cemetery. The saints meditated daily on that moment when the battle would be over and the victory gained.

The Saints Say:

St. Faustina:

1. Some people deceive themselves, saying “There is no eternity.”

St. Louis de Montfort:

2. Death will cast the die, once and for all – heaven or hell.

St. John of the Cross:

3. Death holds no bitterness for the soul that loves.
After death, you will see Jesus. He will pour his light into your heart and you will see yourself as you really are. You will have to admit, “That is me”. In that light you will either walk to hell or march toward heaven. St. Paul writes, “It is appointed that human beings die once and after death there is judgment.” (Heb 9:27)

Many holy people had visions of this Judgment. Therese Neumann would see each person from her little village come before Jesus after their death. Heaven’s door would open. Jesus would walk to the person. Then turn and walk back into heaven. Some would follow immediately. Others would delay, but the door would stay open. Finally, they would enter. Because her village was devoutly Catholic, every soul would eventually join Jesus behind heaven’s door.

St. Theresa of Avila describes various visions of personal judgments. She saw one person taken to heaven immediately and felt that the funeral mass prayers were superfluous. Another time, at a cemetery, she saw the demons dragging a soul off to hell.

At death, your soul will leave your body and you will come immediately before Jesus. This personal judgment is a frightful moment but it is not unfair.

It just seals all the choices of your earthly life. Mary’s Flame of Love wants to assure that those decisions lead to eternal life.

The Saints Say:

St. Theresa of Avila:

1. All things end. Only heaven and hell remain.

St. Francis de Sales:

2. The book of life will be open for everyone.

St. Louis de Montfort

3. Not a single soul who has persevered in serving Mary has ever been lost.

TEACHING #38 – HELL

Our Lady showed hell to the three children of Fatima. Sister Lucy gave her account of this July 13, 1917 vision.

“The rays of light coming from her hands penetrated the earth and we saw, as it were, an ocean of fire. Plunged in the fire were demons and souls in human form. At times, the flames raised them in the air and at other times, they fell back, like sparks in a huge fire. There were groans of pain and of despair which made us tremble with fear.”
The demons could be distinguished by their likeness to frightful animals, all black and transparent. The vision lasted only a moment. Our Lady had promised that we would live in heaven. Without this promise, we would have died of fright."

Why would Our Lady show hell to three innocent children? They had two tasks, to intercede so souls would not go there and to enlighten us about the reality of hell. Hell is an important truth that the world refuses to accept but we must face the reality so we avoid that place.

The Saints Say:

St. Theresa of Avila:

1. One day, in prayer, I found myself plunged into hell. The Lord wanted me to see this place.
2. I never forgot the vision of the place prepared for me in hell.
3. We owe everything to the Lord for saving us from that place.

St. Francis de Sales

4. Consider how insufferable are those pains that will last forever.
5.

TEACHING #39 – ST. THERESA AND ST. FAUSTINA’S VISION OF HELL

Two important saints had visions of hell which they recorded for our benefit.

St. Theresa of Avila:

Although extremely brief, the vision never leaves my memory. The entrance was like a furnace, a long, narrow passage. The ground was filled with evil smelling mud filled with wicked-looking reptiles. There was a wall with a cupboard where I was confined. My feelings cannot be exaggerated. I cannot describe the fire in my soul. These sufferings in hell were intolerable. They are also endless and will never cease.

I felt oppression, suffocation and affliction accompanied by total helplessness. The soul tears itself to pieces. I felt like I was being burned and dismembered. This happened six years ago but I am still terrified.

St. Faustina:

Today, I was led by an angel to the chasms of hell, a place of great torture. The first suffering is the loss of God. The second is a perpetual torture, remorse of conscience. The third is the realization that this condition will never change. The fourth is that the penetrating fire will never kill the soul. The fifth is continual darkness, yet the damned see one another. The sixth is the constant company of Satan. The seventh is despair and hatred for God. All the souls suffer these afflictions. Besides that, there are particular sufferings according to the person’s sins.

I am writing this at the command of God so that no soul may find an excuse to say that there is no hell or that nobody has even been there.
Eileen George, a mystic, has experienced both heaven and hell. After she talks on these subjects, her listeners buy out all her tapes on heaven. The ones on hell don’t sell at all. People just don’t want to think about this reality but sometimes we need this truth to keep us on the road to heaven.

St. Theresa of Avila:

1. Some people cannot spend a single night in a bad hotel. How will they spend all eternity in the devil’s inn?

St. Catherine of Sienna:

2. Having died in mortal sin, these souls are bound together forever in hatred. Being obstinate, their pain will always increase.

TEACHING #40 – HEAVEN

On the road to Damascus, St. Paul encountered Jesus. “Who are you, Sir”, he asked. “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.” came the reply (Acts 9:5). Later, Paul had an even greater experience. “I know someone in Christ who was caught up to the third heaven. This person (whether in the body or out of the body, I do not know) was caught up to Paradise and heard ineffable things, which no one may utter.” (2 Cor 12:1-4)

Trying to describe heaven, Paul could only write, “What eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor what has never entered the mind to conceive.” He states clearly, “This is what God has prepared for those who love him.” (1 Cor 2:9)

So taken up with heaven, Paul wrote, “For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Rom 8:38-39)

St. Theresa of Avila writes, “My brother and I read the saints’ lives. When I read of woman martyrs, I felt that they purchased heaven quite cheaply. We were astonished that heaven never ended. We would constantly repeat “forever and ever and ever.”

An Experience of Heaven

Jeanine Nichol was a French nurse who fought in the underground and was imprisoned for six months in a German concentration camp until freed by the Allies. She married an American soldier and came to the United States.

However, for 30 years she could not sleep at night due to the horrible memories. At Easter mass, as the priest lifted the host up, Jeanine’s soul went to heaven. (Not knowing what happened, her family rushed her to the emergency room).

She recounted her experiences for many audiences (Jesus told her to preach). She would say to everyone, “It was years ago that I saw Jesus in heaven but it seemed like it happened only a moment ago.”

The Saints Say:
St. Theresa of Avila:

1. I love to hear the clock strike. With every passing hour, I am closer to heaven.

2. On the day he died, St. Peter of Alcantara appeared to me and said he was on his way to heaven.

3. I was at a Mass when a Jesuit brother died. The next day, I saw him ascend into heaven.

St. Catherine of Genoa:

1. When God finds the soul as pure as when he created her, he transforms her into himself. The soul forgets all else and sees only God.

2. God draws the soul to himself, inflames her with love and brings her into the pure state in which he created her.

TEACHING #41 – HEAVEN AND HELL

Thinking of hell stirs up fear. Thinking of heaven stirs up hope. Always fearing is not good. Always hoping is quite excellent. We need thoughts of hell only from time to time. We should enjoy thoughts of heaven all the time.

Thinking of hell is good on two occasions. It is needed at the beginning of a walk with God, so we purge by a good confession all the sins of the past. St. Ignatius, in his Spiritual Exercises, has the beginner spend the first seven days in hell. By the end of the week, no one would ever want to go there. Fear of hell also helps in the moments of serious temptations. Even saints thought about hell to get through their serious crises. But don’t forget. Too much thinking of hell can wear you down. The road is a long one and you need endurance.

Thinking of heaven and hell has another excellent result. It gives us a zeal for souls. Seeing the forever of both heaven and hell, the person becomes quite zealous for Mary’s Flame of Love.

After seeing heaven, Jakov, a Medjugorge visionary, says that it is difficult to live on earth. Jeanine Nichol, who experienced heaven in 1974 said, “Once you see Jesus, you can never forget the experience, as if it happened just a moment ago.”

The Saints say:

St. Theresa of Avila:

1. Life is short and heaven is forever.

2. In a vision, I saw an ill Carmelite priest who ascended into heaven without passing through purgatory.
TEACHING #42 – PURGATORY

Purgatory is not one of the Four Last Things, but it shares in the blessings of heaven.

In coming before God, a good person rejoices because they are found worthy of heaven. Yet, to enter heaven immediately would be painful. Without being perfectly holy, they would experience great pain by being in God’s all-holy presence.

In his mercy, God provides the solution. Seeing their own dilemma (worthy of heaven but not yet ready to experience it), the soul joyfully goes off to Purgatory where they have total peace because they can never again offend God.

They suffer much because they love God but do not yet possess him. In fact, their final moments are the most painful because they come so close to God. The saints call them “the friendly souls”. Pray for them. They will always help you. (They have nothing else to do). Devotion to the holy souls is a sure sign of your own salvation. (St. Catherine of Genoa has written the best book on these “friendly souls”).

St. Catherine of Genoa:

1. Except for the peace enjoyed by the saints in heaven, nothing can compare with the peace enjoyed by these souls.

2. When they leave this earth, they see why they were sent to Purgatory, but they do not retain this memory.

3. In Purgatory, the soul is returning to the purity and the simplicity in which God created her.

4. The soul is so satisfied with God’s will, that it never calls pain, “pain”

TEACHING #43 – DECIDING TO BE PERFECT

Jesus says “Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Mt 5:48) All the saints agree on one thing. A person cannot be perfect without making a decision to become perfect. Many saints have recorded the moment of their decision.

1. St. Charles Foucauld was a sinful Frenchman in the African foreign legion. On returning to France, he went to Church with his devout cousin. After going to confession, he thought, “If God loved me so much to forgive all those sins, I must love him totally in return.” The saints are not like us. Having received fully, they love fully in return.

2. Believe it or not, St. Francis of Assisi was involved in war. He spent a year in prison and was returning to war again when he had a vision of Jesus and a second vision at Assisi. After his initial decision, Jesus was able to show him each of the steps to his perfection, including the five wounds in his final three years of life.
3. St. Augustine kept refusing to be baptized, even though he liked to listen to the preaching of St. Ambrose. He kept putting the decision off, saying “tomorrow and tomorrow”. One day, he heard a child’s voice, “Take and read. Take and read.” He picked up the bible “It is the hour now for you to wake from sleep, for our salvation is nearer, the night is advanced and the day is at hand. Let us throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.” (Rom 13:11-12) He stopped saying “tomorrow” and made his decision that day.

4. Fortunately, one day, Matt Talbot ran out of money. His friends (whom he helped so much) refused to buy him a drink. He got thrown out of the local pub in Ireland. That was his moment of decision to stop drinking. He went to the priest, took the sobriety pledge and attended mass every day.

The Saints’ stories are all different but they all led to a decision to begin following Christ and be perfect as the heavenly Father.

St. Theresa of Avila:

1. On this road to perfection, you are trodding a safe path, walked by all the saints.

2. If this road is full of dangers, what dangers to salvation exist for those who are not walking this road?

3. Pursue the road of perfection. Choose to die rather than not to reach your goal.

St. Catherine of Genoa;

4. At death, every soul is confirmed forever in either good or evil. After death, the will is not free.

TEACHING #44 – TIME MARCHES ON

In the 1940’s the newsreel at the movies always showed army troops marching along. A booming voice would cry out “Time marches on”. Nothing is more true. The sun rises and sets. Day follows day and years follow years. No one can stop time. You cannot say to the sun “Be still. Do not move on.” You cannot halt your life for even one moment. It is an ever-flowing stream. We are all helpless. Time passes us by. So we must act now.

Although life swirls around you, God’s voice speaks within. By involvement in the Flame of Love, you have new desires for God. A strange, mysterious hand tugs at your heart. Inside, a voice shouts “Do not put off this invitation because time moves quickly”. The desire comes for just a moment like a gift floating on a river. Grasp it or else it will soon be beyond you.

If you desire life with Jesus, the life of the Flame of Love, then say this prayer:

“O Jesus, you are speaking to me. Your voice invites me to come and to have a new life with you. Right now, at this moment, I say “yes”. I will follow you, Jesus, all the days of my life.”

If you liked the prayer - write it down and say it every day. Book Two will explain this road of perfection and its three stages.
The Saints say:

St. Theresa of Avila:

1. This road contains precious treasures, so the cost is high.
2. We are on a road to a country owned by Someone who loves us.
3. Set out on this road. Just taking one step will do you a lot of good.

St. Catherine of Genoa:

1. God creates every soul pure and free of sin, giving each soul an instinct to see God.
2. A purified spirit finds rest only in God who created her.
3. Paradise has no gates and whoever wishes can enter. God’s arms are always extended.
DEVOUT LIFE TEACHINGS
PART 2 – THE PURGATIVE STAGE

2.1 THREE STAGES OF PERFECTION

Flying to perfection requires two wings, prayer and goodness. The saints teach that mental prayer and virtues should grow together. The saints chart out three stages of this road to perfection which they call purgative (being cleansed), illuminative (being enlightened), and unitive (being united to God). Each stage has a different level of mental prayer and virtue. With meditation (purgative), grows into affective prayer (illuminative), and culminates in the acquired contemplation (unitive).

In the purgative stage, the person begins with meditation. In the illuminative stage, the person uses affective prayer. Goodness also progresses from keeping the commandments (purgative), to practicing virtues (illuminative) to enjoying the Holy Spirit’s gifts. In the unitive stage, they pray the prayer of simplicity.

These devout life talks will describe these three stages.

1. Purgative stage – You meditate with your intellect and keep the commandments.
2. Illuminative stage – You pray very freely with your feelings and will, and practice virtues.
3. Unitive stage – You enjoy God’s presence and allow the Holy Spirit to guide your actions.

Please don’t let this outline confuse or discourage you. Your early difficulties will become victories. “I found the first step on the road to perfection to be the hardest.” (Little Flower). As you walk, you will do less and God will do more. What could be better! So let’s begin this journey to heaven.

Saints Say:
1. I gave up prayer for a year. I was plunging into hell. No need for the devil to send me there. (St. Teresa of Avila)
2. Do not build your foundation on prayer alone. You must have virtues or else you will be a spiritual dwarf. (St. Teresa of Avila)
3. Virtues acquired in youth have the freshness of a spring morning. (St. John of the Cross)
4. The labor is the hardest at the beginner’s stage. (St. Teresa of Avila)

Questions:
1. What did you learn from Section One of these devout life talks?
2. Do you understand the basic points of the outline of the road to perfection?

2.2 – LEARNING TO MEDITATE
Seminarians always learned the need to meditate, a teaching that is now being taught to lay people. Religious training gave priority to the morning meditation, preparing for it by “the grand silence”, (which began at night prayers and continued until after morning mass).

Seminarians learned that God wanted them to enter the world of mental prayer.
1. The first step into mental prayer is formal prayer (time given totally to prayer).
2. Besides prayer in chapel, the person had to speak with God throughout the day (informal prayer).
3. This demanded recollection, (focusing on God’s presence and not allowing the mind to wander on to worldly concerns.)

These are the three basic parts of practicing mental prayer – formal prayer, informal prayer and recollection.

St. Ignatius Method
St. Ignatius of Loyola gave the Church the basic method of mental prayer. He adapted the great methods used by the monks for his active priests and brothers.

The monk could devote his whole day to God. He read the scriptures, meditated on these readings while working in the fields, and came to chapel ready to pray. Ignatius formed these three acts – scripture reading, meditating and praying from the heart – into a method that we will teach here.

His method requires the following acts:
1. Imagining a scene from the gospel.
2. Pondering the teaching.
3. Allowing the feelings and intellect to be touched.
4. Speaking to God in your own words.

Mental Prayer
Mental prayer differs from vocal prayer because you must use all your inner powers – imagination, intellect, feelings and will. St. Ignatius calls mental prayer, “Spiritual Exercises”, meaning you do a lot of work (which is deeply rewarding).

A Conversion Experience
Practicing mental prayer leads to a conversion experience, which is life-changing. This experience is God’s reward for prayer fidelity. It is a gift from heaven, an outpouring in which God embraces the person in religious experiences. All of this lies ahead for you.

Saint Teresa of Avila says:
1. Mental prayer is a friendly conversation and God always rewards his friends.
2. Beginners must withdraw from their sense experiences so they can enjoy God’s presence.
3. If you have not begun to pray mentally, do not miss such a blessing.
4. Be resolute in your desire to pray mentally. If so, you have travelled a long part of the road.

Questions
1. How do you pray? Do you use mental prayer?
2. What are your desires? Do you want to be a person of prayer?

2.3 NEEDING A MEDITATION BOOK

Using all the faculties in mental prayer is new for most. So, beginners usually need a meditation book to get started. Remember, the book is to get you started. (These Devout Life Meditations are available on our website (www.flameoflove.us).

Being Awakened to Christ’s Kingdom

The child gradually awakens to his new world. By meditation, we are awakened to God’s world. A meditation book is a can opener that gives you access to God’s mysteries. When you open the can, you put the opener away.

Let us use another image. By a history book, we enter into the past (when we were not alive). By a geography book, we get to know places that we have never visited. A meditation book does so much more. It brings us into the Kingdom of God. We come to know Jesus, who lives “yesterday, today and the same forever.”

Put Aside the Book
(As you begin to pray, put the book down.)

The book tells your imagination what to picture, your intellect what to think about and your will how to speak to God. You must begin by reading. However, you should quickly put the meditation book away when you start praying.

Be faithful to daily meditating and you will enjoy a great closeness to Jesus Christ which you cannot find anywhere else, because you are entering into Christ’s Kingdom and into spiritual realities.

St. Theresa says:
1. Except after Communion, I read a book to pray to fight off distractions.
2. From the very beginning, you must be resolute to continue in mental prayer.
3. Those who cannot meditate are in great danger. Spiritual reading will help them get started.
4. Beginning prayer is hard because the senses grow tired.

Discussion Points:
1. Do you feel awakened to God? If so, how did this happen?
2. Have you ever practiced meditation? Used a meditation book? Are you committed to making a daily meditation?
2.4 EXPLAINING THE FLAME OF LOVE MEDITATIONS

Beginners desperately need a meditation book but none are readily available. Old books are out of date and new ones have not been published due to lack of demand. So, Flame of Love has produced excellent meditations on the gospel for each day of the liturgical year. These are available on our website.

This talk shows you how to use the meditations of Jesus and the Rich Young Man.

Set aside ten to fifteen minutes. Go to a place where you will not be disturbed. In this quiet place, focus your imagination on the gospel scene of Jesus and the young man. This will settle your mind. If your mind wanders, reset your imagination by recalling the scene.

Read the gospel text slowly. If you find some words that touch you, then stop and ponder.

Read the five thoughts. If a thought moves you to prayer, then begin immediately. (Do not forget. The purpose is to speak with God, not to read a meditation book.)

Read the five affections and make these little prayers your own. Don’t try to use them all, just the one or two that warm your heart.

Always have some resolution (so your meditation affects your whole day).

Take the final thought with you and think of it during the day.

You will be surprised how quickly you can learn to be absorbed in meditation for five or ten minutes. You are a beginner, learning how to swim. God’s eternal ocean awaits you.

The Flame of Love meditations are also excellent for group use and can be part of the Holy Hour, (as one person reads the points aloud over a period of ten to fifteen minutes).

The saints say:
1. Having a good book is a great help to meditation. (STA)
2. At the start of my spiritual life, when I was thirteen or fourteen, I wondered what more I could learn about spiritual perfection. (STL)
3. Meditation aims at seeking God. Once the soul has found him, she should put aside the book. (STA)
4. By using the imagination, the soul practices meditation. These meditative images are necessary to beginner. (SJC)

Group Discussion:
1. Do you understand the meditation process? Review the six steps. Which part is not clear?
2. Does your group discussion end with a meditation? What are the effects?

2.5 MEDITATION: THE RICH YOUNG MAN (Mk 10:17)

Prayer – Come, Holy Spirit. Let me sacrifice everything to follow Jesus.

Imagination: (Picture the young man asking Jesus about eternal life.)

Context:
The gospel begins “As Jesus set out”. This sets the scene. Jesus is on a journey and the young man will be invited to come along. The man’s “kneeling down” shows great piety. His question is excellent. He wants eternal life. Jesus loves him and invites him “to follow”. Worldly possessions are his obstacle. Holding on to so many possessions, he could not travel with Jesus.

Gospel Text: *(Read slowly, possibly aloud)*
A certain man ran up, knelt before Jesus and asked him, “Good Master, what shall I do to gain everlasting life?” Jesus answered, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments, ‘Do not commit adultery. Do not kill. Do not steal. Do not bear false witness. Do not defraud. Honor your father and your mother.’” He answered, “Master, I have observed all these things since my youth.”
Jesus, looking on him, loved him and said, “One thing is lacking to you. Go, sell whatever you have and give to the poor and you shall have treasure in heaven. Then, come follow me.”
Upon hearing this, the man grew sad and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

Thoughts: *(Read all. Ponder the ones that attract you.)*
1. The story begins with great hope. The man asks a fervent question, recounts a history of good moral behavior and seeks eternal life.
2. Knowing the man’s heart, Jesus looks upon him with love.
3. Jesus goes further and offers his greatest gift. He invites the man to follow.
4. Jesus even motivates the man. There will be treasure for him in heaven.
5. Instead of following Jesus, he turns back. His possessions are walls he cannot escape from.
6. We will all meet him at the Last Judgment and discover the end of his story.

Affections: *(When one touches your heart, use your own words.)*
1. Jesus, I also ask you, “What more must I do to gain eternal life?”
2. You invite me to follow you. You stir within and lead me further.
3. Jesus, you do not want me to fail. You want me close to yourself.
4. Jesus, what are my possessions compared to the treasures in heaven? Are they not a small price to purchase the Kingdom?
5. Turning away from you is emptiness. Following you is fullness. I will leave everything to follow you.
6. I am coming, Jesus. I will follow you.

Resolutions: *(Possibly you might want to make your own)*
Today, I will ask Jesus, ‘Lord, what must I do to gain eternal life?’
I will help the poor.

Thought for the Day: *(To recall your meditation)*
Sell all and give to the poor. Your treasure in heaven will be great.

The saints say:
1. If we have resolved to give God our time in prayer, then give it freely and never take it back. (STA)
2. Mental prayer is thinking of God’s greatness and our lowliness. (STA)
3. If you never speak with someone they become a stranger. When communication ceases, friendship loses its power. (STA)
4. God is jealous of our hearts and wants us to love Him alone. (S.Faus)

Group Discussion:
1. Which of the meditation points helped you? What was happening? Did the time seem too short?
2. Is the group meditation effective? Could you sense Christ’s presence in your midst? Can you do this on your own?

2.6 Using Your Imagination, Intellect and Will

On a Christmas Eve, George Washington crossed a river and held a surprise attack on the British soldiers in Trenton. That is a true, historical event, which happened in the past.

The gospel events are also historical and happened 2000 years ago. However, these events are living. They are divine mysteries which contain the same power for us that they held for the apostles. (The most important stories are used for the rosary). Faith uses the imagination, intellect and will. By faith, the person enters into these mysteries.

The Imagination
Jesus and His Kingdom are everywhere. The imagination, inspired by faith, quickly transports you into that spiritual world. Just picturing the scene of Jesus speaking with the rich young man. Imagining a gospel scene causes a prayerfulness. Just imagining the event allows God to act.

Feelings
These often accompany the imagination. You could experience peace, hope and great desires. Feelings are important in mental prayer. When some feeling comes, be sure to pause and experience it.

Intellect
Your mind examines the story’s content. As the young man approaches Jesus, your intellect encourages you to imitate him. As the young man walks away, your intellect urges you to seize your opportunity. You do not want to miss lose out.

The Will
These preliminary acts stir up good desires. Us them to speak to Jesus. Tell him your desires. As you imagine the Rich Young Man walking away, you cry out to Jesus, “Wait for me. I am coming with you.” This is deep, personal, mental prayer.

The Words “Occupy” and “Profitable”
The saints call good mental prayer “being occupied”, (the opposite of “distracted”). Your whole being is with Jesus. “Profitable” means that you are getting something from your prayer. When your faculties are “occupied”, the prayer is “profitable”.

The Importance
St. Teresa of Avila stresses the tremendous value of mental prayer. “Even if progress is slow, by mental prayer we learn to know the road to heaven. I have seen it clearly in my own case. I really pity those who give up mental prayer. They serve God at their own expense, because God pays all the expenses for those who practice mental prayer. Only by mental prayer does He give them consolations to bear all their crosses and grants sublime graces, (as He has given to me). If we close this door, He finds no way to open it.” (Autobiography C.8).

The saints say:
1. These meditative images are necessary for beginners. (SJC)
2. Meditation empties the senses of worldly and natural images. (SJC)
3. The soul practices meditation by imagining Christ crucified or the Risen Christ in glory. (SJC)
4. While picturing Christ, I would unexpectedly experience his presence. (STA)
5. In my beginning prayer, I thought of Christ in the garden. Since he was in great need, I felt I could approach him. (STA).

Group Discussion:

1. How is the story of George Washington different from the gospel mysteries? How is Jesus still present in these stories? By meditation on the gospel mysteries, are you really in contact with the Risen Jesus?

2. Why is the intellect touched first, before the will? Will this always happen? Will the prayer change? Why are the acts of the will more important that the acts of the intellect?

2.7 A Biblical Example of Meditating

Prepare for this talk by reading 2 Samuel, Chapter 7.

When King David had gained rest from all his enemies, he told Nathan, his prophet, that he wanted to build a house for God. Nathan thought this was a good idea. However that night God spoke to Nathan because God had a better idea. He would build a house for David. He promised that one of his descendants (Jesus) would rule forever.

The next morning, when Nathan spoke of God’s goodness, David was overwhelmed.

Sit Before the Lord (V18-29)

After Nathan left, David doesn’t just rush back to his kingly duties. Instead, he goes to chapel. “Then King David went in and sat before the Lord”. That is how meditation begins. We “sit before the Lord”. David then used his intellect. He ponders God’s particular blessings. “Who am I, Lord God and who are the members of my house that you have brought me to this point?” (V 18)
David experienced great emotions. “Great are you, Lord God! There is none like you.” (V 29) Finally, he used his will to pray in great faith, “Go ahead and bless the house of your servant, David.” After all, “You have promised this” and “My house will be blessed forever.”

Conclusion
David made this perfect meditation by “sitting before the Lord”, thinking about God’s promises, experiencing religious feelings and expressing his thoughts in his own words. That is meditation. David’s memory, intellect, feelings and will were all involved. Imitate him. “Sit before the Lord” and use all your faculties in mental prayer.

The saints say:
1. Since I began to pray, God has given me one grace. I have confessed all my sins, even venial ones. (STA)
2. The person meditates to move their affections. (SFdeS)
3. If you resolve to give God a period of time each day, give it freely and never take it back. (STA)
4. Form a picture of Jesus and Mary in each mystery of the Rosary. (SLdeM)

Group Discussion
1. Read 2 Sam.C7 Note the clear outline of meditation.
2. Do you see the value of “sitting before the Lord?” Are you learning how to allow God’s blessings to become more real to you?

2.8 NEEDED HINTS FOR PROGRESS IN PRAYER

The following are the hints that will help you in meditation:
1. Use the Flame of Love meditations (absolutely necessary for every beginner).
2. In meditating, be like a child. Use your imagination to enter into the story. If you enjoy just imagining Jesus talking or acting, do not try to do anything else.
3. Activate your feelings. They will encourage the imagination and intellect.
4. Use your intellect to gain spiritual thoughts. Add your own thoughts.
5. Use your will to speak to God. This is the goal, a conversation with God.
6. When you begin speaking with God, put aside the meditation book. (It becomes an obstacle).
7. Your speaking to God will release religious feelings. These are both delightful and profitable.
8. Let the feelings be like a fire, full of light and warmth. Just let them flow, especially in the beginning.
9. At times, be silent and experience God’s powerful presence. (This is very profitable.)
10. During the day, recall the thoughts and feelings of your prayer time.

Please see the picture! The Devout Life asks much, but the rewards are abundant. Learn some more hints from the following talks.

The saints say:
1. You, who have not begun to pray mentally, do not miss such a great blessing. (STA)
2. I made another mistake. I decided to postpone prayer until I had amended my life. (STA)
3. Prayer time should have diverse acts. Don’t always eat the same food. (STA)
4. If you never speak with someone, they become a stranger. (STA)

Group Discussion:
1. Do you understand these hints? What aspects of meditation do you like? What parts do you not understand?
2. Have you experienced many religious feelings? Have you enjoyed silent mental prayer? Does mental prayer affect your day?

2.9 MORE HINTS TO PROGRESS IN PRAYER

The previous talk focused on your time of prayer. The following hints refer to the rest of your day.

1. Your devout life begins when you meditate every day. (No other door exists).
2. The purpose of meditation is to make you aware that God invites you to speak with Him at every moment.
3. You must also pray during the day. Try to keep your thoughts on God and not let your mind wander.
4. Besides meditating, you must try to change your lifestyle. (Much is explained in later talks).
5. You must be purified of three things – mortal sin, deliberate venial sin and attachments which pull you in the wrong direction. (But all of this takes time. Don’t grow downhearted).
6. Prayer and detachment are close friends. Prayer brings you to God. Detachment removes obstacles that take you away from God.
7. Do spiritual reading every day. This will nourish your mental prayer.
8. Most important, you must never grow discouraged (even by all these hints).

A Totally New Life
Your inner world is filled with hopes, desires, judgments, outlooks, decisions, etc. However, without faith, you have only earthly goals. The devout life opens you to the limitless possibilities of heavenly life with God. Earth is a prison and we are confined by its walls. The natural man is a man of earth, able only to hope and desire earthly realities. The man of devotion has been released from the limits of this natural thinking. He enjoys “The glorious freedom of the children of God” (Rom 8:21).
By devotion, you enter into God’s world and realize what you were missing out on for so long.

The saints say:
1. Anyone who begins the practice of mental prayer should never abandon it. (STA)
2. Without prayer, I was like a person who had fallen into a river, with dangers on every side. (STA)
3. God is never silent. Just ask him to speak. (STA)
5. Keep at the good Master’s side. He will make you a good disciple. (STA)

**Group Discussion:**

1. Look at the eight points. Discuss those that seem important to you. Which ones are difficult?
2. Do you pray during the day? Are you tuning out the world? Are you experiencing heavenly realities?

### 2.10 AFFECTIVE PRAYER AND THE PRAYER OF SIMPLICITY

By using all your faculties in mental prayer, you make progress, going from one level to another. From the very beginning, you should know these levels.

**Level One** (Meditation). By just following the outline for each day, the beginner gains a prayerful spirit. Their mind grows accustomed to entering Jesus’ spiritual world.

**Level Two** (Affective Prayer). The person finds himself “speaking to God” more. This speaking causes religious feelings. The person now enjoys affective prayer, which bestows many religious consolations.

**Level Three** (Prayer of Simplicity). As the “speaking to God” and the religious feelings continue each day, the person learns to be still and quiet. Rather than “speaking with God” they enjoy his presence. Their imagination is quite content to just picture gospel scenes.

**Prayer of Simplicity**

By talking more to Jesus, the person experiences Jesus’ presence. The imagination grows active. After a while, the person does not need to talk to Jesus because he silently experiences Jesus’ presence (or even listens to Jesus speak).

**Many Levels**

The teaching is this. Mental prayer has many aspects – reading the gospel, pondering the thoughts, thinking about Jesus, talking to Jesus, imagining Jesus present, being quiet with Jesus, sensing Jesus’ presence, etc.

All of these are quite good. Some are higher forms of prayer than others. While praying for 15 minutes, the person might experience all of them. They will enjoy prayer and feel new attractions to pray often.

**Gaining the Prayer Skills**

Prayer moves from thoughts about God to words spoken to God. It then moves into a wordless prayer. Here, the imagination becomes prominent. The gospel scene (of Jesus’ presence) occupies you. Words become a distraction and the soul experiences the presence of Jesus (the main purpose of prayer).

By meditating faithfully every day, the thoughts quickly move to the affections. The intellect is set aside. The imagination and the sense of Jesus’ presence get stronger. This is excellent prayer. The soul is awakened!
Progress in prayer moves you quickly into the spiritual world. Your will reaches out to God and you know what to say. That is excellent. Your prayer is more affective, much easier and more consoling. For a few moments, God might give you a feeling of his presence. This is the best of all. Even if you are a beginner, God will stir your religious feelings. When He does, set aside your meditation book.

The saints say:
1. Speak to God in various ways – as Father, Brother, Lord, Spouse. (STA)
2. Use words that come from your heart. (STA)
3. We pour out our soul by speaking, expressing our affections with words. (STA)

2.11 THE IMPORTANCE OF SPIRITUAL READING

In the 1950’s Father Eugene Boylan, a Cistercian, wrote two important books. “This Tremendous Lover” and “Difficulties in Mental Prayer”. He wanted the beginner to move ahead quickly in mental prayer. His secret for quick progress was the value of daily spiritual reading. He taught the following:

1. The devout soul can easily progress in the various stages of mental prayer.
2. To accomplish this, the soul must do regular spiritual reading.
3. Progress in prayer requires mental prayer in the morning and spiritual reading in the evening. Both are absolutely necessary.

Meditation is your offense. Spiritual reading is your defense. You might not pray well every single morning, but at least you can read well every evening. After spiritual reading, you will always feel some kind of accomplishment.

The Goals
Keep in mind the goals of spiritual reading:
1. To fill your mind with thoughts of the kingdom
2. To make the spiritual world very real
3. To give you a place of solitude to escape the world’s influence
4. To instruct you.

Gaining a taste for spiritual reading is a gigantic blessing. If you do spiritual reading every day, you will never lose too much spiritual ground (even on your worst days).

Secular Reading
Concerning secular reading, you must shift your patterns. Read fewer novels. Lessen your desires to devour newspapers and magazine. Reading time is scarce. Secular reading (I am not speaking of needed professional study) wastes your time and robs you of your spiritual desires. Ask yourself some questions, “How much time do I spend each day on secular reading and how much on spiritual reading? Do I read the newspaper everyday but not the bible?” Balance the scale.

The saints say:
1. Holy books and my mother’s devotion awakened holy desires in me when I was six years of age. (STA)
2. When a child, I made a habit of reading books about chivalry. This cooled my holy desires. I wasted hours, days and nights. (STA)

3. Digest what you read. Spiritual reading should lead to recollection. (FJdeC)

4. I read only the Imitation of Christ until I discovered the treasures of the four Gospels. (STA)

**Group Discussion:**

1. What spiritual reading have you done? Do you know what books to read? What books would you recommend to others? How does spiritual reading help you?

2. How much secular reading do you do? How can you cut this down? Do you read the Bible every day?

### 2.12 THE BIBLE AND OTHER SPIRITUAL BOOKS

**Reading the Bible**

The Holy Spirit wrote the bible and every author wants you to read his book. Concerning bible reading, use the following advice:


2. Later, you will find an attraction for the letters of St. Paul and the other New Testament books.

3. Eventually, you will want to delve into the Old Testament.


5. At first, use the New American Bible translation.

**Judgment Day**

A famous book was entitled, “You are What You Eat”. It is even more true that “You are What You Read”. Imagine this, God writes a book. He gives you many years here on earth. Then, you come before him and have to admit that you never read his book. This happens to millions. At least on Judgment Day you should be able to say to God, “I read your book”.

**Other spiritual books**

Concerning other books, I suggest the following:

1. Read the lives of the saints (but do not try to imitate all they did).

2. Never think you have to complete a book. If a book is difficult to read or you have no taste for it, put it away (even if it is a classic). You are probably meant to read it another time.

3. Always mention to your spiritual guide what you are reading. Ask him for suggestions.

4. God wants you to find joy in these books. Don’t read a book that discourages you (even if it is a classic).

**The saints say:**

1. My brother and I read the saint’s lives. (STA)

2. When I read of woman martyrs, I felt they purchased the kingdom quite cheaply. (STA)

3. God said to me, “All harm comes because people do not know the truths of scripture”. After that, I resolved to fulfill the smallest detail in the Bible. (STA)

4. Read good books slowly with many pauses. (FJdeC)
Group Discussion:
1. How much of the bible have you read? What books in the bible attract you most? Do you feel that bible reading is above your skills? Can you read the bible with others?
2. What other spiritual books have you read? Which books helped you the most? What type of book attracts you?

2.13 – THE DAILY BREAD OF SPIRITUAL BOOKS

Spiritual books are logs that feed your devout life fire. You should always be “reading some book”, one that attracts you and quickly welcomes you. Don’t devour these books, but let them feed daily.

Books create a mental world and spiritual books quickly bring your mind into Jesus’ Kingdom. Even before gaining religious experiences, the beginner should enjoy spiritual books.

Each Book Has Its Time
Sometimes, a book will fall into your hands and it is “the perfect book”. Read it and enjoy it. God sent it.
Other books might be highly recommended but they don’t really help you. Set it aside.
Some books might confuse you. Don’t read them. Some talk about spiritual exercises that seem foreign to you. That book is just not for you. You are not meant to read every spiritual book that you pick up or is handed to you.
Probably, you will find a certain kind of book (like lives of the saints or books on a certain topic, like Marian devotion) appeals to you. Good. Just flow with the stream.

The saints say:
1. My uncle gave me a book on the Prayer of Recollection. I was delighted and resolved to follow this prayer method. (STA)
2. I would read only the lives of the saints. This would spur me on to do better. (STA)
3. Choose books which inspire confidence in God. (FJdeC)

Group Discussion:
1. Do you have a taste for spiritual reading? What books have blessed you in the past? What are you reading now?
2. Have you ever been confused by some spiritual book? How did that happen? Do you know when to put a book away? Too complicated? Too boring?

2.14 PROGRESS IN PRAYER THROUGH DETACHMENT

The Time of Religious Experiences
When God floods your soul with his experiences, he also asks something from you. You cannot jump from God experiences to worldly experiences and then back again. You must choose which world you want to live in.
Shutting Down the Senses
What happens is this. Mental prayer awakens you to God’s world but your senses continue to experience the material world. To stay sensitive to God’s experiences, you must decrease your sensual experiences. This activity is called detachment, (an absolutely essential part of devotion). As a result, some experiences must be let go. Life will not be exactly the same.

Let’s use an image. Daily mental prayer is new furniture. To move in new furniture, you must get rid of the old. Spiritual images will increase as your attachment to sensual images decreases. Any other approach is doomed to failure. Getting detached from your sensual world will guarantee great progress. In the Diary, Jesus constantly asked Elizabeth to forego legitimate enjoyments. She belonged to Him alone.

Some Examples
One person liked to listen to music stations while in the car. One Good Friday, they realized that playing music seemed out of place. They turned the radio off. The next week, they found themselves turning it off more often. Now, they seldom turn on the car radio and always use this time for prayer. Their spirit is free to talk with God. God has won his battle for their mind and heart. Victory comes by detachment.

The same experience happened to the daily paper. The evening paper went out of business. So, detachment came easy. Later, the person decided to cancel the morning paper.

Mental prayer cannot be God’s island in the middle of the world’s sea. Your island has to push back the sea and reclaim your mental world for God’s presence.

Mental prayer awakens you to God. Sensual experiences put you to sleep again. So look at your sensual experiences (like listening to the radio, watching television, video games, reading newspapers and magazines). God calls you into his presence. These distractions call you away from his presence. This detachment isn’t accomplished overnight or even in a year. It is just something you have to keep your eye one.

The saints say:

1. How can God occupy a soul when it is filled with junk? (STA)
2. By detachment, the soul gains a capacity for spiritual favors. (SJC)
3. Praying without detachment is just beating the bush. (SJC)
4. I renounced everything so I could live as if there were only God and I. (BL)
5. To journey to God, the soul must detach itself from everything. (SJC)
6. Many sacrifices precede the moment when God possesses the soul completely. (FJdeC)

Group Discussion:

1. What old furniture has to go? What parts of your daily schedule could be changed? What daily attachments can be removed? Will this be easy?
2. Do you see your daily mental prayer as an island? Can your island expand? Do you see how sensual experiences put you to sleep again?

2.15 THE EUCHARIST

One time, a person had experienced two years of worrying about their eternal salvation. One day, they attended a funeral which only heightened these anxieties.
What Do I Hold On To?
During Mass, the person kept repeating the question, “Lord, when I die, what do I hold on to so I can be sure of being in heaven? What do I hold onto?” The question kept getting louder, and the absence of any possible answer was becoming clearer. They believed that this trial would continue for the rest of their life. (It had already lasted more than a year). God, however, was about to solve the problem.
As the man approached Holy Communion, this question grew louder within, “What do I hold on to?” The priest lifted up the host, placed the Eucharist in his hand, and said “the Body of Christ”. God had answered his question. He was to hold on to “The Body of Christ”. It was the most unforgettable Communion of his entire life. The fear dissolved immediately. Now, every day, the “Body of Christ” quiets all his fears.

Eucharistic Miracles
By faith, we believe that Jesus is really present under the appearances of bread and wine. To help our faith God has brought about many miracles in Church history. Here, I will quickly recount a miracle that happened 1300 years ago. The next chapter will recount the miracle in 1263 that led to the Feast of Corpus Christi.

Lanciano, Italy (8th century)
A priest-monk in a monastery of St. Basil, besieged with doubts about Christ’s real presence, said the words of consecration. The host took on the appearance of human flesh and the wine that of human blood. This flesh and blood have never decayed but are always fresh. They have been scientifically examined many times (including in 1971). The flesh is part of the heart’s muscular tissue. The blood is type AB and contains all the usual minerals. They can be seen at the Church of the Miracle, Lanciano, Italy. The Church’s history is filled with these miraculous happenings. (CF Eucharistic Miracles by Joan Carroll Cruz)

Preparing for Eucharist
At Medjugorje, Our Lady appears every day. However, the important spiritual gift centers upon the Eucharist. Our Lady asked the people to have a daily 6:00 P.M. Mass, preceded by an hour of prayer. The people are in Church by 5:00 P.M., reciting the communal rosary. Getting to church early for mass is a great help in the devout life. If the King of Kings will come down from heaven to become our Eucharist, the least we can do is spend some time in preparing for his visit.

The saints say:
1. All the good that is in me is due to Holy Communion. I owe everything to it. I feel that this holy fire has transformed me completely. O how happy I am to be a dwelling for you, O Lord. My heart is a temple in which you continually dwell”. (S.Faus)
2. Often the Lord would reveal his presence in the host. My hair would stand on end and I would feel completely helpless. (STA)
3. I smile when people say they wished they lived in Jesus’ time. In the Blessed Sacrament, do we not have him as they did then? He disguises himself in Communion, so that we come close. (STA)
4. By meditation, we picture a story that happened. In the Blessed Sacrament it is happening now. (STA)
5. After receiving Communion, close your eyes and introduce Jesus to Mary. She will love and adore Him for you. (SLdeM)
6. After Holy Communion, I was carried in spirit before God’s throne. There I saw the angels who constantly praise Him. (S. Faus)

**Group Discussion:**
1. Do you receive Eucharist weekly? Every day or frequently? How important is this to you? What blessings do your experience?
2. How do you prepare? Do you arrive early? Do you stay for a few minutes afterward?

### 2.16 VISITS TO THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

The Church has always taught the **Real Presence**, that the bread and wine are changed into the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus. However, the Church did not fully use this gift until Jesus himself took the initiative.

In 1209, St. Juliana of Liege, an Augustinian nun, began to experience visions in which she saw the moon disfigured by a single dark spot. Jesus explained to her that the dark spot was the Church’s failure to have a Eucharistic feast focusing on his Real Presence. (Corpus Christi). She told the vision to Deacon James Panteleon, who later became Pope Urban IV (1261). Unfortunately, he did not act right away and Our Lord had to take another initiative.

In 1263, while celebrating mass, Father Peter of Prague experienced blood flowing from his consecrated host. When Pope Urban saw this Eucharistic miracle, he realized the importance of establishing the feast of Corpus Christi, the Body and Blood of Christ. The feast included Eucharistic processions, exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and prayer before the tabernacle. Ever since then, visits to the Blessed Sacrament have enjoyed a huge priority in the Devout Life.

**Some Examples**

When St. Thomas Aquinas could not adequately explain a divine truth in his Summa Theologica, he would put his head against the tabernacle until Jesus revealed the right words.

In Mother Theresa’s final illness, the doctor asked the priest to have a tabernacle in her room. When the Eucharist was present, she remained calm all day.

In her diary, St. Faustina of the Blessed Sacrament records many Eucharistic miracles (as an angel bringing her Holy Communion for thirteen days while she was in the hospital). More important, she wrote that she only survived all her troubles because of Jesus’ Real Presence.

A priest stationed in the Philippines, was with Pope John Paul II on his visit there. The pope wanted to pray in a private chapel before the Blessed Sacrament. When the Secret Service men checked the empty chapel with their dogs, the dogs reacted as if someone was present. The dogs were more intelligent than those who refuse to believe in the Real Presence.

**Saint Anthony and the Donkey**

Many European churches have a painting of a donkey kneeling before St. Anthony of Padua, who is holding a host. The story centers on the donkey’s owner who did not believe that Jesus
was present in the Eucharist. St. Anthony proposed a test. For three days, the donkey received no food. Then the donkey was put between his owner who had all the food which the donkey liked, and St. Anthony, who held the Blessed Sacrament. The donkey was led supernaturally to turn away from the food and to kneel before the host.

The saints say:
1. St. Faustina of the Blessed Sacrament composed a “Litany of the Blessed Sacrament” (Notebook #356) which says “O Blessed Host, our only hope in all life’s sufferings and adversities. At the hour of death, in floods of despair, in falsehood and treason, in darkness and godlessness, in longing and pain, in monotony, in the ruin of our hopes, amid the ravages of hell, in efforts that seem fruitless, in storms, in trembling, when all goes poorly, when our eyes grow dim, in tasks beyond our strength, when virtues are difficult, when efforts are misjudged and when Gods’ judgments resound over me, I will trust in you, O Blessed Host”.

2. The Host came out of the tabernacle and came to rest in my hands. I placed it back. This was repeated and I did the same thing. It happened a third time, but now the Host was transformed into the living Lord Jesus. (S. Faus)

3. Without the Eucharist, I would not have the courage to go any further along the way. (S. Faus)

Group Discussion:
1. Do you visit the Blessed Sacrament? How does the Real Presence of Jesus help you to pray? Is there a convenient church?

2. What blessings have you received before the Blessed Sacrament? How is your prayer at a higher level when the Eucharist is present?

2.17 THE SACRAMENT OF CONFESSION

In the 1940’s and 1950’s, there were long lines of people waiting to go to confession. So many adults went to confession at night, that children had to go on Saturday afternoon. Sad to say, there are no more long lines to go to confession. Very few adults come to confession and few parents inculcate the practice into their children.

The Power of Regular Confession

Going to confession has a cumulative effect. Confessions build on one another. Forgiveness follows forgiveness. Good resolutions rest upon prior resolutions. Every confessor should say to a devout soul, “Keep coming back. Every confession allows God to purify you.” A pastor constantly said to his parishioners, “For most of us, the door to heaven is the door to the confessional”. The saints used that door all their life.

A convert once asked the Priest, “Let me get this straight. I commit sins. I come to confession and tell the priest my sins. He forgives me and my sins are taken away”. “That is
right”, the priest said. The convert sat there, stunned and overwhelmed by this truth. Every Catholic should be stunned by the greatness of confession.

**Confession and Habitual Sin**

Devout souls sometimes commit the same sin frequently and confess it regularly. However, they see no change. This failure can lead them away from the confessional. Really, they should go more often. Jesus says to them, “Blessed are those who do not see and still believe” (Jn.20:29).

**The Two Saints of Confession**

The two most famous priest confessors are St. John Vianney (Cure of Ars) and Padre Pio. Both priests spent most of their day hearing confessions.

St. John was the pastor at Ars, France in a remote and neglected parish, for 41 years (1818 – 1859). Finding great moral neglect, he gave vigorous sermons and then heard confessions for 16 hours a day. Over 300 new visitors came each day. Many had to spend a week because of the long line for confession.

Padre Pio had the stigmata for 50 years (1918 – 1968). His day, too, was filled with long lines of penitents. He really knew all their sins before they told him and if they forgot any, he would remind them.

During World War II, an Italian soldier was in prison when he heard an inner voice say, “Run, run!” He found the prison door opened and ran to safety. Wanting to thank God, he went to confession. At the end, Padre Pio said, “Run, run”. The man recognized the voice that had helped him to escape.

Your priest confessors will probably not have the extraordinary power of the two saints, but, he shares totally in their power to forgive your sins. That is the important gift.

**A Personal Witness**

One priest receives the sacrament every day and this practice of many years has had very deep effects. Formerly, he was filled with many anxieties. Now, he finds himself totally unable to fear. He does not know what happened but believes that God has erased all of the images that caused any anxiety about his personal judgment. This is totally a gift from frequent confession, exactly opposite from his human tendency to grow anxious.

The saints say:

1. I wearied of offending God before he wearied of forgiving me. (STA)
2. I was praying for a person involved in occasions of sin. One day I saw the devil angrily tearing up some papers. Later, I learned that the man made a contrite confession. (STA)
3. King St. Louis told his son “Confess often. Choose a fair confessor who will tell you what is needed”. (SFdeS)
4. When the priest absolves you, the saints rejoice and embrace you as cleansed and sanctified. (SFdeS)

**Group Discussion:** (Note: Any discussion of sins should be done in a general way.)
How frequently do you go to confession? What difficulties do you experience? What blessings come?

How has your pattern of confession changed? From less frequently to more frequently, or vice versa? How do you experience your priest confessors? Kind? Understanding? Helpful?

2.18 – CONSCIENCE – YOUR EARTHLY GUIDING LIGHT

Years ago, the religious sisters would read out a list of sins (according to the Ten Commandments) to help us to “examine our conscience”. There was no fun in thinking about sins. However, looking back, this practice formed our consciences to know the right path in moral decisions.

Being Certain of Our Conscience

St. Paul writes, “Each man should be certain of his own conscience” (Rm.14:5) and “Happy the man whose conscience does not condemn himself” (Rom.14:22). About himself, Paul writes, “I have nothing on my conscience” (1Cor.4:4).

Understanding Conscience

God gave you an intellect to judge what is good and what is evil. Also, God has placed within you a moral sense, which praises you for doing good or condemns you for doing evil. You cannot rip out this “moral sense”. If you repress it or fail to respond to its promptings, your problems will just get buried. So, you have both an intellect (which knows right and wrong), and some inner impulse to do right and to avoid wrong. These inner faculties constitute your conscience.

Your Earthly Light

When you die, you will come into Jesus’ full light. You will see your soul perfectly. You will see whether you belong with Jesus in heaven, or away from Jesus in hell. This is the most important moment of your existence.

To prepare for this moment, God has given you an earthly light, your conscience. Trying to put out this light is disaster. Trying to repress this light causes problems. Following this light, leads to earthly peace and eternal glory.

Living By Your Conscience

To live by your conscience, you must:

1. Fully accept that you are responsible for all your decisions (the beginning of all personal freedom).
2. Face honestly all your past immoral decisions. Hide nothing from yourself.
3. Have a desire to be forgiven and fulfill this desire by a good confession.
4. With your conscience purified, be at peace.
5. Shut the door on your past life and never go back.

Your Past Life

A missionary showed the Jesus Film in a Latin American jail. One prisoner had killed three people and was about to be executed. When he saw the film, he believed in Jesus and asked to
be baptized. After his Baptism, the man was jubilant, saying, “In three days I’ll be executed and will see Jesus”. This is totally true. God cleaned out his past, forever.

**Reparation**

By sacramental confession, God forgives all your past sins. Do what is in your power to repair any harm. By pardon and reparation, Jesus will close the door of your past forever.

The saints say:
1. Trust God. His goodness is greater than our evil. (STA)
2. I had a great ability to do wrong. (STA)
3. Do not spend a long time examining your conscience before confession. This would aid the devil. (FJdeC)
4. After confession think no more about your sins. Close the door and move on. (FJdeC)
5. God asks one thing. Man must not act against his conscience. (JCG)

**Group Discussion:**

1. Discuss the two parts of conscience – a moral impulse to do good and the power of judgment to know good and evil.
2. What does sin do to our conscience? What does devotion do? Is it difficult to live up to your conscience? How important is your confessor/spiritual guide in helping you?

**2.19 – YOUR PARTICULAR FAULT**

**Finding Your Primary Fault**

The great writers (especially St. Ignatius) teach that you have a primary fault. If you remove this primary fault, your other vices will come out with it. The primary fault is the root to which your other vices cling. John the Baptist said, “The ax must be laid to the root” (Mt 3:10). You will make true progress by attacking your primary fault.

**How to Discover Your Primary Fault**

The seminary taught the importance of a daily particular examine, to discover your primary fault and to practice the opposite virtue. The saints call this the particular examen that focuses only on your central fault. Limiting this will bring great progress.

**The Saints**

The saints all faced their primary faults. St. Vincent de Paul, known for his love for the poor, spent his early priesthood with the rich. That was his basic attraction.

St. Francis of Assisi, known for his poverty, enjoyed the rich clothes provided by his father, a tailor. He had to leave them behind.
St. Camillus had to renounce his love for gambling.

St. Bernard of Clairvaux was very rigid in his discipline of others. Seeing their discouragement, he condemned his own strictness and followed a more kindly path. All the saints discovered their greatest fault and made it into their predominant virtue.

Examine yourself. Among your faults, which one leads the others? Which is your strongest, predominant fault? Remove that fault and practice the opposite virtue. You won’t be wasting your time.

The saints say:

1. What upset me so much was that I could not see how to correct my faults, like slowness or lack of thoroughness. (STA)
2. Don’t be upset by your faults. Heaven is worth the battle. (FJdeC)
3. Even if your faults are not conquered, at the hour of death you will still be fighting. (FJdeC)
4. The soul’s faults are only faults of frailty. God’s love takes no notice of them and even turns them to an advantage. (FJdeC)

Group Discussion:

1. Have you grown in self-knowledge? Do you know your primary fault? Can you learn the central problem?
2. Have you ever asked others how they see you? (Only do this with your friends). Could you accept their truthful replies? Do you see the value of knowing your primary weakness?

2.20 THE ROSARY

The rosary has a unique preeminence among Marian devotions. Pope Leo XIII is “the Pope of the rosary”, writing nine encyclicals. One tradition says that Our Lady appeared to St. Dominic and gave him the rosary to overcome a heresy (Albigensianism). Another tradition says that the rosary came about because people had an attraction to the gospel stories about Jesus and Mary. Since many people could not read the 150 psalms, they would recite 150 Hail Mary’s (the fifteen decades of the rosary).

The great American apostle of the rosary was Father Peyton, who promoted the family rosary saying, “The family that prays together, stays together”. At Fatima, Mary revealed to the three children that the rosary is God’s great weapon against modern evils.

The Rosary and Mental Prayer

Catholics do not have a tradition of “making a meditation” but they have a strong tradition of “saying the rosary”. The 20 mysteries of the rosary are the perfect gospel meditations. Just take all the teachings given about mental prayer, and apply them to the mysteries of the rosary.
Saying the Hail Mary can be done without any thought. The mind should be occupied with the mystery of the gospel scene. Saying the rosary well leads to the highest mental prayer.

The saints say:

1. As a little girl, I tried to be alone and say many prayers, especially the rosary to which my mother was devoted. (STA)
2. If you are a sinner, with one foot in hell, say the rosary, repent, and go to confession. (SLdeM)
3. Please do not think the rosary is unimportant. It is God’s priceless treasure. (SLdeM)
4. It is hard to express how Our Lady prefers the rosary above all other devotions. (SLdeM)

Group discussion:

1. Do you say the Rosary? Do you meditate on the gospel story of each mystery? What blessings do you receive?
2. Do you have anyone to say the Rosary with you? Do you say the family Rosary?

2.21 – THE HOLY SOULS

The Holy Souls are very prominent in the Diary. Our Lady gives so many promises about freeing them from their sufferings and asks especially the Monday fast to gain this goal. Purgatory is a great mystery of God’s merciful love which we will try to explain. The saints experiences and writings provide a clear picture.

Death

At conception, God creates the human person and joins the person with the body formed by the parents. As long as the body lives, the person remains in the body.

At death, the person leaves behind their body to come before Jesus. This is a moment of perfect light. Each person sees themselves as Jesus sees them. They realize one of three things. They are perfect and ready to instantly enter heaven. They have rejected God and would never be happy in His presence. Or, they love God but they must be purified to fully enjoy His eternal presence.

The soul rejoices to go to purgatory, where all their darkness can be removed. We cannot imagine their sufferings because they are totally different from earth’s trials. The souls have no more free will. They cannot sin or gain more glory. They are totally at peace in God’s will for them to be purified.

Each moment, they ascend closer to God. Each moment becomes more painful because they see more clearly what they do not yet possess – a perfect enjoyment of God.

Finally, the ascent is complete. They are released because they are purified (otherwise, being in God’s presence would be painful).
St. Catherine of Genoa says that Paradise has no gates and whoever wishes can enter, but the soul does not want to enter until it is cleansed. She calls them “the friendly souls”.

Our Lady is always helping them, shortening the time and lessening the pain. Our Lady constantly asks us, in the Flame of Love, to help her. These souls will be helping us some day and welcome us when we finish our ascent to God.

Some Stories

In her autobiography, St. Margaret Mary writes of a vision of a Benedictine priest who appeared to her and asked her to offer her sufferings for him for three months. (God permitted this because the priest had helped her to receive frequent communion.) For three months, she experienced his presence at her side. That side of her body shared in his sufferings. After three months, she saw him bathed in joy and about to enter eternal happiness. He thanked her and promised her his protection. After he entered heaven, her three months of suffering ceased. Such visions and experiences are commonplace among the saint mystics. The story, if it can be said, is the usual one.

The saints say:

1. Don’t worry about the pain of purgatory. It will end. (STA)
2. The holy souls are totally confirmed in God’s will, are content with God’s decrees and are entirely purified of guilt. (SCG)
3. I call these, the “friendly souls”, always ready to help us. (SCG)
4. No one can conceive the importance of purgatory. (SCG)
5. The soul realizes that purgatory was created to cleanse her. So, she throws herself in and finds great mercy in the removal of her sins. (SCG)

Group Discussion:

1. Do you see purgatory as a place of God’s mercy? Do you think you will still need some purging after death?
2. What souls in purgatory should you be praying for? Do you want to experience a closeness to these souls? Do you see how they need you and will help you to save your soul (their only desire at this point)?

2.22 - A SUMMARY OF DEVOTIONS

The previous chapters have described the basic devotions. Please accept the following advice:

1. If possible, receive Holy Communion daily. If you can arrive early or stay after Mass, use this time for mental prayer.
2. Go to confession at least once a month (more often if possible).
3. Say the rosary every day. You can do this on the way to work/school.

4. Read a meditation book before going to bed so you can ponder the thoughts during the night.

5. Give at least fifteen minutes to mental prayer (as early as possible in the day).

6. Find at least fifteen minutes for spiritual reading (in the latter part of the day).

Prayer is only one wing of perfection. The second is goodness. In this purgative stage, the saints speak about overcoming the world, the flesh and the devil. We will begin there:

The saints say:

1. Devotions are the means. The goal is the practice of the presence of God. (BL)
2. The rosary will perfect your other devotions. (SLdeM)
3. Devotions are spiritual activities by which Divine Love touches our hearts. (SFdeS)
4. When our hearts are submitted to God, our devotions are true. (BL)

Group Discussion:

1. Is the list of devotions too long for you? Which ones should you concentrate on? Which devotions attract you? Which ones are difficult to fit into your daily schedule?

2. What is your realistic goal? What can be changed, so you can practice some devotions? Will it be easy? Isn’t the daily fidelity the hardest part? Can others encourage you?

PART B – GOODNESS OF LIFE

2.23 – OVERCOMING THE WORLD

After receiving the opening kick-off, the football player seeks a goal that is 100 yards away. He will only arrive there if he avoids eleven players intent on tackling him. In your devout life, you face three gigantic tacklers, the world, the flesh and the devil. Two are outside of you (the world and the devil). One is within you (the flesh).

The world means your culture which exerts a daily powerful influence over you. The flesh means the sinful tendencies within you that wars against your spirit. The devil means the powerful kingdom of darkness. Let’s begin with an explanation of the world.

A Hostile Environment

The world is a hostile environment to devotion. The reasons are evident:

The devout life demands quiet. The world is filled with noise.
The devout life treasures prayer. The world wants activity.
The devout life demands spiritual activity. The world requires sensual activity. The devout life has heavenly goals. The world dazzles you with earthly goals. The devout life requires you to slow down. The world demands that you run a race.

Jesus warned the disciples, “You do not belong to the world” (Jn 17:16)

A Teenager’s Experience
The Little Flower writes about her teenage years when she spent a vacation with her rich cousins. “I made what I can call my first appearance in the world. I was surrounded with gaiety and pleasure. I was entertained, pampered and generally made much of. For two weeks my path was strewn with flowers and I must confess that this life was not without its attractions for me. I was at the most dangerous time of my life for young girls.” Looking back on that vacation, she wrote as a nun, “Jesus was just showing me what the world was like before He visited me and asked me to be his.”

As a child enters adolescence, the world opens up. It is an inviting, even intoxicating, world. After giving us a brief glimpse and taste, God withdrew us, probably knowing that too long an experience would soon rob us of his gift.

The saints say:
1. Earthly wisdom loves the world’s things and leads men to want to become rich. (SLdeM)
2. The one who does not act like a stranger to this world, will not rejoice like a citizen in the next world. (SAug)
3. The earth cannot make us happy. There is no perfect calm in this stormy sea. (SLdeM)
4. How I pity people who lose their souls! It is so easy to go astray along the world’s primrose path. (STL)
5. By devotion, the soul flees all the world’s traps and overcomes the devil and the flesh. (SCS)

Group Discussion:
1. Were you ever aware of Jesus’ view of “the world”? Look at the five qualities mentioned. Do they describe your world?
2. What needs to be done? What can you do to lessen the world’s influence in your life? How can you form a devout environment?

2.24 – THE WORLD DESTROYS THE LORD’S DAY

Where to Begin!
You ask, “Where do I begin in withdrawing from the world?” God answered that question, “Keep holy the Lord’s Day.” Besides going to Mass you must examine your Sunday schedule because God wants Sunday to be his day. The devout soul asks, “God, what do you want on Sunday? After all, it’s your day.”

Stopping Traffic
When the President of the United States comes to a city, does he tippy-toe in? Does he wait for red lights? No. He stops all the traffic. Being able to stop traffic shows power. After all, this is “the presidential motorcade.”
Well, God doesn’t want to tippy-toe into your world. He wants to be held in awe. He wants you to know that he is powerful. He has staked out one day and said, “This is my day. On this day everything stops. This is the way I know that you worship me.”

The Israelite Prophets
Keeping the Lord’s day formed the nation of Israel. When people violated the Sabbath, Isaiah asked, “Who keeps the Sabbath?” (Is 56:2) God even promised “If you call the Sabbath a delight and hold back your foot on the Sabbath, I will make you ride the heights of the earth (total prosperity) (58:13-14).

In Jeremiah’s time, Jerusalem was going to be destroyed. However, God promised, “IF you keep holy the Sabbath as I commanded your fathers, this city will remain inhabited forever.” (17:22 and 25) They didn’t keep the Sabbath and, a few years later, the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem.

America
In the 1940’s and 1950’s Americans kept the Lord’s Day. All the stores were closed. Activity was hushed. Families looked forward to their Sunday meal. God was powerful in the 1940’s. (He stopped all the traffic). In those decades, America held God in awe. However, the seeds of change had already been planted. In 1933, Major League Baseball played its first games on Sunday (America needed the income!). For thirty pieces of silver, they sold God’s day. Sunday baseball led to NFL football. Now, God loses all his Sundays to television sports. That is the next step of overcoming the world.

The saints say:
1. A soul that desires God’s Kingdom seeks only the will of the King. (STA)
2. If he understands the love God has for him, a soul can set aside everything and be perfect. (STA)
3. Your soul is a great territory that belongs to God alone. (FJdeC)
4. The soul must see that the only serious business in the world is to follow God’s will. (FJdeC)

Group Discussion:
1. What is your Sunday schedule? Do you attend Mass? Do you avoid shopping? Do you turn off the television?
2. What should be your goals for Sunday? How would you be blessed by changing your schedule? Is it a family day for you?

2.25 SUNDAY TELEVISION SPORTS

If you spend much of your Sunday sitting in a soft chair watching sports, you might want to skip this chapter. On the other hand, you really need to read this. Television sports have displaced God. They own your Sunday. Look at their schedules. NFL games occupy 26 Sundays a year. (That is 50% of the calendar). The Super Bowl (held on Sunday) claims the largest viewer audience of the whole year. When football finishes, Major League Baseball takes up the other
Sundays. These little words will have absolutely no effect on the Super Bowl or Sunday sports. Hopefully, they will affect your Sunday decisions.

Let’s review the situation. Until 1933, America did not allow professional sports on Sunday. After 1933, there were blue laws that games had to end at a certain time (so people could attend evening services). Fifteen years later, television enters the scene and sports enter the home. After that, the seasons get longer and longer. They overlap. (After all, Sunday is a big payday for sports teams. Advertisers have everybody home, all day). Originally, they were home because the day belonged to God. Now, Sunday has a new owner. By your devout life, you declare that God owns you and you “cannot serve two masters”.

Pull the Plug

When the world refuses to “render to God what is clearly God’s” and when professional sports teams proclaim that Sunday is their day and not God’s day, then we must pull the plug. Hopefully, each devout soul will make the same effort. Don’t give up. Try to reserve Sunday for the “King’s motorcade”.

A Story

One beautiful Sunday afternoon, a devout soul was watching a professional football game. Suddenly, the inspiration came, “What am I doing inside on such a nice day?” The person took a nice walk by a favorite stream. A victory had begun. Sunday after Sunday, he made the same decision. By the end of the season, he enjoyed a tremendous freedom. Pro football no longer had its hold. God, not the NFL, owned his Sundays.

Each story is different. Each victory is very important. You are getting the picture, the Devout Life challenges you to belong totally to God.

The saints say:
1. Banish all that is not God. He wants to be the only one. (BL)
2. To serve God is the highest employment on earth. His least servant is richer than any king. (SLdeM)
3. Limit your desires to know all the news, to be in the limelight and to go to popular places. (SLdeM)

Group Discussion:
1. Is the devout life coming too close for comfort? Does it have a right to challenge your Sunday sports?
2. How much Sunday sports do you watch? Will you be lost without them? Is this at least a valid question? Can you change your patterns? What will you do instead?

2.26 – VIDEO GAMES (A TRUE STORY)

Essays on the Devout Life book written decades ago would have no chapters on television, internet, I-Pods, video games and all the other technology that strengthens the world’s hold over you. The following is a true story published in a religious magazine. The names were changed.
Jennifer and Sean met at a Bible College and both were Church Ministry majors. They married in August 1998, at 21 years of age. Her father gave them a computer and Sean began with Nintendo 64. Although his schoolwork suffered, Sean moved deeper into this addiction. He linked his computer with someone’s across the hall and began an on-line play, called Even Quest. He played video games with thousands of others on the Internet and rarely wanted to leave this world. At this point, Jennifer left him and took the computer. Sean called, “I want my computer back”. She answered, “What about your wife?” The marriage ended in less than four years.

This young man and woman were deeply committed Christians, (they were studying for ministry), but video games destroyed their marriage. How much more can it ruin your Devout Life? In searching for God, you have to leave that world behind. That world includes video games and all the electronic games.

Elizabeth records a few times when she was caught up with beautiful music. Jesus would ask her if she still belonged to Him. Certainly, we cannot live like monks, but we must limit these electronic images.

The saints say:
1. A soul which feeds upon sensual pleasures has no liberty of spirit. (SJC)
2. What a pity! Vain tastes take up soil meant to cultivate better things. (SFdeS)
3. Children run after butterflies because they are children. However, it is ridiculous to see adults seeking these worldly amusements. (SFdeS)
4. Through no merit of mine, I never became entangled in amusements. Only God’s mercy saved me. (STA)
5. The easiest way to ruin true love is to mix it with sensual desires. (SFdeS)

Group Discussion:
1. What video games do you play? How much time do you devote to them? Do they form an addiction?
2. What should you do? Can you put them aside? What will be the good effects? On yourself? On your family and friends?

2.27 – THE ELECTRONIC WORLD

Coming Out of the Movies
In the 1940’s, children went to the movies on Saturday afternoon. (There was no television). Coming out of the movies was always a shock. After sitting passively for two hours, looking at images on a screen, the child had to return to the real world (where there were no images). However, after a few minutes, the child was able to re-enter the world of personal relationships and daily tasks. That was in the 1940’s.

Images Everywhere
Today, a little boy leaves a movie theater (filled with images) and enters the real world (also filled with images). People are now “electronically wired”. They cannot “tune out”. Life is one continuous experience of images. These images make war on the devout life. Mental prayer demands inner spiritual images while the world supplies sensual electronic images. We must withdraw from these electronic images. This is a non-negotiable condition for devotion.

The Saints’ Teachings
Read the saints’ teachings. They did not advocate that everyone enter a monastery, but they asked people to withdraw from worldly distractions.

These saints lived in the world of 1600, 1700 and 1800. Can you imagine what the saints would say about the omnipresent electronic images of the twenty-first century? These electronic images are winds that ruin God’s divine fire.

Christ the King and Television
One Saturday night, while a priest was writing his homily for Christ the King Sunday, a basketball game was on television. So, he compromised. A few minutes writing the homily were followed by a few minutes watching the game.

The next day, he realized how terrible the homily was. He reasoned, “The homily is on Christ the King, but last night, Christ the King shared his throne with the television.”

At that moment, many years ago, he removed the television from his room and Christ has been the King ever since.

The Family Setting
In your home, where is your television set? Does it sit in a prominent place, like the tabernacle in Church? This is important, because the place of the television determines your family’s activities. Turning on the television affects everybody in the house.

A Total Secular Opinion
The association of pediatricians has made two strong statements:
1. No child under two should watch even one minute of television.
2. No child under 15 should have a television in their room.
That is not a religious voice, but a medical warning. The doctors studied the effects of television on the child’s brain. The brain doesn’t grow while it passively watches television.

The saints say:
1. Anyone who wants to satisfy all their desires is a slave, not a son. (SJC)
2. Liberty cannot live in a heart dominated by desires. (SJC)
3. Desires are like discontented children who never allow their mother to rest. (STA)
4. Souls filled with worldly desires are like sick persons. They have no appetite. They sleep without refreshment and drag themselves through life. (SFdeS)

Group Discussion:
1. How much television do you watch each day? (Be honest). How many television sets are in your home? Does the television sit like a tabernacle in the most prominent position?
2. Is there freedom? If someone turns on the television, do not all have to watch? Are you “electronically wired”? How do you get “unwired”?

2.28 – WITHDRAWING FROM THE WORLD

To receive Jesus’ consolations (so important for the Devout Life), you must leave behind some of the world’s consolations. Let me recount a story of the Little Flower.

Two Saints

The Little Flower was just a teenage nun (having entered the convent at 15) who had the difficult task of helping an elderly nun go to dinner. One night, she heard dance music coming from a nearby party. Her young heart easily imagined the joy of that scene. She looked at the dark walls of the convent with the elderly nun and compared the two scenes. The convent scene easily won out. She so loved Jesus’ kingdom, that the party music had no pull upon her heart. She was an advanced soul. You will get there someday. Do not give up!

Jesus described people without devotion. They will be “eating and drinking, buying and selling, marrying and giving in marriage” (Mt.24:38). What is wrong with eating, drinking, buying, selling and marrying? Nothing! They are absolutely necessary for human life. However, a person who only eats, drinks, buys, sells and marries, is living just for earth. They are not awakened to heaven or to devotion.

Limiting Freedom

Somehow, we believe that God limits our freedom, and that God can be an “intrusion” into our lives. Not wanting God to be “too close for comfort”, we build lifestyle walls (the way we operate) to keep God out. As you remove each wall, God enters. When all the walls between you and God are gone, you will enjoy God’s inner freedom.

Creating a Culture of Light

You cannot withdraw from this 21st century world by yourself. You need others to help you. You must seek out people who share your devout goals. Some excellent students decided that they could never attend a high school party (too much alcohol). They continued this decision throughout their college years. Fortunately, they had extended families to support their decisions. You need others to support your decisions.

The saints say:
1. God wants us to desire eternal blessings but we choose what is passing. (STA)
2. It is a great grace to realize the folly of worldly pleasures. Say farewell to all creatures and rejoice when they leave you. (FJdeC)
3. The world is your ship, not your home. (STL)
4. A devout soul must live in the world without being tainted by it. (SFdeS).
Group Discussion:

1. What are the world’s most powerful attractions for you? Are they overwhelming? Can you get free from their grasp?
2. Who are your friends? Are they a help or a hindrance to your devout life? How have you been changed? Has this caused any shifting in your friendships?

2.29 THE WORLD HATES YOU (Jn 15:19)

The world hated Jesus and He said that it will hate you, also. This hatred is pervasive. People who have no love for God (and some who pretend that they do) will hate and persecute anyone who practices devotion.

The following true stories show that the world’s hatred is at your doorstep.

1. A young couple had three children and the wife was pregnant with her fourth. A neighbor said to her husband, with great anger, “When are you going to learn how to limit your family?” This intrusive neighbor persecuted the couple because they loved children.
2. A priest friend once asked his dad (who was highly trained and very skilled) why he did not go higher in the company. He replied, “I was a Catholic and I refused to join the Masons. Only Masons went higher.”
3. A young boy (13) wanted to be pure but his friends had discovered some pornographic pictures. One friend grabbed the photos and pushed them in the boy’s face. The boy just walked on. The boy would have suffered great trauma if he had given in.
4. A university chaplain recounts the story of a devout young man, coming to him in tears. He said, “I was at a fraternity party two nights ago. When I went to get my coat in a bedroom I saw a couple making love. I just got my coat and left. However, last night at the fraternity meeting, the student said, “Did you get an eyeful last night?” Then, the others ridiculed me and I had to leave”. Even when the good person says nothing, he is persecuted.

The Answer

The world uses two tactics. It attracts you by its enticements and discourages you by its hatred. To survive, you need friends who walk the Devout road. Do not try to stand alone. Jesus gathered his friends before he preached to the crowds. He knew he would need them.

A Final Story

When a couple celebrated their 75th wedding anniversary, a television reporter covered the event. The reporter asked “What is the secret of your success?” “God”, the wife replied. “What joined you and your husband together?” “We prayed every day together” was the answer. When the television news aired the interview, “God” and “prayer” had been cut out. If the world doesn’t want God or prayer. Why should you want it as a friend?

The Saints say:

1. A soul should be prepared to be martyred by the world. (STA)
2. Stop fearing the world and stop listening to popular opinions. (STA)
3. Whenever the world insults us, they are giving us jewels and sitting us on a throne. (SLdeM)

4. At the beginning stage, the soul, engulfed in worldly pleasures and ambitions, is easily vanquished. It must stay close to God. (STA)

Group Discussion:
1. What experiences have you had of the world’s hatred? How did you respond? What long term affect did it have?
2. How does the world entice you? How does it persecute you (or test you)? How do you overcome the world?

2.30 – THE FLESH

The first two chapters of the Bible portray mankind without sin. Adam loves Eve, accepts her as his equal and feels no shame in her presence. When sin enters their marriage, everything is ruined and their relationship is in trouble. After Cain kills Abel, sin spreads. Finally, “The Lord saw how great was man’s wickedness on the earth” (Gen 6:5). These early bible stories reveal that some sinful power had been placed in men’s hearts.

The saints call this sinful power “the flesh”. “Flesh” does not mean “body”. (Your body has an important place in the divine plan.) “Flesh” means some mysterious power of sin which acts within you. This power affects your body, your soul, your feelings, your mind and your will. Unless this power is conquered by the spirit, the flesh will control the person. In the garden, Jesus warned his apostles, “Watch and pray, for the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak”. Unfortunately, the apostles did not pray. Their spirits were not strengthened and they ran away when the soldiers came.

The Civil War Between Flesh and Spirit

Slavery caused America’s Civil War and this sinful power of the flesh causes an inner civil war. St. Paul describes this inner strife. “I see in my members another principle at war with the law of the mind” (Rom.8:23). This power of sin pulls you away from God and wars with your spirit (which always tries to find God).

An Example

Let’s draw a picture a person controlled by this inner power. A man drinks a little too much, uses drugs recreationally, enjoys some pornography on the internet, has some sexual liaisons, and feels no remorse. Having no love for the poor, he spends all his wealth on himself. However, he dresses in nice suits, runs a profitable business and gathers his friends. They think he is a nice guy.

Really, this man is under the power of sin. He carries within himself the seeds of his own destruction. His life, guided by the flesh, is really death. Worst of all, he has no idea of his spiritual state. He doesn’t have a clue. He might even sit in Church every Sunday (in his best suit).
Awakened to Conversion

Possibly that person is you. You are unaware of sin’s power. You don’t face these dark tendencies. Your only hope is the devout life which helps you overcome these powers. Don’t forget “God called you out of darkness into his own marvelous light” (1Pt 2:9) However, you have to struggle to get into that light.

The saints say:

1. The body loves to be indulged and the soul makes little progress. (STA)
2. We are like men who have enemies at the gate. We must always be armed. (STA)
3. When attachments flourish, the flesh is in control. (SJC)
4. Attachments are like wine that darkens the reason. (SJC)
5. Sensuality and spirituality are enemies to each other. When sensuality declines, spirituality grows. (SJC)
6. When a man is a slave to sensual pleasure, he degrades himself and lives like the animals. (STA)

Group Discussion:

1. Do you understand that “the flesh” (the power of sin within you) is not the same as the body? How does your will experience power of sin? How does your intellect, your feelings, your five senses experience it?
2. Are you aware of “the war within you”?

2.31 – THE POWER OF ADDICTION

A True Story

During the day, he was quite normal, even well thought of. But over the years, he had grown accustomed to movies, especially the sexual scenes. Then, he stepped over the line. He walked into an x-rated movie theater. Fairly quickly, he was caught in an addiction that lasted five years. He was set free by God through a miracle of grace.

This story is repeated thousands of times. Just go to any “Anonymous” group and listen to the stories, the struggles and the lapses. Fortunately, they are also stories of victories over addictions.

Understanding Addictions

The sinful power of the flesh can create habits which control you. This is an addiction. Addictions are holes in your devout bucket. Until you plug these holes, your devotion will always drain out and leave you empty.

The obvious addictions are alcohol, drugs, pornography, gambling and illicit sexual relations. If any of these are in your life, then face the issue. Talk with people who can help you. Take the needed steps. If you pray every day, you will not abandon this task (a promise of St. Teresa).
Denial and Despair

Unfortunately, addictions lead to denial or despair. When a person says he has no problem, he is in denial. When a person says that he has no hope, he is in despair. The devout life overcomes denial by giving you an honesty to accept the truth. It overcomes despair by giving you hope. Don’t forget. You are a child of God, created for his glory.

A Story

A counselor speaks of a young person who in his own eyes, was a failure. In the counselor’s eyes, he was a hero. He never gave up. His war did not last just one week or one month or one year. His struggle was true heroism. Never give up. One saint wrote, “We might not win, but at death, God will find us still fighting.”

The saints say:
1. The sensual appetite is a rebellious subject and the will can never defeat it totally. (SFdeS)
2. The soul is degraded by seeking union with corporal things. (SFdeS)
3. By love, man conquers all his evil habits and is ready to perform every good work. (SCG)
4. I was corrupt and your enemy, O God. I went astray and fed on sensual delights. I did not want to be lifted up and I shunned all your helps. (SCG)

Group Discussion:
1. Have you ever experienced God’s miracle of grace? Do you know someone else’s story of victory?
2. Discuss the various addictions. Why do they generate so much hopelessness? Why do people deny they have them? What should be done?

2.32 – ALMSGIVING

It is a great grace when God touches your heart. It is an even greater grace when he touches your wallet (or your pocketbook). When you come before Jesus in Judgment, he will hold in his hands all that you have given to the poor and you will hold in your hands whatever you did not give. Happy the soul whose hands are empty!

Many don’t want the Church to talk money, but opening wallets opens people’s hearts. Withholding money closes their hearts.

Jesus’ Teaching

Jesus frequently talked about money.
1. One time, while denouncing the Pharisees, Jesus suddenly stopped and said, “But if you give alms, everything will be clean for you”. (Luke 11:41) By almsgiving, even the Pharisees could be saved.
2. Jesus pointed out a rich farmer who had full barns but “forgot to be rich in what matters to God”.
3. Jesus told a parable concerning the rich man and the beggar, Lazarus. Lazarus went to heaven. If the rich man had just used some of his money to help Lazarus, he could have joined him. Really, the beggar was to be the rich man’s door to heaven.
4. Jesus invited a young man to follow, but he “went away sad” because he had so many possessions. One preacher says, “You cannot take your wealth with you when you die. However, by helping the poor, you can send it on ahead”. A devout life changes the way you think about money.

Imagine if you took all your money and changed it into pennies. You die and come before Jesus. The doors of heaven are wide open. However, your pockets are filled with millions of pennies. “With real difficulty will the rich man enter heaven.”

**How Much to Give?**

Give at least ten percent of your income. God promises great blessings to those who tithe. “If you bring in the tithe, I will open the windows of heaven and empty out its treasures”. (Mal.3:10)

A Philadelphia comedian went to jail for not paying all his taxes. Later, he would joke, “I was under the mistaken idea that the money I earned was mine”. He was mistaken. Much of what he earned really belonged to the poor.

Realize this. When your generosity becomes constant, (week in and week out), God will give you a heart for the needy and some task for you to do. Your heart only opens up after your wallet.

**The saints say:**

1. God works differently when the soul holds nothing back. (STA)
2. The world’s wealth is poverty in God’s sight.
3. The soul which loves wealth is extremely poor. (SJC)
4. A man can rejoice in riches only if he uses them to serve God. (SJC)
5. Desires for earthly things, withdraws the soul from God’s favors. (SJC)

**Group Discussion:**

1. What riches do you have? Since seeking a devout life, have you shifted your attitude toward money?
2. Could you join with others and use your almsgiving for a widespread effect?

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**2.33 – SETTING ASIDE BODILY COMFORTS**

**Little Sacrifices**

A man really liked coffee to jump start his day, but God wanted his caffeine and it took God a long time to get it. The evidence kept mounting. Every cup the man drank was accompanied by an inner feeling (which he recognized clearly as God’s Spirit). Finally he made a decision, “No more caffeine”. God had been acting for 5 years. (He is very patient).

God also wanted the man to give up wine. He only drank one glass on special occasions and the feelings to give this up were not intense as with the coffee. One day, he read about a highly regarded evangelist who knew God wanted him to give up chocolates. The person realized that the chocolates represented his glass of wine. At that moment, he gave God his wine and has not had another drink. These are little stories, but God gives great rewards for our small sacrifices.
Some Examples

The Flame of Love speaks often of giving up bodily comforts. Monday until 6:00 pm should be a day of fasting on bread and water. Fasting on bread and water until 6:00 pm on Thursdays and Fridays is also recommended. Elizabeth gives many examples of how Jesus rewarded her for little sacrifices.

A generous soul usually discovers appropriate ways of mortifying the body. Hot and cold weather provide many opportunities. (The Little Flower said she suffered most from the cold, yet the other sisters never saw her trying to warm her hands).

A Stimulus to Devotion

These little mortifications are not the center of devotion (Charity is that). They are not even the wings of devotion (prayer and goodness are that). These mortifications are a stimulus to devotion. A devout soul who sets aside little bodily comforts each day usually stays faithful to prayer, goodness and charity.

Give God everything. Be generous. Obey your spiritual guide! If your spiritual guide has to limit your sacrifices, you have a generosity that will serve you well. Soon your heart will be ready for larger deeds. Many do not advance in devotion because they ignore these little sacrifices. Again, the important trait is constancy. Don’t begin with big things. Have, instead a day after day desire to sacrifice little things. Never grow discouraged!

The saints say:
1. When I speak of mortifications, I do not mean the penances practiced by the saints. All I do is break my self-will, check a hasty reply and do little kindnesses with no fuss. (STL)
2. The chains of Jesus set us free, guarding us from the chains of Satan. (SLdeM)
3. For me, mortification was to master self-love. This did me far more good than any bodily penance. (STL)
4. I shall sing without ceasing, even if I must gather my roses from the midst of thorns. (STL)
5. At first my face betrayed the struggle I was having, but gradually spontaneous self-sacrifice came easily. (STL)

Group Discussion:
1. Do you have a spirit of daily sacrifices or is this new to you? What sacrifices seem available to you and easy to do?
2. What would be the value of trying to make little sacrifices? What did you think of the two stories?

2.34 – GENERAL CONFESSION

Very early in your devout life you need a fresh start. So, make a general confession. Tell your confessor that you want to begin a devout life and put the past behind you. Explain your past life and then culminate everything with a general confession.

How To Do This

Don’t be too hard on yourself (as if you have to scrape everything clean). Make a general review of your life. Take it in stages. What were you like in adolescence? How has your marriage been? Were there some years where you wandered far from God? Were there times of serious addictions? What were the big sins of your life? What is your present spiritual
state? Are there any sins that weigh particularly heavy upon you (the ones you really want to get forgiven)? It might be good to write out your list ahead of time. Distinguish between sins that you have already confessed and those that you have not.

The goal is not introspection but freedom. Don’t try to produce a perfect list. For a general confession, an outline suffices. The goal is to experience a feeling of innocence.

Never Look Back

Once you have made your general confession, never, never, never look back! Having honestly discussed all your moral failures, you must close the door forever. I will tell you why.

By coming closer to God, you will grow more sensitive to your sinfulness. You will view your past actions much differently. You will wonder how you did all these things! This new sensitivity is good. However, if you judge past actions by your new awareness, you might be tormented and discouraged.

After your general confession, live from confession to confession. At each confession, just mention only those sins that you have committed since your previous confession. This rule is so important, that it is absolutely unbreakable. Be obedient to the confessor.

St Francis de Sales
In making a general confession, St. Francis de Sales gives the following advice:

1. Do not be afraid. Sin is shameful when you commit it but it becomes honorable when you confess it.
2. Sorrow and confession remove the deformity and stench of sin.
3. God is honored by your self-accusation.
4. The soul gains relief by revealing his sins to the priest.
5. The Precious Blood waters the soul.
6. When your heart is open, sin escapes.
7. By the confessor’s words, God Himself speaks to you.
8. All the angels and saints join the priest in forgiving you. Go to the confessional, be purified and begin the road of perfection.

The saints say:
1. Begin your devout life with a general confession. After that, always seek this second Baptism in the sacrament of Confession. (SCS)
2. Struggle against any aversion to opening your soul in confession. (FJdeC)
3. God wants your confessor to know your thoughts and actions. If you do this, nothing will harm you. (STA)
4. I continued to depend on my confessor for many years. (SCG)

Group Discussion:
1. Do you want to make a general confession? How would you prepare for it? What would be the correct setting? What priest would you choose?

2. What would you foresee as the good effects? Would it be difficult? Can you close the door on your past? What would be your future practice of confession?
2.35 - UNDERSTANDING THE DEMONIC WORLD

The secular world attracts you. The demonic world attacks you. You must know your enemy.

Angels and Men

The Church gives a clear teaching on the origin of the demonic world.
1. God created angels.
2. Angels stand at the height of all creation. (Man stands only at the pinnacle of material creation.)
3. Angels are rational creatures with free will.
4. They are immortal and will live forever.
5. Like us, they had to make a choice between good and evil.

The Angels’ One Time Choice

Because angels understand everything at once, they cannot change their minds. When the demonic angels said to God, “I will not serve”, their first answer was their final answer. Even if invited a thousand times, they would not change. Therefore, they cannot be redeemed by Christ.

Now, these fallen angels want us to say “No”. They are the kingdom of Darkness (the demonic world) and we must understand our battle against them. The demons want every human being to suffer (both in this life and in the next).

The Satanic Battle

1. Satan entered human history by the sins of mankind.
2. He does not control history because Jesus Christ is the Lord of history.
3. However, when Jesus is absent (due to our free choice), then Satan has no powerful adversary. He has no one to overcome him and cast him out.
4. Jesus described his power over Satan, “But no one can enter a strong man’s house to plunder his property unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can plunder his house” (Mk.3:27).

The strong man is Satan. We are his property. But, Jesus has greater power. He ties Satan up, plunders his house and sets us free.

When Michael the Archangel cast Satan out of heaven, the angels sang, “For the accuser of our brothers is cast out”. However, they go on to warn us, “But woe to you, earth and sea, for the Devil has come down to you in great fury for he knows he has but a short time” (Rev.12:10-12). Cast out of heaven, Satan patrols the earth.

The Inevitable War

The war between Satan and Jesus began early. Jesus won every battle, beginning with the three temptations in the desert. Wherever Jesus went, he cast out Satan. Jesus was a
conquering army on a victory march. Even Jesus’ seventy-two disciples had this power. “Lord, even the demons are subject to us because of your name” (Lk.10:17).

Before ascending into heaven, Jesus promised, “in my name, you will drive out demons” (Mk.16:17). Until the end of time, Jesus will be casting out Satan. In the next chapter, we learn how Satan enters our lives in the first place.

The saints say:

1. I don’t give a snap of my fingers for all the devils in hell. They fear me. (STA)
2. No human power is equal to the devil’s power, but divine power overcomes him and divine light penetrates his schemes. (SJC)
3. By experience, the devout soul learns the devil’s schemes and the need for angelic protection. (SJC)
4. God uses the devil to exercise the soul in virtue. Satan does what he does not want to do and cannot help himself. (SCS)

Group Discussion:

1. What ideas in this chapter were new to you? Do you understand this kingdom of darkness? Do you believe in Satan’s powers?
2. Do you see your need of Jesus’ powers? Do you call upon Jesus’ name?

2.36 – SATAN’S TWO DOORS

The Skin’s Protection

Satan enters our lives through two doors, personal sins and dabbling in the occult. This chapter examines both doors.

Concerning Satan’s entrance through sin, the skin can act as an analogy. Normally, skin protects your body. When your skin is cut, your body becomes vulnerable. This opening allows germs to enter and ultimately lead to infection. Let’s study this analogy. The cutting of the skin represents a human sin. The germs represent the sin growing worse. The infection symbolizes sin that is out of control, because Satan has entered.

All sins have progressions and in the later stages Satan finds an entrance. I’ll give some examples:

1. You use bad language (a cut). Your language becomes very salty (the germ). You constantly blaspheme (demonic infection).
2. You begin to gamble (a cut). You find yourself caught more in the addiction (the germ). You are ready to risk a lot of money and cannot shake the habit (demonic infection).
3. You commit adultery (the cut). You have no desire to stop (the germ). You become promiscuous (demonic infection).
These three stages apply to every possible sin. Frequent, unrepented sins are doors to the demonic. You arrive at a stage where Satan is in control.

**Being “Out of Control”**

When a person’s behavior is “out of control”, the person is “no longer himself”. The demonic has taken over. Although these persons appear very normal, they are on a leash, controlled by some sin. The leash can be drugs, alcohol, sexual desires, money, power, office, hatred, jealousy. The demonic controls this soul and it cannot stay away from the evil.

If they were to be found out, they would be ruined. How many people have viewed internet pornography at work, even though this could cause their dismissal. Yet, they cannot help themselves. They are under another power. We call this bondage and Jesus alone can untie us.

**Dabbling in the Occult**

The second door is the “occult world”, the many practices and objects which receive their power from the kingdom of darkness. These include fortune tellers, tarot cards, ouija boards and countless other items. These “occult powers” are Satan’s counterfeits of the Holy Spirit’s powers. They are not fake. They are dangerous. The Catholic Church wisely tells us to stay away. If a person dabbles in the occult, even for “entertainment”, Satan gains a hold. Avoiding them is the only means of victory.

Other entrances into the occult come from the many strange Eastern religions and the movements that tell you to “develop your divine potential” (yoga, transcendental meditation, Riki). The modern world contains many doors to the occult, hidden in a secular guise with terminology like spiritual energy and divine potential.

**The saints say:**

1. Be careful of the devil’s counterfeit gifts which are recognized by their fruits. (STA)
2. Do not be restless. This is the devil’s goal. (STA)
3. The devout soul must be awakened to her enemies. Otherwise, she will fall from a great height. (STA)
4. Souls inspired by the devil become headstrong, haughty and ready to meddle in many affairs. (SFdeS)

**Group Discussion:**

1. Discuss the three stages leading to infection. Discuss how various sins cause you to lose control. What is this powerlessness and how do you get free?
2. Do you understand the occult world? Have you ever seen this as a serious problem? Were you ever naïve about these occult doors?

**2.37 – SATAN’S TACTICS AGAINST DEVOUT SOULS**

Because devout souls are not involved in serious sin or the occult, Satan must use different methods.
Getting Souls Off the Path

Devout souls walk quickly, always anxious to do God’s will. Satan cannot stop them, so he gets them off the path. They think they are following God but they begin to lose their peace. So, they try even harder. The results are worse. They have no peace and they are very discouraged.

They have veered onto a side path. They need to apply the brake and ask a question. “When and where did I lose my peace? As the Holy Spirit enlightens them, they should turn around, go back, and resume the path where they enjoyed peace.

Wrong Interpretation of a Truth

Let me uncover another tactic of Satan. You certainly should read spiritual books. However, Satan might twist what you read into a disturbing conclusion. He will even use something you read in the bible to disturb you. Here is an example. A young man was very happy as a seminarian, moving along smoothly to ordination until he read a book about Jesus’ calling people to priesthood. Satan filled him with doubts. “Did Jesus really call you to priesthood?” A great darkness came upon him. He lost all his joy. Fortunately, he had a spiritual director who, in one minute, cut right to the heart of the deception. Peace and joy returned immediately.

Regain Peace

Learn this important truth. Peace comes from God. Anxiety comes from Satan. You must follow this unchangeable principle. “When Satan steals your peace, go back and find it.” “When did I stop being at peace?” After answering that question, turn around, go back and get on the road that you had been walking on.

God’s Permission

Satan actually needs God’s permission to attack you. This is called God’s implicit will. Why would God ever allow Satan to attack His children? Saint Thomas gives the answer. God uses Satan as His instrument to accomplish some aspect of God’s purpose. For example, by being tricked by Satan, the seminarian could learn Satan’s tactics and teach you.

The saints say:
1. If the Lord is powerful and the devils are his slaves, what harm can they do to me who am the King’s servant? I can fight against all of hell. (STA)
2. Watch and pray. That is the only way to see the devil’s tricks. (STA)
3. The devil will use all of hell’s powers because one devout soul will win a multitude for God. (STA)
4. The devil can make many false ideas seem true. (SJC)

Group Discussion:
1. Did you understand these examples? Have you ever experienced anything similar? Examine your experiences of confusion, loss of peace and inner darkness.
2. Why would God allow Satan to attack you? Does this happen frequently? What safeguard can avoid a Satanic attack? What can be done to be freed from these actions?
Have you ever watched the construction of a new building? After months of laboring on the foundation, the workers seem to have little to show. Yet, they have accomplished much. The building will soon be completed because the other floors will go up quickly with much less effort. The purgative stage lays the foundation. It seemingly takes so long but this final chapter assures you that much has been accomplished.

Look at your progress:
1. You desire a Devout Life.
2. You consciously try to pray mentally every day.
3. You have a taste for spiritual reading.
4. You use the sacraments regularly.
5. You struggle to overcome your sins.
6. You want to find a devout community where others have the same goals.

You might object that those six goals are not yet gained. However, they have become your goals. They are what you want. You are headed in the right direction. Keep going and learn the next stage of the road to perfection, the Illuminative Stage.

The saints say:
1. We become beginners by resolving to follow God in prayer. Just thinking of this dignity gives me comfort. (STA)
2. The labor is hardest at the beginner’s stage. (STA)
3. I do not want beginners to go at a slow pace. (STA)
4. Once we begin, God begins to work. (STA)
5. From small beginnings, we come to a great end. (SJC)
6. It is only the first step that counts along this path. (STL)

Group Discussion:
1. Look at the six points of progress. Comment on those parts that have happened to you. Which parts have not happened?
2. What are your new goals? How has your daily life changed? What other changes would you want to make?
St. Catherine of Genoa was a married woman with a very difficult husband. For five years she was entangled in the world. One day, when she went to confession and she was lifted to the highest summit of perfection in a single moment. She could never explain this road of perfection because she had never walked it.

The Sunrise

For others, the road to perfection is like a sunrise. The first streaks of dawn (purging) lead out of the darkness of sin. The rising sun (illuminative) gives clarity. The full light of the noonday (unitive) leads to divine union. Then (if he so wills) God bestows the dark nights, which are the door to a new day of total union.

Why Called Illuminative?

This illuminative stage focuses on Jesus, the light of the world. Mental prayer becomes a conversation with Jesus and goodness requires an imitation of his virtues. Jesus fulfills his promise, “No follower of mine will ever walk in darkness” (Jn.8:12).

Jesus’ Mortal Life

In the gospels, many people met Jesus. They either accepted him or rejected him. John describes these two groups. “He came into his own but his own people did not accept him. But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God to those who believe in his name.” (Jn.1:10-11)

In the Middle of All History

Jesus stands at the very center of history, just as his cross stood between the two thieves. You are either at his right (as his friend) or at his left (as someone who ignores or rejects him).

He is a king with an eternal kingdom and he wants you to be there. He wants to say, “Come into my kingdom”. He does not want to send you away, “Depart from me”.

The only way to enter the kingdom is to know Jesus. That is the Illuminative Way.

The Risen Jesus

By rising from the dead, the glorious humanity of Jesus is everywhere. “In Jesus, we live and move and have our being”. Jesus is always with us, constantly inviting us into his presence. “The king of kings has no office hours.” (STA) This illuminative stage awakens you to his presence.

Some Saints

Saints always provide the best examples. St. Paul was killing Christians until he met the Risen Jesus. After that, he became the great apostle.
Peter was leaving Rome in fear when the Risen Jesus said those famous words, “Quo vadis?” (Where are you going?). He returned to Rome and accepted martyrdom.

Although he had been in prison for a year, St. Francis was on a horse returning to war when he had a vision of a hall filled with armor. That beginning experience caused him to turn back. Other experiences followed, especially Jesus’ voice saying “Rebuild My Church.”

Jesus appeared to St. Catherine of Sienna when she was six years old. When she was 19, he appeared again and placed a wedding ring on her finger. She was ready for her work for the Church.

Granted that the saints’ experiences are extraordinary, but everyone should have a story of meeting Jesus and beginning a new life. This is called, the Illuminative Way.

The saints say:
1. Why is Jesus loved so little? He is too unknown. (SLdeM)
2. Is this just a little gift – to have such a Friend beside you? (STA)
3. Keep at the Good Master’s side. He will make you a good disciple. (STA)
4. God wanted Christ to be a companion in our sufferings so we could be his companions in glory. (SFdeS)

Group Discussion:
1. Have you ever had a spiritual encounter with Jesus? If so, please describe that moment and its effects. Are you constantly aware of his presence?
2. How does the purgative stage prepare for that moment? What is expected after the experience?
3.

3.02 – MAKING JESUS YOUR LORD

On December 27, 1673 (the feast of St. John), Our Lord appeared to St. Margaret Mary. He invited her to sit next to him as the Beloved Disciple had done at the Last Supper (resting on Jesus’ heart). Jesus took her heart and put it within his own. Then, He placed her heart (burning with divine fire) back in her breast. After that, she belonged to Him totally. That gift can be yours. Jesus wants you totally for Himself.

False Lords

In the center of your heart is a pedestal called your free will. You decide who occupies that pedestal and rules as your lord. “False lords” like pleasure, power, fame, money, alcohol, drugs, laziness and recreation can occupy that place.

Only Jesus should be on that pedestal. You must enshrine him as the Lord of your free will. Anyone or anything else is “a thief or a robber” (Jn.10:1), stealing everything you have.

An Example

Every Saturday night, Joe headed to the bar. Fortunately, one night, a friend invited him to a large, Saturday night prayer meeting. Each Saturday, he came to the prayer meeting instead of to the bar. During those weeks, alcohol ceased to be his lord. He removed it from
the pedestal and replaced it with Jesus Christ. Joe died two years ago, always faithful to his true Lord.

Who is Boss?
This is so important. After death, you will have no free will. You will come before Jesus Christ and realize that he is the real Lord. That is too late. Life presents an important question, “Who is in charge around here?” You must make that decision while still on earth.

“Who is the boss?” “Whom do I answer to?” Jesus alone is Lord. Everyone else is just a pretender. Only Jesus can claim, “Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will acknowledge before my Father in heaven (Mt.10:32). You only need his one vote to enter heaven.

The Saint on a Pedestal – St. Simeon the Stylite (390-459)
St. Simeon lived on a pedestal for 36 years. He wanted Jesus to be his Lord, but his holiness and miracles attracted gigantic crowds. To preserve his heart for Jesus, he built a ten foot high pedestal. Because the crowds increased, he had to build three more pedestals, each higher than the previous one.

He was very effective. He preached from his pedestal and worked miracles. Many, including two emperors, consulted him in their decisions. They always knew where to find him!

The saints say:
1. Many have renounced Satan but they have not chosen Jesus as king. (SFdeS)
2. Jesus is like a king observing you from the mountain to see if you are fighting as his soldier. (SLdeM)
3. My best remedy is to fix my mind on Jesus. (STA)
4. Many consider themselves as Christ’s friends but they know him very little. (SJC)

Group Discussion:
1. What “false lords” have been enshrined on your pedestal? Are any still there? Do you want to remove them? What freedom came when you dethroned them?
2. Was there ever a moment when you accepted Jesus as your Lord? Do you experience his protection over you? Are you willing to set aside all that hinders his lordship over you? Do you want Jesus to be your Lord?

3.03 - DISCOVERING YOUR IDENTITY IN CHRIST’S LIGHT

Earthly and Heavenly
You have an earthly identity. This includes your name, and your family of origin. As the years go on, you discover your place in society. You marry and have a place in your home. Besides your earthly identity, you also have a heavenly identity (what God wants you to be). You can discover this identity only in Jesus Christ.

Human life is a road. You can follow God’s path or your path. You can become what God always wanted you to be or what you chose to become. After death, you will see if your life was true or false. Did you become the person God intended you to be? The road is
complex (notice the many chapters in this book). However, you have a special light to guide your way, Jesus Christ.

**Experiences and Decisions**

To help you make the right decisions, Jesus “Became flesh and lived among us” (Jn.1:14). He is “the light shining in the darkness“, and “the true light which enlightens everyone” (Jn.1:5 and 9). Let’s study some saints.

**Always Follow Christ’s Light**

St. Rene Goupil was a young French Catholic who wanted to become a Jesuit. However, his health failed and he had to leave. His great love for Jesus Christ drove him on. Instead, he studied surgery and found his way to Canada, joining the Jesuit missionaries there. On September 29, 1642, he was tomahawked to death, the first of nine North American martyrs. Having failed to be a Jesuit, he found God’s light leading him to a Jesuit mission. God has very clever ways of getting us to His goal.

**Living in the Light – St. Agnes (d304)**

Agnes was beautiful, rich and sought in marriage by many young noblemen, even though she was only 13 years old. Agnes had her identity in Christ and she told these young suitors that she had consecrated her virginity to a heavenly husband. Her suitors went to the emperor, believing that the threat of death would change her mind. She stayed firm in Christ and was sentenced to beheading. St. Ambrose wrote, “She went to her execution more joyfully that other brides go to their wedding.” She knew who she was – the bride of the King of Kings.

**A Final Note**

To accept Christ as your light will reveal God’s plan for you. If you reject Christ and spurn the devout life, you will live in a darkness which you can never overcome. You will seek the wrong goals and will waste your life. It doesn’t have to be that way. Let Christ be your light and you will easily answer the important questions, “Who am I? Why do I exist? What is my life all about?”

The saints say:

1. *Without Jesus as your guide, you will lose your way.* (STA)
2. *When Jesus is your Lord, he will teach you many things.* (STA)
3. *What power surrendering to the King has!* (STA)
4. *A soul that enjoys his kingdom, seeks only the will of the king.* (STA)
5. *To the victor, God will give a white stone with the new name written.* (STL)

**Group Discussion**

1. *Do you like being “who you are”? Do you realize God chose to make you “who you are”? Do you know that your identity is still not finished? That you have a big part in fashioning yourself?*
2. *Do you ask many questions about life’s purpose? Do you find many answers? How does a devout life help you?*
**Killing the Prophets**

Jesus cried over Jerusalem saying, “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you kill the prophets and stone those sent to you” (Mt.23:37). Jerusalem killed many prophets sent by God, including Jesus! God sends prophets to you, also. These are his inner inspirations, the good desires that invite you. As you make progress, God increases these desires. He speaks to you like a father. He is proud of you because you are trying to be his child. So, he tells you what to do.

Inspirations come from external causes (like a homily or book, or a conversation). At other times, they come to you directly (inside you). Following these promptings is critical.

**A Summer Inspiration**

God placed a very important inspiration in the heart of a young seminarian. When he told his pastor, he received a clear direction. “Serve God at the newly formed Spanish Center.” The whole direction of that seminarian’s life depended on that inspiration and that advice.

Accepting God’s enlightenments leads to more light. In the final stages, God’s light will totally dominate you (with your consent). Begin now to respond.

**Growth in Following Inspirations**

Every saint became a saint by following God’s inspirations. This is what happens. By mental prayer, the soul awakens. They realize that they are in God’s presence and he inspires them. They develop an interior sense of always listening. They learn to recognize God’s stirrings. They know God is leading them and they must follow. Let’s look at two saints who encountered many obstacles but still found God’s will.

**St. Raphaela Mary Porras (1850-1925)**

Poor Raphaela went through a lifetime of difficulties, but she always followed God’s inspirations. She joined a community of nuns but soon all the others left. Only Raphaela and her sister remained. However, God sent a priest to help them begin a new congregation. When the congregation spread, Raphaela was elected mother general. However, her sister wanted to take over. For the last 32 years of her life, the foundress lived in obscurity, doing housework. Raphaela wanted only to obey God’s inspirations. Having a high office or living in obscurity did not matter. She always followed God’s inspirations. She was canonized in 1977.

**Listening to Your Heart - Blessed Margaret Bourgeoys (1620-1700)**

At 20 years of age, Margaret applied to the Carmelites and to the Poor Clares. Even though her great devotion was well known, both rejected her. However, Margaret continued to follow God’s inspirations, which led her to leave France. Because Margaret sensed a personal love for Canada, in 1657, she left France and went to Montreal, where she opened her school. Her love for all children, (including the Indian children) led her to begin many schools, (at a time when violence was everywhere). She founded the Notre Dame Sisters of Montreal and for over fifty years she was, by influence and accomplishment, the First Lady of Montreal. She kept listening to God’s inspirations until she found a place that accepted her.
The saints say:

1. In this world we choose either eternal life or eternal death. There is no middle ground. (SFdeS)
2. Your future is in the hands of an infinitely good Father who will gladly reveal his plan. (FJdeC)
3. God’s will is infinitely powerful and kind to all who follow it unreservedly. (FJdeC)
4. The soul must see that the only serious business in the world is to follow God’s will perfectly. (SJdeC)
5. When I tried to run away from these interior inspirations, God said that on Judgment Day he would demand of me a great number of souls. (S. Faus.)

Group Discussion:

1. Can you list some moments when God enlightened you? What was the situation? What was the effect?
2. What exterior means (people, books, events) have helped you to see God’s will? How did you cooperate?

3.05 – MOTHER THERESA AND ST. MARGARET MARY

By his inspirations, God moves you into the mystery of his will. Two saints’ lives show that accepting one inspiration leads to another.

Mother Theresa

Mother Theresa of Calcutta grew up in Albania. God led her to a congregation in England. This order sent her to Calcutta where she taught for many years in a girls’ private school. Internally, God’s inspirations were overwhelming, even leading her to make an extraordinary vow (revealed only after her death). With her confessor’s permission, she vowed, under pain of mortal sin, never to reject any inspiration of Jesus. Her life was a total “yes”, to God’s call.

Four years later, on September 10, 1946, God asked her to leave her congregation and to work among the poor, an extraordinary sacrifice which produced worldwide results. God could bring forth all her great accomplishments because she always said “yes” to the moments of inspirations.

St. Margaret Mary

St. Margaret Mary details God’s light and her “yes”. First, God led her to mental prayer. “I felt strongly drawn to mental prayer but I did not know how to make it”.

Second, God led her to the Eucharist. “I could have spent whole days and nights there, without eating or drinking, without knowing what I was doing, except being consumed like a burning candle.”

Third, God led her to a vow of perpetual chastity. “Without knowing their meaning, God’s Spirit had me say over and again, ‘I consecrate to you my purity, and I make you a vow of perpetual chastity’.”
As she entered the Visitation Convent at Paray-le-Monial, her inner life was a great drama of one soul always saying “yes” to God. After saying “yes” so often, she could never say “no”. “I could not in any way withdraw from God’s light which acted within me. Despite all my efforts, I could not disengage myself or prevent his workings. He had taken a deep possession of me”.

St. Margaret Mary did the most menial jobs. At one time, she cared for two very difficult donkeys. While buried in obscurity, she enjoyed the light of the Sacred Heart revelations. Be like these two saints. Keep saying “yes” to the God’s inspirations.

A Superficial Light

Some souls receive God’s light and begin to work for him, sometimes quite successfully. However, when exterior success comes, they abandon their devout life. They cease to seek God’s inspirations and their work becomes superficial. Please remember. God wants to guide you and you must follow God’s inspirations until death.

The saints say:

1. Each favor of light prepares the soul for the next favor. (SJC)
2. Upon receiving Holy Communion, God gave me a ray of spiritual light that was so powerful that my body and soul seemed to enter eternal life. (SCG)
3. To approach divine light, the soul must set itself in darkness. (SJC)
4. Illumination is the light which prayer causes in the soul’s faculties. (SJC)

Group Discussion:

1. What struck you about Mother Theresa’s story? Were you awed by her vow? What if she had not said “yes”?
2. Did you understand the internal journey of Margaret Mary? What parts meant the most to you?

3.06 – LIGHT FOR YOUR CALL

After lowering his net and catching many fish, Peter was enlightened about his own sins. “Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man” (Lk.5:8). Then Jesus said, “I will make you a fisher of men”. By obeying Jesus and repenting of his sins, Peter was prepared to receive God’s call.

My Father’s Teaching

A father was a great homilist who deeply loved his congregation (his children). His children always remembered one practical homily. “It is not important to your mother and I what you become. You have to choose what will make you happy because it is a terrible life to get out of bed every day and go to a job that you do not like.”

In religious words, the father’s teaching goes this way. God created you to be happy and he gave you a call to some career. He made you physically, emotionally and intellectually
perfect for His purpose. He also gave you hopes and desires that move you to this work. If you discover what God has planned, you will want to get out of bed every morning.” A devout life helps this process. Let me give an example.

A group of young adults got involved in a charismatic prayer group. These young adults were still in the decision-making years. Enlightened by devotion, they began to see God’s call. Some broke off a wrong dating relationship. Others changed careers. Quite unexpectedly, young girls started to enter the convent and young men entered the seminary. Others chose careers that served people. All of these young adults were totally new to the devout life but God was enlightening them about His will.

**A Bad Situation**

Unfortunately, in these decision-making years, many young people break all ties to the Church. They do not attend Mass. They do not hear God’s voice. Often, they do not keep his commandments. They walk in darkness during the very years (18-35) when they make their serious decisions. The Devout Life touches everyone but no one so deeply as the young adult.

**A Plea**

To the young person, I say, “God wants to reveal his call for you. Seek a devout life. Learn to listen to His inspirations. Happy that day when God reveals his plan! Blessed is the moment when you hear him say ‘Come here’ or ‘Go there.’ This is the great treasure!

The saints say:

1. *The angels are amazed that man’s heart can abandon what is worthy for what is unworthy.* (SFdeS)
2. *Do not cramp your great desires. By God’s help and your continual efforts you shall reach the goal.* (STA)
3. *Work to increase the fire of your desire.* (SCS)
4. *Jesus realizes that we often do not know God’s will.* (STA)
5. *If you can find everything that is good in God’s will, why search elsewhere? Do you know better than God?* (FJdeC)

**Group Discussion:**

1. *What decisions has God helped you with in the past? Did you make any important decisions when you were not close to God? How did they turn out?*
2. *Do you see God’s purpose for your life? Do you see why he created you? Or, are you still searching for your purpose?*
3.07 - THE LIGHT OF GOD WITHIN YOU

In 1175, a 22 year old man from a noble family (St. Bernard of Clairvaux) had trained at the best university. Suddenly, he found a stirring within to leave everything behind. No one could dissuade him from this sudden change in direction. A few weeks later, he and 31 others (whom he brought along) went to St. Stephen, the abbot at Citeaux. With this decision, a new wave of prayer and devotion entered the Church. Bernard, and his miracles, changed the history of Europe. He settled gigantic disputes. He established popes and emperors. All turned to him and sought his advice. The monasteries were filled again.

Inspirations in Prayer

That story highlights three essential truths.
1. Your devout life will prepare you for your task in life.
2. When you are ready, God will give you a work that is very precious and valuable to the world and to the Church.
3. Only by receiving God’s internal inspirations can you learn His plan.

The Importance of Inner Inspirations

I say this from the housetops. “You, who want to do great things for God, know that God must first do great things within you. You who would build churches for God, know that he must first build his temple within you. You who would convert the whole world, know that God must first convert your own heart and enrapture you”. Look at St. Bernard. God inspired him to enter a monastery so he could change all of Europe.

Know this. God wants to make you his masterpiece. He will accomplish His work when you follow his inspirations.

St. Peter Canicius (1521-1597)

Peter was God’s instrument during the very important 16th century, when Protestantism was beginning in Europe and when the printing press had just been invented.

However, he started out in the wrong direction, studying law at Louvain University because his father wanted that. However, God’s light led him away from law and into the priesthood. He founded many Catholic universities that still exist to this day and wrote a catechism that converted many back to Catholicism. All because he followed his heavenly, not his earthly, father.

Jesus Your Light

Right now, you desire to rid your life of sin, to pray, to attend daily Mass. You have experienced God’s early favors and realize that God has called you to a devout life. God’s special fire has burned away many of your other desires. The question is, “How does Jesus Christ become the light of your world?” That is the next chapter.

The saints say:
1. You will find God when you resolve to please him and not yourself. (FJdeC)
2. How noble is that servant who has given God everything without condition. (SLdeM)
3. When will my littleness enjoy friendship with your greatness? You are light and I am blind. You are life and I am death. (STA)

4. When I saw all that God had done, I was filled with wonder, “Who am I that God seems to care for no one else?” (SCG)

Group Discussion:
1. Do you understand “the inspirations of God”?
2. How do you experience God’s inspirations in the middle of the world’s secular culture? What difficulties are involved? What extra efforts are needed?
3. Are you seeing the absolute need for prayer? Is God working and speaking in your heart?

3.08- THE LIGHT OF AFFECTIVE PRAYER

Religious experiences will multiply as you are faithful to morning meditation. Continue to use a meditation book but realize that the quality of prayer will change. You will need only a few minutes of reading the book before experiencing a stream of feelings. These feelings will lead to a prayer filled with affections.

When this affective steam slows down, pick up the book again. Soon, the stream and the words will begin again. Mental prayer shifts from the intellect to the affections, from understanding to religious feelings, from thinking about Jesus to talking with him. This is great progress.

More Quickly & Regularly
By praying with your affections, Jesus Christ becomes your inner light. In the beginning, you need meditation and spiritual reading so your mind comes alive to spiritual realities. Next, Jesus captures your will by this affective prayer. Please move from meditation into affective prayer as quickly as possible.

This is how. When you meditate, let your will quickly reach out to Christ. Always seek to experience Christ’s presence. This is called the fire of devotion. When your whole being is immersed in religious experiences, you enjoy God’s fire.

Maintaining Affective Prayer
By religious experiences, fervor becomes a regular, daily gift. You experience Christ’s abiding closeness. You possess a burning desire to speak with him. God places a fire in your heart and you rejoice to see the fire grow.

Finally a Fire
You have reached a new stage. Like a boy scout who kept rubbing the wood together, you finally have a fire. Now you must cease rubbing (meditative prayer) and give all your efforts to maintaining the fire.

Close the Doors
Protect your new fire from the world’s wind. Guard it. Surround it with protection. Don’t let your mind be an open door where everything comes in and ruins your fire. Close the
windows and doors. They will destroy God’s greatest gift, the Spirit’s warm fire of devotion within you.

St. Philip Neri (1515-1595)
This great saint of Rome, who guided many to the papacy, had such a fire of God that his heart expanded and broke two ribs. (An autopsy after his death verified this experience). This fire also produced a bodily heat that caused him to glow. During mass, this divine fire seemed to emanate from his eyes and face. The decree of his canonization reports, “His face and eyes sent forth sparks of fire”. The bodily warmth from these excessive fires forced him to keep all his windows open in winter. You must keep your windows shut because you just have a little fire for now.

The saints say:
1.  God’s movements are like fire, more brilliant than the noonday sun. (BL)
2.  I saw that God created me from pure love and I should love him with the same love. (SCG)
3.  I wish everyone would understand that God is always working and that it is very easy to reach sanctity. (FJdeC)
4.  The soul is under an impulse that forces it to seek God always. (SJC)

Group Discussion:
1.  Do you understand the method of meditation? Have you gained the habit of daily meditation? Do you experience some success with the method?
2.  Can you pray with your feelings? Does your mind speak personally with God? What is happening in your mental prayer?

3.09 - PRAYING ALWAYS - (RECOLLECTION)

Personal Growth into Affective Prayer
God moving you into the steady fervor of affective prayer is a great gift. However, something much more important should happen. You realize that Jesus is always with you. You need to pause for just a moment to experience his presence all around you. This is the gift of “praying always” (one of the greatest of graces).

God Within
Soon, Jesus’ presence becomes very internal. You are aware of Jesus living in your soul (a far greater experience). After this gift, you live within your soul as much as possible. Jesus is now your inner light. Your thoughts are never far away from him. The saints call this recollection or the prayer of God’s presence. All progress in prayer depends upon your always remaining in God’s presence.

Praying Always
This path into recollection is very simple. First, you meditate. Then, you move quickly into affective prayer. By these religious feelings, you realize that God is everywhere. Finally, God takes you into yourself (St. Teresa’s inner castle) and you experience God’s indwelling through your Baptism.
Brother Lawrence is the best example. He felt closer to God during the day, than when in chapel. When he went on retreat, he experienced dryness. When he returned to his normal duties, he experienced God’s closeness.

Formal and Informal Prayer
You must pray formally (in your times of prayer) and informally (always aware of God’s presence). You enjoy God in two ways.
1. By formal prayer you will have deep experiences of God.
2. By informal prayer (pausing and lifting your heart to God) you will enjoy a constant sense of his presence. (People often saw Pope John Paul II prostrate in prayer during his working hours.)

The Prayer of God’s Presence

Being aware of God’s presence moves you into the Prayer of Simplicity. Gradually, the affective words become a hindrance because you experience God’s presence. Few words are needed because you experience God and are keenly aware of His presence. God is a skilled workman within your soul, accomplishing much with little effort on your part.

Brother Lawrence

Brother Lawrence, the great spiritual writer on God’s presence, wrote the following:

1. The time of prayer is not different from other times. We are one with God in chapel and at work.
2. We must become perfect worshippers of God.
3. A soul filled with the Spirit makes progress even in sleep.
4. Talking with God is the most delightful life in the whole world.
(Go to the next chapter for more quotes.)

In Practice

Become familiar with all these prayer forms (meditation, affective prayer and prayer of simplicity) so God can lift you up quickly. Always use your highest level of prayer. If you experience affective prayer, set aside meditation. If you experience the prayer of simplicity, set aside affective prayer. When these special moments pass, return to your normal prayer level.

Please note: Your state of prayer differs from God’s passing gift. A state of prayer is the level that you experience each day. God’s passing gift is when you experience a higher level (for a short period of time). If you are faithful to recollection, God’s passing gift will soon become your abiding state of prayer.

The saints say:

1. For a recollected soul, any spark can set her afire. (STA)
2. In the beginning, the recollection is not profound, but if the soul cultivates this habit for a few days, the benefits will show. (STA)
3. Spiritual sweetness comes only from interior recollection. (SJC)
4. Safeguard this small devotion. Look always within, even though this requires great effort. (BL)

Group Discussion:
1. Do you experience God’s presence in your prayer? Do you feel God’s touches upon your feelings? Can you stay in God’s presence without using words?
2. Do you try to speak with God during the day? Do you experience His presence, especially when you are alone?

3.10 - BEING IN GOD’S PRESENCE - BROTHER LAWRENCE

Brother Lawrence, the Carmelite author of the spiritual classic, “Practice of the Presence of God”, writes:

1. My chief concern in these years of religious life has always been to be in God’s presence.
2. For the past thirty years, I have had a joy so constant and strong, that I cannot keep it hidden.
3. God is at the center of my soul and I enjoy great contentment by being conscious of this treasure.
4. All devotions are just the means to come into God’s presence.
5. Think of God always, day and night, in all your tasks and even in your amusements.
6. Live and die with God.
7. Sometimes I see God in such a way that I say, “I no longer believe in God because I see him”. I experience what faith teaches.

A Quote From Brother Lawrence

I share with you the method I have used. Sometimes, I picture myself as a criminal before his judge. At other times, I see God as my Father. I keep my spirit in his presence, banishing all other thoughts. Although practicing this imperfectly, I receive many blessings. By repeating these “acts”, they become a habit and staying in God’s presence becomes natural. Follow this advice.

1. Do not forget God, even for a little while.
2. God has many ways to draw us to himself. He never withdraws unless we withdraw first.
4. Make your heart a temple of the Spirit where you worship constantly. Be preoccupied with God.
5. To reach this state is difficult but if you keep knocking, God will open the door.
6. God is in your midst. Do not seek him elsewhere.
7. Unfortunately, we ignore God and busy ourselves with trifles.
8. Banish all that is not God. He wants to be the only one.
9. By practicing the Presence of God, the soul becomes spiritual very quickly.
10. As a preacher, I would preach only this practice of God’s presence. To give this favor, God empties the soul of everything else.

The saints say:

1. Our minds are always wandering, so we must form this habit of prayerfulness at all costs. (STA)
2. Let the eyes of your soul always look upon the Lord. He never takes his eyes away from you. (STA)
3. Recollection is when a soul uses her faculties to enter into herself to be with God. (STA)
4. I will not allow myself to be absorbed in the whirlwind of work as to forget about God’s presence. (S. Faus)

Group Discussion:

1. Do you understand Brother Lawrence’s simple approach to God? Does it appeal to you? How can you practice it?
2. What would be the results if you lived every moment in an awareness of God’s presence? Can you try doing this?

3.11 - THE HUMANITY OF JESUS

St. Theresa of Avila faced many problems (sometimes with confessors and sometimes with diverse spiritualties) concerning the humanity of Jesus. This problem arises as the soul makes progress. There is a temptation to leave Jesus’ humanity aside to seek a direct contact with God in the Trinity. St. Theresa of Avila was adamant in her teaching that the humanity of Jesus was the only way to divine union. She rejected any confessor who led her by another path. Even the soul enjoying divine union must stay united with Jesus’ humanity. This solid spirituality is based upon the mystery of “the Word became flesh”.

Scriptures

Before Jesus was born, Noah, Abraham, Moses and the prophets had divine encounters with God. In the New Testament, the apostles do not encounter the Father. They experience Jesus. When Peter, James and John went up the mountain, they saw Jesus transfigured. When Paul had his religious experience, he asked, “Who are you?” The voice said “I am Jesus”. On the island of Patmos, John experienced Jesus who said, “Once I was dead, but now I am alive forever and ever” (Rev.1:18). These disciples always experienced the humanity of Jesus. Jesus, himself, explained this change from the Old Testament to the New.

The Change

When Philip asked, “Lord, show us the Father”, Jesus responded, “Philip, whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’. Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?” (Jn.14:9-10)
In the Old Testament, God forbade the Israelites to make any image. In the New Testament, God Himself made the perfect image, the humanity of Jesus. Jesus is the living image of God. “What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked upon and touched with our hands concerns the Word of life.” (1Jn.1:1). Religious experiences must lead you to the humanity of Jesus. Just stay there. Go no further. In Jesus, dwells the full light of God. As Jesus said, “Whoever sees me, sees the Father”.

The Christmas Crib

Every Christmas, parents lead their children to the manger by the altar. The children delight in all the figures, especially in Mary, Joseph and Jesus. Many think the manger is for children but the first Christmas scene was designed by the Church’s greatest mystic, St. Francis of Assisi. After experiencing the greatness of God, the best way he could express it was in the baby Jesus. In our spirituality, be like children and follow St. Francis.

The saints say:

1. While picturing Christ, I would unexpectedly experience his presence. (STA)
2. In heaven, everyone will be satisfied through Our Lord’s humanity. (SCG)
3. Focusing on the events of Jesus’ life refreshes our minds and removes distractions. (SLdeM)
4. You must never stop meditating on Christ’s sacred humanity. (STA)

Group Discussion:

1. Do you understand why the gospel stories are the focal point of meditation?
2. Do you use your imagination in prayer? Is it easy to picture Jesus?
3. What emotions do you have when you are in Jesus’ presence? Has your sense of his presence grown greater?

3.12 – ASCENDING WITH JESUS’ HUMANITY

The Risen Jesus

By becoming man, God’s Word descended from heaven. Jesus’ death and burial was the lowest point of his descending. After that “God greatly exalted him” (Phil.2:9) and “He ascended on high” (Eph. 4:8).

The Ascended Jesus

By ascending into heaven, Jesus’ humanity was united with the Trinity. The Ascension is, “the irreversible entry of Jesus’ humanity into divine glory”. By his Ascension, Jesus gives us access to the Father. (Catechism 659 and 661)

Two Clear Teachings

By focusing on Jesus’ humanity, we experience the power of His ascension.

1. To gain our heavenly glory, we need only to be united to Jesus’ humanity.
2. We must reject the many “religious searching” groups that avoid the humanity of Jesus. These proliferate in America and are dangerous, destructive roads, real minefields that must be avoided.

**Power and Importance of Christ’s Mysteries**

Because of Jesus’ Ascension, when our mental prayer focuses on the gospel stories, we enter Christ’s glory and are in contact with the power of God in Christ Jesus, now sitting at God’s right hand.

The saints say:

1. *In Jesus, a human nature enjoys a personal unity with God.* (SFdeS)
2. *Our greatest help to holiness is Christ’s sacred humanity. We must always meditate on Christ’s mysteries.* (STA)
3. *For a long time I realized that Our Lord was more tender than a mother.* (STL)
4. *Could this possibly be the Lord of heaven and earth needing man’s friendship to be happy?* (SLdeM)

**Group Discussion:**

1. *In prayer, do you ever imagine Jesus in heaven, or yourself with him? Do you firmly believe that you will be with Jesus someday?*
2. *What are your favorite mysteries? What graces do you receive from them?*

### 3.13 - THE PRAYER OF INTERCESSION

**Seeing the Mysteries of the Kingdom**

By experiencing God through mental prayer, the devout soul gains great power to touch God’s heart. The following stories to encourage you to intercede “for the saints as God wills” (Rom.8:27).

**The Grace of Anticipation**

One day, on the way to church, Eileen George, a mystic, saw a truck which had been in an accident. The driver had died. She began to pray for him. On the way home, she again passed the truck and God said, “Your prayer saved that person’s soul”. She protested, “But I only began praying after he had died.” God said, “I know, but I saw your prayer and bestowed the grace of forgiveness in his heart so he was saved.” She calls this the “grace of anticipation”. God, knowing someone needs a grace, anticipates the prayers of an intercessor, and grants the grace even though the prayer (in earthly time) was said later.

This is a very consoling teaching. We can pray even after a person has died because time in the Kingdom is not the same as time on earth. This “grace of anticipation” highlights the power of intercession.

**Saving Souls From Hell**

On January 8, 1937, St. Faustina prayed, “Jesus, I beg you by the inconceivable power of your mercy, that all the souls who will die today escape the fire of hell, even if they have been
the greatest sinners”. Jesus answered, “I see that this was dictated by your pure love for me; that is why I am complying with your requests”. (Notebook #873) This extraordinary gift means that everyone who died on January 8, 1937 will be in heaven. Probably, many had died that day, even before Faustina said the prayer. This, again, was the Grace of Anticipation.

Heaven penetrates human life. When a person is devout, earthly life and heavenly life intermingle. Time and eternity mix freely. By devotion, you can call down God’s glory upon earth. In your mental prayer, intercede with great faith. God, with all his saints and angels, is listening.

St. Francis deSales

The saints’ lives are filled with powerful intercession. As St. Francis deSales was traveling to a monastery on foot, when a gigantic snow storm began. Soon, he realized that his life was in danger. He raised his eyes, said his prayer, and the snow stopped.

The saints say:

1. I felt that I was God’s Queen and I used my new title to ask the King for every possible benefit for his subjects. (STL)
2. Asking for a month, a year, ten years or twenty years is not enough. We must ask until the moment of death. (SLdeM)
3. When I pray for what God wants, I am speaking clearly to someone who listens eagerly. (STA)
4. In answer to my prayers, God frequently delivered people from serious sins. (STA)

Group Discussion:

1. Do you believe that God responds to your prayers? Were there moments when your request was granted? Do you join hearts and ask God with others?
2. Do you pray each day for blessings? Did you ever pray and God showed you what to do?

3.14 - A MYSTIC’S EXPERIENCE OF THE TRINITY

The Foundation of All Devotion

Catholics believe in the Trinity. However, almost no one thinks of experiencing the Trinity. Yet, to experience the Trinity is the ultimate goal of the devout life, made possible through Christ’s humanity. The Trinity wants to absorb the devout soul, allowing it to experience the Father, Son and Spirit. By his Ascension, Jesus’ human nature is totally one with the Trinity, able to lead us into a union with all three Divine Persons.

A Mystic’s Experience of the Trinity

While preaching publicly for decades, Eileen George has often explained to people her own relationship with the Trinity. Eileen was adopted by poor Italian parents. To play hop-
scotch, she had to use broken pieces of glass as her markers. One day, a boy name Butch joined her. He took the broken pieces of glass and rounded them off with one stroke of his finger. Later, Eileen fell from a swing and seriously cut her knee. Butch healed it with his touch. One day, as she received Holy Communion, Butch was there. She told him to get out of the way. At this point, the pastor began to realize that something very special was happening to this little girl.

Butch accompanied Eileen all through her years, coming to her whenever he chose. Very quickly, she knew he was Jesus. For 20 years, she complained to him. “Butch, I know you but you have never shown me your Father.” (When the soul is ready, Jesus will gladly take her to the Father.)

The Father

One day, Jesus showed her the Father. Eileen saw him just as she sees any human person. She fell in love with the Father. A voice within said, “You think you see the Father in his fullness but you would die if you did”. After experiencing the Father, the special doors of ministry flew open (called “Meet the Father Ministry). Because she had not yet experienced the Spirit, she would ask the Father for that gift.

The Holy Spirit

Six years later, the Father said to her “Look to the right”. She saw a silhouette, but still no identity. The Father said, “I am leading you”. The figure came closer and she saw a heart beating. The figure entered into her but did not pass through. A voice said, “Call me KASHA, lover of your soul”. The Spirit became very real to her as the Bridegroom of Mary and the Third Person of the Trinity. Later, her spiritual director said she had experienced spiritual marriage. Now, her ministry could come to its fullness.

Conclusion

These are mystical touches of God given to those who have made great progress. Yet, from the beginning, you should experience a devotion to the Father, Son and Spirit. It usually happens in this way. You first enjoy a relationship with Jesus in prayer. Gradually, Jesus reveals his heavenly Father, first as someone who provides. “The Father knows what you need before you ask him” (Mt.6:8), then as a personal friend, “The Father himself loves you” (Jn.16:27).

The next step is an awareness of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, sent by the Father and the Son. You realize that the Holy Spirit is a person who is present and helps you. The three Divine Persons are alive in your soul and want you to be aware of their presence and activity. Father Tanquerery writes, “The Trinity is the cause of our holiness in two ways, by dwelling in us and by giving us a supernatural organism which enables us to perform God-like acts.”
Brother Lawrence says:

1. As much as possible, I keep myself with the Trinity who lives at the center of my soul.
2. Make your heart a temple of the Spirit where you worship constantly.
3. The Trinity dwells at the center of your soul. Why not pause and worship?

The saints say:

1. Jesus is the spouse but some would like to look at their wedding ring instead of the spouse who gave it. (SFdeS)
2. By infused knowledge, the soul sees all of the Trinity’s attributes in one simple Being. (SJC)
3. The Trinity raises the soul above all creatures and the soul finds itself even more hidden. (SJC)
4. Jesus pervaded my soul and from that moment on I felt the Most Holy Trinity within my heart. (S.Faus)

Group Discussion:

1. Do you have a relationship to God as Father? Do you experience the Father’s protection? Do you feel like God’s child?
2. By devotion, have you come to know Jesus in a personal way? What is new for you?
3. Do you ask for the Holy Spirit? Is the Spirit real to you? Do you experience His spiritual gifts (charisms)?

3.15 – RETURNING TO YOUR FIRST FERVOR

St. Teresa

To enter the convent, St. Teresa of Avila made valiant efforts to learn how to pray mentally and to break away from her family. However, after becoming a religious, she began to enjoy hours of worldly friendships and conversation. She had lost her first love. Fervor had delivered her to the convent life, but she had no further interest in a fervent life. She lived this way for 20 years.

Leaving Love Behind

In your first fervor, you receive many divine favors because you make great sacrifice. As time goes on, the devout life becomes like a plain, having no mountains and valleys. Great battles have been won. The enemy has been routed. You enjoy affective prayer and deep peace. However, at this stage, you can lose the burning desires of first fervor.

God has brought you to good pasture and you are tempted to enjoy the pasture (which God gave) and leave behind the intense personal love that brought you there. When fervor began, you rejected many worldly comforts and made great sacrifices. The discipline paid off. The rewards were great. You gained the Illuminative Stage.

Lukewarmness
Having gained this level, you stop making those sacrifices. The saints call this problem lukewarmness. All the worldly comforts that you set aside start getting back in. God is good and he does not remove your prayer gift. Yet, you are not living the disciplined life that merited (if I can use that word) the prayer of simplicity.

**Your First Love**

Jesus said to the Church of Ephesus, “I hold this against you: You have lost the love that you had at first. Repent and do the works you did at first” (Rev.2:4). Sometimes, you will need a new door to open so the fires of devotion burn brightly again. Please do not forget this lesson. You must always search. You must always be looking. The devout life is not a pasture to graze in but a road to walk on. The soul must always search and search.

The saints say:

1. **Lukewarmness is the worst kind of life, having no joy in God and no pleasure in the world.** (STA)
2. **At the beginning, souls take great pleasure in loving God. As time goes on, they change, no longer taking pleasure in God.** (SFdeS)
3. **God brings about success but this can be ruined if the soul is not faithful.** (FJdeC)
4. **Sometimes, souls are fervent and ready to do anything. Then they become tepid and bored with devotion.** (SLdeM)

**Group Discussion:**

1. **Do you see a picture of yourself in this chapter? What sacrifices did you make at the beginning? How did God reward you?**
2. **What has changed? Is your fervor growing or cooling off? Are you less faithful than when you began?**

**3.16 - THE INTERESTS OF JESUS**

In the 16th Century, as many Catholics were abandoning the Church, St. Teresa of Avila wrote to her nuns, “Jesus has so few friends these days, let us, at least, be good ones”. As Jesus’ good friend, you must have His interests deeply at heart.

**A Story**

In 1985, a priest saw a young boy on a bike hurtling down the hill in front of the Church. After the bike crashed, both a nurse and a doctor stopped their cars. When the boy’s father arrived on the scene, they urged him to take his son to a hospital because his arm was broken. The father wasn’t interested. “What can we do?” he asked the two professionals. “Nothing” they said. The priest cried that night, thinking of a little boy with a broken arm, and a father who had no interest.

**Our Hearts**

“Interests” reveal our hearts. People have romantic interests and self-interests. Countries speak of their interests. By romance, a person gains a deep interest in another. At the pinnacle of all interests stand the “interests of Jesus”, the highest and most unselfish
interest of all. Jesus had everything, yet he emptied himself so we could have everything. The devout soul tries to return the favor.

What are Jesus interests? Everything! Jesus wants children to have enough food, the young to be well educated, families to be happy and nations to be at peace. Nothing escapes His heart. He desires every possible blessing upon every single person. However, his only non-negotiable interest is that everyone gain eternal life.

Jesus’ Special Friends
Jesus reveals his interests to his special friends. “To Francis Xavier, Jesus said, “Go to India”. To Damien the Leper, he said “Go to Molokai”. To St. John Brebeuf, he said “Go to Canada”. To St. John Neuman, he said “Go to America.” Someday Jesus’ cry will ring out in your heart. He will say, “Go”. When you hear his call, serve his interests. This is why you were born. Don’t worry. Jesus will overcome your fears. That is the next chapter.

St. Benedict Biscop (628-690)
St. Benedict was born in England of high birth. As a young man, his family sent him to Rome to get a liberal education. However, as he saw the sinfulness of Rome and the temptations coming from the other students, he made plans for his escape.

Without telling anyone, he left Rome, and went thirty miles away into the mountain regions where he found a call to greater solitude. His intense desires for Jesus' interests led him back to England where he founded the monasteries of Wearmouth and Jarrow, the centers of Catholic intellectual life. He constantly traveled to Rome to bring back every spiritual and intellectual treasure he could find, all for the interests of Jesus. He prepared the way for the intellectual accomplishments of St. Bede the Venerable.

The saints say:
1. After experiencing hell, I would do anything to prevent one soul from going there. (STA)
2. Few souls work simply for God. (SJC)
3. Souls which lack generosity only lend things to God. (STA)
4. How much a soul ablaze with love can do for Jesus! (STA)

Group Discussion:
1. What are Jesus’ interests in your life? Do you try to serve his interests? How successful have you been?
2. What would be your own “vital interests”? Can you list these? Are you willing to sacrifice them for others, and for Jesus’ interests?
3.17 - FEAR IN SERVING JESUS

God said to Jeremiah, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you ... a prophet to the nations I appointed you” (Jn.1:5). God also has a plan for you. He is an expert archer and you must become an arrow in his quiver. When that happens, he will send you wherever he chooses.

Overwhelmed by the Task

There is one problem. You will be afraid. God had to say to Jerimiah, “To whomever I send you, you shall go. Have no fear before them.” (Jer.1:7-8) The angel said to Mary “Do not fear, you have found favor with God” (Lk.1:30). The transfigured Jesus said to Peter, James and John “Get up and do not be afraid” (Mt.17:7). The Risen Jesus assured John on the island of Patmos, “Do not be afraid. I am the first and the last, the one who lives” (Rev.1:17). Teresa of Avila wrote, “It may sound strange but you need to have great courage to receive God’s favors”.

God’s Work

Fear always accompanies a divine task. Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid. I will make you a fisher of men”. Jesus said to Paul “Do not be afraid. Go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you” (Acts 18: 9-10). An angel told Paul, “Do not be afraid, Paul, you are destined to stand before Caesar.” (Acts 27:24). God has important tasks and you will accomplish them (if you do not run away in fear).

A Special Story

When she was a little child, St. Frances Cabrini fell into a river and almost drowned. She was always afraid of water. Later, she founded the successful Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart and was quite content to establish her schools and houses all over Italy. However, a bishop told her to go to America. She consulted the Pope himself, Leo XIII, “Not to the East, but to the West”, he said. This poor saint, deathly afraid of water, spent the rest of her life crossing the Atlantic Ocean innumerable times. Before sanctifying America, she had to conquer her fears.

The saints say:

1. I was always impeded by fears until I resolved not to worry about my poor health. (STA)
2. God has given me the grace of having no fear. I will do my duty at any cost. (STL)
3. Mary will rid your heart of all fears. (SLdeM)
4. Why should you be a coward? Our King is all-powerful. (STA)

Group Discussion:

1. What hold does fear have over you? Have you allowed your fears to stop you from serving Jesus?
2. Are you growing more fearful or less fearful? What helps you to cast aside your fears? Where have you won victories over your fears?
3.18 - THE NEW TESTAMENT LETTERS

In the purgative stage, the devout soul should read the gospels because they were written to invite people to become disciples. After a while, you will want to read the New Testament letters because they were written to show devout souls how to make progress. St. Paul wrote to a unique audience. His communities contained baptized believers who had received the Holy Spirit and were awaiting Jesus’ return. These early Christian communities had fashioned a new lifestyle and were living as if “the world was passing away”. Such people had never existed before in history (not even in the most fervent days of Israel).

These believers had experienced fervor, accepted personal discipline, formed a devout community, and sought the interests of Jesus. The letters make little sense for anyone without a devout life. For the devout soul, the letters are logs for your spiritual fire.

These sacred authors and their new believers had their hearts afire, waiting for the King to return. If you read them with a fervent heart, your inner fire will leap up. Try to memorize some of the verses and feed your inner fire all day long.

The saints say:

1. God still writes on the hearts of the devout the same words that he wrote in Scripture. (FJdeC)
2. The Bible is God’s mysterious utterance and its words are drops from God’s ocean. (FJdeC)
3. If you give your whole attention to God’s word, you will not worry about your spiritual advancement. (FJdeC)
4. I was reading Paul’s letters and I discovered my call when I came upon his words, “I shall show you a still more excellent way” (1Cor.12:31). This was the way of love. (STA)

Group Discussion:

1. What letters have you read? What is your favorite letter? What are your favorite verses?
2. Do you have a set time and a regular place to read the letters? Are you committed to New Testament reading?

PART B
GOODNESS OF LIFE

3.19 - PRACTICING THE VIRTUES

You experience God by receiving his consolations. You serve God by practicing the virtues. Religious experiences are God’s gifts. Virtues are your response to these gifts. In the Illuminative Stage, you begin a “season of refreshment” (Acts 3:20), a precious time which must not be squandered. The seeds of affective prayer must bring forth a harvest of virtues. Jesus said, “I work during the day, for the night comes when no one can work” (Jn.9:4). The
Illuminative Stage is the day, a time filled with abundant light. Your work during this day is to acquire solid habits, so your spiritual house can withstand any trial.”

**Good Habits Buried Within**

God has a purpose for every season of life. At every stage, we must acquire new virtues which prepare for the next stage.

A skilled artist fulfills his tasks easily because he has good habits, the lessons he learned as an apprentice. He takes these habits for granted and even forgets how he developed them. Yet, every time he plies his trade, these forgotten habits serve him well, allowing him to create his masterpieces.

This is the secret of the saints. They cultivated good habits for years. Buried deeply in their spirit, these virtues allow them to create masterpieces of holiness. Let’s begin cultivating virtues with the three evangelical counsels (poverty, chastity and obedience).

**Three Models of Virtue**

Three Jesuit saints were born in the 16th century. All were known for their purity and becoming saints quickly, St. Aloysius Gonzola (23 years old), S. Stanislaus Kostka (18 years old) and St. John Benchmans (22 years).

Aloysius came from a rich family and had to resist his father’s pressure so he could enter the Jesuits. He always wanted to become perfect quickly, so he practiced heroic virtue. When a plague broke out in Rome, he served the sick and caught their disease. He wrote to his mother not to be sad for he would welcome her to heaven.

Stanislaus was from a politically important family in Poland. When the Jesuit Provincial did not want to accept him into the Order for fear of his father, Stanislaus walked 350 miles from Vienna to Rome, was accepted into the Jesuits by St. Francis Borgia, and died 9 months later.

John was from Belgium. He was studying at a Jesuit school when he read the life of St. Aloysius, which turned his heart to the priesthood. He, too, went to Rome to study and, like Aloysius, he died of a contagious disease.

All three lives prove that the ladder of virtue can be climbed quickly if we maintain the eagerness of youth.

The saints say:

1. *Although I enjoyed many divine favors, I was still a beginner in virtue. (STA)*
2. *We cannot build towers without the foundations of virtues. (STA)*
3. If we keep the commandments, God is obliged to give us salvation. (STA)
4. We must practice virtues but not always in the most excellent way. Heroic virtues are only counseled, not commanded. (SFdeS)
5. The essence of the virtues is the will of God. (S. Faus)

Group Discussion:

1. Do you see the value in establishing good habits? Are they within your reach? Are you motivated? Do you have a plan how to proceed?
2. What virtues do you practice? What virtues do you lack? What virtues would you like to practice?

3.20 - POVERTY

Jesus was born poor and died poor. He said, “The foxes have lairs and the birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head” (Lk.9:58). To some, he said “Go, sell everything and give to the poor” (Mt.19:21; Mk.10:21; Lk.18:22). To the apostles He said, “It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” (Lk.18:25).

The Saints and Poverty

All the apostles and the early disciples took Jesus’ teaching on poverty very seriously. After Pentecost, the newly baptized “had all things in common” and “would sell their property and possessions” (Acts 2:44-45).

St. Barnabas sold his property and put the money at the feet of the apostles (4:37). St. Paul used his skill as a tentmaker so he did not ask money for himself.

A few centuries later, St. Anthony inherited his father’s possessions. At Mass, he heard Jesus words, “Go, sell all you have and give it to the poor”. He did just that and thousands followed him into his life of evangelical poverty.

Eight hundred years later, another rich young man named Francis began to give away the clothes in his father’s tailor factory. When his father dragged him before the Bishop, Francis took off all his clothes and left Assisi behind. Soon, many others joined Francis in his poverty. The question is, “Where do you begin in practicing poverty?”

Where to Begin

Begin by tithing. Give ten percent of your income to God. This is clear biblical teaching. If you do this, God will help you to make correct financial decisions. You will get out of credit card debt and put your finances in order. In contrast, clinging to possessions has two bad effects. You do not trust God and your heart becomes hardened to people’s needs. Practicing
poverty allows your money to help others. Because you help others, God will give you many blessings.

Two Stories

1. Thirty years ago, a rich couple went to Haiti for a vacation. Although living in the tourist hotel, they saw many who were mired in poverty. When they returned home, they reevaluated their lifestyle. They changed. Their neighbors thought they had gone insane, but the extra cars and the extra luxuries were all sold. They committed themselves to a lifetime of helping the poor.

2. The original founders of the Carmelites were so committed to poverty that they lived totally by the food given to them each day. At night, they gave away all the extra food. In this way, they would have nothing left and would need to beg again. Each day, they trusted God for their food.

Poverty is an inner fire that drives you to simplify your lifestyle. It has no external rules. Do everything under the guidance of your director.

St. John the Almsgiver (550-619)

At 50, John was a rich widower who had buried all his children. Because he helped the poor, he won everybody’s respect and was made the Archbishop of Alexandria.

Immediately, he asked for a list of the “masters”, by this he meant the poor. He took the 7500 poorest people under his protection. When he found 80,000 pieces of gold in his church treasury, he distributed the money to hospitals and monasteries.

When his stewards complained, he told them the following. When I was young, a beautiful woman (representing charity) appeared and said, ‘If you be my friend, I will lead you to the king”. He spent his eleven years as Archbishop, as a great friend of Queen Charity and of the poor.

The saints say:

1. There is not enough paper and ink to describe the evils that come from rejoicing in earthly goods. (SJC)  
2. How happy to see a soul saved on judgment day because they gave alms. (STA)  
3. For Christ’s sake, seek to be detached from everything in this world. (SJC)  
4. A detached soul has a generosity to serve God. (SJC)

Group Discussion:

1. Do you set aside 10% for God’s works? Do you see the importance of helping the poor?
2. Can you live a life of detachment? Do you understand what is needed? Can you see how detachment frees you to love God and people?
3.21 - CHASTITY

Because the world is drunk on sexual pleasures, writing about chastity is like preaching sobriety in a bar. The problem is this. Years ago, people tried to be chaste because sexual acts could lead to human conception. Now, contraception has removed that motive. If contraception does not work, abortion is available. With all these options, the world challenges the Church to defend its teachings on human sexuality. Fortunately, Pope John Paul II has responded to this challenge by writing, Theology of the Body and Love and Responsibility. This chapter outlines the Pope’s thoughts in these two books.

THEOLOGY OF THE BODY

“In the beginning”, Adam accepted Eve as his equal, saying “At last, bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. This one shall be called woman”. The man and woman were both naked, yet they felt no shame (Gen 2:23-25).

This biblical story outlines “sexuality from the beginning” (as God created it) before sin poisoned the relationship.

1. Man and woman are equal.
2. Each accepts the other fully.
3. They have a passionate relationship. They “cling” to one another.
4. Their relationship is in order. They feel no shame in their nakedness.

The Disordered Sexuality

Sin shatters this “beginning” order and the third chapter of Genesis describes these changes:

1. The man blames the woman (3:10).
2. The wife sees her husband as “master” (3:16).
3. The marital passions have become “sexual urges” (3.16).
4. They feel shame in the relationship and need clothes (3:21).

This is the disordered sexuality that the world foolishly accepts as normal. Only chastity overcomes this disorder and restores the correct personal relationship between man and woman.

The Restored Sexuality

The Jews could not accept Jesus’ teaching against divorce because Moses allowed that practice. Jesus said that Moses was confronting disordered sexual practices that resulted from their “hardness of heart”. Jesus’ goal was to restore sexuality as it was “from the beginning” when “God made them male and female” (Mk.10:6). By Christian chastity, the sexual drive is reordered and correctly integrated into the human personality.
LOVE AND RESPONSIBILITY

In this book, Pope John Paul II does not quote the bible much. Instead, he uses philosophical arguments, based upon the dignity of the human person.

Human sexual activity is not the same as animal sexuality. Sexual relations between a man and woman are personal and must preserve the dignity of the persons. Only chastity safeguards the personal dignity of the couple. Again, I will summarize the Pope’s thoughts:

1. The male/female relationship contains three levels of attractions:
   a. the bodily attraction (the lowest level),
   b. the romantic attraction (a higher level) and
   c. the personal attraction (the highest level).
2. Most male/female relationships begin with the romantic attraction which leads the couple to spend time with each other. They find themselves caught up in a very emotional and personal drama.
3. A disordered sexuality misuses romantic love and seeks bodily union before marriage. Seeking sexual relations before marriage is love of the body and not love of the person.
4. If the couple is chaste, their romantic love ascends to the personal love. Chastity frees them to love each other as persons, not just as bodies.
5. When two people reach the level of true personal love, they are candidates for a lifelong, faithful marriage. In marriage, all three attractions (bodily, romantic and personal) are active and strengthen each other.

Conclusions

The Pope describes “love for the person“:

1. True personal love can be expressed sexually with only one person. So, it is faithful.
2. True personal love perseveres in “good times and in bad”. So it is permanent.
3. True personal love must be open to conception and not closed in on self. So, it is procreative.
4. Marriage is the only atmosphere which can adequately welcome children. Any other arrangement (like cohabitation) is too frail.
5. God instituted marriage (Gen. 1 and 2). Through marriage, couples receive God’s permission for their sexual activity.

St. Margaret of Scotland (1045-1093)

Of noble English birth, Margaret and her family had to flee to Scotland from the Court of King Edward. Seeing her virtues, King Malcolm of Scotland fell in love and married her. Her influence as queen mother was astounding. Malcolm became a great king, encouraging good priests and good teachers trained in the Catholic faith.
She had eight children. Three sons became kings of Scotland. Her daughter married King Henry I of England and was called “good Queen Maude”. She is a great example of holy married love.

The saints say:

1. *Guided only by sensual pleasure, man degrades himself and lives like the animals.* (SFdeS)
2. *Control your senses. Otherwise, you cannot enjoy the full divine presence.* (BL)
3. *By tasting the Spirit, the devout soul can live chastely.* (SJC)
4. *Our inner desires are at war. By Christ’s Blood, this war can cease.* (STA)

Group Discussion:

1. *Was the Pope’s teaching clear to you? Did you accept it easily or did you struggle with it? Did it enlighten you and give you a different outlook?*
2. *Where does the Pope’s teaching clash with the world’s viewpoint? Which seems better to you? Which is easier? Which is healthier?*

**3.22 - THE SAINTS AND CHASTITY**

There are two groups of saints. Some are known for purity from their earliest years. These include Aloysius Gonzaga, Gerard Majella, Dominic Savio and innumerable others. Some saints are well-known for recovering their chastity, like Mary Magdalene, Augustine (who fathered a child out of wedlock), Charles de Foucauld and many, many others. The saints differ greatly, but sanctity always demands a total commitment to a chaste life.

Two Stories

The life of Thomas Aquinas contains a powerful example of purity. His family opposed his becoming a Dominican and tried to change his mind. To entice him, they sent a beautiful woman to his room. Thomas grabbed a fire brand and the woman quickly fled. The dispute was finished.

The great modern example of purity is Maria Goretti. At 12 years of age, she was killed by Allesandro, who wanted sexual relations. After her death, she appeared to him in prison and brought about his conversion. He attended her canonization.

**St. Catherine of Sienna (1347-1380)**

By a mystical experience, Jesus claimed Catherine as his own when she was just six years old. However, as she reached adolescence her family demanded that she fix her hair and dress in fashion. For a while she accepted their demands, but then decided to cut off her golden brown hair. In response, the family harried her. She bore these difficulties with patience until her father relented and allowed her to follow her call.
At 19, Jesus and Mary appeared to her. Our Lady lifted up her hand and Our Lord put a wedding ring on her finger. Her original consecration now led to great tasks for the Church.

The Little Flower’s Mother

Marie-Azelie Guerin had eight children. The three boys died in infancy. She bore these tragedies with great faith, saying that her personal sufferings were little, compared with her sons’ heavenly glory.

Eight years before her death, she contracted cancer. Yet, she conceived and gave birth to her youngest, the Little Flower, four years before her own death. Her devotion led to great sacrifices for her family.

An Important and Amusing Story

Zelie Guerin (the Little Flower’s mother), lived with her parents in Alencon, France, with seemingly no thought of marriage. One day, as a young man (Louis Martin) walked by, God said to her, “that man will be your husband.”

That night, she told her parents that she was going to get married. She had to acknowledge that she did not know the man’s name or address and that he had no idea of his future bride and wedding.

Believing God, the parents discovered who the man was, and invited him to a party. Six months later, they were married. He had studied to be a priest for a while and believed that they should live as brother and sister. After a few years, Zelie took him to a priest who convinced him that having children was the better path for him.

A Dissolute Culture

Early Christianity faced great problems in preaching chastity. The Jewish culture accepted divorce. Men committed adultery but only women were accountable for their adulterous behavior. Pagan cultures (like Corinth), were known for their debauchery. Yet, Paul preached the highest level of purity to those who had been quite tolerant of sexual license. Jesus and St. Paul never closed their eyes to the problems. They spelled out clear ideals, and encouraged believers to chastity, even amid great difficulties. Hopefully, the following chapters will do the same.

The saints say:

1. A soul which is striving for this chastity must pray or it will never attain it. (St Faus)
2. When sinful desires guide the soul, it is like being led by a blind man. (SJC)
3. The flesh lost its state of innocence and now it wars against the spirit. (SCS)
4. God’s grace seizes our hearts but never takes away our liberty. It’s power entices but never forces. (SFdeS)
Group Discussion:

1. *What attitudes among your friends support chastity and which attitudes tear it down?*
2. *What aspects of society cause you the greatest difficulties with chastity? Are there any aspects that support chastity?*

### 3.23 - CHASTITY IN PRACTICE

Christian chastity has sound foundations:

1. Sexuality is the deepest part of our being a person. We are **male** or **female** at the core of our existence.
2. Sexual attractions exist so that people marry and have children.
3. The modern culture has pushed back the age of marriage. As a result, young people experience sexual drives but have no marriage partner.
4. This can lead either to self-gratification, (especially for young men) or to sexual activity before marriage.
5. Even for married people, a disordered sexuality leads to sexual gratification away from the marital act, and to infidelity.
6. The modern world views Catholic chastity as impossible, unreal and out of touch. It has a “bad name”, when really it has **great wisdom**.

#### Needed Decisions

The devout soul in the illuminative stage must be committed to the following:

1. Avoid all illicit sexual acts that involve another person. A devout soul must not draw someone else into their sin (even if the other person is quite willing).
2. Eliminate, as much as possible, the innumerable external sexual stimuli.
3. Limit, as far as possible, all illicit **internal** images and feelings.

For men, this latter will be the most difficult. A devout soul can walk away from an illicit sexual partner and can put pornography aside. However, he cannot walk away from his own body and his sexual drive. He must use the sacrament of confession faithfully. Priests usually are very understanding of the person’s struggle against solitary sin.

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**St. Francis of Assisi**

Like everyone, Francis experienced sexual temptations. Like a saint, he did all he could to overcome them. On one occasion, the temptations were so strong that he threw himself among thorns to win the victory.
God rewarded this heroic effort. In the Portiuncula Church of Assisi, even to this day, roses grow without any thorns. If these roses are planted elsewhere, they grow their usual thorns. This phenomenon remains a perpetual tribute to the saint’s victory over temptation.

The saints say:

1. For every grace I made good use of, God gave me many more. (STL)
2. Unfortunately, we make weak resolutions. (STA)
3. The flesh is a frontier which the soul must cross by trampling underfoot illicit desires. (SJC)
4. Passions remain in us. This leads the soul to exercise virtue and spiritual courage. (SFdeS)
5. By cultivating the opposite tendency, the soul can correct its natural instincts. (SFdeS)

Group discussion:

1. How does chastity help to integrate sexuality into your personality? What have been the benefits of trying to be chaste?
2. What obstacles to chastity can you easily avoid? Which ones are difficult to avoid?

3.24 - PRE-MARITAL CHASTITY

Premarital Chastity

Young people used to marry much earlier. Most were still living at home on their wedding day. Two modern developments have made premarital chastity very difficult. People marry later and before marrying they have their own apartment/home. These circumstances have led to very high percentage of cohabitation before marriage. The cultural safeguards for chastity have been removed. Culture changes but God’s law does not.

False Views

In our culture, most couples assume that sexual relations are a normal part of dating. As the relationship develops, they feel at liberty to cohabit. Couples preparing for a Catholic wedding might even go off together on vacation. (That used to be called the honeymoon.) Catholic colleges have co-ed dorms. Sexual activity is everywhere and chastity sits on the sidelines.

Those attitudes come from the widespread acceptance of contraceptives (and abortion). The ability to have intercourse without conception (or without birth) removes a primary motive for abstinence. The devout life goes against this culture. The devout person decides to “wait for marriage”. Gaining this goal requires that the couple have a personal spirituality and a mutual agreement to “wait until marriage”. This desire for pre-marital chastity brings a great gift.
The Greatest Earthly Reward

By “waiting until marriage”, you have a better chance to marry the right person. Dating is a selecting process. Having sexual relations before marriage blinds and entraps. (One partner might use sexual activity to ensnare another. Chastity allows you to evaluate the other person objectively and to break the relationship (with fewer regrets) if this is not the right person.

False Concepts

Couples falsely believe that their romantic love should lead to the bedroom. This is a total disaster, filled with self-love and twisted emotions. Chastity is absolutely required if the two persons are to keep their eyes open to confront problems.

When you enter a romantic relationship, you must demand chastity (of yourself and the other). God will then give you light to know whether to continue in this relationship or to walk away. Pre-marital relations put out all the lights and place you in darkness, at the very moment when you are making the most important decision in your life – who to marry.

A Special Gift

Chastity before marriage means you can trust your partner after marriage. If your partner broke God’s law with you, why won’t they do the same with another? Pre-marital chastity is the best preparation for a permanent and faithful marriage.

The saints say:

1. Nothing is as strong as love or as sweet as its strength. (SFdeS)
2. Desires are like discontented children, never allowing their mother to rest. They are like cataracts, which blind us. We call good, evil and evil, good. (SJC)
3. Desire awakens, but only love acts. Desire spreads the soul’s wings. Love makes her fly. (SFdeS)
4. A loving nature contains the danger of loving wrongly. (SFdeS)

Group Discussion:

1. How do your ideas of pre-marital chastity conflict with the world’s ideas? What effect have contraception and abortion had upon couples?
2. Do you see the connection between chastity and choosing the right marriage partner? What conflicts arise in the dating period?

3.25 - MARITAL CHASTITY

Marital Chastity

In a good marriage, each partner must practice a great deal of sexual self-restraint. For example, the needed tenderness in love-making comes only from chaste love. In many circumstances (such as illness) true love refrains from intercourse. Also, every marriage has periods which demand total continence (as in the late stages of pregnancy and in times of
physical separation). Trying to be pure before marriage pays big dividends toward a good sexual life in marriage.

**Marital Thoughtfulness**

Within marriage, chastity brings about **thoughtfulness**, **tenderness** in lovemaking and an understanding (when intercourse must be postponed). Lack of chastity causes resentment and sometimes even **frigidity**. Chastity raises the sexual act above the animal level and makes it an expression of true love for the person.

**Artificial Contraception**

Marital chastity will not use artificial contraception. Pope John Paul II explains the reasons for this teaching.

1. Human sexuality is not animal sexuality because it takes place on the personal level.
2. The couple must treat each other as persons, especially in the marital act.
3. The woman’s body already contains natural limitations to conception.
4. She has only a definite number of years to bear children, and, within those years, only certain cycles of fertility.
5. In choosing to have children or to postpone them, the couple should examine these bodily laws.
6. To refuse to learn them is to reject God’s law, which is built into our bodies.
7. To respect the woman’s body (in its fertility and non-fertility) is the greatest love a husband can have.
8. Artificial contraception treats the woman’s body as a thing, a source of male pleasure.
9. Respecting each other’s bodies is the door to permanency and fidelity. All of the Pope’s insights are contained in his book, “Love and Responsibility”.

**Need for Devout Life**

Living up to that ideal demands great sexual sacrifices, which are impossible unless the couple shares a devout life. Using Natural Family Planning during the years of child-bearing requires that the couple have a mutually shared spirituality. They also need a good confessor to guide the couple in their attempts to live out a total marital purity.

**The Good Result**

Having all the children that God might send or limiting the number by Natural Family Planning is heroic sanctity, with great results. The relationship has an **integrity** and a wholeness. To practice Natural Family Planning, the couple must communicate on the deepest level and must constantly show consideration. The price is very high but the personal and marital benefits are also gigantic. This issue is very central to every marriage. The greatest proof of this teaching is the extremely low percentage of divorce among those couples who practice Natural Family Planning.

**The saints say:**

1. *We quickly conform ourselves to whatever we love.* (SFdeS)
2. Love is perfect only when the lovers reach an equality and are mutually transformed into each other. (SJC)
3. Love is a flame which consumes and always seeks to benefit whomever it cherishes. (SCG)
4. Love cannot be limited. A limited love is not pure and simple. (SCG)

Group Discussion:

1. What results from thoughtfulness and tenderness within marriage? From selfishness?
2. How is God's law built into our human bodies (as Pope John Paul II taught)? Can you see the long-term harm done by artificial contraception? What are its effects?

3.26 - VIRGINITY FOR THE KINGDOM

Jesus and St. Paul placed before the world an unheard of ideal, virginity for the kingdom. They believed that the Holy Spirit’s presence could be so intense that the devout soul could sacrifice even marriage to spread the kingdom.

Jesus’ New Teaching

In the Old Testament, Israel did not esteem virginity because children were God’s blessing. When Jesus taught that men could not divorce their wives, the puzzled apostles said, “If that is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry” (Mt 19:10). At that point, Jesus went further and praised those who “renounce marriage for the sake of the Kingdom” “Whoever can accept this, ought to accept it”. (Mt 19:12). What a scene! The apostles cannot accept the permanency of marriage and Jesus talks about a permanent commitment to virginity.

The New Power

Jesus wanted his disciples to practice virginity because He would send the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. By the Spirit’s power, his disciples would be faithful in permanent marriages and, in some cases, would even sacrifice marriage itself. By a devout life, the person can practice chastity within marriage, and in some cases, totally renounce sexual activity for the kingdom. Virginity frees the

St. Agnes (d.304)

She consecrated herself as a virgin but her riches and beauty attracted many men. She told them all that she had a heavenly husband. They denounced her as a Christian to the Roman governor, hoping to shake her resolve.
The judge, at first, used promises, then threats and finally, torture. At 13, she was martyred. Over the centuries, she has become the Christian symbol of virginity for the kingdom.

**St. Rose of Lima (d. 1500)**

Because Rose was beautiful, her parents wanted her to marry, so they could benefit financially. However, Rose had taken St. Catherine of Sienna (1347 – 1380) for her model, seeking to be a Bride of Christ. Because she sold flowers to help her parents, they allowed her to live in the hermitage she had built. Both were satisfied.

**The saints say:**

1. *When we began to say our vows, Jesus appeared with a golden band around his waist. He removed it and put it around my waist. Since then, I have had no attacks against the virtue of chastity.* (S. Faust.)
2. *Love is never idle. It is always in motion, throwing out sparks of love.* (SJC)
3. *This nuptial robe of love is the shortest and safest way to the kingdom.* (SCG)
4. *The infinite God desires infinite love.* (SCS)

**Group Discussion:**

1. *Are not all called to virginity, at least for a period of time? Discuss the value of perpetual virginity in serving the kingdom.*
2. *What value do you see in virginity? What is its real goals? Does the world accept it or reject it?*

**3.27 - THE HOLY SPIRIT’S SEXUAL REVOLUTION**

At Pentecost, the Spirit brought about the true “sexual revolution”. Single disciples lived chastely. Married disciples were faithful to their spouses. Some believers, like St. Paul, even permanently renounced marriage for the kingdom. A whole new tradition of chastity for the kingdom arose within Christianity. For 2000 years, many consecrated souls have embraced this tradition of consecrated virginity. St. Paul’s teaching is clear:

**Paul’s Teaching (1Cor.7: 25-28)**

1. A believer who wishes to marry commits no sin.
2. However, because “the world in its present form is passing away”, a believer should be intent upon the Lord.
3. When people marry they “are divided”. Besides thinking of the Lord’s interests, they must also think of their spouse.
4. An unmarried person is “concerned about the things of the Lord, so they can be holy in both body and spirit.”
Practical Thoughts on Virginity

1. Most believers are called to marriage. This is their “perfect way” to reach heaven.
2. This special call to virginity comes from the Holy Spirit in two ways.
   a. Some are touched deeply by God and accept an inner call to virginity.
   b. Others are attracted to the priesthood or religious life. To accept this call, they accept lifelong virginity, believing that they can live this discipline.

Virginity and Religious Experiences

A person called to virginity must have a life of daily religious experiences. Only these religious experiences make virginity for the kingdom easy to accept. While experiencing God, the person does not feel they are “missing out”. There are no “inner regrets.” Without religious experiences, there is a great void. To be psychologically healthy, virginity for the Kingdom requires religious experiences. Practicing virginity without prayer is like trying to plant a tree in a desert and expecting it to bloom. It won’t.

In the early 1970’s, hundreds of young people were touched by the Holy Spirit. Many of these entered religious life and faithfully serve the Church. Many even considered embracing a single life in the world. The point is this. Religious experiences were leading them to a commitment to Jesus which, in some cases, included a commitment to perpetual virginity. Whether single or married, a soul touched by devotion embraces Jesus’ gospel message of chastity.

St. Columban (540-615)

St. Columban was born in Ireland and as a young man had a difficult struggle to be pure. In fact, a number of beautiful young women caused him many temptations as they sought his affections. He admits that he was grievously tempted to yield.

Instead, he sought the advice of a holy religious woman who said, “Do you think that you can avoid these women? Look at Samson with Delilah and David with Bathsheba. Turn away from this river of temptation.” Columban took this advice seriously. He became a monk, later a missionary to Europe and the founder of great monasteries. All because he cherished purity.

The saints say:

1. When once I love, I love forever. (STL)
2. Passing by, Jesus saw that I was ripe for love, and I wanted to love him passionately. (STL)
3. **Love includes all vocations. Because it is eternal, it embraces every time and place.** (STL)

4. “My God, I love you with all my heart” is not just an expression. It impels your soul to lay hold of God, with emotions beyond all description. (BL)

**Group Discussion:**

1. Why is a devout life needed for Christian purity? What is the Holy Spirit’s role in sexual purity?
2. Why would a person committed to virginity feel “they were missing out”? How is that void filled?

**3.28 - OBEDIENCE**

“He was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross”. (Phil 2:8)

Adam and Eve said their “no” and began man’s separation from God. Mary said her “yes” to the angel Gabriel and began man’s reconciliation with God.

**Hearing the Right Voice**

Obedience comes from a Latin word meaning “to listen to”. A person obeys the voice which they listen to. In the world, you listen to many voices. By devout obedience, you listen to God’s divine voice. The apostles listened to God when they were hauled before the Jewish authorities. They said, “Is it right for us to obey you rather than God?” (Acts 4:19) Obeying God, they defied the authorities and continued to preach.

In the purgative way, obedience extended to God’s Ten Commandments. In the illuminative stage, obedience reaches all of your decisions. A child of the light walks in total obedience.

**A Saint**

St Aloysius Gonzaga, a Jesuit seminarian, was playing chess at recreation. Knowing his holiness, a friend asked, “What would you do if you knew you would die within this hour of recreation?” “I would just continue playing chess, for this is God’s will for me”. Every moment, the devout soul seeks only one thing, to say “yes” to God’s will. When your obedience becomes a total “yes” to God, you are like Jesus, “consecrated in truth” (Jn.17:19). Jesus said, “A son can only do what he sees the father doing” (Jn. 5:19).

**The Church’s Voice**

A final note. The devout person obeys the Church’s voice. When Satan tries to destroy devout souls, they must trust the Church. Just do what the Church teaches. Obey your confessor. That is all God asks. When devout souls hear these words, they are filled with peace. The darkness is swept away and they see the road clearly.
Fear only one thing. Fear your free will that can say “no” to God. Obedience forms a habit of saying “yes” to God. As this grows stronger, your “no” fades away. As the devout soul stops listening to many voices, the Master’s voice grows clearer.

Who Can Destroy You?

The saints feared no one but themselves. They realized that they could say “no” to God’s will. St. Vincent DePaul used to say, “God, please do not trust Vincent”. You are the only one who can destroy yourself, when you say a “No” and not a “Yes” to God’s will.

St. Gerard Majella (1726-1755)

Gerard joined the Redemptorists and was professed by its founder, St. Alphonsus Liguori. Everyone saw his great holiness that included ecstasies, levitations and supernatural knowledge of people and events.

However, to everyone’s surprise, a woman accused Gerard of inappropriate sexual behavior. He said nothing and lived under suspicion for three months until she admitted her lies. Gerard explained to St. Alphonsus that he was just obeying the rule that a religious was not to excuse himself. Alphonsus admired the great obedience but said that, at times, that rule does not apply.

The saints say:

1. A disobedient soul will win no victories even if the Lord Jesus Himself, in person, were to hear his confession. (S.Faus)
2. If a soul stops being guided by the compass of obedience, it strays into the desert where the waters of grace quickly fail. (STL)
3. For thirty years, Jesus gave more glory to His Father by being obedient to Mary than if he worked his greatest miracles. (SLdeM)
4. How can any child obedient to Mary (God’s wise director) go astray from eternal life? (SLdeM)

Group Discussion:

1. What “voices” do you listen to? Who is influencing you by their words?
2. Where do you hear God’s word? How strong is his word in you? What are the effects of obedience to God’s words?

3.29 - THE MORAL & THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES

Your human nature contains many natural powers (the five senses, and the interior powers of imagination, memory, intellect and free will). Your baptismal nature gives you many supernatural powers (called infused virtues). Your natural powers increase automatically. Your infused virtues grow only by personal devotion.
Three Stages of Virtues

In the purgative stage, these infused virtues are weak (hampered by habits of sin). In the illuminative stage, they awaken and assert their influence. In the unitive stage, the gifts of the Holy Spirit lifts these virtues to a level far beyond your own power.

Father Tanquerery writes, “God dwelling in our souls gives us a supernatural organism which enables us to perform God-like acts”. This “organism” is the moral and theological virtues infused at Baptism. The saints highlight four moral virtues (prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance) and the three theological virtues (faith, hope and charity).

These seven virtues are powerful seeds bringing forth a gigantic harvest of good fruits. Let’s study all seven.

An Outline of the Seven Virtues

*The Moral Virtues* (putting order in your Christian life)

- Prudence – choosing wisely
- Justice – giving to others what is owed to them
- Fortitude – gaining strength to overcome obstacles
- Temperance – moderating the attractions of sensual pleasure

*The Theological Virtues* (uniting you with God)

- Faith – by which you believe what God has revealed
- Hope – by which you trust that God will fulfill his promises
- Love – by which you unite yourself with God

The saints say:

1. *You will never regret the difficulties in gaining the virtues.* (STA)
2. *The King of Glory will be united with us only if we try to attain the greatest virtues.* (STA)
3. *Faith points to the Promised Land. Hope provides Manna. Only Charity leads us.* (SFdeS)
4. *Baptism must sow a vigorous seed of all the virtues in the soul.* (STL)

Group Discussion:

1. *Do you find yourself growing in the virtues? What ones do you practice well? What others do you need?*
2. Do you understand the distinction between moral virtues and theological virtues? They are all infused. What is an infused virtue?

3.30 - PRUDENCE

Over three hundred years ago, a brilliant student at the University of Paris looked forward to a great career (as a professor). One day, an older man joined the young students. He, too, at one time had dreamed of a great career (as a soldier). However, after the light of God had led him into two years of prayer, his priorities changed from soldier to priesthood. That is why he came to study. The young man was St. Francis Xavier. The older man, St. Ignatius of Loyola. Both had prudence. Francis had an earthly prudence that led him to teach. Ignatius had a supernatural prudence that led him to holiness. Ever so slowly, Francis set aside his earthly dreams to accept Ignatius’ goal of holiness.

A Letter

Years later, while in India, Francis wrote these words to Ignatius, “Again and again, I have thought of going to the universities of Europe, especially Paris and crying out like a madman. Many people here in India are not becoming Christians because there is nobody to preach. I wish they would work as hard at this as they do at their books and so settle their accounts with God for the talents he has entrusted to them”. These words come from supernatural prudence.

Different Goals

The difference between worldly prudence and supernatural prudence is their goal. Worldly prudence judges everything by earthly goals. Supernatural prudence raises its eyes to heavenly goals.

Jesus contrasted these two goals. “What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul?” (Lk.9:25). He told his disciples, “Seek first the Kingdom of God and all these things will be given you besides” (Mt 6:33).

Earthly prudence often conflicts with supernatural prudence. People put great store on their bank accounts but Jesus says “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth.” People can be crafty and self-seeking but Jesus says, “Become like a little child.”

Hearing A Different Voice

By supernatural prudence, the saints all shared the same goal. They wanted to hear Jesus say to them, “Well done, good and faithful servant. Inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” (Mt 25:34) The saints always asked, “How does this present decision affect eternity? How will I see this decision when I come before Jesus? Will I be happy or sad that I chose it?”

The Goals of the Master

Prudence reshuffles your values. Worldly riches fade. God’s kingdom becomes the pearl of a great price. The saints shaped their decisions by this new wisdom.
Another image will make the point. Only Jesus sees the world as it really is. The rest of us have an upside-down view. Unfortunately, when Jesus speaks, we think his world view is upside-down. By supernatural prudence, we gain Jesus’ world-view. We wonder, “Why didn’t I see this before? Why didn’t I see this when I was younger?” Don’t worry. God still has enough time to make you perfect.

A Final Word

Jesus told a parable about the rich man and the beggar, Lazarus. The rich man had lots of earthly prudence. After all, he saved his money and dined in luxury every day. However, this “prudence” was no prudence at all. He ended up in hell. If he had supernatural prudence, he would have asked Lazarus to dine with him. He would have washed his sores and given him a place to sleep. At this point, his friends would question his earthly “prudence”. However, his supernatural prudence would have gained a place right next to Lazarus in Abraham’s bosom.

St. Katherine Drexel

She was a rich and beautiful debutante, but also filled with the greatest supernatural prudence. She saw the need for Catholicism among the African-Americans and among the Native Americans (through a Philadelphia priest who became a bishop).

She asked Pope Leo XIV to send missionaries to the United States. He replied, “You must found your own congregation”. (She was a lay person at the time.) Prudence made her set aside her earthly riches and found the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament.

The saints say:

1. The soul must see that the only serious business in the world is to follow God’s will perfectly. (FJdeC)
2. The world sees someone as wise who is a keen businessman and turns everything to his own profit. (SLdeM)
3. A soul with prudence does not prize highly what the world cherishes. (STA)
4. Always remember. Time passes quickly. This shows the uselessness of the world’s wealth, which worldly people give up much sleep to gain. (STA)

Group Discussion:

1. What prominent people are naturally prudent but supernaturally are fools? When have you been supernaturally foolish in your decisions? When did you seek after the wrong goal?
2. Are you becoming supernaturally prudent? How does this new prudence shape your decisions?
St. James describes a believer who brings forth no acts of justice. “If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day and one of you says, ‘Go in peace, keep warm and eat well’ but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it?” (2:16) This injustice contrasts with the justice practiced by Saint Joseph.

The Example of Joseph

St. Joseph had a dilemma. His fiancé, Mary, was pregnant and Joseph was not the father. Matthew writes, “Joseph, her husband, since he was a just man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly” (1:19). Joseph had this dilemma because “he was a just man”.

If he were selfish, he would do whatever he wanted. However, being just, Joseph found himself in the middle. He had accepted both his obligations to God (as manifested in the Mosaic Law) and his obligations to Mary (the one whom he loved). So, he “decided to divorce her quietly”, thus fulfilling his obligations to both God and to Mary.

How important was this decision! Not exposing Mary to public shame allowed Joseph to marry her when he learned of her virginal conception. His decision not to have Mary killed, was even more important. The Messiah would have died within her.

Three Types of Justice

We must practice justice toward God, others and the community (social justice). Practicing justice toward God is based on God’s rights over us. Jesus said “render to God what is God’s” (Mt.22:21). “What is God’s?” The atheist answers “Absolutely nothing”. The cynic says “Very little”. The believer says, “Very much”. The saint says “absolutely everything”. For the saints, God is “all in all”. He has done everything and we are all debtors, totally unable to repay God.

When God took Teresa of Avila to hell and revealed her place there, she realized how much she owed him. When God multiplied his spiritual favors, she exclaimed, “I am deeper in debt to you every day”. We are all debtors. Without Jesus, we were headed toward a grave of total death. But “When we were dead in our sins, God brought us to life with Christ” (Eph.2:5).

Justice to Other Persons

Justice is as extensive as human relationships. Children and parents must be just to each other. Employers must be just to employees (and vice versa). So must friends and spouses. Everyone, in every relationship, must be just. Justice respects everyone as a person, demanding both kindness and thoughtfulness.

A priest works with a poor Spanish-speaking community. Helping them is really his greatest privilege. They owe him no debt. He owes them so much. The priest always has telephone messages to return. In his debt to the people, the messages from the poor Spanish always get responded to before the messages.
People talk much about charity (which extends to few) and overlook justice (that involves everyone). “O devout soul, open your eyes to all the demands of justice. Open your heart to all the opportunities for justice and you will earn the same praise as St. Joseph. ‘He was a just man’”.

**Social Justice**

Cardinal Helder Camara of Brazil had a powerful saying about social justice. “When I relieve poverty, I am called a saint. When I question the economic systems that create poverty, I am called a Communist”.

For centuries, cultures lived in isolation. Now, global communication has awakened everyone to the great inequalities. However, the awakening hasn’t reversed a situation that grows worse daily. Political solutions fail. However, personal initiatives seem to have success, sometimes on a wide scale.

Decades ago, President Carter saw the problem of river blindness caused by the bite of a fly in underdeveloped countries. When he sought a solution, a scientist at Merck developed a medicine (Mectizan) which stopped and prevented the disease. The company treated everyone free of charge.

**Practicing Justice**

Who knows where your devout life will lead you? Let this virtue of justice awaken you to the inequalities of human existence. Ask a simple question, “What can I do to soften the hardships of human existence?” Then you will not just say “Keep warm and eat well.” You will try to restore justice to the earth.

**St. Stanislaus Kostka (1550-1568)**

Stanislaus became “perfect in a short time”. (He died at 18.) By accepting injustices, his life was a long series of suffering imposed by others.

First, his brother bullied him. This caused him to grow close to death. Then, he wanted to enter the Jesuits, but his father threatened him. He had to leave Poland and go to Rome where St. Francis Borgia saw his holiness and accepted him into the Jesuits. Upon entering any church, his face became like fire and at Communion he went into ecstasy.

By his acceptance of injustice, he won out over many harsh personalities. Learning of his death, his brother repented of his actions and became a Jesuit himself. His vocation was the fruit of Stanislaus’ suffering for justice’s sake.

**The saints say:**

1. Justice is a love which serves God. Therefore, it treats all men fairly. (SFdeS)
2. God could have demanded our service without any salary because we owe him a thousand debts. (SFdeS)
3. As the soul grows richer and richer, she falls deeper and deeper in God’s debt. (STA)
4. Justice is not something that stays shut up in one’s heart. (STL)
Group Discussion:

1. When are people unjust to you? When are you unjust to others? Is justice the highest virtue? Is it often overlooked?
2. What rights do other people have? Do you respect their rights? Do you feel any call to social justice? Do people claim their “rights” and not accept their “duties”?

3.32 - FORTITUDE

Getting You to the Finish Line

Every devout life faces a “test of time”, the difficulty of continuing on a path of daily sacrifice until death. To help you “to get to the finish line”, God infused fortitude into your soul, the power to be faithful to God until the very end. Let’s study some saints.

The Saints

The most famous early martyr was St. Ignatius of Antioch, (d.107). On his way to Rome to die, he wrote letters to various churches, begging them not to hinder his death. “I am writing to all the churches to let it be known that I will gladly die for God, if only you do not stand in my way. I plead with you. Show me no untimely kindness. Give me the privilege of imitating the passion of my God.”

He was also aware of his own fears that could turn him away from the prize. He wrote, “When I see you, if I should then beg you to intervene in my behalf, do not believe what I say. Believe instead what I am writing to you now.”

St John Brebeuf, the Jesuit martyr, knew that “getting to the end” would be extremely difficult in his mission to the Indians. He wrote, “I vow to you, Jesus my Savior, that as far as I have the strength, I will never fail to accept the grace of martyrdom. I bind myself this way for the rest of my life. I will have neither permission nor freedom to refuse opportunities of shedding my blood for you. On receiving the blow of death, I shall accept it from your hands. May I die only for you.” That death blow came on March 16, 1649, after hours of cruel torture.

Daily Fortitude

Daily fortitude is often greater than martyrdom. Look at the fortitude of Pope John Paul II in the Solidarity crisis. Early in his pontificate, the Pope had committed his papacy to the success of Solidarity. Then came the military crackdown. Seemingly, all his plans were in ruins. What inner questioning and doubts must have arisen? How many lonely moments? By fortitude, he stayed with his direction and was vindicated by the complete collapse of Communism. A fitting reward for his fortitude.
Staying with the Course

Whether it is John Brebeuf, Ignatius, or Pope John Paul II, fortitude is the virtue which keeps the Devout Soul on course. John Brebeuf writes, “I bind myself in this way for the rest of my life”.

The above examples are fortitude in grand enterprises. For now, bind yourself to fortitude in your devout life. Do not turn away from your daily mental prayer and your daily growth in the virtues. Don’t forget. Fortitude completes the task and doesn’t walk away when obstacles appear. The devout life is not earthly greatness (which makes you well-known). It is God’s greatness (which makes you live forever). Don’t quit. You have only one lifetime and one finish line. Just get there.

Jesus’ Greatness

Jesus revealed the secrets of his passion to Luisa Picaretta. She writes that the final 20 minutes on the cross were the worst of all. When Jesus was so close to the goal, the finish line seemed so far away. Only by fortitude, could Jesus proclaim, “It is finished”. Our greatest hope is that we will say the same sentence some day.

The saints say:

1. Don’t lose your courage. Otherwise, you will lose many blessings (STA)
2. Be persuaded that you have a long way to go. (FJdeC)
3. To stay firm in a torrent, to sail through turbulent seas, to be calm in a dangerous countryside, are miracles which Mary works for her children. (SLdeM)
4. Let the Lord test you. He knows how to do it well. (STA)

Group Discussion:

1. What times in your life did you need fortitude? Did you ever give up and not persevere in some task?
2. What present goals do you have that require fortitude? Do you have friends that support you? Can you stand alone, when needed?

3.33 - TEMPERANCE

God created our inner desires for pleasure. However, these appetites often overflow their banks and take control of our lives. Temperance vanquishes these overflowing powers by moderating your appetites.

Two Appetites

Two appetites are very essential, the attraction to nourishment (to preserve your own life) and the attraction for sexual activity (to preserve the human race). Previous chapters taught about chastity. This chapter will focus on moderation of food and drink.
Matt Talbot

Matt Talbot spent his free time in the bar, a slave to the addiction of alcohol. One day, by God’s grace, he had no money. Strangely enough, his friends refused to buy him a drink and the owner threw him out. At that moment, Matt Talbot visited the priest to take the pledge of sobriety. How did he stay sober for the rest of his life? He began by rising early and attending Mass. Then came the religious experiences and the solid virtues. Finally, there were the heroic deeds of hours of prayer. These are the familiar steps to perfection. For Matt Talbot, the important virtue was temperance.

Moderation in Food

Although moderation in food is not as dramatic, some fasting is an essential part of devotion. Even science realizes the value of limiting daily calories. For years, the evidence has been plain. Monks and cloistered religious, who limit their food, live many more years than others. As the world clamors for longer and healthier lives, science says that the only provable cause of longevity is a limitation of daily calories (a solution we don’t like to hear).

Where to Begin?

Temperance should begin with snacks (eating between meals) and with alcohol consumption (limiting even the legitimate use). After these are accomplished, the soul must begin some form of fasting.

A Personal Story

For years, a priest was aware of Our Blessed Mother’s request (at Medjugorje) that her followers fast on bread and water (on Wednesday and Friday). He sought out a brother priest (Father Robert Faricy, S.J.) who kept that fast. Fr. Faricy said, “Fasting is a gift. Do you want the gift?” The priest said, “Yes”. Fr. Faricy just prayed for the gift, giving no rules and no advice. Yet, after that prayer, the priest found himself fasting on Wednesday and Friday. He feels no different on these days because the body adjusts and accepts the imposed limitation upon its cravings.

Some Suggestions

1. Make healthy choices and put aside foods that are not good for your body.
2. Restrict yourself to eating at meals.
3. At each meal, make some little sacrifice. (It is easier to do this at the beginning of the meal.)
4. Be strict with yourself concerning wine, beer and even caffeine.
5. Making little sacrifices of food (that can happen so often in the day) is very important.
6. Fasting at special times (like Lent) causes some physical weakness. However, this translates into increased patience and spiritual humility.
7. Do all your fasting under obedience to your spiritual guide.
8. Fasting does not need to be heroic. Its purpose is to remind you that you belong to God.
Your devout life

These four moral virtues (prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance) get your life in order. However, you need the three theological virtues (faith, hope and charity) to unite your soul with God. The following chapters explain these theological powers.

The saints say:

1. We can weaken these appetites but never destroy them. They live with us and will die only when we die. (SFdeS)
2. Attachments to appetites make a soul inconsistent in serving God. (SJC)
3. A soul with disordered desires cannot appreciate God’s things. (SJC)
4. God works powerfully when the soul keeps nothing back. (STA)

Group Discussion:

1. Concerning food and drink, what temptations do you encounter? What in your lifestyle needs to change?
2. Have you tried to fast? Are you afraid of fasting? Do you want to begin?

3.34 - FAITH – SWITCHING ON THE LIGHT

Dan Lord, S.J., a famous priest author, came from a devout home. However, during college years he read many rational philosophers. One morning, he woke up and had no faith. He had lost all belief in the supernatural world. Fortunately, through a slow process of reading religious authors and discussing Catholic beliefs with a Jesuit priest, he regained his faith. One morning, he realized that he once more believed in God’s kingdom. The light went back on.

Faith is a supernatural light which lets us believe that God is the Father who created us, the Son who redeemed us and the Holy Spirit who sanctifies us. He is a God who wants us to live with him forever.

The Fatima Children

We actually live in two worlds, the world of earth which we can see and the world of heaven that we cannot see. By faith, our spiritual eyes see this invisible kingdom of Christ and allow it to exercise power over us.

Our Lady allowed the three children of Fatima to see this invisible world. One month, she promised to take them to heaven. The next month, she showed them hell. They said that they would not have survived the vision of hell except that Our Lady assured them that they were going to heaven.
Two Examples

Father Bob Bedard, a Canadian priest and founder of the priest congregation, Companions of the Cross, details a special faith moment. When he was seventeen, his father asked him to attend a mission. One night, the priest was describing eternity, “Imagine an iron ball the size of the earth and a little dove flying around it. Every thousand years the wing of the dove touches the iron ball. The length of time which the wings would need to totally wear away all the iron would not even be the beginning of eternity.” Bob certainly believed in eternal life. However, that example made eternity very real for him, totally affecting the rest of his life.

Three years later, while studying pre-dentistry at college, he began his 22 minute walk from home to class. During these 22 minutes, the truths of faith again filled his mind. By the end of his short journey, he was wondering, “Why am I not a priest?” His faith had awakened him again. He discovered God’s call,

Awakened to Living Faith

In 1972, two women attended a conference on the Holy Spirit’s power. During one talk, they grew frightened. Both had experienced a great light of faith and did not know what was happening.

One women said, “I am overwhelmed with God’s presence and all I can say is, ‘God, you are so good.'” The other said, “All I can think is ‘God, you are so great and I am so small’”. Faith had opened their eyes to the reality of God, With progress in devotion, faith will open many new doors for you.

St. Martin of Tours (371-397)

St. Martin of Tours was a soldier, who cut his cloak in half for a beggar. That night Christ appeared to him and said, “Martin, you are still a catechumen but you covered me with this garment.” His faith was so alive that he could no longer kill anyone. When he told the Roman general, he was accused of cowardice. He replied, “I am not afraid. I will stand alone and unarmed in the line of battle”. The general had Martin thrown in jail and, then, discharged from the army. His burning faith immediately led him to convert his family and found a monastery.

Ten years later, the people of Tours demanded that he become their bishop. Faith had led him to baptism, to the monastery, and to his task during his final 26 years of life of guiding the people to Jesus, whom he had first seen as a beggar.

The saints say:

1. *I could not believe that there were people without faith. I was convinced that they did not mean what they said when they denied the existence of another world.* (STL)
2. *When God finds a soul full of faith, he pours out a river of graces.* (BL)
3. Faith laughs at calamities and sees God’s will in them. (SFdeS)
4. I have made more acts of faith in the past year than in all my life. (STL)

Group Discussion:

1. What faith struggles have you had? How did you overcome them?
2. How real to you is God’s kingdom? How has your awakened faith changed your life?

3.35 - FAITH OPENS GOD’S DOORS

In 1971, faith had led a young man to a very special door that was about to open. Feelings within him were so strong that he found himself saying, “All that I am. All that I have. All that I will be is tied up with what is behind that door.” Life is a series of doors. Faith alone can lead us to God’s special doors.

An Example

A young man was searching for answers when he was invited to go to Medjugorje. He came back filled with faith, but still not knowing God’s plan. Then he saw a television ad inviting him to a Young Adult Prayer Group. Before Medjugorje, he would have changed the channel. Now, faith filled him with spiritual interests. Of course, he would respond. Without knowing it, he was really entering the door of the priesthood. To get him there, God used the doors of Medjugorje, the television ad and a young adult prayer group.

At Baptism, God infused faith into your soul. Allow this faith to enlighten everything and your whole life will change.

Three Causes of Faith Loss

Jesus asked “When the Son of Man comes, will he still find faith on this earth? (Lk.18:8) In the modern world, so many have lost their faith. The causes are multiple. I will list three.

One cause is immorality. When people break God’s commandments, they generally lose their desire for God. A second cause is the attractions of the world. When people become engrossed in their career, in the good times, in the excitement of what the world offers, faith fades from their hearts. A third cause is life’s trials. Suffering can burden and confuse even good people. Immorality, worldly attractions and personal trials are faith’s three enemies. The devout life curbs immorality, pulls the soul away from the world, and gives hope in the middle of trials. Hope is our next chapter.

St. Edmund (841-870)

Edmund became king of East Anglia. He was wise and cheerful and guided the English countryside for the rest of his life, always instilling the Catholic faith.
Unfortunately, the Danes constantly attacked England. In 869, Edmund had to retreat to a castle. The Danes sent proposals that Edmund refused to accept because they betrayed the Catholic faith. So, in 870, he was martyred for the faith he so zealously spread.

The saints say:

1. My faith is so strong that I think I have lost it. Earth seems to be fading away and the day of heaven is dawning. I no longer need to believe. I am seeing. (BL)
2. God’s work is done stitch by stitch on his side of the tapestry. We see only the needle and the thread. Only when the work is complete, will God show us his side of the masterpiece. (FJdeC)
3. When Mary helps you, your faith will be so great that even extraordinary graces will be granted. (SLdeM)
4. By letting my faith be tempted, God has greatly increased my spirit of faith. (STL)
5. We know God through his creatures but this is like looking at his feet. Faith alone allows us to gaze at his face. (SFdeS)

Group Discussion:

1. To what doors has your faith led you?
2. Discuss the obstacles mentioned above. What other obstacles do you experience?

3.36 - HOPEING TO GET TO HEAVEN

A 96 year old man was deeply troubled because his 97 year old wife had to be hospitalized. At this point, they had been married 73 years. The future was uncertain. All he kept saying was, “We are almost there. We are almost there.” Everyone knew exactly what he meant. All during their marriage, they had lived for heaven. Now, “they were almost there”. What lay ahead? How would the two of them make it to the end?

While faith deals with earth, hope keeps our eyes on heaven. It’s one purpose – to keep our hearts fixed on heavenly glory. Let me recount the great stories of hope in the new converts, Saints Perpetua and Felicity.

The Martyrs of Carthage

Perpetua was a noble woman. Felicity was a slave. Both were catechumens. They were imprisoned with their instructor, Saturus, who decided to baptize them. The pregnant Felicity gave birth while waiting to be martyred. The story of their sufferings and death was so remarkable that it was commonly read at mass in the African Churches. These newly baptized converts were filled with hope. Their only goal was heaven. The eyewitness account reads as follows:

Perpetua saw that Felicity was prostrate, so she lifted her up and they stood together. They went toward the gate, where Ructicus, another newly baptized, greeted them. Perpetua asked, “When are we going to be led to the beasts?” Only when she saw the marks of violence
on her body and dress did she realize that it had already happened. She then called her brother and said, “Stand firm in faith. Love one another. Do not fear because of our sufferings.”

Saturus encouraged the soldier, Prudens, to Christian faith. “Here I am and (although covered with blood) I have not yet felt any wild beast.” Saturus said to Prudens “Do not let these things frighten you. Rather, let them strengthen you.” Then he asked for Prudens’ ring. He soaked it in his own blood and returned it as a keepsake, leaving him a sacred remembrance. He said, “Now believe with your whole heart. I will be killed by the leopard in one bite.” In fact, the leopard’s bite caused so much blood to flow, that the other Christians proclaimed, “Washed and saved. Washed and saved”, meaning he had received a second Baptism of blood.

The people wanted the martyrs to die in the center of the arena. Without being asked, they moved to the center and completed their witness, giving each other the kiss of peace. All received the deathblow in silence. Saturus was the first to die. Perpetua had to guide the shaking hand of the inexperienced gladiator to her throat. “Such a woman could not have been killed unless she willed it.” These saints were all new believers, recently baptized, yet so filled with hope that nothing could block their way to heaven.

The saints say:

1. Why should we, blind creatures, not place all our hope in God’s hands? What could be more secure? What safer refuge exists? (FJdeC)
2. In the beginning, the soul must remember that human life is short, earth is empty and heaven has eternal value. (STA)
3. Desiring heaven is honorable, as is fearing to lose it. (SFdeS)
4. Let us begin our journey to heaven. We can discover every road and all the doors are open. (FJdeC)

Group Discussion:

1. How did the story of the new believers, Perpetua and Felicity, help you?
2. Do you think much about getting to heaven? Are you ever filled with anxieties that you will not enter the Communion of Saints?

3.37 - HOPE’S FIVE EARTHLY BLESSINGS

Let’s highlight the earthly blessings that come from hoping for heaven.

You answer your deepest questions.

Every person searches for meaning, asking, “Why was I born” and “What’s the purpose of my life?” Hope provides the answers. “You were born for heaven” and “Your purpose goes beyond this world.” You are immortal, made for a life that does not fade. Hope gives parents reasons to have children. By giving birth, they cooperate with God in filling heaven.

You see earth quite differently.
By focusing on heaven, you see earth differently. You don’t fear getting old. You aren’t consumed with collecting earth’s toys. You don’t try to make earth your permanent home. By hope, you realize, “I’m just passing through. On my way, so to speak.”

By hope, you no longer fear death.

You no longer fear sickness, aging or everything that can kill you. Jesus says, “Do not be afraid of those who can destroy the body” (Mt 10:28). People without hope like to avoid cemeteries. They are painful reminders that life passes away. The saints welcomed death. It had always been their finishing-line.

Your anxieties are lessened.

You are not consumed by daily anxiety. Jesus said, “Your heavenly Father knows what you need. Seek first His Kingdom and all these things will be given you besides” (Mt 6:31-32). God made you for heaven and he will supply all you need to reach the final line.

You are not lost in the universe.

Hope says that you are not an unknown person who just happened to be born. You are not a lost star. You are not one among 6,000,000,000 people. You are a unique human person loved by God and created for his purpose. Without supernatural hope, billions of people walk in an emotional darkness but “now you are light in the Lord.” (Eph. 5:8)

Consoling the Sorrowing

Losing a loved one is always difficult. However, as the person of hope experiences that darkness, they frequently ask, “How can anyone who has no faith or hope go through this?” No need to respond. The person’s own hope was already consoling them.

The saints say:

1. God is our guide, taking us across an unknown country in the dark of night. Trust his skills to bring you to heaven. (FdeC)
2. In heaven, our souls will plunge into God. Our infinite desires, never fulfilled in this world, will dissolve in God’s presence. (SFdeS)
3. Say the Rosary every day and Mary will take you to heaven to see Jesus. (SLdeM)
4. I felt that one day I would live forever in a more beautiful country. I was like Christopher Columbus who sensed the existence of a new world. (STL)

Group Discussion:

1. What are your deepest hopes? What is your purpose? Does human life have meaning for you?
2. Do you see how quickly life passes, or, do you try to make earth your permanent home?
A Chance to be President

To picture the magnitude of Christian hope, imagine that you successfully run for mayor and then, with a favorable political climate, were elected governor. In a few years, your name reaches the national scene and you have a chance to become President. In seeking the most powerful office in the world, you are experiencing a unique hope. You never dreamed of being the President of the United States.

The Christian Hope

That hope (as great as it is) pales in comparison with Christian hope. Hoping to be president has two difficulties. First, you might not win. Secondly, if you do, you will only serve a few years. Hoping for heaven is different. If you run, you will certainly win. Also, you will enjoy endless years living with Christ. Paul writes, “The runners in a stadium all run to win a perishable crown but we run for an imperishable one” (1 Cor. 9:24-25).

Why don’t more people run for heaven? The problem is distance. Death seems so remote and most don’t believe death will ever arrive (at least not in their lifetime). They aren’t really interested in what happens after death.

St. Alphonsus Liguori (1696-1787)

By hope, Alphonsus overcame the three great failures of his life. All three marked a turning point.

He began life as a successful lawyer (Never losing a case). At 24, he gave a brilliant speech but overlooked an important part. Seeing his mistake, he said to his opponent “The case is yours”. Seeing this loss as God’s sign, Alphonsus decided to be a priest.

At 36, he founded the Redemptorist priests, dedicated to preaching to the poor. However, dissensions broke out and the new order did not flourish. Suddenly, new vocations filled the houses.

At 84, he made another mistake and the pope removed him as head of his own community. However, those final seven years were his most important, filled with supernatural gifts and great writings. Every time failure seemingly ruined everything, hope took him off on a new road,

An Earlier Generation

Life in America before antibiotics was quite different because death happened so unexpectedly. For that Catholic generation, hope in heaven was all they had. Then came World War II. Many young men died or were wounded. How did these families survive? Hope in heaven got them through. The frailty of human life impressed a truth upon that Catholic generation, “Only one thing is important and that is to get to heaven.” Catholics in the first half of the 20th century lived by hope.
The saints say:

1. Abandon your life to God and he will not abandon you. (FJdeC)
2. The human person is the greatest creation in the whole universe, made to live eternally in union with God. (SFdeS)
3. I found perfect happiness in the thought of heaven. (STL)
4. Even the brightest day finishes with darkness. It is only the first day in heaven that will have no end. (STL)

Group Discussion:

1. Are you consumed with earthly ambitions or with heavenly hope? Does the greatness of heaven lift up your heart?
2. What trials have you had? During these times, did you think of heaven?

3.39 - GAINING CHRISTIAN HOPE

“He who perseveres to the end, will be saved.” (Mt.10:22)

Fumbling the Ball

Not wanting his running backs to fumble, a football coach teaches them to cover up the ball until they reach the goal line. The soul trying to reach heaven knows full well that it can fumble the ball. True hope never relaxes and uses every possible means to gain eternal life. The following 9 secrets are very important:

1. Have devotion to Mary
   Mary is the safe road, the easy way. She softens all trials. She brings help earlier than expected. “Following her, you will not turn away.” (St. Bernard) Read the classic books on Mary (True Devotion by St. Louis de Montfort and Glories of Mary by St. Alphonsus). Let Mary become deeply ingrained into your spirituality.

2. Receive Eucharist daily if possible.
   Jesus gave you a complete promise. “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life.” (Jn.6:54) “Whoever eats this bread will live forever.” (6:58) There are no clearer words.

3. Go to Confession Regularly
   Confession purges every obstacle. The devil is your accuser but he has no power when you declare your sins to the Church’s priest. At Medjugorje, Mary frequently says, “Monthly confession will be the salvation of the West.” That is good motherly advice. St. Francis deSales went to confession every day as did Pope John Paul II.
4. **Have devotion to St. Joseph.**  
   He is the patron of a happy death, because Jesus and Mary were at his deathbed.

5. **Hold on to God’s gifts.**  
   In the devout life, God will lead you to little practices of mortification and small acts of piety. Hold on to what God gives. You need them for the journey.

6. **Carry very few bags**  
   Carry as little baggage as possible. Your journey is a long one. Leave behind as much as you can. Never think, “It is only a venial sin.” Always do the little things.

7. **Never worry about the future.**  
   Saint Faustina said that she experienced anxiety only when she thought of the future trials. When your trial comes, God will be there.

8. **Never feel secure.**  
   You must distrust yourself and have confidence only in God. That is hope’s formula. A great difference exists between peace of soul and smugness.

9. **Take no chances**  
   Take absolutely no chances with your eternal life. You might do great things for God. You can raise the dead, found churches and even convert the whole world. But, if you lose your soul, you are a complete failure. There is no reason for anyone on earth to be damned because God wills that all be saved (1Tim.2:4).

   There are two sins against hope, despair and presumption. The next chapter explains them.

The saints say:

1. *Does not everyone want to return to their own country? So, let us not linger long in this foreign land called earth.* (STA)
2. *Since I began to pray, God has given me one grace. I have confessed all my sins, even venial ones.* (STA)
3. *At Communion, I frequently see a door into heaven.* (STA)
4. *Use both love and fear. Love quickens our steps. Fear makes us look where we are going.* (STA)
5. *I am going to remove the veil of heaven so earth will not doubt God’s goodness.* (S. Faus)

**Group Discussion:**

1. **What devotional practices listed above do you use? Which ones don’t you use?**
2. **What advice in this chapter did you find helpful?**
3.40 - GOD’S MERCY OVERCOMES DESPAIR

Every priest has encountered souls who openly say, “I have no hope. I am going to hell”. What has entangled their feelings? What has brought them to that point? The story is always very personal, usually dealing with past sins and overwhelming feelings of guilt. Jesus, Himself, attacked these problems when he spoke of his Divine Mercy. The following are Jesus’ own words, spoken to Saint Faustina so souls could overcome despair.

**Explanation of His Mercy**

1. The flames of My mercy are burning Me. I desire to pour them out upon the human race. (1074)
2. Souls that appeal to My mercy delight me. (1146)
3. No sinfulness can match My mercy. (1273)

**Words to Sinners**

4. By My mercy I pursue sinners along their paths. My heart rejoices when they return. (1728)
5. Tell sinners that I am always waiting for them. (1728)
6. I am speaking to them through the remorse of their conscience. (1728)

**Invitation**

1. Let the greatest sinners place their trust in My mercy. They have the right, before others, to trust in the abyss of My mercy. (1146)
2. I am more generous to sinners than to the just. (1275)
3. Let them not fear to approach me. (1275)
4. My mercy works in those hearts which are open to it. (1577)
5. I desire that aching mankind press into My merciful heart. (1588)
6. I cannot punish even the greatest sinner who appeals to My mercy. (1146)
7. Happy is the soul who, during its lifetime, has immersed itself in My mercy. (1175)

**Confession (Sacrament of Reconciliation)**

1. When you approach the confessional know that I am there awaiting you. (1602)
2. I am only hidden by the priest but I myself act in your heart. (1602)
3. Every time you go to confession, My mercy flows down into your heart. (1602)
4. In the confessional, the sinfulness of the soul meets the mercy of God. (1602)
5. Tell souls to look for mercy in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The greatest miracles are incessantly repeated there. (1448)

**Promises**

1. He who trusts in My mercy will not perish. (723)
2. I will justify the soul in My unfathomable and inscrutable mercy. (1146)
3. No soul that has approached me has gone away unconsolled. (1777)
4. All sinfulness gets buried in My mercy. (1777)
Despairing soul, please read Faustina’s diary. It was written for you. The following are her own sayings:

**Saint Faustina says:**

1. *I always looked with one eye at the greatness of my sins. With the other, I looked at God’s mercy.* (S.Faus)
2. *I wish I were a priest. Then I would always preach about God’s mercy to sinful souls drowned in their despair.* (S. Faus)
3. *God is infinitely merciful. He wants everyone to know this before they die.* (S.Faus)
4. *All of my nothingness is drowned in the sea of God’s mercy.* (S.Faus)
5. *I have now learned that Satan hates God’s mercy more than anything else.* (S.Faus)

**Group Discussion:**

1. *Do you focus on your sins or on God’s mercy?*
2. *Which of Jesus’ sayings recorded above were the most important to you? Which ones surprised you?*

### 3.41 - PRESUMPTION

When encountering a person for the first time, a priest usually begins by asking, “How is the good Lord treating you?” The Lord gets very high ratings. Almost everyone believes that he is doing well by them.

Another question which the priest would like to ask (and might someday), is "Do you think you are going to heaven?” I believe that the answer will be about the same – practically everybody believes they are heaven-bound. What fuels this optimism? Does it correspond to reality? How would the saints view the question?

**Fear of the Lord**

The saints lived in a holy fear which always warned them that, while they were on earth, salvation was never assured. What a contrast! On the one hand, we have people blissfully proclaiming that they are going to heaven and on the other hand, the saints working out their salvation in fear and trembling.

There is a cultural sin of presumption. As devotion decreases, as faith in God wanes, as people withdraw from religious practices, many just believe that they are going to heaven. This is how it has always been. Withdrawn from God, people say, “I am a good person”. They have little insight into their sometimes gigantic failings and no understanding of God’s holiness.
They don’t meditate. They do not consider the four last things. In a sense, they do not even worry about the question, “Am I going to heaven?” Most people who go to hell will go there from presumption. They believe that they are “a good person” and do not really need to use the means provided by God for their salvation. They cast aside religious practices, refuse to listen to Church teachings on the commandments, and have no interest in all the appeals of Jesus to take advantage of Divine Mercy.

An Era of Faith

Years ago, people were good, (very, very good), but they knew they were not worthy of heavenly life unless they went to Mass, used the sacraments, and kept the commandments. Today, America suffers from the widespread cultural presumption that heaven just comes to everyone and no one needs to make much effort.

A Picture of Presumption

Dear Reader, you might ask, “Am I sinning by presumption?” Answer the question this way. God has provided certain means to get you to heaven. If you are using those means, then you are not presuming. The means are clear – Communion, confession, prayer (the rosary) and a sincere attempt to keep the commandments. They are the means. Use them and you are certainly not presuming.

The saints say:

1. If someone had taught me to fear God, I would have grown strong. May this fear of God never be taken from you. (STA)
2. Not offending God because of a fear of hell is very good. (SFdeS)
3. The saints were always on guard. They saw themselves as their own greatest enemies. (FJdeC)
4. Our Lord is happy when we get to know our sins and try to realize our spiritual poverty. (STA)
5. To be secure, the soul must never forget how weak she is. (STA)

Group Discussion:

1. Was there ever a time when you just presumed you would be saved, even though your life was not in order? What are the signs of presumption?
2. How do you see things now? Do you know how to seek God’s mercy?
Reading the mystic saints, (like Teresa of Avila, Margaret Mary, Faustina and others), reveals a surprising aspect of their lives with Jesus. Frequently, he reprimanded them and His criticism was always fair. The saints accepted his words as true. Sometimes, their opportunity to do good was over. At other times, the reprimand made them do something to correct their lapse.

These mystic saints did great works for Jesus and he blessed them for their labors. Yet, he expected perfection. His love for them was total and their love was also expected to be total, (in big projects or little sacrifices). To one saint he said, “Where have you been? I have been waiting for you”, meaning that a long time had passed since she had prayed. One saint rejoiced in praying before the Blessed Sacrament. Jesus said, “Why are you leaving so soon?”

At the same time, Jesus fulfilled the saint’s expectations. St. Margaret Mary was misunderstood by her superior who felt that she was feigning illness. “I don’t want to see you in this infirmary for six months”. So, Jesus healed her for six months.

Expectations of Other People

Further readings of these saints also reveal Jesus’ expectations of others. To the mystics, Jesus would comment on other people, how he thinks about them and whether they are helping or hindering his work. Nothing escapes his eyes.

These stories reveal a certain pattern and a profound affect. Jesus’ expectations are always suited to the person. They can always comply with his wishes. Failures are never the last word. The person always gets a chance to make amends. With every person, Jesus has expectations that can and should be fulfilled.

A Real Friendship

The friendship with Jesus is very, very real. He is not an “everything is alright” Jesus. Nor is he a stern, unrelenting task master. He expects perfection. Nothing else will satisfy him. He is ready to do everything to help us love him as he loves us. As you encounter Jesus, you will learn Jesus’ expectations of you.

The saints say:

1. Christ the King looks with pleasure upon the person who struggles with the world, the devil, and temptations because of love for him. (SLdeM)
2. As I began to dance, I suddenly saw Jesus at my side, racked with pain and covered with wounds. He asked, “How long shall I put up with you and how long will you keep putting me off. (S.Faus)
3. I behaved towards Jesus like a child who thinks she is allowed to do anything and regards her father’s treasures as her own. (STL)
4. Brightness filled my room and I saw the face of Jesus. Large tears were falling on my bedspread. He said, “It is to this convent that I have called you, and nowhere else.” (S.Faus)
Group Discussion:

1. What idea do you have of Jesus Christ? Has this idea changed since joining the group?
2. Did you realize that Jesus expects total perfection, yet is so patient with you?

3.43 - DON’T STOP YOUR SEEKING

At times, a young man would pull his car to the side of the road, overwhelmed with a strange feeling. Then, he would cry out to the Lord, “I am missing out. I don’t know what it is, but I know I’m missing out.” This was not a totally empty feeling. He just knew that God expected more of him and he had to keep searching. Your devout life should be filled with these special moments. After experiencing them, God will reveal the next part of His plan.

St. Francis deSales

Francis and his cousin accepted the difficult invitation to win Protestants back to the Catholic Church in Switzerland. The work was difficult, hazardous (their lives were threatened often) and seemingly hopeless. Very few returned to Catholicism. His cousin grew discouraged and returned to his home diocese.

Francis kept searching. He started to write little booklets. They spread all over the country and called thousands back to Catholicism. He is the patron saint of writers.

Keep Searching

Perfection is a road and each stage prepares for the next. However, the next stage only begins if the person keeps seeking. When these opportunities appear, the soul knows why they had to keep seeking. Otherwise, they would never have found.

Our lives receive direction from the duties of our state in life. However, the real directional gifts come from within (by God’s inspiration) and from without (from seemingly chance circumstances). The seeking soul always finds them.

The point is this. In the beginning, the soul knows that it must find the road. However, after a while, the soul is tempted to stop searching and to feel that it has found the road. What a mistake! There are always new stages to discover. Keep seeking.

The saints say:

1. Some people discourage this unlimited seeking, saying, “It is dangerous”. Do not listen to them. (STA)
2. We are like the bride, who does not immediately find her beloved and must keep seeking. (SFdeS)
3. Some people pose as Christians but they do not seek to please God or atone for their sins. (SLdeM)
4. The soul seeks God as burning lips seek water. (S.Faus)
5. More than one soul has left the road along which God wanted it to journey. (S.Faus)

Group Discussion:

1. Are you still searching for God? Where are you looking? What are you finding? Who/what can help in your search?
2. When, in the past, did you find God? Recount the story.

3.44 - CHARITY - THE FIRE IN YOUR BELLY

In the business world, “a fire in your belly” describes a young person wanting to get to the top. In the devout life, this fire is the Holy Spirit, who consumes the devout soul with a supernatural charity which others cannot understand. True love is always striving because love is satisfied only for a moment. Then it moves on, seeking what can be accomplished in future moments.

Charity Takes Control

At this point, much of the road to perfection has been travelled. Sins have been put away. Meditation has led to mental prayer. Virtues are planted. Faith has been awakened and hope reaches out for heaven. Finally, charity comes onto the scene. She has been there all along, like a smoldering fire covered over by sins and failures. Now they are removed, and her flame bursts forth. Charity must rule. She is the queen. She alone unites you to the king. Let this fire burn! “Love is as strong as death and relentless as the netherworld. Deep waters cannot quench love nor floods sweep it away” (Song 8: 6-7). The food of this fire is a generous spirit.

The saints say:

1. O Lord, carry me off to the furnace of love. Plunge me into its burning depths so that I can be its ecstatic victim for all eternity. (STL)
2. My God, help us to experience your love before we die. (STA)
3. The fire of God’s love must never be mingled with any other love. (SJC)
4. The soul’s health is its love for God. When that love is not perfect then the soul’s health is not perfect. (SJC)
5. Nothing can impede divine love. It conquers all difficulties. (SCG)

Group Discussion:

1. Do you experience a deep fire, a yearning to be one with God? How do you fulfill that desire?
2. What do you strive for? What holds a priority in your life? Is this the correct priority?
3.45 - DO YOU LOVE ME?

Peter was just a fisherman when Jesus of Nazareth invited him to be his disciple. His life was filled with many special moments. He showed great faith, proclaiming, “You are the Christ, Son of the living God”. He displayed great loyalty, “Lord, you have the words of everlasting life” (Jn.6:68), and great bravery, “Peter got out of the boat and began to walk on the water” (Mt.14:29).

His failures were also great. To the lowly maid, Peter said, “I do not know the man”. When the cock crowed, “He went out and began to weep bitterly” (Mt.26:75).

All Set Aside

A moment came, when all of Peter’s actions (good and bad) were set aside. Sitting on the shore in Galilee, the Risen Jesus questioned him about the only issue that really mattered, “Simon, son of John, do you love me? (Jn.21:17) Peter understood the importance of this moment. Jesus was giving him another chance. When he replied, “Lord, you know that I love you, he was ready to be the Pope.

Dear soul, Jesus asks you the same question. Listen to those same words spoken within. All your strivings have led you to this point. Jesus is giving you a special moment. “Do you love me?” With the Little Flower proclaim in your soul, “My vocation is love”. Now, never turn back.

St. Josephy (1580-1683)

Josephy had the world at his feet. Besides having great skills and a good job, the owner liked him so much that he offered to make him his partner (while Josephy was in his early 20’s). In addition, the owner had a beautiful daughter who was in love with Josephy. What more could any young man want?

Josephy loved Jesus so much that he turned away from all those riches to become a monk and a priest. He became a bishop and he loved everyone. However, he was the “man in the middle”, trying to bring about unity with Rome. Tremendously misunderstood, an angry mob threw his body in the river.

The saints say:

1. O God, you love me without me loving you. (SCS)
2. Whoever does not want to love God more, does not love him enough. (SFdeS)
3. Love is ingenious. It discovers hundreds of little crosses to bear for Jesus’ sake. (SLdeM)
4. In all your actions, have only the motive of pure love for God. The smallest actions done from love are of more value than great actions done from other motives. (FJdeC)

Group Discussion:

1. Can you put aside your successes and failures, and open your heart to Jesus’ question, “Do you love me?”
2. Do you love generously? Can you learn to love? Do you believe the Holy Spirit can make you a great lover of God?
When adolescence bursts upon young people like a mighty river suddenly let loose, they are filled with energy, dreams, ambitions, desires (good and bad). A new affective life breaks forth that will never again accept the restrictions of childhood years. “When I was a child, I thought like a child but now I have put aside childish things”.

The world’s ceaseless activity comes from these inner feverish searchings of the human heart. What can harness this river, move its forces in the right direction and make sure it serves God and man? That task is assigned to charity – the queen of all the virtues and the goal of all devotion. Without charity, the soul cannot gain divine union and cannot even overcome its own self-love. Without charity, all is lost – both on earth and in heaven.

Charity alone can guide man’s affections to God. If we do not seek God, then this inner ocean of affections will destroy us.

St. Clare of Assisi (1194-1253)

St. Clare was a beautiful young woman who refused to obey her family and get married. At 20, she heard St. Francis preach. She ran away from home, cut off her beautiful hair and wore a penitential habit.

Despite her family’s objections, she refused to return home. When her fifteen year old sister, Agnes, joined her, the family decided to physically carry her out of the convent. But, Agnes’ body got so heavy they had to put her down. Soon, this fire of love brought her mother, another sister and many other noble women (who left their riches behind) to the convent. Concerning Clare’s great love, Chesterton wrote “Christ was her bridegroom and Francis was her shining knight.

The saints say:

1. Love speaks from the soul’s highest point. All the faculties and affections must obey her. (SFdeS)
2. I found my destiny the moment my soul lost itself in your love. (S.Faus)
3. I try to have such a love for God that it makes amends for those who do not love him. (S.Faus)
4. By love, man conquers all evil habits and stands ready to perform every good work. (SCG)

Group Discussion:

1. Do you find your heart moving toward God? Does this happen often? Were there special moments when you felt powerfully moved?
2. Where does your inner stream of affections flow? What goals do you have?
3.47 - THE SAINTS AND ROMANTIC LOVE

It was 1947. An eleven year old boy was sitting on a swing at 4:30 P.M. Most of the kids had already gone home for supper, when she walked over and sat next to him. Being four years older, she had no romantic interest. He just happened to be there on the swing. They talked for about twenty-five minutes and then she left.

At supper that night, the boy couldn’t understand the delightful feelings within. Afterwards, he hurried back to the playground for the evening session. She wasn’t there. It was his first experience of love. In the next few years, other such moments inevitably happened and he realized that a new world was opening up, a new world of romantic love fashioned by God.

The saints choose the language of romantic love (even with sexual overtones) to speak of their relationship to God. They quote the most sensual of all scriptural books, the Song of Songs. (How this book of thirty two love poems ever got into the Bible is a divine mystery.) Their language of divine union becomes extremely romantic. They even speak of Spiritual Betrothal and Spiritual Marriage (explained in Book Five). In this Illuminative Stage, divine love takes center stage and begins with a divine intrusion.

Augustine’s Divine Intrusion

Before coming to Milan, Augustine had led a life of sin. By hearing St. Ambrose preach, he experienced God’s invitation to love. Then his inner war began. God intruded but Augustine kept saying, ‘Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow’”. At 32 years of age, Augustine heard a child’s voice say “Take and read. Take and read.” Opening the bible, Augustine read, “It is now the hour for you to awake from sleep. The night is advanced. The day is at hand. Let us throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light” (Rom.13:11-12).

Augustine described this divine intrusion, “You called, you shouted and you broke through my deafness. You breathed your fragrance on me and now I pant for you. I have tasted you; now I hunger and thirst for more. You touched me, and I burned for your peace. When I am united to you with my whole being, I shall be free at last. O Beauty, ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved you.”

Let me shout this from the housetops. God wants to intrude into your life and have you exclaim, “O Beauty, ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved you.” When God intrudes, a divine romance begins. In the next chapter are two saints who made divine love the center of their devotion.

The saints say:

1. My love tries to equal God’s love. This is like a tiny drop of water measuring itself with the whole ocean. (S.Faus)
2. Jesus places my heart into the fire of his love. Then his Divine Presence invades me and I forget everything else. (S.Faus)
3. Jesus, may the live coal of your love burn constantly on the altar of my heart. (SLdeM)
4. My soul is a bottomless abyss and nothing can fill it but God himself. (S.Faus)
5. After her death, St. Teresa of Avila appeared in a vision and revealed that she had died because God inflamed her with love. Her nature could not handle divine love, so her soul departed to God. (SFdeS)

6. Is my heart really full of pure love? Are my limitless desires just a piece of foolishness? Tell me, Jesus. You know I want the truth. (STL)

Group Discussion:

1. How did you react when adolescence opened up the mysteries of romantic love? Did you ever think of God in these terms?
2. Have you experienced God’s call to divine love? How did it happen? How did you respond?

3.48 - THE LITTLE FLOWER AND BROTHER LAWRENCE

The Little Flower

In her autobiography, the Little Flower was trying to resolve her inner call. She describes her inner quest to find her place in Christ’s Mystical Body. Looking at St. Paul’s list of ministries, she could find none that fit her situation (1Cor.12:27-31). Although disappointed, she continued to read until her eyes fell upon the sentence, “But I shall show you a more excellent way”. Her heart was throbbing. She continued to read, “If I do not have love, I am nothing. There remains faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love” (13:13). She concluded, “My vocation is to love, for the heart is the most important of the body’s organs. When it stops beating, there is no more life”.

A few years later, her vocation of love reached its pinnacle. When she read of saints choosing to be victim souls for Divine Justice, she grew frightened. Then, in her unique genius, she thought “Is it not more important to be a victim soul for God’s merciful love than for his justice”? So, on June 9, 1895 she wrote her “Offering of Myself to God’s merciful Love”. (This beautiful prayer can easily be found but don’t become a Victim of Divine Love without your confessor’s permission).

Wanting to do all under obedience, she went immediately to her sister (who then headed the community). Her sister, not grasping the greatness of this oblation, quickly gave her permission and Therese became a victim soul of merciful love – an oblation that she urged many to make (never to be done without the permission of a spiritual guide). This was her genius. She focused on love and set aside all else.

Brother Lawrence

Brother Lawrence had the exact same simplicity. He wrote, “If love is the goal of the spiritual life, why focus on anything else?”
Brother Lawrence never focused on heaven (to get rewards) nor hell (to avoid punishment). He never thought about judgment and, after confessing his sins, he refused to think about them (an excellent practice). His prayer was the presence of God and his relationship with God was more intense during his work than during prayer. When he went on retreats, he found himself desolate, seemingly away from God’s presence. When he returned to his normal routine, he was overwhelmed by divine consolations. He writes, “God deceived me. I entered the monastery to find sufferings and I found only consolation in God’s presence.

At this stage, be like Brother Lawrence. “If love is the goal of the spiritual life, why focus on anything else?”

The saints say:

1. **Divine Justice demands perfect victims, but Divine Love has chosen me as a victim – feeble and imperfect creature that I am. So, my folly is to hope that your love will accept me as its victim. (STL)**
2. **I beg you to choose in this world a multitude of little victims worthy of your love! (STL)**
3. **The soul can only understand God by love. (BL)**
4. **Pure love is capable of great deeds. It is never broken by difficulty or adversity. Pure love never errs. Its light is strangely plentiful. (S.Faus)**

Group Discussion:

1. **How did the stories of these saints enlighten you?**
2. **Do you feel a call to love God? Have you followed this call?**

**3.49 - THE LOVE OF KINDNESS**

Ascend or Descend

Everyone loves someone or something. Some people love what is above them. Others love what is beneath them. According to what you love, you will either ascend or descend. By the devout life, you ascend to God, to all the angels and the saints. By a sinful life you descend to the animals and the devils. Every human person either ascends to heaven by loving God and neighbor or descends to hell by loving only themselves.

In August 1941, a group of prisoners escaped from the German concentration camp at Auschwitz, Poland. In retaliation, the Germans, wanted to execute ten prisoners, including a Polish sergeant. When his name was announced, he cried out, “What about my family?” A Polish priest, St. Maximillian Kolbe, offered to accept death in his place even though he had never met the man. “Greater love than this no man has, that he lay down his life for his friend” (Jn.15:13).
Loving Your Neighbor

Few of us will be called to the heroic deed of this saint, but all are called to a life of kindness. Kindness comes in small doses. It is a spiritual intravenous needle that slowly but effectively drips God’s goodness into your soul. Its three forms are thoughts, words and deeds.

Kind Thoughts

You must think kindly of everyone you meet. You must see goodness in others (and sometimes pretend it is there). By kindness, you must excuse others (as we so often do for ourselves) and you must forgive. Don’t forget. Jesus is “the Kindness of God” (Tit.3:4).

Kind Words

Kind words are difficult to say but they have great effects upon the hearer. They dispel fear, overcome darkness, heal wounds and remove conflicts. People’s lives have been totally changed because someone spoke a kind word. Years ago, a Christian Brother said to a young man, “You have a great ability to write”. The brother praised everything that he wrote. Those kind words planted the seeds of a writing career.

Kind Deeds

Kind deeds are the real test of a devout life. They are a greater proof of holiness than miracles. Mother Theresa wrote to her sisters, “Be kind to each other. I prefer that you make mistakes in being too kind rather in working miracles with unkindness.”

Progress in Kindness

To make progress, you must:

1. Laugh at yourself and refuse to take yourself seriously.
2. Seriously try to love everyone.
3. Place the kindest interpretation on the deeds of others.
4. Realize that everyone is limited in their goodness.
5. Accept diverse personalities
6. Be kind to yourself and put up with your own faults.
7. When you have failed in all the above, begin again.

A hint! When you gain an ease in relating to others you are probably growing in kindness.

Blessed Joan Delanque (1666-1736)

At 25 years of age, Joan inherited her family’s house and business. The inheritance caused Joan to become totally immersed in making money, even turning away beggars (whom her mother always helped). She opened her store on Sunday (a scandal to all). Money was her false god, until a devout woman, Frances Souchet, needed a place to stay. In a rare moment of kindness, Joan took her in for a number of years. Slowly, the woman changed Joan. As she changed, God gave Joan visions of the special work of forming a congregation of nuns (the Sisters of St. Anne) to take in orphan children. She went from total selfishness to sainthood by one act of kindness that changed the whole course of her life.
The saints say:

1. The surest sign of our union with God is to love our neighbor because we cannot be sure that we love God. (STA)
2. True charity consists in putting up with all your neighbor’s faults, never being surprised by his weaknesses and always being inspired by his smallest virtues. (STL)
3. When you see someone else’s faults, be sorry for them as if they were your own. (STA)
4. Even when the devout soul sees something sinful she does not judge. Instead, she finds compassion and intercedes with humility. (SCS)
5. Show a kind face to troublesome people. Go where God calls you, doing your tasks quietly. (FJdeC)

Group Discussion:

1. When have you experienced kind words or deeds? How did they affect you?
2. Can you put a kind interpretation on the deeds of others? Are you able to say kind words?

3.50 - THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS

“One soldier thrust his lance into his side and immediately blood and water flowed out. (Jn.19:34)

The Humanity of Christ

The great mystical saints always highlighted Christ’s humanity. St. Francis of Assisi loved the Christmas scene. Saint Dominic focused on the mysteries of the Rosary. St. Theresa of Avila told her sisters to cling to Jesus’ humanity. Because this devotion to Christ’s humanity reaches its highest level in devotion to Christ’s Sacred Heart, these chapters will highlight the revelations to St. Margaret Mary and to St. Faustina.

Jesus’ Heart

The seeds of the Sacred Heart devotion came through the writings of St. Bonaventure (1221-1274), St. Gertrude the Great (1256-1302), St. Albert the Great (1206-1280), St. Catherine of Sienna (1347-1380) and St. Francis de Sales (1567-1622). The most important preparation came from St. John Eudes (1601-1680) and his book, “Devotion to the Adorable Heart of Jesus”. This book provided a theological basis for the great revelations that were to come so quickly.

St. Margaret Mary

All these saints prepared for the modern devotion to the Sacred Heart revealed by Jesus’ appearance to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647-1690). When she was 20, Jesus appeared to her and strengthened her resolve of virginity (so she could overcome her family’s pressure to
marry). Four years later, she entered the Sisters of the Visitation (which was filled with devotion to the Sacred Heart through its founder, St. Frances de Sales).

On December 27, 1673 (the feast of the Beloved Disciple), Jesus appeared and told her to sit next to him in the Beloved Disciple’s place. He told her that she would be his instrument in spreading the love of his heart to the whole world. For eighteen months he amplified this first revelation, showing her his heart of flesh, which is now familiar to all Catholics.

Since many would not believe the words of an uneducated nun, Jesus sent the brilliant St. Claude La Colombiere. He validated these revelations and became the apostle of Sacred Heart devotion.

**Practical Aspects**

The practical aspects of this devotion include more frequent reception of Communion, an hour of prayer every Thursday night to imitate Jesus’ prayer in the Garden, establishment of the Feast of the Sacred Heart and enthronement of the Sacred Heart image.

Our Lord made twelve promises for those who practice devotion to the Sacred Heart:

1. I will give them all the graces necessary for their state of life.
2. I will establish peace in their families.
3. I will console them in all their troubles.
4. They shall find in My Heart an assured refuge during life and especially at the hour of their death.
5. I will pour abundant blessings on all their undertakings.
6. Sinners shall find in My Heart the source of an infinite ocean of mercy.
7. Tepid souls shall become fervent.
8. Fervent souls shall speedily rise to great perfection.
9. I will bless the homes where an image of My Heart shall be exposed and honored. (The basis for the enthronement).
10. I will give to priests the power of touching the most hardened hearts.
11. Those who propagate this devotion shall have their names written in My Heart, never to be effaced.
12. The all-powerful love of My Heart will grant to all those who shall receive Communion on the First Friday of nine consecutive months, the grace of final repentance. They shall not die under my displeasure, or without receiving their Sacraments. My heart shall be their assured refuge at that last hour.

**Enthronement of the Sacred Heart**

Father Matteo founded the Catholic University at Valparaiso, Chile. After years of success, the University burnt down. His priestly work seemed to be destroyed. However, the picture of the Sacred Heart was miraculously preserved. Taking this as God’s call, Fr. Matteo began the devotion of having families enthrone the sacred Heart to fulfill Promise 9 – that homes would be blessed.
Many popes blessed this work. Fr. Matteo became the greatest 20th century preacher. Over 100,000 priests listened to him preach.

**Today’s Apostle**

God led Gloria Anson to enthrone the Sacred Heart image in her own home. Her husband and four children, each night, made the preparatory devotions. When her husband, an active alcoholic, enthroned the Sacred Heart in their home, he stopped drinking and began to receive daily Communion. Gloria Anson has devoted decades to preaching the enthronement of the Sacred Heart in everyone’s home. (Promise 9).

**Conclusion**

The Sacred Heart devotion contains the whole devout life. It appeals to the imagination (so necessary for the beginner), leads to fervor and feelings (needed for the illuminative stage) and provides all that a mystic needs to gain the fullness of divine union. By revealing his Sacred Heart, Jesus fulfilled Teresa of Avila’s teaching that every devout soul must cling to his sacred humanity.

**The saints say:**

1. *One day, after Communion, the Sacred Heart showed me that He was the most beautiful, the wealthiest, the most powerful, the most perfect and the most accomplished among all lovers.* (SMMA)
2. *I received graces which I had never experienced before, particularly a deep understanding of his passion and death.* (SMMA)
3. *He made me repose for a long time upon his Sacred Breast, where he revealed the marvels of his love, those inexplicable secrets of his Sacred Heart.* (SMMA)
4. *He asked me for my heart. He placed it in his own adorable Heart. It looked like a little atom being consumed in a great furnace.* (SMMA)

**Group Discussion**

1. *Have you made the Nine First Fridays? Which of the 12 promises are important for you?*
2. *What aspects of the Sacred Heart devotion appeal to you? Do you find consolation? Is the Sacred Heart an easy image to use for mental prayer?*

**3.51 - A SPECIAL MINISTRY IN SACRED HEART DEVOTION**

Monsignor John Esseff, a priest of the Scranton diocese, had Padre Pio as his spiritual director. He, himself, was spiritual director to Mother Theresa. Since 1959, he has had a call to spread the devotion of Enthronement of the Sacred Heart. The following is his own description of his call.

**An Ecstatic Experience**

In 1959, parishioners generously paid for a trip to Rome and Lourdes. I used that time to ask Padre Pio to be my spiritual director. While in Rome, I visited St. John Lateran Basilica
and entered the Blessed Sacrament chapel. There, I experienced an overwhelming presence of God’s Majesty. Unable to stand, I was forced to my knees, and then to prostrate on the floor, trembling and crying before the Blessed Sacrament. God’s awesome presence seized me. All I could say was, “What do you want, Lord?” God answered, “Charity.” This state of ecstatic prayer lasted for a long time and I was unable to move or even to stir. When I got my bearings, I got up, walked closer to the Blessed Sacrament, was knocked again to the floor, and had the same experience. I wept and cried out, “What do you want, Lord?” “Love”, God answered.

I waited for the longest time to hear what more might come. I had a sense of being outside of myself. The ecstasy lasted a long time. Again, I walked closer to the Blessed Sacrament. A third time, I was knocked to the floor. As I lay there, the Lord said two things, “Teach the love of my Sacred Heart”, and “Learn more about the pope buried in this chapel.”

Pope Leo XIII

After these hours of ecstasy, I would do whatever God wanted. I felt quite dazed. I had entered St. John Lateran in the early morning and now it was late afternoon. As a tour passed by, I heard the guide telling the people that Pope Leo XIII was buried in this chapel. I looked around and saw his tomb elevated on the wall in the Blessed Sacrament chapel. So, I prayed before his tomb.

After returning home, I did as God directed. My research uncovered a curious piece of information. As his final act, Pope Leo enthroned the Sacred Heart of Jesus over the whole world. I now see that Jesus desires to be King of the entire world and I must promote this devotion everywhere.

Divine Mercy

In the 20th century, Jesus appeared to St. Faustina and revealed the Divine Mercy devotion, explained in the next chapter.

The saints say:

1. Flames issued from every part of his Sacred Humanity, especially from his adorable Bosom, which resembled an open furnace. (SMMA)
2. My only repose and adoration consisted in remaining prostrate before my God. (SMMA)
3. His love took everything away because he wanted me to have only the riches that came from his Sacred Heart. (SMMA)
4. He kept me two or three hours with my lips pressed to the wound of his Sacred Heart. (SMMA)

Group Discussion:

1. What effect did Msgr. Esseff’s story have upon you? Did you ever have an experience of God speaking to you? Did you respond to God’s desire?
2. How do people experience their call? Do you know God’s call upon your life? How can you seek to know it?

3.52 - SECRETARY OF DIVINE MERCY

The revelations to St. Margaret Mary became even clearer when Jesus revealed the Divine Mercy devotion to St. Faustina. The two saints are very similar. Both Margaret Mary and Faustina wrote their diaries under obedience. Both also burned what they wrote and were told to write again. Faustina’s Diary is much more extensive than Margaret Mary’s, and Jesus’ revelations and promises are clearer and greater.

The Divine Mercy revelation shows that we are in a new spiritual age. Jesus’ abundant promises and his mercy are falling from the heavens. Any soul in today’s modern world has access to this mercy. The following summarizes the central aspects of these revelations.

The Greatness of God’s Mercy

Jesus told Faustina, “Write, ‘the greater the sinner, the greater the mercy’. Summon all to confidence in the incomprehensible depth of my mercy for I desire to save all. The well of mercy was opened wide with a lance on the cross for all souls. I do not exclude anyone.”

Jesus repeated this appeal. “Know my daughter that my heart is mercy itself. From this sea of mercy, graces pour out upon the whole world. No soul that comes to me departs without being comforted. All misery vanishes in my mercy and every grace (redemptive and sanctifying) stems from this source.”

The Painting of the Image

Jesus asked that a picture be painted of his image with the words: Jesus I Trust in You. (327) Sister Faustina writes: “I saw Jesus dressed in a white garment. He held one hand raised in blessing and the other hand was touching his garment at the breast. From under the garment came two rays of light, one red the other pale.”

Jesus explained. “The rays represent the blood and water which gushed forth from the depths of my mercy when my agonizing heart was pierced on the cross. The pale rays symbolize the water, which cleanses and purifies the world (Baptism). The red rays represent the blood, which gives new life to the soul (Eucharist). These rays will shield the soul before the justice of my Father. Fortunate are those who live in this shelter, for the justice of God will not reach them there.”

Jesus asked Faustina for:

1. A feast of Divine Mercy to be established on the Sunday after Easter. (Pope John Paul II did this.)

2. Preparation for this Divine Mercy Sunday through a Novena of Mercy (beginning on Good Friday).
3. Reception of the sacraments of confession and Communion on this feast (or within eight days).

The Chaplet of Mercy

On September 13, 1935, a special vision happened. Sister Faustina saw an angel about to punish the inhabitants of a city. While praying, she heard these words: “Eternal Father, I offer you the body and blood, soul and divinity of your dearly beloved son, Our Lord Jesus Christ in atonement of our sins and those of the whole world.” This prayer stopped the chastisement and is said on the Our Father bead of the rosary.

On each Hail Mary bead is said, “For the sake of His Sorrowful Passion, have mercy on us and the whole world.”

Jesus said “Say this chaplet unceasingly. Anyone who says it will receive great mercy at the hour of death. Priests will recommend it to sinners as a last hope. If the most hardened sinner recited this chaplet even once, they will receive grace from my infinite Mercy. I want the whole world to know my infinite mercy. I want to give unimaginable graces to those who trust in my mercy.”

Main Promises of Divine Mercy

The promises of Divine Mercy to St. Faustina are very extensive and are contained in her Diary. Each day the person should recite the Chaplet of Divine Mercy (said on Rosary beads). Jesus said, “My daughter, at the hour of their death, I defend as my own glory, every soul that will say this chaplet, or when others say it for a dying person, the indulgence is the same”. (Diary 811)

Devotion to the Sacred Heart and Divine Mercy is the perfect bridge. They help the soul to cross over from the Illuminative to the Unitive Stage.

A Ministry to the Dying

In 1936, St. Faustina entered a hospital near Cracow and was placed in a ward where some people died almost every day. Some were peaceful but, for many, there was the tormented agony of a soul far from God. For two months, Faustina would leave her bed and kneel (sometimes for hours) until she saw the person grow calm. She witnessed firsthand the power of Divine Mercy. When the doctors forbade this practice (for her own health), Faustina just prayed from bed and the same graces were given.

The saints say:

1. As long as a person is alive, he can become a great saint, so great is the power of God’s mercy. (S.Faus)
2. O Jesus, how great is the fire of purest mercy which resides in your Sacred Heart. (S.Faus)
3. O Blessed Host, you contain the Body and Blood of the Lord Jesus as proof of his infinite mercy, especially for poor sinners. (S.Faus)
4. Each time I think of God’s mercy and the ingratitude of sinners, pain stabs at my heart. (S.Faus)
Group Discussion:

1. Compare the Sacred Heart image revealed to St. Margaret Mary and that revealed to St. Faustina?
2. What effect do these revelations of God’s mercy have upon you? Do we not offend Jesus if we do not believe his promises?

CONCLUSION

How great are these works of Jesus! Yet, he invites all to go up higher, into the active unitive stage where the Holy Spirit begins to take charge. Let’s keep reading and studying.
Meditation, Affective Prayer and Acquired Contemplation

Looking back on this road, we see that mental prayer simplifies. The beginner uses Meditation, a fairly complicated process which needs a book and requires the use of all his faculties – imagination, intellect and will. Affective Prayer simplifies meditation. The imagination focuses easily, the intellect quickly grasps the truths, and the will can pour out its prayers. (Since Brother Lawrence is the great writer about acquired contemplation, I will be quoting him frequently.)

In this unitive stage, affective prayer simplifies into acquired contemplation. “Contemplation” means “to look at” or “to gaze”. That is the soul’s prayer. She has acquired the power to gaze at God with very little effort. In acquired contemplation, the imagination comes quickly into God’s presence. The intellect receives great light from one simple truth. The will finds itself going to God, without the need for many acts. The soul enjoys God’s presence and experiences some divine union, while the faculties do very little work.

The soul glides along. God touches whatever faculty he chooses, the imagination by a picture; the intellect by a revelation, and the will by some delight. Although the soul remains active, God does most of the work. (“We must become perfect worshippers. That is what we will be in heaven.” (BL)

Prayer Lasts Longer

As prayer simplifies, it can also last longer. Words move into the background and the soul simply stays in God’s presence. The soul doesn’t do much “praying” because it enjoys God’s presence. “My chief concern in these forty years is to always be in God’s presence.” (BL) This prayer of simplicity is so easy that the soul can be in God’s presence even when involved in works.

While using acquired contemplation in prayer, the soul uses active recollection when working. It remains in God’s presence by very simple interior acts. “I am so accustomed to God’s presence, that I always receive his help.” (BL) In the next stage (passive unitive way) God will draw the soul into his presence whenever He wishes. This is the mystical gift of passive recollection.

The Actual Experience

In acquired contemplation, the soul enjoys a delight in prayer and has a vague vision of God’s presence (with little intellectual activity). The soul might experience the Father’s love for five or ten minutes, before needing to move to another thought. “If we knew our need for God’s favors, we would always seek his presence.” (BL)

Simplified Forms

By daily mental prayer, the soul acquires certain religious images, (as the Passion of Christ, or Christ’s Eucharistic presence). As these forms possess the soul, the entire prayer life
simplifies. Even during vocal or liturgical prayer, God absorbs the soul through these simplified forms. The advantages of acquired contemplation are obvious. Both prayer and work are done in God’s presence. “I keep myself with God, at the center of my soul.” (BL) The soul does less as God does more, both in prayer and in acquiring virtues.

The saints say:
1. God will forbid no one to drink of the waters of contemplation. (STA)
2. Acquired contemplation is not perfect in its beginning stage. So, the soul must return to meditation, at times. (SJC)
3. When meditation produces the honey of devotion it is called contemplation. (SFdeS)
4. When God acts more and the soul less, the prayer is more perfect. (FJdeC)

Group Discussion:
1. Have you experienced any progress in prayer? Do you understand simplified forms? What blessings did you receive from these forms?
2. Can you describe God’s touches on your soul? How do you dispose yourself for these Divine touches?

4.02 - EXAMPLES OF ACQUIRED CONTEMPLATION

Early on this road, God can give prayer experiences which are contemplative. (The soul might not realize this). The following two experiences should encourage beginners to move along.

The Rosary
A young woman, at the beginning of her conversion, found herself forgetting to say the vocal parts of the rosary and even forgetting to have the beads slip through her fingers. At each mystery, she was content to picture the scene and do nothing else. There were no distractions. The imagination was fixed and the intellect was still. At the end, there was an inner sense of God’s presence, as if she had just received Holy Communion. “Somehow I forgot about vocal prayer.” (BL)

The Woods
The seminary had beautiful woods that surrounded a large sports field. While at prayer, a seminarian found God leading his spirit to these fields. There he met God. He was alone with him. No words were said. There was just his presence. God was a Father and he was His son. God was the Lord and he was His disciple. God was the Spirit and he was His loved one.

This gift always began with a picture of a gospel scene and affective prayer. That was the door. Soon, however, God would lead him in spirit towards this field. God wanted to meet him at this field and let him rejoice in God’s presence. Nothing had to happen. No need for words or revelations (although some might come). The prayer was full and complete. As the seminarian arrived at this field, God awaited him and he just stayed there.

Still a Beginner
Father Boylan in “This Tremendous Lover” had written clearly about the Dark Night and Infused Contemplation (Book Five). He said that no matter how exalted the prayer, if the person had never gone through the Dark Nights, they were still a beginner. This was wonderful. The seminarian could enjoy all the divine favors of Acquired Contemplation and still see himself as a “beginner”.

These prayer favors began within a year of the original prayer experience. Therefore, Acquired Contemplation is not necessarily a long way off. When it is reached, the soul is still a “beginner”.

**God Gives to All**

Acquired Contemplation is a level of prayer that God will give to everyone. It is the normal goal of mental prayer and everyone can arrive there, even within a short time. It is not extraordinary and demands no special favors.

**The saints say:**

1. By ordinary grace, everyone can gain the state of prayer which is a “simple gaze” upon God. (BL)
2. During this stage, the soul should meditate sometimes and contemplate at other times. (SJC)
3. These souls are losing their first method of prayer but God is giving them a new spirituality. (SJC)
4. After I began to drink the waters of contemplation, God plunged me in. (STA)

**Group Discussion:**

1. How do you use your imagination in prayer? Do you experience a stillness? What scenes does the Spirit bring to your mind?
2. How long have you been practicing mental prayer? Have you been faithful to it? Have you been generous in giving time? Is it a daily part of your schedule?
As a plane takes off, the passengers know they are moving quickly. Even as it climbs into the sky, they still feel the speed. However, as the plane pierces the clouds and reaches its cruising altitude, there is very little experience— even though the plane flies faster than ever. That is a picture for the three stages of prayer.

The Devout Life is a divine flight. In the purgative stage, the soul accepts the difficulties of leaving earth behind. In the illuminative stage, there is the power of climbing into the sun’s light. In the unitive stage (where the greatest progress is made) the soul cruises along with less effort, as if nothing is happening.

A Row Boat With Sails
Since airplanes were not yet invented, the saints used a different model, a rowboat with sails. As the little boat leaves the world’s harbor, the soul must row strenuously. Later, the ocean becomes calm and the soul, guided by the moral and theological virtues finds rowing very easy. But then comes another stage, God himself moves the soul.

The Change
Because the Spirit’s wind fills the boat’s sails, the soul does not need to row. The soul has to change its attention from rowing, to setting the sails to catch the new wind. When the wind blows, the oars are put away. The soul adjusts from actively practicing the virtues to yielding to the Spirit’s gifts. The soul has become an experienced sailor ready to move quickly. The soul’s powers (called virtues) are lifted up by the Spirit’s powers (called gifts).

Some Examples
I’ll give some examples: By the virtue of faith, the soul always tried to figure out and to discern God’s will. By the gift of Counsel, the soul sees what God wants in a single glance. By the virtue of Fortitude, the soul tried to be strong amid trials. By the gift of Fortitude, the soul enjoys God’s own strength. By the virtue of Faith, the soul believed in God’s truths. By the gift of Understanding, the soul sees all these truths at once and how they come together in harmony. By the virtue of Charity, the soul valiantly did God’s will. By the gift of Wisdom, the soul relishes the Divine Will and finds an almost irreversible attraction to it.

By his gifts, the Spirit gains his greatest control over the soul.

The Shared Gift of Fortitude
The Spirit’s gifts are best used when hearts join together. That was the story of St. Fulgentius of Ruspe (468-533). He entered a monastery governed by Felix, who asked him to be co-superior. For six years, they lived in great charity. In 499, they were both arrested. When the persecutors began beating Fulgentius, Felix said, “He is too delicate, whip me who am stronger”. So, they beat Felix first and Fulgentius only later. The two shared in the Gift of Fortitude.
Helping Others

Another example of using gifts together happened to St. Paula (347-404) who, fortunately, gathered with other saints. She was 32, had five children, and was living in Rome, when her husband died. At this point, she met St. Marcella, also a widow, who brought her into a Devout Life. She also met and worked with St. Jerome.

He, however, left for Bethlehem. She and her daughter, St. Eustochium, desired a monastic life and joined him. Knowing Greek and Hebrew, she helped Jerome in his biblical work and, with her daughter, she founded monasteries and convents. To gain the fullness of divine life, the saints need other saints.

The saints say:
1. **Being in God’s hands, I was stronger than all the devils. I could not even injure myself.** (STA)
2. **God, here I am. I am all yours. Fashion me according to your heart.** (BL)
3. **Let us stem God’s tide no more. Let us break all our inner dams, opening the way for grace and making up for lost time.** (BL)
4. **I do not grow weary of crying out everywhere, “Abandonment, unbounded and unreserved abandonment to God’s actions”.** (FJdeC)

Group Discussion:
1. **Have you tried to foster the virtues? Where have you succeeded? Where have you failed? Are you still trying?**
2. **When have you experienced a new ease? When has the Spirit moved you more quickly? Are the virtues growing more powerful?**

**4.04 - PUTTING THE SPIRIT IN CONTROL**

A man recounts his first attempts at skiing. On the first day, he started down the beginner’s slope. When he was out of control, he just fell in the snow, got up and started again. When he arrived at the bottom, a ski instructor was ready to reveal all the secrets of successful skiing. By the third day, he was enjoying the trip down the slope without any falls.

In the Devout Life, there are **three basic secrets** to put the Holy Spirit in control.

1. **Interiority**
2. **Generosity**
3. **Consciousness of the Spirit**

Your Inner Thoughts

A priest would ask his school children, “Who is always in your dreams at night?” After many false guesses, someone would finally answer, “I am”. In human life, a twenty four hour stream of thought flows within, and you are the thinking subject.

In the modern world, you no longer own that interior stream. Every time you turn on the radio, the television, the internet, the I-Pod, the Blackberry, others put their messages in your stream of consciousness. They even pay billions of dollars to have that privilege. The Devout Life turns off these external voices so the Spirit can guide you.
Listening

Do you keep giving advice to somebody who doesn’t act on it? “Stop wasting your breath”, they say. Well, the Holy Spirit doesn’t waste his precious breath, either. He looks for souls with attentive ears.

When Samuel was young “a revelation of the Lord was uncommon” (Sam.3:11), meaning that the Spirit wasn’t doing much speaking. God called to Samuel twice and he went to Eli, the high priest. However, Eli did not understand. Only on the third try, did Eli figure out that God was speaking. So, he told Samuel, “If you hear the voice again, say, ‘Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening’”. With that advice, the whole history of Israel changed. The powerful prophet, Samuel, began his long career of listening to the Holy Spirit.

Knowing the Spirit

The Holy Spirit is not a dove, or a wind or a breath. He is not a voice. He is a Divine Person, just as the Father and Son are Divine Persons. He is called the “forgotten” and “unknown” Person, but He doesn’t like those titles. He wants his presence to be seen through your human nature. Jesus received a human nature from His mother. The Holy Spirit is different. He uses your human nature.

In the Devout Life, you and the Holy Spirit work together. Until now, he has been “behind the scenes”, hidden and unseen. All of that is about to end. The Holy Spirit will manifest himself in seven special ways, called sanctifying gifts. The following chapters study all seven.

Use His Name

Businessmen and politicians who can remember names are usually successful. People respond to them. The Holy Spirit is the same. When you call him by name he responds mightily. So, pray often, “Come, Holy Spirit.”

The saints say:
1. God works quite differently when the soul keeps nothing back. (STA)
2. Happy the person to whom the Holy Spirit reveals his secrets, especially of Mary his spouse. (SLdeM)
3. An unmistakable sign of being led by the Spirit is to think and speak often of Mary. (SLdeM)
4. God transports our spirits like a giant picking up straw. (STA)
5. The soul collects the wood but only the Spirit enkindles the fire of divine love. (STA)

Group Discussion:
1. Have you begun to listen to the Holy Spirit? Have you been attentive and generous? What are the results?
2. Do you realize that the Holy Spirit will use your human nature? Are you willing to be his instrument?
Padre Pio had an extraordinary gift of Counsel, knowing each penitent’s secret thoughts and pointing out God’s will. This Counsel was a charismatic gift, used for the good of the penitent. Counsel, the sanctifying gift, is personal, revealing God’s will to you.

Jesus’ first public use of Counsel was when he deliberately stayed in the Temple while his parents went back to Nazareth. His actions confused Mary and Joseph and Jesus had to explain, “Did you not know that I must do my Father’s will?” The Father had revealed his will, but even his parents “did not understand what he said to them” (Lk.2:49-50). To reveal the Father’s will to you, the Holy Spirit uses his gift of Counsel. He gives this power so the soul makes the right decision.

Some Extraordinary Graces of Counsel
This infused gift leads to surprising decisions. Francis of Assisi renounced his riches and became at odds with his father. Thomas Aquinas broke away from his family to join the Dominicans. St. Catherine of Sienna resisted her parents who wanted her to marry. St. Rose of Lima, a beautiful girl, also had to resist her family’s desires to see her married. These saints responded according to God’s will, even if they alienated others by their decisions.

By Counsel, the person no longer “figures out” the right decision. God infuses the right answer. The light comes from above (heaven), not from below, (the human intellect). By God’s vision, the soul sees each situation as God sees it. The answers come quickly. The soul knows exactly what to do and to say. When told not to preach anymore, Peter told the Jewish leaders, “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

Because Counsel reveals God’s will in every situation, the devout soul has a new responsibility. When Counsel lights up God’s path, the soul must choose to walk it. Where does Counsel inevitably lead? To total and complete abandonment, into the arms of a loving Father.

The Role of a Spiritual Director
Counsel must operate under obedience to a director. All important enlightenments should be submitted to a spiritual director. Once these are confirmed, you can seek new enlightenment. The road to perfection always leads us on.

Some Saints and Counsel
As always, saints give the clearest examples.

When St. Damien was in the seminary, his older brother was ordained. However, he died before leaving for his mission assignment in Hawaii. Led by Counsel, Damien knew God wanted him to take his brother’s place. His religious superiors accepted his request and Damien was ordained in Honolulu, where he served as a parish priest.

Later, when the government decided to segregate some of his parishioners who were lepers to the island of Molokai, Damien’s frequent visits embarrassed the government. So, they decreed that no one was allowed to go back and forth. Most would have abandoned the
mission, but the Spirit’s gift of Counsel guided Damien to his surprise decision. He would live and die with the lepers on the island of Molokai.

Another Example

Counsel led Mother Theresa from her teaching apostolate at a girls’ high school to serve the poor of Calcutta. As the work unfolded, the Spirit led her back to the girls’ school where she recruited volunteers, and began her world-wide congregation.

St. Jane de Chantel (a widow), knew to leave her adult children to found the Visitation Nuns with St. Francis deSales. St. Vincent dePaul knew how to structure his Sisters of Charity so they would be free to serve the people.

St. Teresa of Avila knew to leave her own convent and establish St. Joseph Convent in Avila, with strict enclosure and withdrawal from the world. By Counsel, the saints made surprising directions. Only later, could people see God’s wisdom in their choices.

The saints say:
1. Right now, you are standing between heaven and hell. Both are open and waiting for you. May the Spirit’s Counsel guide you always. (SFdeS)
2. When God acts as your guide, he demands complete confidence. (FJdeC)
3. To receive abundant divine light, the soul must not interpose its own will. (SJC)
4. To receive God’s light, the soul just waits upon God’s Spirit. (SJC)

Group Discussion:
1. Since beginning your Devout Life, how has God enlightened you? What surprising decisions have you made? What has been the effect?
2. Is God’s light increasing? Extending to more aspects of your life? Has it brought about a new ordering of priorities?

4.06 - THE GIFT OF PIETY

A loving father was strict with his young sons, but seeing that they had grown into very good adolescents, he changed his approach. One day, the youngest son said, “Dad has changed”. This was true. He had always loved them as a father but now he had become a close friend. His sons had a new idea of their father. The gift of Piety accomplishes the same goal, giving us a new idea of God the Father. Paul describes this new gift, “You received a spirit of adoption through which we cry out “Abba” (that is, “Father”) (Rom.8:15).

God, the Intruder

As the Devout Life begins, God is seen as a lawgiver. As the soul practices the virtues, God seems closer and more friendly. Finally, the gift of Piety fully reveals him as Father.

God is a Creator who cares for all his creatures. However, God is Father, only to those “who believe in Jesus’ name” (Jn.1:12). These he empowers to become his children. After his resurrection, Jesus said to Magdalene, “I am going to my Father and your Father” (Jn.20:17). His death and rising had restored the original relationship which Adam and Eve had enjoyed. We, again, were his children and He was our Father.
Two Final Stories

At fourteen years of age, a young boy caught scarlet fever, which kept him in bed for four weeks. His father, who loved him deeply, altered his work schedule to come home for lunch. Every day, upon entering the house, he would immediately come upstairs.

One day, not realizing his weakness, the young man got out of bed and walked to the top of the stairs. He fainted and would have fallen down all the steps. However, his loving father had already ascended the stairs. When he fell, he fell into his father’s arms. The gift of Piety reveals to the soul that the loving Father is always at the top of the stairs, not allowing us to fall.

A thirty-five-year-old man frequently came home. His father would prepare a bowl of ice cream and some hot tea. One day, the man was deeply burdened because of a misunderstanding with his boss. After receiving the ice cream and tea, the man, surprisingly, began to weep profusely. He ate quickly and left the house to take a walk before his father could see. The weeping continued until his whole body was shaking. God spoke so clearly within. “Do you see the love that your father has shown for you? I do not see you as your superiors see you. I see you as your father does. The man was lifted up by the Gift of Piety.

The saints say:
1. God is a good father. From experience I know that he causes everything to prosper for his children. (FJdeC)
2. The Father teaches me as if I were his favorite. He enjoys my company in a thousand ways. (BL)
3. God’s heart seeks our love. The Father passionately commands us to love him. (SFdeC)
4. Be simple as a child. When the Father finds this quality in us he hurries his work. (FJdeC)

Group Discussion:
1. Since beginning your Devout Life, how has your idea of God changed? Do you experience His closeness? Have you seen his Fatherly care?
2. Can you cite moments when the Father saved you from harm? When he revealed his love? Do you experience God as Father in your mental prayer?

4.07 - THE GIFT OF FORTITUDE

A seminarian often dreamed that he was being martyred. The only problem was, that just as he was about to be killed, he would wake up, very much alive, and having to face the difficulties of daily life. Martyrdom might require much less fortitude than fulfilling daily demands. One day, as St. Charles de Foucoul was in his hut in the African desert, a man broke in and killed “the holy man”. This martyrdom was really a quick victory compared to his years spent in that desert, trying to evangelize.

The Virtue of Fortitude

At Baptism, God infuses both the virtue and the gift of Fortitude into our souls. The virtue begins to operate right away and prepares for later heroic acts.
The Little Flower used the virtue of Fortitude at the turning point of her whole life, the first step into a life of Fortitude. “On Christmas Day, 1886, after midnight Mass, I was excited to open my gifts. Daddy used to love to see my happiness. However, this Christmas, Daddy was irritated and said, (thinking I couldn’t hear him) “Thank goodness, it’s the last time we shall have this kind of thing”. I went upstairs to remove my hat. My older sister, Celine, urged me not to go down. “It will upset you too much!” But Therese was not the same. In an instant, Jesus had changed her. “I suppressed the tears and pulled out my gifts with great cheerfulness.” Daddy laughed. Celine thought she was dreaming. I had gotten back the strength of soul I had lost as a four year old (when her mother died). On that glorious night, the third period of my life began.”

The Gift of Fortitude

St. Therese practiced heroic acts of fortitude in her convent life. She appeared joyful when she took a demanding nun to supper every night. While in deep spiritual darkness, she showed so much joy that others thought she was enjoying consolations. She accepted the greatest physical pain associated with tuberculosis that eventually took her life. She was so peaceful in the midst of terrible physical sufferings that some nuns wondered if she was really sick. By using the virtue of Fortitude, (when she acted bravely as a little girl), she was able to receive the gift of Fortitude, by which she won the total victory against all odds.

St. Paul was martyred in Rome, but that was easy compared with his years of trials. He writes, “Five times at the hands of the Jews, I received forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. I passed a night and a day on the deep, on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my own race, dangers from Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers at sea, among false brothers, in toil and hardship, through many sleepless nights, through hunger and thirst, through frequent fasting, through cold and exposure.” (2Cor.11:24-27). Looking at St. Paul’s trials, we ask “How did he do that?” He didn’t. The Spirit within him accomplished the task. He will do the same for you.

Where to Begin

Dear reader, what should you do? Just begin where you are. Put your oar in the water and make daily acts of fortitude. Soon, the Spirit will send his wind and you will find yourself doing heroic acts for God.

The saints say:

1. To accept afflictions from God is perfect love because the only thing loveable about afflictions is that they come from God. (SFdeS)
2. When I was a child, I was sad when I suffered, but now I relish these bitter fruits with peace and joy. (STL)
3. We must take courage. When Our Savior told us to fight, he also promised victory. (SFdeS)
4. The soul must have courage to walk firmly while the lightning flashes and the tempests roar. (FJdeC)
Group Discussion:
1. What were your initial difficulties in trying to live a Devout Life? How did you overcome them? Did you gain a habit of fortitude, remaining strong when confronting difficulties?
2. What difficulties are you facing right now? How are you better prepared to confront them? Do you run away from difficulties?

4.08 - THE GIFT OF FEAR OF THE LORD

Two young brothers, close in age, would get into fist-fights. One brother tended to punch the other in the stomach. The mother, fearing permanent harm, would always say, “Do not punch your brother in the stomach”. Of course, in the middle of the battle, the boy would forget mom’s words.

One day, he did hurt his brother and, as usual, his mother was upset and repeated her words, “Don’t I always tell you not to do that?” For the first time in his life, he experienced perfect contrition, total reverential fear. His mother could have given him any penance, he was truly sorry only because he hurt her. With the gift of Fear of the Lord, we dread every sin because it offends God.

Increasing Our Capacity

When the person experiences God’s closeness, a danger exists that God’s consolations could breed an unhealthy familiarity. In accepting his favors, the soul can forget God’s greatness and majesty and forget that we are all God’s creatures. The unfortunate effect of this familiarity is that God cannot bestow greater favors because he does not want to jeopardize our eternal salvation.

Fear of the Lord removes this problem and opens the devout soul to immense favors. When the soul has reverential fear, God can give visions, miracles, raptures and every possible gift. Yet, the soul will only see herself as a worthless creature.

A Saint

St. Margaret Mary, one of the Church’s greatest saints writes, “My Master always shows me how hideous are my faults. He reproves me most for my disrespect before the Blessed Sacrament. I am at peace only when I see myself unknown and buried in oblivion. I had such a horror for sin that I would have to hide so I could weep over my slightest fault”.

This tremendous fear prepared her for great gifts. “The Savior has poured out his graces so abundantly that I find it difficult to contain my joy. The joy is then replaced by fear that I would omit the smallest duties. My Savior took away my fears, saying that he would adjust the graces to my schedule”.

Her simplicity shines through in one letter. “My Savior revealed all the graces I would receive through devotion to the Sacred Heart. I asked him to give these graces to a worthy soul, since I am really an obstacle to His plan.” However, “He said that he chose me because I was totally convinced of my nothingness and could not attribute anything to my own powers”. By Fear of the Lord, this saint enjoyed extraordinary divine favors because she saw herself as worthless.
Sources of This Gift

In 1981, a priest died very young of a heart attack. His early death confronted another priest in a new way. He imagined his friend’s soul leaving his body and coming before God. What was that like? What was the experience of appearing before God and entering eternal life? At that point, the priest could hold on to nothing. All that was being accomplished in his priesthood seemed so small. His own devotions seemed so little. Everything was overshadowed by the greatness of God. The priest was in his early forties at the time, but this gift has never left him. St. Teresa wrote, “When the soul sees God’s greatness, it also sees its own lowliness.”

The saints say:
1. In prayer, God gave me the gift of fear, but it was so swallowed up in love that I never thought of punishment. (STA)
2. Fear of losing God overwhelms me and I can hardly write. (STA)
3. Love of God and fear of God are our two strong castles. We use them to war against the world, the flesh and the devil. (STA)
4. Fear surrounds the outside. Inside, the soul’s joy and peace increase. (SJC)
5. In the middle of temptations, our love for God must have Fear of the Lord at its side. (STA)

Group Discussion:
1. Do you think much of your eternal salvation of your being with God forever? Are you overwhelmed by the thought of eternity? Do you see how unworthy you are?
2. Do you think much about God’s greatness? Of his power and might? How does this affect you? Do you draw closer to him or pull further away?

4.09 - THE GIFT OF KNOWLEDGE

On many summer nights, a devout man would take his little son for a walk to the playground. There, in the open field, he would look up at the sky, seemingly unable to remove his eyes from the stars. Once in a while, he would say, “Who can look at the heavens and not believe there is a God?” For him, the beauty of God was most evident on a starry summer night.

Creation is the catechism which God wrote for everyone to read. He wanted mankind to enjoy the warmth of the sun and the fruits of the harvest, so they would know how good he is. Adam lost that gift and now men see creation only as a fulfillment of their own needs. The Gift of Knowledge restores our sense of wonder and allows the devout soul to see how all creation glorifies God.

Appreciation
St. Francis of Assisi is well-known for his special relationship to creatures. One day, while he was preaching, a flock of birds were chirping away, disturbing his homily. He went over and preached to the birds. They listened attentively and then, at his command, they flew away. There was also the famous wolf of Bobbio, who terrorized the citizens. They called in St. Francis, who taught the wolf to protect the city and taught the people to care for the wolf.
**Destruction**

Unfortunately the world has rejected Francis’ approach and has used the creation of the atom to unleash nuclear destruction. An atomic scientist said, “After the blast, we knew the world would not be the same. We had become destroyers of creation”.

**The Mystery of the Human Person**

A very special priest meets many people and deeply loves every one of them. He enjoys this gift of Knowledge. As he comes into the person’s presence, he is overwhelmed by this mystery of creation. God himself chose to create this man, or woman, or child. All through the conversation, he remains in this awe that God created this person.

These inner feelings determine everything. They determine how he responds to their requests or how to point out their failures. The more he experiences the gift, the more he feels at one with the person. That is how God feels, at one with his creation.

**A Special Saint**

The Carmelite, Brother Lawrence (author of the spiritual classic “The Presence of God”) had a conversion experience which did not happen in the usual places (like a chapel) or in the usual way (like hearing a homily). One day, touched by a Gift of Knowledge, he looked at a withered tree and realized that, when springtime came, God would fill that tree with great beauty. This began his Devout Life. Forty years later, he wrote that this moment contained all the graces of his call to perfection. He was a unique saint. He found God everywhere and would prostrate in adoration on the floor of the kitchen, while preparing food for the other monks.

**St. Augustine**

When worldly souls are plunged into created things, they run away from God. When devout souls are plunged into created things, they enter into God’s presence. Augustine describes the effects he experienced by the Gift of Knowledge. “I plunged into the lovely things which you created. You were with me but I was not with you. Therefore, created things kept me from you. But you called and you broke through my deafness. You dispelled my blindness. You touched me and I burned for you.”

**Walking By the Ocean**

Many people enjoy walking along the ocean with the sun setting. All is at peace and in the heart is an overwhelming sense of God’s majesty. You can use those imagined scenes in your mental prayer. No words need be said. Just enjoy the stillness of God in the majesty of his creation.

**The saints say:**

1. *By the gift of knowledge, the soul sees the multiplicity of God’s beauty in created things.* (SJC)
2. *As my father and I walked home, I gazed with delight at the stars shining above.* (STL)
3. *When I saw the richness of this natural loveliness, my heart soared up to my Beloved, who had scattered such masterpieces all over our place of exile.* (STL)
4. Saints in ecstasy are astonished by God’s order in the smallest creatures like bees and ants. (SÌdeM)

Group Discussion:
1. Where in creation do you most experience God’s presence? Does nature ever bring you into God’s presence? How does a star-filled night affect you?
2. How do you misuse creatures? When do you take creation into your own hands?

4.10 - THE GIFT OF UNDERSTANDING

G. K. Chesterton wrote about his conversion to the Catholic Church, “I decided to build my own religion. When I had put the last board in place and I stepped back to see what was built, I realized I had constructed Catholic orthodoxy”.

Devout souls do not need the genius of Chesterton to construct their religious beliefs because the Catholic Catechism defines all these truths. However, souls do need the Gift of Understanding so they can pierce deep inner meaning of these truths and see their harmony.

No Attraction Yet

One day at the park, two nine year old boys were on the swings. One yelled to the other, “This is great. There are no girls around to ruin our fun”. Not yet awakened to sexual attraction, the great mystery of the opposite sex had no hold upon them. Many people see God like these boys viewed girls. They are not awakened to God and have no interest in knowing Him. Devotion changes that. The mysteries begin to attract as the brilliant gift of Understanding claims their hearts. Here are a few examples.

On the night of his priestly ordination, a priest frequently woke up and found his heart saying, “I am a priest. I am a priest”. This is something which happens frequently in his prayer. He doesn’t discover any new truth. The Spirit just impresses the same overwhelming truth, “I am a priest”. The effects are deep. A layperson could ponder a different truth, “I am baptized or I am a temple of the Holy Spirit”. At Communion, the person should be overwhelmed, realizing that “Jesus is within me”.

As a priest was teaching first graders, the religious sister told him that one boy had questions and even she wasn’t sure of the answers. The little boy asked, “Is the blood of Jesus present in the host?” Is the body of Jesus present in the wine?” “Are the Father and the Holy Spirit present with Jesus in the host?” The child’s mind was being touched with Understanding. St. Thomas Aquinas asked the same questions.

A Mystic

By Understanding, the truths of faith became more real than the truths of earth. A mystic goes through total darkness every Lent. On Easter, Jesus has some gift for her. A priest asked her, “What gift did Jesus give you this year?” She said, “His presence in the Eucharist is so real, that you could cut off my arm and I still would not deny it”. What happened? She has believed in Jesus’ presence in the Eucharist since childhood but Understanding flooded her intellect with new and total certainty.
One day, a priest was pondering Jesus’ power over Satan. Wherever Jesus went, Satan had to leave. Suddenly, he realized why Jesus wanted to die on the cross. Dying was the only way he could get to the tomb where Satan was in control. What good would it be if Jesus totally healed the world but Satan still owned the tomb? Satan won’t be at your tomb. Jesus cleaned him out of there.

These catechism truths capture our souls because the Spirit writes their full meaning on our soul. Mary is the best example. Our Lady used the gift of Understanding. She was always “pondering these things in her heart”. (Lk.2:51)

**The Saints Say:**

1. **God gives souls a profound knowledge. They see the greatness of God and see that they do not really know him.** (STA)
2. **At times, God’s special light gives a sublime contemplation of heavenly mysteries. Discovering a beauty that we could never imagine, we fall into a state of wonder.** (SFdeS)
3. **God has given me to understand that all we cherish under the sun is fleeting and to love him is all that lasts.** (STL)
4. **For years I read much about God and understood nothing. Then God taught me everything in one minute. Even my confessor was astounded at what I knew.** (STA)

**Group Discussion:**

1. **Since beginning your Devout Life, what Catholic truths have meant much more to you? How did these mysteries come alive for you? Do you feel that you have entered a new world?**
2. **What awakened you? Can you recall special moments of this awakening? When does your mind ponder these mysteries?**

**4.11 - THE GIFT OF WISDOM**

Working with her husband, Dr. Marie Curie, the brilliant Polish chemist, won the Nobel Peace Prize (1911). Their living conditions were deliberately stark. They had no chairs in their apartment/laboratory because they did not want guests to stay long. Their ascetical discipline was rewarded with constant insights. They climbed the great mountain of wisdom and understood the qualities of radium (1902).

So it is with the devout soul. Wisdom is the summit. The soul gains Wisdom only by a thousand self-denials and many moments of God’s light. Standing on this mountain top, the soul views everything at once. To this soul, God has become the beginning, the end and the way. The sacred writer would say, “Give me wisdom, the attendant at your throne” (Wis.9:4) and “I sought to take her for my bride” (8:12).

Wisdom sees all and relishes all. The gift of Wisdom and the virtue of Charity are sisters. Charity unites the will to God. Wisdom makes all the other faculties docile to charity so they, also are joined.

By Wisdom, the soul sees that the Devout Life is a love story and that God has brought this little soul into his own heart. After tasting Wisdom, the soul sees no sacrifice as too great.
No trial is too powerful. She sees. She tastes. She relishes. God is all she wants. If God draws her into the Dark Night of Infused Contemplation, she will not hold back.

As he pours out his Wisdom, the Holy Spirit whispers to the soul, “Set me as a seal on your heart, and as a seal on your arm, for love is as strong as death and its flames are a burning fire” (Song 8, 6-7). St Augustine wrote, “O my God, to you do I sigh day and night. You drew me to yourself that I might see. You overcame the weakness of my vision and sent forth the strong beams of your light. Now, I hunger and thirst for more.”

Many chapters have explained this road. In the next chapter, I will describe a soul who has reached this point in the road.

The saints say:
1. When the soul drinks God’s wisdom it forgets the world’s beauty and sees its own knowledge as pure ignorance. (SJC)
2. It is quite impossible to describe the secrets of heaven in the words of earth. (STL)
3. Wisdom means a delectable knowledge, a taste for God and his truth. (SLdeM)
4. Wisdom sets souls on fire. They want to do great works for God’s glory and for souls. (SLdeM)

Group Discussion:
1. Do you feel God has rewarded your sacrifices in living devoutly? What changes have you seen? What do you now relish? What are your spiritual desires?
2. How have your tastes and your desires changed? How do you now see the things of earth? What attracts you to God?

4.12 - A DEVOUT SOUL IN THE UNITIVE STAGE

The devout soul has walked this road of perfection for some time, and has reached the point to which God wants to take every soul. I will try to describe this moment. You, the reader, must believe that God will lead you to this level.

1. These souls awaken in the morning, dedicated to definite periods of prayer.
2. They have no doubt that they will keep their commitment to prayer.
3. They know their prayer will be fruitful.
4. They know they will experience God’s presence throughout the day.
5. They are deeply sensitive to what God expects.
6. They respond to God’s inspirations because they are always in His presence.
7. They realize when they no longer experience God’s presence.
8. They are keenly aware when they are not following God’s will.
9. Doing God’s will has become second nature.
10. They experience a deep peace.
11. God reveals to them their inner feelings.
12. They always find God’s help in their trials.
13. They experience God as their Father.
14. They cling to Jesus, the way to the Father.
15. They experience the Holy Spirit as a Divine Person.
16. They follow the Spirit’s direction.
17. They sorrow only when they fall short of God’s will.
18. They find any deliberate sin, even venial, a violation of their covenant with Jesus.
19. They cannot live without the Eucharist or confession.
20. They are totally bonded to God and find complete freedom.
21. They exist only to serve God, especially to help him save souls.
22. They hope that God will totally absorb them.
23. Their will is fixed on God.
24. They experience God everywhere.
25. They live in God’s face.
26. They love Mary with all their heart.

This is the picture of souls in the active unitive stage. They have gained an intimacy with God, who wants to absorb them into himself. Their life is very simple. This stage is unitive, drawing everything into a oneness. These qualities don’t suddenly appear. The Divine artist must touch each part of his canvas until the full beauty comes forth. The following chapter explains these 26 points.

The saints say:
1. Souls without prayer are like paralyzed people, unable to move their spiritual hands and feet. (STA)
   I just abide in God’s presence, and have a wordless, secret conversation between myself and God which never ends. (BL)
2. The time of prayer is not different from other times. We are one with God in time of action and of prayer. (BL)
3. God wants an empty space in the most remote corner of our soul to communicate himself at every moment. (FJdeC)

Group Discussion:
1. Which points above do you experience already? Can you put these graces in your own words?
2. What points are new to you? What ones do you not yet experience or understand? (Answering these questions will prepare you for the next chapter.)

4.13 - EXPLAINING THE PICTURE

The previous chapter reveals the goals of a truly Devout Life in 26 points. Here, I will explain each of these parts:

These souls awaken in the morning, dedicated to definite periods of prayer.
Prayer is the soul’s mindset. Just as a business person mentally outlines what they must accomplish each day, so devout souls plot out their obligation to pray. A successful day is a day of talking to God. Devout souls see nothing else as primary (although all the cares of the world are in their heart).

They have no doubt that they will keep their commitment to prayer.
To pray is their greatest privilege and their most important duty. Prayer is so imbedded that they always keep their commitment to pray. They fulfill all the demands of charity and of
obligation, but prayer guides their daily schedule. They could not tolerate a day in which they did not pray. To devout souls, prayer is more important than food or drink. They feast on prayer.

When Jakov, the Medjugorje visionary, ceased having his visions of Mary, he greatly missed this daily joy of talking to Mary. Similarly, a devout soul would find a day without prayer very difficult.

*They know that prayer will be fruitful.*
At this stage, their prayer is constantly fruitful. Sometimes, they experience an overwhelming sense of God’s presence. At other times, just a divine peace. God always touches them in prayer and they always receive some divine blessing.

*They know they will experience God’s presence throughout the day.*
Even amid the greatest activity, they seek God (active recollection). They do their tasks well, but are not absorbed by them. The heart is kept for God.

*They are deeply sensitive to what God expects.*
The natural person is concerned about self. The loving person is concerned about others. The devout person is totally concerned about God. What God expects of them dominates their day. (The devout soul never separates God and neighbor. Both are in his heart.)

*They respond to God’s inspirations because they are always in His presence.*
All day long, they ask “What does God want now?” God answers them by inner attractions (called “inspirations of grace”). These souls are experts. The tiniest clue reveals God’s will. They hear the softest inner voice. God’s smallest prompting reveals what He wants. God’s inspirations touch everything – their thoughts, feelings, words and tasks, even the very quality of their emotions.

*They realize when they no longer experience God’s presence.*
The soul experiences God everywhere and in every situation. Even with this attraction, their human nature can pull them away from God and absorb them. The soul senses this and knows when it has left the Father’s presence. God’s inner work is vast and the soul can respond to only a few of these inspirations. God always knocks at their door. Sometimes they answer. Sometimes they don’t answer. However, they realize when they have responded and when they haven’t.

*They are keenly aware when they are not following God’s will.*
During each day, these souls experience an inner restlessness when they are away from God’s will. In these moments, they simply turn to God, who then shows them his Divine Will and how to return to it. God wants the devout soul to be at certain places at certain times. He gives them a “spiritual sense” which whispers, “This is where you should be. Just stay here” or “This is not where I want you to be, so don’t stay”.

**An Example**
St. Faustina was dancing with a boy, when everyone disappeared and she saw Jesus. He told her that he didn’t want her to be there. When everyone re-appeared, she excused herself
and went to a church. Jesus appeared again, telling her to take the train and go to Cracow. These were her first steps toward joining the Sisters of Mercy. This extraordinary story shows that God wants us to be where he wills.

**Doing God’s will has become second nature.**

After years of trying to do God’s will (every moment of every day) they acquire a pervasive “second nature” (grace). Although their “self-absorbed nature” still functions, their “grace nature” constantly moves them to serve God and not self during every day.

**They experience a deep peace.**

Seeking only God’s will gives them peace. If they get served good food, they enjoy it. If they get served poor food, they enjoy it. In every moment, they only want God’s will. That is “their food”, “to do the will of the one who sent me.” (Jn. 4:34)

They live totally “from within”. External events don’t shatter their emotions because they always seek the same goal – to do God’s will. Situations change but their goal remains constant.

**God reveals their inner feelings.**

During storms, the pilot looks at his instrument panel to see where he is. God has given these devout souls an unbelievable internal instrument panel to show them where they are with God. These souls are precious to God who always guides them by their inner emotions.

**They always find God’s help in their trials.**

Devout souls go through trials that no one else could survive. During these trials, God knows that they will seek him in prayer. There, he always provides some answer (or some relief). Being saved by God so often, they are convinced that God will always find some way to rescue them. When they are weak, God answers quickly. When they are strong, God delays the answer knowing that they will gain even greater glory by persevering in the trial.

**They experience God as their Father.**

Devout souls relate to God as a child relates to the most benevolent father. Years of devotion have formed this Father-child relationship, which comes from religious experiences not from religious books. They have experienced the Father’s benevolence in ways which nobody else would believe.

**They cling to Jesus, the way to the Father.**

Devout souls know that the kingdom of God is a great mystery, filled with saints, angels, religious experiences, dark trials, unbelievable consolations, divine inspirations and inner revelations. They also know that they can get lost on the road of perfection. So, they cling to the humanity of Jesus (especially in the Eucharist) and focus all their religious experiences upon him. St. Teresa writes, “In all my trials, I know I have a good Friend at my side.”

**They experience the Holy Spirit as a Divine Person**

The Spirit does for devout souls exactly what he did for Jesus. He absorbs them into the Trinity. He prays within them. He drives them into the solitude of contemplation or into the activity of the crowds. They experience the Spirit just as Jesus described him.
They follow the Spirit’s direction. The Spirit guides all their decisions. These souls refuse to follow their passing impulses or their own thoughts. They go where the Spirit leads them. Even if the Spirit removes their religious consolations and seemingly abandons them, they still wait for the Spirit to lead.

They sorrow only when they fall short of God’s will. They do not worry about honors or power or titles or pleasures or riches. Losing these worldly honors causes them no difficulties. They sorrow only when they have disappointed Jesus. When this happens, they go to him in prayer, gain his forgiveness and move on. Teresa writes, “My only sorrow is when Jesus looks at me after I have failed him.”

They find any deliberate sin, even venial, a violation of their covenant with Jesus. They are not scrupulous. They know the difference between serious sin and venial sin. But for them, any deliberate sin, even venial, violates their covenant with Jesus. What others would do without any thought, they shrink from. They would not tell a lie to save themselves from death. They regret any unkindness. They do not talk about the faults of others. When they have time to weigh their choices, they never choose sin. Jesus has been so good to them that offending him is unthinkable.

They cannot live without the Eucharist or confession. They always prepare for Mass by serious prayer. They relish the moments of Eucharist and experience Communion’s effects all day long. They have similar feelings towards confession. Living in God’s light, they see their faults. Confession quiets all their fear. When they receive absolution, they rejoice more than even the greatest sinner.

They are totally bonded to God and find complete freedom. They fear saying “No” to God and feel safe only when absorbed in God. They see their free will as dangerous and often ask God to take away their freedom to offend him. They enjoy complete freedom in God alone.

They exist only to serve God, especially to help him save souls. They see each soul as an infinite mystery, a person who will live forever. They are consumed for souls. They will do anything to preach the gospel and will make hundreds of hidden sacrifices to win graces for lost souls.

They hope that God will totally absorb them. Knowing what God has already accomplished in them, they want to come under his power even more. They seek to be absorbed by Him, no matter what the cost. God stands at the top of the mountain and the soul remains in the valley constantly trying to climb into the divine presence. Each day, the soul tries again, always trusting that soon God will lift them to the mountaintop—in his time.
Their will is fixed on God.
If they had access to billions of dollars, they would experience no greed. If they were deprived of everything, they would be quite content. Their will is totally fixed on God, like a compass needle always pointing to heaven.

They experience God everywhere.
Nothing is an obstacle to their experiencing God’s presence. Whether they are alone or with others, in church or in the world, God is present and He always has them to himself.

They live in God’s face.
They do not hide from God like Adam. They are children of the light and of the promise. Living in God’s face, they turn away from their own darkness.

They love Mary with all their heart.
Wanting the blessing of his father (Isaac), Jacob obeyed his mother (Rebecca). These souls also know the secret of gaining the Father’s blessing. They allow Mary to cover them with Jesus’ clothing and to prepare the right food so they gain the blessing. They practice deMontfort’s True Devotion realizing that Mary will supply whatever is lacking in them. (Refer to Book Six)

Conclusion
At this stage, all the soul’s efforts have become totally fruitful. These faithful souls have “lost themselves” in God’s light.
They have followed Christ as far as the road goes. Jesus says, “Where I go, you cannot follow but I will come back and take you to myself”. Now, the path leads into the supernatural prayer of infused contemplation which only God can grant them. The next section explores that unique part of the road that needs God’s special intervention.

The saints say:
1. These souls neglect their own interests to serve the Master’s at every moment. (FJdeC)
2. A soul in total submission to God has a great capacity to serve him. (FJdeC)
3. Accustom yourself to practice silence. (STA)
4. Some people discourage this unlimited seeking of God, as if it were dangerous. (STA)
5. A resolute soul knows that it cannot retreat. It has gained too much. (STA)
6. My best remedy is to fix my mind on Jesus. Without God’s favors, nothing is accomplished. (STA)
7. Let Jesus find one soul where he can be a guest. (STA)
8. God’s goodness never fails his friends. (STA)
9. We please God and find his favors only through Jesus’ Sacred Humanity. (STA)
10. A soul filled with holy desires is always hungry. (SJC)

Group Discussion:
This chapter contains so many points that discussion can be very helpful to assimilate everything.
1. Looking at these 26 points, which ones do you experience now? When did they begin? How did you practice them? What are the effects?
2. Looking at these 26 points, which ones are new to you? Can anyone else in the group help you or explain this point?
3. Which points especially attract you? How will you gain them?
A History of Surprises

God never changes internally. However, the devout life faces new situations, and He always brings forth surprising new actions. His greatest surprise came in the fullness of time, when “God sent his Son, born of a woman” (Gal.4:4). After they killed the Son, God raised Jesus from the dead. Fifty days later came the great surprise of Pentecost, the new outpouring of the Spirit with speaking in tongues and signs and wonders.

Just as human history has moments of great crises and great opportunities, so does the history of God’s kingdom and the Church. All history is a clash of kingdoms, God’s and Satan’s.

Special Moments

In special moments, this spiritual clash erupts into extraordinary crises (like the two world wars). The forces of evil erupt and God’s forces respond. When the clash is over, a surrender takes place.

At this moment in history, we are bracing for the greatest battle since Jesus won his victory on the cross. For 2000 years, Satan has looked forward to this moment. He was defeated by the Resurrection, and can never erase that event. However, he can cover over that light, and plunge the human race into darkness. This is the clash of kingdoms, the behind-the-scenes struggle. Human persons are instruments (of God or Satan). Through them, the clash bursts forth into the events of our world.

These talks will focus on two of God’s surprising actions – Catholic Pentecostalism and the Marian apparitions.

The saints say:

1. The Holy Spirit is writing a book that will only end with human history’s final moment. This book tells God’s plan for all mankind. (FJdeC)
2. God’s works are without limit. Who will ever recount his wonders? (STA)
3. Unfortunately, we are satisfied with little, when God plans great things. (BL)
4. I must be God’s disciple, attending only his school. (FJdeC)

Group Discussion:

1. How do you see modern times? Can you see the sources and effects of Satan’s powers? Can you also see God’s powers?
2. Where do you think that you fit in? Is God preparing you for some special role?
Pope John XXIII

A few centuries ago, in an amazing village in Czechoslovakia, a beautiful woman saved the people from starvation. Mary appeared on the mountain and taught the people to invoke the Holy Spirit. After that, the villagers manifested all the Pentecostal gifts (healings, miracles, prophecy and tongues), with each succeeding generation using those gifts. When someone was sick, all prayed for a healing. The village was totally devout – reading the Bible, attending Mass, living the gospels.

In the 1930’s, God told the people that their village would be destroyed. The Nazi invasion in 1938 fulfilled that prophecy. Fortunately, one young girl, Anna Schmitt survived. Years later, she told the story of Bishop Angelo Roncalli (later Pope John XXIII) coming to the village in the 1930’s and enjoying the charismatic manifestations. The Pope himself had the gift of tongues (according to a layman who worked with him). We now understand why Pope John asked the Church to pray for a New Pentecost.

In the 1970’s, people in the Catholic Pentecostal Movement would say, “If only Pope John could see what happened when he had us pray for a New Pentecost”. Really, the Pope had already seen a village filled with those Pentecostal gifts which would suddenly erupt within the Catholic Church in 1967.

Blessed Elena Guerra and Pope Leo XIII

Worldwide Pentecostalism began with the hopes of Blessed Elena Guerra (1835-1914), who founded the Oblate Sisters of the Holy Spirit and formed prayer groups which invoked the Holy Spirit. More important, she wrote twelve confidential letters to Pope Leo XIII, asking him to dedicate the twentieth century to the Holy Spirit.

At her urging, Pope Leo invoked the Spirit upon the world on December 31, 1900. At that exact moment, the Holy Spirit came upon a prayer cenacle in Topeka, Kansas where the members were laying hands to impart the Holy Spirit. One woman, Agnes Ozman began to pray in tongues. This was the beginning of all modern Pentecostalism. The little stream became a gigantic river, usually based in specifically Pentecostal Churches.

The Duquesne Experience (1966-1967)

In the 1960’s, Pentecostalism entered a few Protestant churches. In 1967, the greatest Pentecostal explosion took place in the Catholic Church beginning at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh. In 1966, some professors decided to investigate Pentecostalism. They attended a home prayer group of an Episcopalian woman, Elizabeth Dodge. Here they received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and charismatic gifts.
In February, 1967, at a weekend retreat for students, they spoke about the Holy Spirit. On Saturday night, the Pentecostal manifestations began spontaneously. The young students were baptized in the Spirit and prayed in tongues. Catholic papers reported these events and the seeds for the worldwide Catholic Pentecostal Renewal had been planted.

This stream flowed quickly to Catholic groups in South Bend, Indiana and Ann Arbor, Michigan, where leadership emerged and conferences were held. In June 1971, 7000 attended the Notre Dame Conference and Pentecostalism was named the top Catholic religious news story. In 1974, 25,000 attended. At the grassroots level, many prayer groups sprung up. The story was just beginning.

The saints say:

1. Jesus Christ abandoned himself to the Holy Spirit. He did not even consult his own past to know what to do in the future. (FJdeC)
2. The Holy Spirit brings forth no other Divine Person. Now he brings forth members of Christ's Mystical Body, through Mary. (SLdeM)
3. My Spouse is very rich and I will use all his treasures. (STL)
4. Every soul should ask the Spirit to blow through its garden because this is so blissful. (SJC)

Group Discussion:

1. Do you know much about the history of worldwide Pentecostalism? Of Catholic Pentecostalism? Have you ever participated in Catholic Pentecostal groups or events?
2. Has the Church experienced a New Pentecost or is that still to happen? How would a “New Pentecost” bless the Church?

5.03 - A VISIT TO A PRAYER GROUP

The Story of a Priest

In April 1970, a priest attended the Pentecostal prayer meeting that had just begun in Philadelphia at the inner city parish of St. Boniface. About forty Catholics, from the suburbs, were attending this charismatic Mass. The leader, Brother Pancratius, C.SS.R., asked the priest to return because, at mass, he did not experience praying in tongues or any charismatic gift. Since nothing particularly touched the priest, he thought he would never return. However, God had planted his seeds.

A year later, the priest was experiencing great darkness in his ministry.

The Great Gift

His sister-in-law told him about all she received from her charismatic prayer group. Suddenly, he was absorbed by an inner light and knew exactly what to do. He would go back to St. Boniface. For the next two weeks, he bought every book he could find on this Catholic
Entering the Door

He called Brother Panky (his nickname) to find out the time for the meeting. Brother asked, “Weren’t you here about a year ago?” The priest realized that it was one year to the day. (God was really working!)

That night, the priest stood before the doors of St. Boniface for the second time, filled with extraordinary light and saying within, “A year ago, I was right here and this meant nothing to me. Now, it means everything, “why I was born”, “why I am a priest”, “the purpose of my whole life”, “my whole eternity is connected with what is behind that door”. He was about to enter the door of Catholic Pentecostalism (April 16, 1971). May these talks bring you through the same door.

The saints say:

1. Devotion makes the person eager to join with others who share the same interests. (SFdeS)
2. Our heart has a secret instinct for happiness. We seek it, not knowing where to find it until faith reveals its presence. (SFdeS)
3. My heart was too small to hold the gift. I felt as if my soul had been reborn and some of its neglected strings had been restored. (STL)
4. I realize very clearly that happiness has nothing to do with material things which surround us. It dwells in the very depth of the soul. (STL)

Group Discussion:

1. What moments in your life were very special? Did you seek God’s help? Did he answer your plea? Who was there to help you?
2. Have you experienced moments of great darkness? Have you ever been filled with sudden light? What were the effects?

5.04 - BEING PRAYED OVER

Early Experiences

Within that year, the prayer group had grown from 30 to 150 people. The priest attended the newcomer teaching with 20 others, listening to two laymen teach about the Baptism of the Spirit and praying in tongues. At the end of the night, the 150 people entered church and Brother Panky invited them to praise God. Suddenly, the church was filled with the most beautiful six-part harmony of prayer tongues (his first experience!). It ended suddenly, as if a conductor had waved his baton.
The next week, he again heard the group singing and praying in tongues. Within him, grew a tremendous desire to do the same. By the third week, two feelings burned within. First, he had discovered unbelievable spiritual treasures (exactly what he needed for his priesthood). Secondly, he felt like he was a failure. All these people were praying in tongues, while he remained quiet.

Seeking the Baptism of the Spirit

Knowing that prayer tongues came with the Baptism of the Spirit, he asked to be baptized in the Spirit. A large crowd gathered around, laid hands and prayed. It was a special moment. He pictured the stream of God’s will carrying him along. He knew to surrender his whole life. Afterward, he began saying strange words (which he later found out were Greek).

Praying in Tongues

The next night (May 1, 1971) in his own room, he was reading a book about praying in tongues. The teaching was the same as at St. Boniface. Open your mouth and God will supply the words. For 30 minutes, he walked around his room saying, “La, La, La” believing that God would bestow his gift. Then, he realized that his lips were saying unknown words. They were flowing from his lips without him forming them. He had yielded to tongues. He prostrated on the floor for 20 minutes, allowing the gift to flow freely.

He was doing exactly what the apostles had done 2000 years ago. Convinced that this was quite real, he slept soundly. In the morning, he began again and the words flowed quite freely. He was about to spend his first full day praising God in the Spirit’s language. The door had opened. Now would come the other gifts. (All the powers of Pentecostalism are described in “A Key to Charismatic Renewal in the Catholic Church”. – available at Amazon.)

The saints say:

1. The only gift you possess that is infinite is your desires. (SCS)
2. Souls must not rest until they find the object of their desires. (SFdeS)
3. We limit God’s stream by having small desires. (BL)
4. Waters are given to those who thirst. (FJdeC)

Group Discussion:

1. Do you know much about the laying on of hands? Has anyone or any group laid hands in prayer?
2. Are you familiar with praying in tongues? Do you experience the gift? Would you want to enjoy the gift?
The priest tried to fit these new powers into his knowledge of the devout life. What was this Baptism of the Spirit? The answer soon became very clear. The lay people in the prayer group told the priest about their own religious experiences, namely, what happened when they received this Baptism of the Spirit. Years before, the priest had received this religious experience as a seminarian, but did not know it had a name. Also, he knew nothing about the gift of tongues.

He saw God’s method. He gave this religious experience to those who searched for it. Being a seminarian, he had searched and found. People in the prayer group also were searching, and knowing where to find, they received the beginning religious experiences.

**Very Practical**

Pentecostalism is practical, communicating religious experiences by a very simple process. When people join the group, they receive teachings on the Baptism of the Spirit (the beginning religious experience). They are encouraged to receive this Baptism. Having great faith in the Holy Spirit, the group lays hands and prays for the Baptism of the Spirit. Using these means, the Catholic prayer group fosters religious experiences in all its members.

The group also provided many helps for a devout life. They taught religious experiences. They provided a weekly meeting to sustain these beginning experiences. They formed a devout community (stressed so often in these teachings) which kept alive the flame of prayer. The whole process was simple and effective. From this small prayer group came forth a gigantic religious movement which filled Philadelphia’s largest indoor arenas for decades.

*The saints say:*

1. *In spiritual matters, whoever is satisfied does not have enough. Spiritual graces always demand a desire for more.* (SFdeS)
2. *To possess God, we must seek him ardently.* (SLdeM)
3. *The soul does not lose her life. She is mingled with God and God lives within her.* (SFdeS)
4. *I often repeat, “Lord, what do I care about myself or about anything that is not you.”* (STA)

*Group Discussion:*

1. *Discuss your own religious experiences? Is there any experience you had which was life changing? How did it come about?*
2. *Do you participate in any Devout Community? Do you see the need to gather with others to sustain your devotion?*
5.06 - PRAYING IN TONGUES

Brother Pancratius gave excellent teachings on praying in tongues, and helped beginners to pray in tongues by a practice called “yielding to tongues”. As a result, everyone in the prayer groups (many thousands) prayed in tongues, just as Paul had urged, “I want all of you to pray in tongues” (1Cor.14:5).

Brother’s teaching went this way. “When a person speaks in English, he uses three faculties – his intellect, his will and his lips. When a person prays in tongues, he uses only his will and his lips. The person does not use his intellect because the Holy Spirit provides the words. St. Paul calls this “praying with the spirit” in contrast to “praying with the mind” (1Cor.14:15).

How to Receive

Usually, to begin to pray in tongues requires three things. First, the person hears others praying in tongues and realizes the gift is available. Secondly, he receives some basic teaching on prayer tongues. Third, he desires the gift. At this point, he should receive the laying on of hands for the Baptism of the Spirit. After that prayer, as the leader prays in tongues, the newcomer looks at the leader’s lips, moves his lips and prays with him (leaving English aside). Soon, the newcomer is aware that prayer words are flowing out and that he is praying in tongues.

A week after praying in tongues, the priest attended a smaller prayer group and was asked to help a woman yield to tongues. After the prayer and the laying on of hands, the priest asked the woman to leave English aside and to pray in tongues. Since he was a priest, she had total confidence and began immediately to use prayer tongues. Since then, the priest has helped thousands to pray in tongues.

A Permanent Gift

The person must continue to use the gift until they have a total confidence that they pray in tongues. The gift is permanent. After yielding to tongues the first time, the person can pray in tongues whenever he wishes (like learning to ride a bike). Praying in tongues is a special gift bringing about tremendous spiritual effects. It enriches mental prayer and opens the person to the Holy Spirit, who anoints the person with his spiritual gifts (the charisms) to help others.

A woman once asked, “Where do tongues fit into this devout life?” A good question. Prayer tongues is not a different road but moves the person more quickly along the road of devotion.

Qualities of the Gift – Further Explanation

Praying in tongues enhances all the gifts of prayer which you have already received. Your mental prayer goes to a new level as you allow the Spirit to speak to you. Also, praying in tongues is easy, does not tire you out and can be used all day.
By praying in tongues you give the key to your heart to the Holy Spirit and He gives you the keys to his treasury of spiritual powers. When you pray in tongues, you and the Spirit pray together. You use your will and your lips. He provides the words.

**Personal Experiences**

After yielding to tongues, the priest found prophetic words coming to mind (next chapter). He discovered new joys and ease in mental prayer. The divine presence seemed much closer.

One time, a couple asked to pray in tongues. They received the gift. The next week, however, they said, “We lost our gift”. Really, no one loses the gift. The couple just did not get comfortable and confident. So, for the second time, they prayed in tongues. The next week they said “We didn’t lose the gift this week.”

*The saints say:*

1. *Because praying in tongues was not a widespread experience, there are no quotes available. They are a definite part of the Church’s tradition and described by Father Tanquerey (#1515).*

**Group Discussion:**

1. *Is the teaching clear? Does anyone in your group experience the gift? What questions do you have? What do you not understand?*
2. *Where can you seek the gift? Are there any prayer groups in your area? What can you read?*

**5.07 - THE HIDDEN PENTECOSTAL TREASURES**

The St. Boniface prayer meeting was held in a long, but narrow room with three rows of the chairs facing each other. As the priest arrived one night, only one seat in the first row was open. As the group prayed in tongues, he experienced the prophetic gift for the first time. Some words were going around in his head and he didn’t know what they were or what to do. As the tongues ceased, the woman facing him gave her prophecy, “The Lord says that I have placed the words in your mind. Speak the words I have given you.” The Lord’s command was clear. For the first time, the priest spoke prophetic words in the Spirit.

**A Leadership Group**

Fortunately, Brother Panky began a smaller group to form leaders. Because these people were deeper in the Spirit, the prophetic gift came more powerfully. Brother stressed the charisms, saying, “Use the gifts and the meetings will grow. Stop using the gifts and nothing will happen.” At these leaders meetings, all the gifts were flourishing.

**The Hidden Treasure**

At that time (1971), Philadelphia had only eight groups, but Brother had deep faith that people could come to St. Boniface, learn about Catholic Pentecostalism and begin their own
parish group. In those early months, the growth was taking place because Pentecostalism was a treasure house of God’s powers. This hidden treasure, if guided correctly, was a mustard seed that could grow into the largest of trees.

The people were learning quickly how to form new groups, how to bring people into the Baptism of the Spirit, how to hold conferences and how to nourish the prayer groups. Within five years, Catholic Pentecostalism in Philadelphia grew to 160 groups and rented the largest indoor facilities that were available. Many young people in the movement became priests and religious.

Telling Others

This powerful world of Catholic Pentecostalism branched out into many forms; a weekly priest prayer group, teaching conferences to train people, Men’s Prayer Breakfasts, Women’s Prayer Luncheons and a Young Adult Group. Each group had the same, clear focus. People gathered to praise God through the power of his charismatic gifts. As Brother said, “We used the gifts and the groups flourished.”

The saints say:

1. As God increases his favors, I fall more and more into debt. (STA)
2. Our love for God is never sufficient and we should not remain still in our sufficiency. (SFdeS)
3. Just as a river sweeps along all that it meets, so your love, Jesus, sweeps along my soul. (STL)
4. God wants you to be holy like Jesus in this life and glorious with him in the next. (SLdeM)

Group Discussion:

1. Can you see the many divine powers hidden in Catholic Pentecostalism? Why do not people seek them? Why do you hesitate to ask for them?
2. Even if you do not understand, do you feel drawn to them? If you understood these gifts of service, would you not be a better instrument in helping others?

5.08 - HEALING AND DELIVERANCE

One night, Brother Panky called a group over and said, “We are going to pray for a healing”. This was all still new for most of us. A religious sister sat in a chair and Brother took her feet into his hands. As we began to pray, I watched her right leg move. She was going to need an operation for her back and had a right shoe with a large instep. After the prayer, she took off her shoes and walked around the Church. She called off the operation. A year later, she witnessed to the complete healing of her back.
Deliverance

The next week, a woman came to the meeting with a distorted face. (That is the best way to describe it.) Brother again pulled a group together. “We are going to pray deliverance”. All of us went into a little chapel. Brother said, “I will ask her about each problem”. As she answered the question, Brother would say, “In Jesus’ name, I cast you out”. The woman mentioned about five problems (fear, anxiety, etc.) that she experienced. After each one, Brother said his prayer. After these short prayers, she said, “I don’t understand. You just say ‘be cast out’ and it goes”. The woman’s face was different. The distortions were gone. As she continued with the group, everyone could see that God had restored her beauty.

Healing Ministries

Over these years, many people with powerful healing ministries have come as speakers to Philadelphia. One Catholic has raised people from the dead. Others have many stories of healings. We have all met people who have been healed of one thing or another. The secret is to hang around people who enjoy God’s powers. All of these are quite ordinary people with one thing in common. Through Pentecostalism, they have learned about charismatic powers, which God gladly gives to ordinary people who believe in His actions.

How can we be certain that the Spirit will pour out his signs and wonders? The answer is this. Praying in tongues and powerful signs go together. All those with great healing ministries speak in tongues. If people want to be baptized in the Spirit and pray in tongues, then God can give them powers to prophesy, heal, deliver from evil spirits, etc. If a person refuses to accept the Baptism in the Spirit and praying in tongues, then God has difficulty in bringing the person into powerful, wide scale charismatic actions.

The saints say:

1. I believe the devil was given physical power over me, but that he could not touch my soul or mind. (STL)
2. The combat between the Archangel Michael and Lucifer still continues on earth. (SLdeM)
3. God has declared an eternal war, fought relentlessly between Mary and the devil, between her children and his. (SLdeM)

Group Discussion:

1. Do you understand this world of charismatic powers, such as prophesy and healing? Does it seem far away from your own experiences?
2. Do you know anyone with a powerful, charismatic ministry? Do you ever pray for someone to be healed? Has God ever given you a word to speak to others?

5.09 - SPIRITUAL GIFTS (CHARISMS)

The two experiences of Baptism of the Holy Spirit and praying in tongues are for everyone. Their central purpose is your own holiness. Paul writes “Whoever speaks in tongues sanctifies himself” (1Cor.14:4). These two experiences open the door to spiritual gifts which sanctify others. Paul writes, “Whoever prophesies sanctifies the Church” (1Cor.14:4).
Pentecostalism contains powers for personal holiness and for helping others. St. Paul lists nine such powers. (1Cor.12: 4-11)

**Researching the Nine Gifts**

With Catholic Pentecostalism, the Church has two worlds. In 1971, a priest found himself in two worlds.

The parish life is normal (so to speak). Nothing extraordinary usually takes place. In Pentecostalism, many extraordinary happenings occur. Fortunately, these nine spiritual gifts are described in “The Spiritual Life” by Father Adolphe Tanquerey, S.S. (a French priest who taught in U.S. seminaries). This text is accepted by all Catholic scholars as an authoritative manual.

Father Tanquerey has an excellent section on charisms, but he classifies the nine charismatic gifts as *extraordinary* mystical phenomena. Since in Pentecostalism, ordinary people use these gifts all the time, they were obviously neither *extraordinary* nor *mystical*. Father Tanquerey thought they were *extraordinary* and *mystical* because the gifts had been absent from normal Church life for centuries and manifested only by saints.

Right now, the Spirit is pouring out the gift of praying in tongues. If the Spirit pours out this one manifestation, will he not pour out all of his spiritual gifts? The sad point is this. Many Catholics say, “That is for some people”. This attitude deprives the Church of many spiritual gifts because tongues is the regular door to all the charisms.

This section is entitled “Modern Development in the Devout Life”, not because charisms are modern, but because the widespread appearance of charisms is modern. Unfortunately, only a small percentage of Catholics know or use these charisms.

**What Should Be Done?**

Members of Devout Communities can solve this problem. They are interested in holiness and in all the helps which God offers. In this “new development”, God is pouring out His Spirit. People are praying in tongues and using charisms. Devout souls should study these. Paul says, “I do not want you ignorant of spiritual gifts” (1Cor.12:1.) Open your hearts and your groups. Allow the Spirit to bestow these powers. Pentecostal churches use these powers very effectively. This is the next talk.

*The saints say:*

1. *God did not withhold these favors but souls, by their own fault, were deprived of untold blessings.* (FJdeC)
2. *God’s gifts are given but they are hidden under different appearances.* (FJdeC)

**Group Discussion:**

1. Are you open to studying the charisms? Do you believe God will bestow them?
2. Will you use them for the Church? Cannot God use you in wonderful ways to help his people?
Many priests working among the Spanish are frequently greeted by “Yo soy Penecostal” (I am Pentecostal), meaning ‘I am no longer a Catholic.” What power do these churches have? Anyone involved in Catholic Pentecostalism can provide the answer.

This is the picture. Outside of the Catholic Church, Pentecostalism grows and flourishes. It steals our members and evangelizes those who have never heard the gospel. If this is true, then why do we not learn from them? God placed Pentecostalism in the Church in 1967. In so many places, this seed came forth, flowered for a while, but then withered. Critics would say that it was a passing phenomenon. Really, its powers never found deep soil.

Pentecostalism is now the third force in Christianity (together with Catholicism and Protestantism). Pentecostalism is not a church. It is a spirituality, able to generate tremendous Church growth. The point of this chapter is that by using the Spirit’s powers, Pentecostal Churches throughout the world enjoy explosive growth.

A View Forty Years Later

In Philadelphia, and in some other dioceses, Catholic Pentecostalism received proper pastoral guidance, and became a long-lasting movement.

People involved in Pentecostalism have read these Devout Life Teachings and said, “I wish I had these teachings when I was in Catholic Pentecostalism”. Pentecostalism is extremely practical. The Devout Life is very deep. The two need each other. Maybe we will get it right the second time around!

Group Discussion:

1. Have you had any contact with Pentecostal Churches? What struck you about their pastoral methods?
2. Can we learn anything from them? How would the Catholic Church benefit? Can Pentecostal gifts be experienced by the average Catholic? Are you interested?

5.11 - THE LAYING ON OF HANDS

At the end of each prayer meeting, Brother Pancratius would invite anyone who needed prayers to go to the end of the pew. The experience was always similar. The leader would say a short prayer in English and then all would begin to pray in tongues. A deep peace and renewed faith comes over the person. The experience always lifts up and this practice can be a regular part of the devout life. Let’s examine this gift in scripture.

New Testament

Vatican Council II highlighted the laying on of hands, but only in the administration of sacraments. That is far too limited. The New Testament shows a much more extensive use. James tells the presbyters to lay hands upon the sick person (5:14). Hebrews says that the “laying of hands” was basic Christian teaching (6:2). In the gospels, Jesus often laid hands,
usually to heal. In the Acts of the Apostles, the disciples laid hands for various purposes – to heal, to bestow the Holy Spirit and to commission for missionary work. Acts 14:3 says that the Lord granted “signs and wonders to occur through their hands”. Pentecostalism began when the little bible study group in Topeka, Kansas realized the power of the laying on of hands to impart the Holy Spirit.

Early Years of Priesthood

There is this legitimate question, “What has happened to this ministry of ‘laying on of hands?’” Most priests and people do not lay hands to pray for people. Yet, many experiences of very balanced people show the power of this action. Some special people have laid hands on thousands of people, with many blessings. Some people wanted the fire of devotion. Others wanted freedom from demonic affliction or healing of illnesses. Why do just some lay hands and most Catholics are ignorant of this gift? Parents should lay hands every night upon their children and people should pray over each other frequently. Paul wrote to Timothy, “Stir into flame the gift you received by the laying on of hands.” In the Diary, Elizabeth encourages people in the cenacle to bless one another. Do that with great faith. Let us restore this gift. Without the laying on of hands, the fire of the Spirit is easily lost.

Some Final Words

Special Testimony

Father Michael Scanlon, T.O.R., the famous president of Franciscan University (Steubenville) has told many people his story. In the late 1960’s, he was confessor to a contemplative nun whom he considered the holiest person he knew. One day, she surprised him, “Father, make sure you get involved in this Pentecostal Movement. It has helped me to grow in holiness”. If Pentecostalism helped this holy nun, then Father Scanlon knew it would help him also.

Soon after this, Father James Ferry came to Father Scanlon’s seminary at Loretto to speak about Pentecostalism. Afterward, he invited the seminarians to come forward to receive the Baptism of the Spirit. To his great surprise, the first one on his knees was the rector, Father Scanlon. At that moment, he entered a door that totally changed his priesthood and led to his great work at Franciscan University. Hopefully, this special section will be like the contemplative nun’s advice “Make sure you get involved in this Pentecostal Movement”.

Group Discussion:

1. **What special doors have opened for you?** Do you desire to help others into devotion? Do you have a zeal to study, so you are prepared?
2. **When, in your life, has anyone given you good advice?** What blessings did you receive by following it?
3. **Have you ever had anyone pray over you by laying hands?** Did they use prayer tongues and charismatic gifts? Please describe your experience.
4. **Do you lay hands in prayer?** Or, do you know others who do? What blessings come from these prayers in faith?
Never in the Church’s history have there been so many Marian apparitions. They signal the spiritual clashes that are taking place and reveal God’s intention of exalting Mary’s Immaculate Heart.

The Miraculous Medal

Mary’s modern apparitions began in Paris on July 18, 1830 (the vigil of St. Vincent de Paul) when Mary appeared to St. Catherine Laboure (a novice in St. Vincent’s Daughters of Charity). She appeared again on November 27, 1830. Mary told Catherine to have a medal made (called the Miraculous Medal), which contains the words, “O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee”. This medal and the miracles that followed brought about a great increase in devotion to Our Lady’s Immaculate Conception and led Saint Pope Pius IX to declare the dogma of the Immaculate Conception (in 1854).

Lourdes

Four years later, February 11, 1858, Mary appeared to St. Bernadette Soubirous. On March 25, 1858 (the Annunciation) Mary said, “I am the Immaculate Conception”. Never having made her First Communion, Bernadette did not even understand what the words meant.

Besides these two apparitions, Mary has appeared on many other occasions in the 19th century:

1. Bangy, France (1840) - Sister Justine Bisqueyb eru
2. LaSalette, France (1846) - Melanie Mathiev (15) and Maximum Giraud (11)
3. Pontmain, France (1871) – Eugene (12) and Joseph (10), Francoise Richer (11); Jeanne-Marie Lebosse (9); Eugene Friteau (6) and a two year old girl. (The adult villagers saw only three bright stars).
4. Pellevoisin, France (1876) – Estelle Faguette
5. Knock, Ireland (1879) – Mary McLoughlin, Mary Beirne, Patrick Hill and eleven others
6. Troyes, France (1845) – Sister Apolline Andrieveau, D.C. – to whom she revealed the red scapular
7. Green Bay, WI (USA) 1858 – Adele Brisse (accepted by the bishop as truly supernatural in 2010).

All of these apparitions, prepared for the great apparitions of the 20th and 21st century. The focus will be upon the two great sites, Fatima and Medjugorje.

Note: Taken from the book, “A Woman Shall Conquer” by Don Sharkey (Bruce Publishing)

The saints say:

1. The Little Flower described her miraculous cure when she was ten years old. (1883) “Suddenly, the statue of the Blessed Virgin glowed with a beauty beyond anything I had ever seen. Her face was alive with kindness and an infinite tenderness, but it
was her enchanting smile which really moved me to the depths. My pain vanished and two great tears of pure joy crept down my cheeks.” (STL)

2. Even the most spiritual Christians do not understand the mystery of Mary. (SLdeM)

3. Mary is the magnificence of God, filled with unimaginable beauty. (SLdM)

4. In the highest heavens and in the lowest part of hell, all things proclaim Mary’s wonders. (SLdeM)

Group Discussion:

1. Are you familiar with any of these apparition sites? Did you realize the fresh outpouring of Marian apparitions? What does this seem to mean?

2. Recount your own devotion to Mary. How does Mary help you?

5.13 - FATIMA – THE PREPARATORY VISIONS

The Fatima story has three parts:

1. Apparitions of the Angel of Peace (1916)

2. The six apparitions of Our Lady (Mary 13, 1917 to October 13, 1917)

3. Later apparitions to Sister Lucy

The Three Visionaries

Before beginning, let us meet the three visionaries.

Lucia dos Santos was the youngest of six children, (born on March 22, 1907) and a cousin to Francisco and Jacinta. Our Lady told her that she would remain on earth for many years and that she was to learn to read so she could spread the messages of Fatima. She died on February 13, 2005.

Francisco Marto was the sixth of seven children, (born on June 11, 1908). His mother and Lucia’s mother were sisters. Our Lady told him that she would take him to heaven quickly. He died on April 4, 1919.

Jacinta Marto was the seventh and final child, (born on March 11, 1910). Mary also told her that she would be taken quickly to heaven. She died on February 20, 1920.

The Angel of Portugal (1915 – 1916)

To prepare for Mary’s appearances, the Angel of Portugal came first to Lucy and then, later, to all three children.

In 1915, Lucy, and three companions (not Jacinta and Francisco), saw a figure above a tree “like a statue, made of snow, transparent by the sun’s rays.” This apparition happened two more times, with no words being spoken. Later, Lucy wrote, “This apparition made an impression but, little by little, it disappeared and I would have completely forgotten it.”
A year later, Lucy, Francisco and Jacinta had the daily task of caring for their families’ sheep. All three saw the angel. (The other two knew nothing of the previous appearances.) Lucy writes: “It was a young man, about 14 or 15 years old, whiter than snow, transparent as crystal when the sun shines through it, and of great beauty.” The Angel knelt and bent his head until it touched the ground. The children, led by a supernatural impulse, did the same.

The angel taught them a prayer. “My God, I believe, I adore, I hope and I love you. I ask pardon of you for those who do not believe, do not hope and do not love you.” Afterwards, the children found themselves in an intense spiritual atmosphere. The profound impression of the vision imposed a special silence. Because Francisco saw the angel but did not hear his words, the other two told him what was said. In all the apparitions, Francisco saw but did not hear.

Other Appearances

In the summer of 1916, they suddenly saw the Angel beside them. He said, “What are you doing? Pray. Pray very much! The Holy Hearts of Jesus and Mary have designs of mercy on you. Offer prayers and sacrifices constantly to the Most High. Pray for your country. I am the Guardian Angel of Portugal.”

In October, 1916, they saw the Angel again, who was holding a chalice in his left hand. The sacred host was suspended above it, while drops of blood fell from the host into the Chalice. The angel left the chalice and host suspended in midair, knelt beside the children and taught them this prayer. “Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, I offer you the most precious Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ, present in all the tabernacles of the world, in reparation for the sacrileges, outrages and indifference by which He Himself is offended. Through the infinite merits of His Most Sacred Heart and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I beg of you the conversion of poor sinners.” (Ed note – This is similar to the prayer that Jesus taught St. Faustina two decades later).

The Angel then gave Lucy the Sacred Host and gave the chalice to Jacinta and Francesco saying, “Take and drink the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, horribly outraged by ungrateful men. Make reparation for their crimes and console your God.” The effects of this mystical experience remained for days and left the children in a weakened condition. Later, Francisco asked what he had received. When Jacinta told him that it was Holy Communion, he replied,” I felt that God was within me, but I did not know how.”

The saints say:

1. I was subjected to serious illness and great pain. In Holy Communion God removed this pain in a flash and I was well. This often occurs. (STA)
2. I cannot put into words how vehement are my desires for Holy Communion. (STA)
3. It is hard to express how Our Lady prefers the Rosary over all other devotions. (SLdeM)
4. No one can understand the riches of holiness contained in the mysteries of the Rosary. (SLdeM)
Group Discussion:

1. Are you closely acquainted with these three children? Were you aware that there were apparitions before Mary appeared? Notice the vision’s effects upon the children.
2. Discuss how God always prepares us before giving a task. The children prepared by faithfulness to prayer.

5.14 - THE CENTRAL VISIONS (May 13, 1917 to October 13, 1917)

On Sunday, May 13, 1917, at the now famous Cova da Iria, the three children saw a Lady all dressed in white, more brilliant than the sun. The Lady spoke “Do not be afraid. I will do you no harm”.

Lucy: “Where does Your Grace come from?”

Lady: “I am of heaven.”

Lucy: “What does Your Grace want of me?”

Lady: “I have come to ask you to come here for six months in succession, on the 13th day, at the same hour. Later on, I will tell you who I am and what I want. Afterwards, I will return here yet a seventh time.”

Lucy asked about heaven, and Our Lady assured them that they all would come there but Francisco had to say many rosaries. After they accepted all the sufferings that were ahead, Our Lady said, “You are going to suffer much, but the grace of God will be your comfort”.

A light came from Our Lady’s hands and the children saw themselves in God. Our Lady spoke again: “Pray the rosary every day, in order to obtain peace for the world, and the end of the war.”

Lucy: “Can you tell me if the war will go on a long time, or will it end soon?” (World War I)

Lady: “I cannot tell you yet, because I have not told you what I want”.

Then Our Lady began to softly rise, going up towards the east, until she disappeared in space. Francisco said, “Oh, my dear Lady. I will say as many rosaries as you want”.

Second Vision

On June 13, 1917, Our Lady repeated her directive to come each month on the 13th. Concerning taking the children to heaven, she replied to Lucy, “Yes, I will take Jacinta and Francisco soon. But you are to stay here some time longer. Jesus wishes to make use of you to make me known and loved. He wants to establish devotion to my Immaculate Heart in the world. To whomever embraces this devotion, I promise salvation. These souls shall be clean to God, as flowers placed by me to adorn his throne.”
Our Lady’s hands again gave forth a great light. Lucy writes, “We saw ourselves in this light, as it were, immersed in God. Jacinta and Francisco seemed to be in that part of the light which ascended to heaven. I was in that part which was poured out upon the earth.”

Third Vision and the Great Secret

On July 13, 1917, Mary revealed the great secret that has three parts. Lucy described the first two parts in 1941. (The third part was partially revealed by the Vatican in 2000). The first part was a vision of hell. Lucy’s description of this vision is contained in Part One of these Teachings. The second part of the secret concerned the Pope consecrating Russia to Mary’s Immaculate Heart. Our Lady promised that World War I would end but, “If people do not cease offending God”, a greater war would begin under Pope Pius XI. A “night illumined by an unknown light” would be God’s sign (such a light happened on January 25/26, 1938).

Our Lady also said “To prevent this, I shall come to ask for the consecration of Russia to my Immaculate Heart and the Communion of Reparation on the First Saturdays”. (Later, Our Lord and Our Lady came to Lucy on June 13, 1929 and said that this consecration should take place.) Her promise was, “In the end, my Immaculate Heart will triumph”. These two secrets were revealed to the world in 1941.

The Third Part of the Secret

In June 2000, the Vatican revealed some of the third part. It included a vision of an angel with a flaming sword crying out “Penance, penance, penance”, followed by a vision of a bishop dressed in white in a half ruined city, in procession with bishops, priests and others. All are martyred and an angel gathers up their blood. There is another aspect of this third secret which was not revealed. Our Lady also gave Lucy some words which are still not public.

Fourth Vision

On August 13th, the communist government imprisoned the children. So, Our Lady appeared on August 19th (feast of St. John Eudes). She promised to work a miracle so that all the world would know that these visions were true. Our Lady told Lucy that the Fatima gift would have been greater if the government had not tried to destroy the revelations.

Fifth Vision

On September 13, 1917, 30,000 people gathered. Our Lady promised the great signs in October.

Sixth Vision

On October 13, 1917, 70,000 people gathered. Our Lady kept her promise. There was the miracle of the sun which pulsated in the sky (called “The Dance of the sun”). People watched this phenomena (which lasted about ten minutes). Then, the sun seemed to leave its orbit and come toward earth. People felt that this was the end of the world. Suddenly, the sun returned to its normal position in the sky. Rain had fallen all night and continued up until the time of the vision. Everyone had been soaked. Gigantic puddles were everywhere. After the miracle, all was dry, as on a hot summer day. Mary had given her great sign.
The saints say:

1. Mary is a masterpiece. God alone sees her full beauty. (SLdeM)
2. When will the happy time come when Mary will be the queen of all hearts, making them subject to her Son? (SLdeM)
3. Instructed by the Spirit and encouraged by Mary, St. Dominic preached the Rosary for the rest of his life. (SLdeM)
4. If you wish to reach the heights of contemplation, say your Rosary every day. (SLdeM)

Group Discussion:

1. Review the six apparitions and comment on them. Can you see how Our Lady prepared the children?
2. What do you think of the two great apparitions, July 13 and October 13, 1917? What is the heart of the Fatima message? Why is it so important?

5.15 - LATER VISIONS AND LOCUTIONS TO LUCY

History

After these six visions, Our Lady quickly took Francisco (April 4, 1919) and Jacinta (February 20, 1920) to heaven. The new bishop of Fatima was very solicitous for Lucy and asked her to enter a boarding school. On June 17, 1921, she entered the convent school at Vilar de Porto. Her identity was known only by the Superior. When she finished her studies, she entered the Sisters of St. Dorothy (who staffed the school). The apparitions and locutions of this period took place at different convents where she was assigned. Later, to gain greater solitude, she entered the Order of Carmel, where she died on February 13, 2005 at almost 98 years of age.

Pontevedra, Portugal - December 10, 1925

On Thursday, December 10, 1925 Our Lady and the Child Jesus visited Lucy in her room. Our Lady explained the Five First Saturday devotions and revealed her promises of all the graces necessary for salvation. Later, Our Lord appeared two times, asking why publicizing this devotion was delayed.

Visions at Tuy, Spain

Lucy finished her postulancy at Pontevedra, and on July 16, 1926 she entered the novitiate at Tuy, Spain, near the Spanish-Portuguese border. She received the habit on October 1, 1926 and pronounced first vows on October 3, 1928. The following visions occur there.

June 13, 1929

(Ed. Note – This is considered a very important vision)
Our Lord informed her that it was time to reveal to the whole Church the secret of his desire for the consecration of Russia to the Immaculate Heart and of his promise to convert Russia. This communication took place during Lucy’s holy hour (11:00 pm to midnight) on Thursday evening, June 13, 1929. This request was accompanied by a vision of the Trinity, which Lucy described:

“I understood that it was the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity that was shown to me, and I received lights about this mystery which I am not permitted to reveal”.

Our Lady also told Lucy, “The moment has come when God asks the Holy Father to make, in union with all the bishops of the world, the consecration of Russia to my Immaculate Heart, promising to save it by this means. So numerous are the souls which the justice of God condemns for sins committed against me, that I come to ask for reparation. Sacrifice yourself for this intention and pray.”

Lucy told her confessor who ordered her to write down what the Lord wanted done.

Summer, 1931

Lucy: “Later on, by means of an interior communication, Our Lord said to me, complaining, ‘They did not want to heed my request! Like the King of France, they will repent and do it, but it will be late.’” (Ed. Note: When Jesus appeared to St. Margaret Mary concerning the Sacred Heart devotions, he told her that he wanted the king of France to dedicate the country to the Sacred Heart. None of the kings complied and 100 years later, the French Revolution began.) “Russia will have already spread its errors throughout the world, provoking wars and persecutions against the Church. The Holy Father will have much to suffer.”

January 25 – 26, 1938 – The Sign That World War II Would Begin

On July 13, 1917, Our Lady had prophesied that a greater war would break out if people did not cease from offending God. Our Lady said, “When you see a night illumined by an unknown light, know that this is the sign given by God – that He would punish the world for its crimes, by means of wars, etc.” This “night illumined by an unknown light” was January 25 – 26, 1938. (Tuesday – Wednesday). There is voluminous testimony to what scientists called an “aurora borealis”. This aurora was witnessed in North Africa, Europe, Canada and the United States. This was undoubtedly the sign but was this an aurora borealis? The scientists at Lyon, France wrote, “The spectacle that we have just witnessed is very curious. It is an aurora borealis at high altitude, a very rare phenomenon for our latitudes, distinguished this time by rays of oxygen and nitrogen emission of a peculiar spectral composition. Usually a shadow passes over the sun and 48 hours later, the aurora borealis occurs. However, no shadow passed over the sun. Therefore, the causes of an aurora borealis do not exist.”

Writing Down the Third Part

January 2, 1944 – Tuy, Spain

In December 1943, Lucy was commanded by her bishop to write down the third part of the secret. This caused her great problems of conscience because Our Lady had told her to keep it a secret. Now she was commanded by Church authority to write it down. To resolve this dilemma, Our Lady appeared and gave her permission. On January 3, 1944, Lucy wrote
down the vision on a note tablet. On January 9, 1944, she wrote Our Lady’s words on a sheet of paper. Both documents were sent to the Vatican in April, 1957.

May 13, 1948 – Lucy received the habit of Carmel and the name Sister Mary Lucy of the Immaculate Heart. She remained a Carmelite until her death.

There were many other divine visits. However, all of the above provides the reader with the central message of Fatima.

Now, on to Medjugorje.

The saints say:
1. St. Francis deSales bound himself by oath to say the whole Rosary every day of his life. (SLdeM)
2. It is dangerous (if not fatal) to abandon the Rosary. (SLdeM)
3. When people asked me about the vision, I could only say, “The Blessed Virgin looked most lovely and I saw her smile at me”. (STL)
4. I was like a child flinging itself into the arms of its mother, begging her to protect it. (STL)

Group Discussion:
1. What parts of the Fatima visions did you already know? What aspects in this account are new to you? As you read these accounts, what are your own thoughts?
2. Do you say the Rosary daily? Have you fulfilled Our Lady’s request for the Five First Saturdays? Do you see the urgency of the Fatima visions?

5.16 - MEDJUGORJE – MARY AS THE MODERN JOHN THE BAPTIST

On June 24, 1982 (the feast of John the Baptist) Our Lady began to appear to six young people, promising to reveal ten secrets. By now, some visionaries have received all ten secrets. Other visionaries, who do not yet know all the secrets, will continue to see our Lady every day until they, also, know the secrets.

Revealing the Secrets

Mirjana, one of the visionaries who has received all the secrets, has publicly revealed that Our Lady has chosen her to reveal these secrets to the world. She has selected a priest to whom she will reveal each secret ten days before it occurs. The priest will pray and fast for one week, and then reveal each secret to the world three days before it happens. Mirjana said that she and the other visionaries do not communicate with each other about the secrets, but presume all have the same ten secrets.

It is overwhelming to realize that these visionaries know the great future events that will shape the world. These Medjugorje visions are extraordinary in two ways. First, Mary has appeared every day since 1981. Second, these ten secrets are given to six young people who will publicly announce them to the world before they happen.

Devotion of the Village
The validity of these apparitions is clear from so many aspects. Especially important is the great devotion of this village (both past and present).

In 1933 (the 1900th anniversary of Jesus’ death) this Catholic village decided to place a large cross on the top of the mountain, (Medjugorje means “in the middle of the mountains”). There it stands today, a gigantic testimony to their faith, built in difficult economic times. Also, in instructing the visionaries, Mary asked for a daily Mass at 6:00 PM, preceded by a holy hour. This exceptional village has fully complied. For decades now, the people faithfully come to Church from 5:00 until 7:30 PM.

The public locutions of Medjugorje are printed in *Words From Heaven* (Published by Caritas, Birmingham).

The saints say:
1. *Without my heavenly Mother, I would be lost.* *(SLdeM)*
2. *Mary shelters her children as a hen does her young. She whispers to them and saves them from the vultures.* *(SLdeM)*
3. *Mary is filled with riches, beauties, delights and blessings left there by Jesus who lived in Mary for nine months.* *(SLdeM)*
4. *Mary is God’s wonder and she works wonders in those who lose themselves in her.* *(SLdeM)*

Group Discussion:
1. *Have you visited Medjugorje? Do you know the story? Have you read the messages?*
2. *What does the existence of these secrets say about the future of the world and about Mary’s role in world history?*

**5.17 - THE FINAL AGE OF MARY**

This very quick overview of Fatima and Medjugorje (even leaving aside the many other acknowledged places of Marian apparitions) lead to some very important conclusions.

**Conclusions**
1. Mary’s concern for the world is our greatest hope during this a time when earth is filled with atomic bombs and unsolvable crises.
2. The extent of Marian visions, the level of her prophetic warnings and the urgency of the messages are unequaled in Church history (excluding, of course, Jesus’ resurrection appearances).
3. These revelations are not just “private”. They involve the Pope’s death and world-wide events.
4. Mary said that if people obeyed her word, World War I would have been shortened and World War II would have been avoided. Only God and the six visionaries know what events are involved in the Medjugorje secrets.
5. The ten secrets at Medjugorje go beyond all prior Marian revelations in so many aspects. First, so many Catholics know that there are secrets. Second, each secret will
be publicly revealed three days before the event. (Lucy knew there would be some great sign on October 13, 1917.)

6. Concerning these ten secrets, the seventh secret will not happen, because people have prayed. One secret will definitely happen because it is too late to turn back God’s justice. The implications are that many of these secrets are chastisements, but some can be lessened if the world just listens to Mary.

7. The primary demand of all these visions is devotion (the central theme of this book), specifically devotion to the Immaculate Heart by prayer and fasting.

8. The world teeters on the brink of world-wide catastrophe. Out Lady tries valiantly to save us. She appears every single day. She is the new John the Baptist, preparing the world for Christ’s Second Coming. All devotion must be plunged into Our Lady. The heavenly Father will save the world by devotion to Mary’s Immaculate Heart. From now until the end of time, we will be in the Age of Mary.

Now, let us study the great saint, Louis de Montfort, who prophesied this new Age of Mary and explained why it would happen.

The saints say:

1. When will men see this blessed time, this Age of Mary, when many chosen souls will lose themselves in her heart? (SLdeM)
2. His Kingdom will come only after Mary is known and begins to reign. (SLdeM)
3. Mary is God’s treasurer, the distributor of his graces and the co-redemptrix of the human race. (SLdeM)
4. When my mother died, Our Lady helped me and brought me to herself. (STL)
5. God took pleasure in hiding Mary during her mortal life. (SLdeM)

Group Discussion:

1. Discuss the world crisis and the many forces of evil? In what direction is the world headed? Can any human leaders solve these crises?
2. Discuss the power of Mary. Her concern for the world. Her daily visits and messages. Does this strengthen your resolve to know, love and serve Mary?

5.18 - TRUE DEVOTION TO MARY

Two of God’s special friends, Pope John Paul II and Mother Theresa, were consecrated to Mary according to Demontfort’s teaching. So, those who follow this devotion are in good company.

St. Louis de Montfort

Ordained in 1700, Father deMontfort spent his sixteen years of priesthood preaching missions, highlighting True Devotion to Mary. He prophesied that Satan hated his book and would cause it to be lost. This happened. No one even knew he had written this book. Over a hundred years later (in 1842) a Montfort priest found the handwritten text, yellow with age, at the bottom of an old chest (just as the saint had prophesied).
The basic teaching of “True Devotion” is the following:

1. Jesus came the first time through Mary. His second coming will also be through her.
2. God formed Mary as his “perfect mold” of holiness. She will mold all future saints.
3. Her womb is the new Garden of Eden. Jesus lived there for nine months, leaving behind all his graces.
4. Because Mary distributes all graces, she is Co-Redemptrix of the human race.
5. Mary is the easy, secure and quick road to God. Following her, the soul will not get lost. (St. Bernard).
6. The Final Age of history will be an age of Mary when the greatest saints will come forth.
7. By True Devotion, the person consecrates everything to Mary (body, soul, exterior and interior goods and the value of all good actions). Mary, in turn, gives the fullness of her blessings.
8. Devotion to her is a sign of being among the elect. The devil cannot overcome those who have true devotion.
9. Mary is the new Rebecca. Her followers are Jacobs who get the blessing of Isaac.
10. Those who despise her devotion are Esaus. Although the first born, they have chosen earthly blessings and have sold their heavenly inheritance.

An Evaluation of True Devotion

1. The manuscript was found at the right time (1842) because Mary had just appeared to St. Catherine LaBoure and the Age of Mary was beginning.
2. The book prophesied this Final Age of Mary who will prepare the world for Jesus’ Second Coming.
3. From now until the end of the world (whenever it happens) we will be in the Age of Mary.
4. This Age of Mary is evident from the multiplication of Marian apparitions (among which Fatima is the great watershed and Medjugorje is the great light).
5. In the present gigantic struggle between light and darkness, the Church desperately needs Mary’s intercession.
6. Mary will raise up extraordinary saints in unbelievable numbers (as St. Louis de Montfort prophesied).
7. Mary will give extraordinary signs to invite the world to believe in her Son. This is already happening.

We are in the Final Age of Mary and True devotion to Mary will be the door to great holiness and to the devout life.

The saints say:

1. By True Devotion, you give more glory to God in a month than by years with any other devotion. (SLdeM)
2. The practice which I will reveal is unknown to most Christians, well known to a few devoted souls but is practiced by very few. (SLdeM)
3. Even the most spiritual Christians do not understand the mystery of Mary. (SLdeM)
4. I would even write this book in my own guilty blood if this would help men learn this True Devotion. (SLdeM)

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**Group Discussion:**

1. Have you read True Devotion?
2. What special value do you see in St. Louis’ Marian teachings? Are they not unique? And consoling? How do they help you to love Mary?
3. Which of the conclusions meant the most to you? Does the evidence support these conclusions? Do you see the warfare taking place between Mary and Satan?

## 5.19 - THE SECRET OF MARY

Why does devotion to Mary succeed when other devotions fall short? The following devotional thoughts try to answer that question.

1. The soul becomes holy when God comes closer. If, two thousand years ago, God came closer by choosing Mary, does he choose a different way now?
2. Mary has all God’s treasures and wants to give them away.
3. Lacking everything, the soul needs Mary’s abundance.
4. When Jesus sees the soul hidden in Mary, he accepts the soul because He always welcomes His mother.
5. In trials, the soul should invoke Mary at Cana, because it cannot wait for a delayed response. Sometimes, her answer even comes before ten Hail Marys are finished.
6. There are “false Christs”, but there are no “false Marys”. The real Christ is the Son of Mary. Find her and you will find the true Christ.
7. In the journey to God, souls will sometimes go down a wrong path (no matter how discerning). Mary will not allow mistaken judgments to destroy any soul.
8. Jesus is the way to the Father and Mary is the sure way to Jesus.

Be clear about this. Souls do not have the time, the strength, the goodness, the conviction, the patience or anything else to become a saint, but God has changed everything in this Final Age of Mary. What would normally be totally out of reach can be yours, but only through Mary. “Following her, you shall not lose your way”. (St. Bernard)

All of this is written in deep gratitude to Mary who has done everything. Words of thanks are totally inadequate.

**The saints say:**

1. Mary covers her children with her own merits. (SLdeM)
2. Mary is the Redeemer’s masterpiece, the first of all redemptions. (SfdES)
3. From her throne, the Queen of Heaven watched over her little flower. (STL)
4. What a difference between a soul who resembles Christ by the work of a sculptor and a soul molded in Mary by the Holy Spirit. (SLdeM)
Group Discussion:

1. *Describe your own feelings toward Mary. Do you trust her? Confide in her? Feel her presence and help?*
2. *How does she make a difference in your devout life? What trials has she brought you through? What blessings has she gained for you?*
BOOK SIX
CONTEMPLATION

PART ONE - THE PASSIVE UNITIVE STAGE

6.01 YOU CANNOT FOLLOW

The first disciples asked Jesus, “Where do you stay”. When he answered, “Come and see”, they followed him (Jn.1:38-39). In another scene, Jesus says to Peter and Andrew “Come after me”. Later, he invited James and John to follow him (Mk.1:16-20).

A Different Saying

After the Last Supper, Jesus said something quite different to his disciples, “Where I go you cannot come” (Jn.13:33). However, he promised, “I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be” (Jn.14:3).

At some point, Jesus said to you, devout soul, “Come, follow me”. In this passive unitive stage, he says, “Where I go you cannot come, but I will come back and take you to myself”. This passive unitive stage is the great divide in the Devout Life. The soul passes from asceticism to mysticism, from active to passive, from ordinary gifts to extraordinary favors. Every soul is invited to the active, unitive stage. The passive unitive state is seemingly found by few.

I say “found by few” because God’s intentions are not clear. St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa debate this speculative question, whether these extraordinary, passive stages are meant for every soul. Both agree that there is a clear division between ordinary and extraordinary.

Sources of Teaching

These chapters find their foundations in the writings of Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross and Francis deSales and provide their outline of mysticism.

For these chapters, I am deeply grateful to Father Adolphe Tanquerey for his book “The Spiritual Life”, (Numbers 1418 – 1481). St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross are the great teachers of these mystic phenomena and Father Tanquerey provides the clearest outline to understand their teachings.

The Saints Say:

1. One piece of advice. Do not expect to reach this stage by your own diligence. If you do, your devotion will turn cold. (STA)
2. God is leading the soul by contemplation which is different from meditating and reasoning. (SJC)
3. This is God’s extraordinary road. (SCG)
4. The master is teaching without a word being spoken. (STA)
5. I undertook this writing to explain this night. Many souls pass through it but know nothing about it. (SJC)

Group Discussion:

1. Why should you be interested in the mystical life? Do you even hope to enjoy these favors?
2. Would it be better to hide these favors from you? What is the advantage of explaining what is seemingly far beyond you?

6.02 - INFUSED CONTEMPLATION

Contemplation has two stages, acquired (natural) and infused (supernatural). Teresa explains this infused supernatural gift, “I call supernatural that which cannot be acquired either by industry or by effort, no matter what pains we take for that purpose. We can dispose ourselves and that is a great thing”. Later, she writes, “Our Lord makes the soul come higher and higher towards himself. Then He catches his little dove and places it in a nest where she reposes.”

John of the Cross writes, “The soul does nothing of itself because God works within. The soul just patiently and freely consents” and “There is a difference between a human and a divine work, between a natural and a supernatural operation. These souls do not act of themselves. The Holy Spirit is the principal agent.”

God at the Soul’s Center

By infused contemplation, God possesses the soul, determining when, how and for how long he will absorb the soul. God acts in the soul’s summit, touching the highest parts of the intellect with wisdom and the highest part of the will with a relish for divine things. He acts at the “center of the soul”, which is superior even to the soul’s faculties of intellect and free will.

God’s Action

At the soul’s center, God produces both an experiential knowledge (in the intellect) and an ineffable love (in the will). Feeling an irresistible attraction to God, the soul goes out of itself and is lost in eternal love. It is transformed like iron in a fire, yet still remaining iron.

The Soul’s Response

The soul becomes passive, unable to use its faculties in prayer (as it did before). God gradually “binds the faculties”. In the beginning stages, the soul can act by gazing at God and loving Him, joyfully consenting to being lifted up to God.

By this experiential knowledge, God becomes a living reality to the soul, causing the soul to feel His presence and to relish his favors. This gift is halfway between ordinary faith (earth) and the beatific vision (heaven).
The Saints say:

1. Infused contemplation is a blessing which the soul could never earn. (STA)
2. Unacquainted with this new experience, souls think they are doing nothing. (SJC)
3. God does not allow us to drink the waters of perfect contemplation whenever we want. The choice is his, not ours. (STA)
4. In contemplation God does everything and we do nothing. The work is his alone. (STA)

Group Discussion:

1. As you read of God’s favors, how are you affected? How are your eyes opened to the reality of God?
2. Does seeing God’s ultimate actions throw any light on the early teachings about mental prayer? Can you appreciate the need for all the faculties to participate in prayer?

6.03 - VARIOUS ASPECTS OF INFUSED CONTEMPLATION

The Effects

Infused contemplation brings a mixture of unspeakable joy (relishing God’s presence) and great sadness (not enjoying complete possession of him). Mystical stages are both painful (stressed John of the Cross) and sweet (stressed by Teresa of Avila).

Souls cannot describe their experiences because they are plunged into a divine darkness. They perceive God obscurely and experience an intense love that defies words. “The soul has no desire to speak of it and can find no example to make such knowledge known.” (John of the Cross)

St. Teresa explains this obscurity, “Divine union happens on earth only when the mind knows that God surpasses all creatures”. Although in a divine darkness, the soul senses God’s presence and his total transcendence.

The soul cannot describe its ardent love. “Only the bride and the bridegroom hear the accents of this song. It is a nuptial song, expressing the sweet emotions of the soul. It cannot be understood by a neophyte in virtue. It belongs to advanced souls who have become worthy of the Spouse.” (St. Bernard)

Advantages of Contemplation

The advantages are obvious. God receives greater glory because the soul’s praises come directly from the Holy Spirit. The soul, made holy through an experimental knowledge and an ardent love of God, practices the highest virtues.

Freely Given
God gives this gift to whom he wills, when he wills and how he wills. Usually, these souls are well prepared, but sometimes he gives it to souls to snatch them from the devil’s grasp. St. Theresa says, “Sometimes, but rarely, God lifts sinners to contemplation for a short time to see if this grace will induce them to prepare for his favors”.

God called some privileged souls (St. Rose of Lima, St. Teresa of the Child Jesus) to contemplation in their infancy. Others attain infused contemplation out of all proportion to their virtue. “I remember a sister whom God enriched in three days. Another reached contemplation in three months. Both of these were still young. Others receive this gift only after a long time. No limits can be placed on God who is so anxious to bestow his favors.” (St. Teresa)

**Needed Preparation**

Usually, the soul must prepare by complete abnegation. “Let the soul be established in pure, spiritual nakedness.” (John of the Cross) “God gives this gift to those who are saying “goodbye” to the world.” (St. Teresa)

They must practice abandonment to God’s will, live according to the gospel maxims, transform all their actions into prayers and joyously accept all trials. (Even those dedicated to study, must renew their love for God during their intellectual pursuits.)

**Three Signs**

St. John of the Cross gives three signs which show that a soul is disposed for God’s infused gift:

1. The soul no longer finds satisfaction from meditation. (This emptiness must not be due to lukewarmness or to physical difficulties.)
2. The soul experiences God’s presence without using images and no longer wants to use the imagination in prayer. “He drinks sweetly without effort, having no necessity of images.”
3. The soul delights to be alone with God, without any intellectual considerations. “Nothing remains except a general and loving knowledge and attention”. This is the most certain of the three signs.

**Desiring Contemplation**

Can the soul desire infused contemplation? The saints respond affirmatively. However, this desire must be humble (the soul is never worthy) and conditional (according to God’s good pleasure). At this stage, the soul can only wait at the door.

**Waiting at the Door**

This is the picture of souls at the most advanced stage of “active perfection”, immersed daily in God’s sanctifying presence. By doing this, they sit faithfully at the door, waiting for God to begin the dark night of infused contemplation and mystical union. The soul cannot actively gain this supernatural prayer. All depends on God’s free decision. When advanced souls
experience infused contemplation, they are total beginners to this passive stage. So, these next steps must begin slowly.

The Saints say:

1. *The trials given to contemplatives are terrible, and are overcome only by God’s consolations.* (STA)
2. *God’s flame has great wealth. The soul has only great poverty and nothing to contribute.* (SJC)
3. *At the fountains of the living waters (contemplation) God fills the soul and removes all tastes for earthly things.* (STA)
4. *Just one touch of God is enough reward for all the trials of life.* (SJC)

Group Discussion:

1. *Do you grasp the limitlessness of God’s favors? Do you see the greatness of sufferings associated with these favors? Why must the two go together?*
2. *What is the importance of humility? Why must every soul wait upon God’s decision?*

6.04 - GOD REMOVES THE IMAGES

“Images” are a great help in both affective prayer and active contemplation. However, “images of God” or “images of Christ’s humanity” are not God himself. Although the soul has made great progress by using these images, it now must be emptied of the images. God, (the reality behind these images) touches the soul directly and infuses contemplation. The images of God are now useless. God Himself welcomes the soul to an extraordinary degree of intimacy. However, the poor soul experiences emptiness, deprived of its spiritual images.

A Storehouse of Images

Let’s put it this way. For years, the soul has gained a storehouse of spiritual thoughts and images, which brought about great emotions toward Jesus Christ. Later, the soul experienced Jesus’ presence with just a few images.

These spiritual experiences (given through images) detached the soul from the external world. Spiritual writers call these “sensual religious experiences”. Inside the devout soul are thousands of religious feelings, experiences, images and memories, all resulting from daily mental prayer. As God gives infused contemplation, he brushes aside these “sensual religious experiences”. As God draws close to the soul, it senses nothing and feels lost. It is entering into God’s darkness.

The Saints say:

1. *If it does not go backward by desiring images, then it is going forward, even though it perceives nothing.* (SJC)
2. *It seems like God is surrounded by a cloud which the soul cannot pierce.* (SJC)
3. When the soul feels the dryness (with no spiritual images) it should not believe that God is far away. (SJC)
4. This sense of God’s absence is so oppressive that souls seeking perfection would die if God did not intervene. (SJC)

Group Discussion:

1. Is your mental prayer filled with images? What images are the strongest? What effects do they bring?
2. Have you moved into acquired contemplation where you sense God’s presence with few images?

6.05 - A BLINDING LIGHT

Infused contemplation is God’s overwhelming light. However, this light is too strong and far beyond the soul’s capacities. As a result, the soul experiences God’s light as darkness. Later, after being purified, the soul will enjoy the capacity to experience this new light. Infused contemplation changes the soul, leading it from incapacity to capacity, from perceiving darkness to perceiving light. The soul is searching for God (as it always did) but the sensual pleasures of prayer (the consolations, the spiritual thoughts and peace) are totally absent. God enlightens the soul’s inner faculties but the soul experiences nothing. God’s blessing (at this point) is too spiritual for the soul’s faculties to enjoy. The soul must remain faithful to prayer, even though it seemingly “cannot pray”.

Two Mistakes

Souls can make two mistakes. Thinking that their prayer is fruitless, they abandon all attempts at mental prayer. They try “to work for God”, turning totally to an active spirituality. Or, they try to pray mentally in an active way, using prayer methods that worked in the past. Both approaches will fail. God will do the work. The soul must be both faithful and passive.

God wants a two-fold response. First, souls must keep the commitment they have made to formal and to informal prayer. They must also remain faithful to the duties of their state of life. God is extremely happy when souls pray faithfully, while experiencing no consolation. This “prayer of faith” unites the soul directly to God without using any “forms” or “images”.

The saints say:

1. The soul experiences strangeness because it has grown accustomed to sensual consolations. (SJC)
2. Only after the dark night will the soul again experience this spiritual pleasure. At this point it is arid. (SJC)
3. When the divine light assails the soul, its own weaknesses cause the suffering. (SJC)
4. My spiritual dryness increased and I found no comfort in heaven or earth. (STL)
Group Discussion:

1. Do you understand a “light that is too strong”? Can you see that the unpurified soul cannot perceive God’s light?
2. Can you appreciate the importance of passivity and the suffering involved?

6.06 - THE EFFECTS OF THE DARKNESS

Just as an x-ray is developed in a dark room and reveals what could not be seen in the light, so, in the Dark Night, the soul gains self-knowledge. In this spiritual darkness, God shows the soul her real state, all her hidden sins and imperfections. The Dark Night also purifies them.

Every soul has many selfish attachments which steal some love away from an all consuming God. This night of the senses is a “short-cut” to perfection, a cleansing which the soul could not accomplish by itself.

The Wet Log and the Fire

John of the Cross likens the devout soul to a wet log and infused contemplation to a fire. At first, the fire causes loud noises as it dries the wood and turns it black. When the wood is dried and totally enkindled, it takes on the beauty of the fire and then enjoys complete union with the flame. The fire changes the log into its own beauty. The black is gone and the red glow begins. In like manner, God gives the soul his own beauty. All is a gift. “He who is mighty has done great things in me”. God’s fire will continue until the soul is totally one with Him.

The Soul’s Duties During the Night

Teresa of Avila was always chastising her nuns, telling them not to be like toads, who make slow progress, or like people who take a year to complete a journey of a few days. She wanted them all to “hurry as quickly as possible”. She rejects the “prudence” which always finds reasons to go so slowly because God makes generous, “non-prudent” souls advance quickly.

The saints say:

1. God brings the soul into this night of sense to bring it into conformity with the spirit. (SJC)
2. By this dark night, the soul goes forth from created things to eternal things. (SJC)
3. God makes the soul ready to serve without the sweetness. It acts for God alone, not for its own profit. (SJC)
4. The soul practices patience and long-suffering by persevering in prayer even when there is no consolation. (SJC)

Group Discussion:

1. Have you gained self-knowledge by your Devout Life? How has this helped you?
2. Are you aware of some of your selfish attachments? What have you done to purify them?
6.07 - THE PHASES OF CONTEMPLATION

Certainly, God adapts his favors to each person’s temperament. Contemplation comes “individually packed”, perfectly suited to God’s call for each soul. However, a definite unity runs through this multiplicity of religious experiences and St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross (Spanish contemporaries in the 17th century) provide the classic outline.

Teresa talks of four degrees of God possessing the soul:

1. **Prayer of Quiet** - God acts in the *summit* of the soul while letting the lower faculties and senses free to function.
2. **Prayer of Full Union** - God seizes all the *interior* faculties and leaves only the exterior senses free to function.
3. **Prayer of Ecstatic Union** (Spiritual Espousal) - God seizes both the *interior* faculties and the *exterior* senses.
4. **Prayer of Transforming Union** (Spiritual Marriage) - God possesses all internal and external faculties in a stable and permanent way.

John of the Cross speaks of two dark nights – one of the *senses* and one of the *spirit*.

Putting the teachings of the two saints together, reveals the stages of infused contemplation.

**Stage One** - Prayer of Quiet
   a. Arid (Dark Night of Senses)
   b. Sweet

**Stage Two** - Prayer of Full Union

**Stage Three** - Prayer of Ecstatic Union, Spiritual Espousal, (Two Parts)
   c. Sweet
   d. Bitter – Dark Night of the Spirit

**Stage Four** - Prayer of Transforming Union (Spiritual Marriage)

We follow this outline in the subsequent chapters.

*The saints say:*

1. *Night, pitch black unchanging night was my fate. I slept through the storm.* (STL)
2. *God dwells in a darkness which is not accessible to man’s spirit. When God leads a soul into this darkness, it becomes filled with light.* (FJdeC)
3. *The soul experiences no movement because God is carrying her. By doing nothing, the soul accomplishes everything.* (SJC)
4. *God gave me a ray of spiritual light that was so powerful my body and soul seemed to enter eternal life.* (SCG)

*Group Discussion:*

1. *Can you see God’s continuing claim upon the soul? How he absorbs her until he possesses all her faculties?*
2. *Can you understand the soul’s pain? How she does not even understand what God is doing? Can you see the hidden blessings?*
6.08 - PRAYER OF QUIETUDE

THE ARID STAGE - DARK NIGHT OF THE SENSES

At this special moment (“the fullness of time” so to speak) God opens the door and infuses contemplation into the heart of this special little soul. This beginning experience is painful and dark. The soul leaves behind the light of natural prayer and enters the twilight, the midnight and the dawn of the first Dark Night (of the senses).

**Twilight Experience**

The soul’s natural lights are gradually extinguished and God’s new light begins to shine. However, God’s light is so spiritual that the soul’s spiritual sensitivity (even though it is advanced) cannot yet see this light. At the same time, the lower lights of sensual spiritual favors are being extinguished. The soul enters into the partial darkness of a night that is just beginning.

**Don’t Turn Back**

Because the senses experience very little in prayer, the soul needs spiritual knowledge and a competent spiritual director,. The soul is confused and the hours given to prayer seem fruitless.

John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila teach that the devil wants the soul to turn back and give up prayer. This one soul is worth thousands and thousands of other lesser souls. The stakes are very high. Let me spell out three reasons.

**Reasons**

1. The soul has devoted its whole life to prayer. Having made progress in divine union and in virtues, the soul is entering its most fruitful years. To turn back, would be to abandon a life’s work which has involved so many sacrifices and is about to bring a great harvest.
2. God invites the soul to indescribable intimacy, to secret favors and to ministries of intercession for his Church. God’s heart is totally open to this beloved little soul. God’s plans are infinite and only the soul’s capacity limits his favors. God is about to multiply the soul’s capacity in millions of ways by leading her into the midnight stage.
3. The Church desperately needs this soul. She will save thousands of souls. She will animate all the missionaries and guide all the bishops. She is the heart of Christ’s Body. Without her, all is dead.

*The saints say:*

1. *In the beginning of contemplation the soul experiences grievous afflictions in its spirit which overflow into the senses.* (SJC)
2. *The flame is bitter at first. At the end, it will be sweet.* (SJC)
3. *Souls enter this night when God draws them from the state of beginners and places them with the progressives, those already enjoying contemplation.* (SJC)
4. The night of sense is common to many souls. These are the beginners. The night of the spirit comes to few.

Group Discussion:

1. Do you understand the image of a light too spiritual to be perceived? Of the lower lights being extinguished, causing a twilight experience?
2. Do you grasp the great importance of this soul? Of its temptations to turn back?

6.09 - THE MIDNIGHT STAGE

As the soul remains faithful, infused contemplation takes greater and greater control of the faculties. The sensual consolations and lower lights are removed. The soul begins to doubt its friendship for God. It feels like a person who doesn’t even believe in God or who has no devotion.

Between Earth and Heaven

The poor soul is caught in darkness, halfway between earth and heaven. For years, it has renounced the pleasures of earth, but has enjoyed the favors of heaven. Now, even heaven’s favors are taken away. All is darkness. As the process goes on, it becomes midnight.

The soul must not move. Any action, of any kind, only makes matters worse. Yet her faculties always want to “solve the situation”. The poor soul has trouble in quieting its imagination and intellect. They want to “pray as usual”, making those acts that previously brought a sense of God’s closeness. This is a mistake. Whatever the soul does actively is a hindrance.

The soul must respond in two ways. It must be faithful to prayer (not shortening the time) and it must do nothing in prayer, not using its sensual faculties (imagination and memory). It must seek God with the highest part of its soul in total faith.

A Director

Blessed is the soul which has a director, one who is learned enough to know what is happening (even if he has not personally experienced a dark night). The soul is like a plane flying in total darkness which needs a good control tower to land safely.

The saints say:

1. A director can bring infinite gain to the soul (if he gives good advice) or infinite loss (if he is mistaken) (SJC)
2. Not all directors have sufficient knowledge nor is their spirituality so perfect, so as to direct a soul in every state of the spiritual life. (SJC)
3. When God brings the soul into this solitude (where it can make no acts) it thinks it is doing nothing and strives to do something. (SJC)
4. The soul is like a baby who wants to walk when its mother would carry him. (SJC)
Group Discussion:

1. Since beginning your Devout Life, have you ever doubted your friendship with God? Have you had moments when you lost all faith in God’s existence?
2. After years of praying, is it not natural for the faculties to remain active? Why is this now a hindrance?

6.10 - THE DAWN EXPERIENCE

As the soul remains faithful, the dark night purges the faculties. These become capable of seeing God’s infused light, the greatest spiritual favor she has ever received.

Having gone through the first night, the soul is purified in its sensual faculties, but not yet purged in its rational faculties. Still, it is a new dawn, but the soul can make the mistake of thinking that the darkness is over.

A Time of Respite

This dawn is a respite from darkness and from purging, not a total, uninterrupted light. The darkness returns and the soul realizes (much better than the first time) that God is purging it with alternating periods of light and darkness. When in the light, the soul must remember that darkness will surely return. When in the darkness, the soul must believe that light will surely come. The soul grows used to a life of alternating light and darkness, periods of consolation followed by purging. This is tremendously profitable for the soul and extremely beneficial for the Church.

The saints say:

1. Because the sweetness is so great, the soul might think that the trials are over. (SJC)
2. Comparing the purged and the unpurged parts of itself, the soul sees clearly what still needs to be purged. (SJC)
3. The night within my soul had also gone. Jesus had awakened. Joy had returned. The tempest of my ordeal was replaced by a gentle breeze which filled my soul. (STL)
4. When the trials return, the soul suffers more intensely after a period of relief. (SJC)

Group Discussion:

1. Can you see the gentleness and thoughtfulness of God? Does he not see when you need light and when you can stand darkness?
2. Is not this testing beneficial? What are its effects?
6.11 - A MYSTIC’S DESCRIPTION

Wanting this book to be very personal, Eileen George, a mystic who has gone through all these trials, was asked to describe her experiences. The following are her words.

“There is an emptiness beyond description. God withdraws His presence gradually, and, in the beginning, I try to be brave, thinking that I will survive with grace, but there is an inner hurting. In the middle of the night, I grow anxious because I know I am losing my security. In the final stages, I grow defiant and angry. I scream out at God, ‘I love you but you don’t love me. I would never do this to you’”.

I try to find him. I tell him I will search under every rock. I ask “Where are you?” and “What have you done?” It is not despair, but I feel I am at the bottom of a well and I cannot see the light at the top. There is not even the grace to hope. I am stripped of everything. I wouldn’t wish this on my worst enemy. I don’t want to pray (but I still do). I get nothing out of Communion. It is hard even to believe that Jesus is there. During this time of trial, my director would say, “Don’t worry. God will come back” but it certainly looked like a final state to me.

When I come out of each dark experience, Jesus calls me by name and the light returns. Jesus will say, “I longed to have you pursue me. I delighted to see you grow stronger”. After each absence, I easily feel a greater closeness with God. I cling to the Father. My heart burns with such love that I feel I am going to die. After the purification, the gifts are beyond all expectation. The soul is cleansed in a new way, and I do not want to fail God or to hurt him, even in the smallest way.”

The saints say:

1. The wounded soul, in seeking for God, has the vehemence of a lioness whose young have been stolen. (SJC)
2. In these dark waters, the soul is hidden and well protected because it is so close to God. (SJC)
3. The soul is blinded to its own lights so it can see supernaturally. (SJC)
4. Spiritual souls would like to explain their state to their director but they do not know how. (SJC)

Group Discussion:

1. What struck you about this very personal description? How close was God during this time? How did she perceive him?
2. Were you touched by the results? By the greater gifts? By God’s special love for her?

6.12 - PASSIVE RECOLLECTION

When the Night of the Senses ends, the bitter aspects of infused contemplation turn sweet. This new beginning is marked by very definite spiritual favors. Later, these new favors will also fade and become less frequent. At each stage the soul must “let go”. Clinging even to God’s favors is an obstacle to divine union. This is the Fourth Mansion of the Interior Castle. Teresa calls this the prayer of Divine Delights because God’s presence causes great spiritual delights. She uses the image of a cistern, which used to receive water through external pipes.
but now enjoys the water surging up from within. This prayer is preceded by Passive Recollection.

Passive Recollection

In the active unitive stage, the devout soul practiced active recollection, remaining by a deliberate choice, in God’s presence all during the day (even outside of formal prayer). After the first night of the senses, this active recollection becomes passive. Whenever he chooses, God makes his presence felt within and the soul enjoys passive recollection. The soul need not recall God’s presence. God initiates this experience of his inner presence whenever he desires.

Teresa’s Description

For Teresa, this passive recollection was her first experience of supernatural prayer. “It is like having another set of senses. The soul wants to close off the exterior senses, and does not want to see or hear anything, so she can withdraw and talk to God alone. The soul still controls the faculties, but they reach out to God.” In another place, she writes, “The great king, at the center of my soul, is like a shepherd calling my faculties together. This shepherd’s call has such power, that my faculties leave behind all exterior things and hurry to him in the castle.” She goes on “Let the soul do nothing, just be absorbed. Don’t try to understand what is happening. At most, just say a few words of love. The soul will know when God wants the understanding to cease acting”. Passive recollection prepares the soul for the Prayer of Quiet.

The saints say:

1. A soul recollected in God would not give up her repose for anything in the world. (SFdeS)
2. In this deep repose the soul enjoys a delicate sense of God but is not conscious of her own enjoyment. (SFdeS)
3. Whenever you find yourself on this simple repose of confidence, stay there. Do not move. (SFdeS)
4. The soul cannot count the blessings impressed by this silent contemplation. They are delicate anointings of the Spirit. (SJC)

Group Discussion:

1. Do you practice active recollection trying to be always mindful of God’s presence? What blessings have you received from this practice?
2. Can you see how these mystical gifts are greater? How greater favors come at each stage?

6.13 - THE PRAYER OF QUIET (DIVINE DELIGHTS)

In this first supernatural prayer, God binds only the will, leaving the intellect and memory free to wander. (“Bind” means that the faculty cannot function. As the supernatural prayer progresses, God binds more faculties and even the exterior senses. Their “non-functioning” allows God to act.) St. Teresa calls this the Prayer of Quiet or the Prayer of Divine Delights.
St. Teresa explains, “Having prepared the soul by passive recollection, God sets the soul near to himself. She realizes that in a short time she will be one with him in divine union. Although she sees herself in his kingdom, she is so overwhelmed by reverence that she asks no questions. The will is captive. Nothing troubles the soul, except to realize that she soon must return to the exterior world. Her faculties are inebriated and intoxicated with delight and satisfaction. Desiring nothing else, the soul exclaims with Peter, “Let us build three tents here”.

While the will is inebriated, the intellect and imagination might wander. The will should ignore them and continue enjoying God’s delights. The ability of the other faculties to wander shows that the soul has not yet reached the Prayer of Full Union.

**Divine Delight**

This is “Divine Delight” because the soul’s spiritual joy is different. “Delights flow to the soul’s innermost parts with calm and gentleness.” These divine delights are far superior to the joys of acquired contemplation. “This heavenly water enlarges our whole interior with inexpressible delights. The soul cannot even understand what God is giving her.” Teresa adds, “These delights are so close to heaven, that the soul loses all cravings for things of earth”. “The soul sees that she cannot purchase even one instant of these delights. No earthly delights can give such happiness. These heavenly joys alone satisfy.”

**The saints say:**

1. *Sometimes the experiences are two-fold. The soul both perceives God’s presence and hears him speak. (SFdeS)*
2. *In the Prayer of Quiet, all the faculties are stilled and the soul realizes she is close to God. If she were any closer, there would be divine union. (STA)*
3. *The soul knows she is in the kingdom. She is in a swoon. Her body does not want to move because it experiences the greatest delights. (STA)*
4. *The Prayer of Quiet is excellent, having no mixture of self-interest. The will seeks God’s good pleasure, wanting only to be pleasing in God’s sight. (SFdeS)*
5. *The Prayer of Quiet is supernatural. We can neither acquire it nor prolong it. (STA)*

**Group Discussion:**

1. Can you see the need for preparing the soul by the First Dark Night and passive recollection?
2. Can you appreciate how God must purify before giving higher delights? Is this a picture of being prepared for eternal delights?

6.14 - **THE EFFECTS OF THE PRAYER OF QUIET**

**A Source of Delight**

The soul’s delight comes from God himself. Teresa writes, “He sends no messenger because he is so close. The soul need not speak. The King can read her lips”. “God wants the
soul to realize that He knows her and wants her to feel the power of his presence. He bestows great interior and exterior satisfaction.”

Overcomes Fears

“Although she now fears God more than ever, she has lost all servile fear and has confidence that she will be in heaven.” “She no longer fears bodily sickness. She desires the greatest austerities and has faith that she can accept any future trials. Having seen God’s greatness, she now sees her own lowliness. Having tasted God’s delights, she easily despises earthly consolations”.

Relishes God’s Presence

The soul relishes God’s presence which she experiences in her superior part. This Prayer of Quiet is not totally passive. God seizes only the will, not the imagination or intellect.

Progress of Gift

At first, this gift of divine delights comes at intervals, is faint, and sometimes not perceived. The duration is short (the length of a Hail Mary). Later, this favor comes more frequently and lasts longer (half an hour). The divine quiet captures the will. The other faculties can still fulfill their duties. Sometimes, spiritual inebriation accompanies the prayer and can last for a couple of days (while the person perfectly fulfills exterior duties).

Two Forms of Quiet

St. Teresa describes two contrasting forms of quiet, (silent and vociferous). In the silent form, “the soul is like a child nursing at his mother’s breast. The mother so loves the baby that she forces the milk into his mouth. He need not even move his lips.”

In the vociferous (praying) type, “the soul utters a thousand praises, trying to please the one who holds her in this state”. While in this state, Teresa would compose love verses.

The saints say:

1. By remaining still, the soul does much. (SJC)
2. The soul should now remain in repose. She has found God whom she was looking for. (SFdeS)
3. At times the soul says nothing. At other times, it perceives God and speaks to him without destroying the prayer of quiet. (SFdeS)
4. The soul does not have imaginations or multiple words because these are no longer of any use. (FJdeC)

Group Discussion:

1. Are you amazed at God’s designs upon the soul? And of his constant, loving concern? Is this a new picture of God for you?
2. Can you see why the delights come slowly at first and then more quickly? What is spiritual inebriation?
A Final Stage of Quiet

Until now, God’s hold has been primarily upon the will. The other faculties were left to roam. The new sleep of the faculties is a higher form of quiet in which God seizes both the will and the understanding. (For now, the imagination and memory remain outside of God’s command.) Teresa writes, “In this kind of union, God gathers in both my will and my intellect, which no longer reasons. It looks at what is happening. Because it sees so much, it does not know which way to look”.

“The memory remains free. It wars with the will and understanding, trying to put everything into confusion. The memory tires me out and I ask the Lord to deprive me of this power. Memories are like restless gnats which buzz around and trouble people. Consider the memory like a madman and leave it to its madness. Only God can limit its extravagances.” This final stage of quiet prepares for full union.

The Soul’s Actions

The soul must be humble and not attempt to initiate what is totally God’s favor. If the soul, by its own actions, tries to bring about this experience (suspending the actions of the will and understanding) it is bound to fail. This gift is totally a divine favor.

When the divine favor begins, the soul should stop its own “active prayer” and follow the Holy Spirit. This “following the Spirit” will be either that of silence or praising (described above). “If the memory and imagination wander off. Let them go. Just keep enjoying the gift.” (St. Francis deSales)

The saints say:

1. The soul spends many hours in a great forgetfulness, not knowing where it has been or how much time has passed. (SJC)
2. The whole soul and all of its powers seem to be asleep, while the will delights in the Beloved’s presence. (SFdeS)
3. The soul does not know what it did or thought. It cannot pay attention to what occupies it even though it tries. (SJC)
4. So that God can work, the faculties must be silenced. (SJC)
5. I suffer no pain in prayer because my faculties are suspended. The pain comes when the prayer is over. (STA)

Group Discussion:

1. Does this astound you – the intellect now is gathered in while the memory is free to roam? These saints understood man’s psychological make-up.
2. Notice that all is God’s initiative. The soul cannot force the gift.
6.16 - THE PRAYER OF FULL UNION

*(God seizes all the interior faculties)*

The Prayer of Quiet and the Sleep of the Faculties, prepare the soul for the next favor, the Prayer of Full Union (Teresa’s Fifth Mansion). In the Prayer of Full Union, God seizes all the interior faculties (will, intellect, imagination and memory) and the soul has total certitude that God lives within her. By seizing the faculties, “God makes the soul quite stupid, so He can imprint true wisdom”. (Teresa) While in this state (which is always short) the soul does not perceive, understand or respond to anything. The time seems shorter to the soul than it really is.

Teresa writes, “When the soul comes to, she has total certitude that she was in God and God was in her. This happens because God implants himself in the soul’s interior. Even if many years pass before God bestows this favor again, she never doubts or forgets it.”

**Describing Full Union**

In Full Union, the soul has absolutely no distractions and no weariness. “The prayer is like manna from heaven. She abandons herself to the joys. No matter how long the prayer goes, her health is never injured.” “The soul enjoys without understanding what is enjoyed. The soul knows that it possesses the source of all blessings. The senses are taken up in this joy and cannot perceive anything else. One moment of this joy compensates for all earthly suffering.” (Teresa)

**A Contrast**

There is a clear contrast between the Prayer of Quiet and the Prayer of Full Union. In the Prayer of Quiet, God seizes the will (and sometimes the intellect). However, God does not seize the other faculties and the soul can doubt that it experienced union with God. In the Prayer of Full Union, God seizes all the interior faculties and the soul has total certitude that God was united with the soul.

**The Effects**

The soul undergoes a marvelous transformation which St. Teresa compares to a silkworm becoming a butterfly. The soul receives an ardent zeal to glorify God, a total detachment from creatures, perfect abandonment to God’s will and great love for neighbor (especially to save their souls).

**Preparing for Spiritual Espousal**

This union is the first meeting of lovers. The soul senses that if it is faithful, God will espouse the soul and then lead it to mystical marriage. The soul must continue her efforts to love God and to detach her heart from everything else.

*The saints say:*

1. *The Prayer of Union fastens the soul to God. Only by much force and pain is it removed.* (SFdeS)
2. If the soul’s imagination is diverted, her intellect will hold on to God. If someone loses her intellect, her will takes hold. (SFdeS)

3. The soul wants freedom from exterior works so she can remain with Jesus. Yet, she accepts these works as necessary for union with him. (SFdeS)

4. The soul sees clearly that it has been carried far from every creature. It has become remote, placed in a profound retreat, in an immense desert with no boundary. (SJC)

Group Discussion:

1. Do you marvel at God’s actions? Do you see how he gradually claims all the soul’s faculties? Would you want this gift? Will it not be yours in heaven?

2. Will not God transform you, also, according to your surrender? Is there not still more to come?

6.17 - ECSTATIC UNION (SPIRITUAL BETROTHAL)

Spiritual Espousal

Infused contemplation begins as darkness and leads into light. Spiritual espousal is just the opposite. It begins with sweetness and leads into the bitterness of the Dark Night of the Soul.

Another Dimension

By Ecstatic Union, God adds another dimension. In the Prayer of Quiet, God seized the will. In the Prayer of Full Union, he seized the interior faculties. In the Spiritual Betrothal, God seizes all the faculties (both interior and exterior). This is called Ecstatic Union, because God absorbs the soul and all its senses cease to act.

This absorption has two sources. First, the soul’s intellect admires God as he reveals the divine mysteries. Second, the soul’s will loves God and experiences great sensible enjoyment. By admiring God, the soul loves him even more. By loving God, the soul admires him even more. The two faculties (intellect and will) act upon each other.

By absorbing the intellect and will, God gradually seizes the senses and suspends all their activity. Even the person’s physical life slows down. Breathing is slower and bodily warmth grows less. “The body gradually cools with a gentleness and unspeakable delight”. When seized by this ecstasy, the body becomes immobile and remains fixed in its position. The body is not weakened but feels new energy. Sometimes the senses are completely suspended. At other times, the person can recall the revelations which they received (as happened with St. Catherine of Sienna).

Describing Ecstasy

In Ecstatic Union (even more than in mystical union) God seizes and suspends the actions of the interior senses. The will, however, remains free to accept these gifts and can gain merit. Full ecstasy itself lasts from a few minutes to a half hour. Incomplete ecstasy can
precede and follow full ecstasy and might last a few days. A soul comes out of the ecstasy spontaneously and experiences anguish in returning to its normal life. It gradually regains control over its body.

At times, a religious superior might command a soul to come out of ecstasy. The soul always obeys a vocal command but sometimes can ignore a command that is only mental.

The saints say:

1. In raptures and ecstasies the body has no feelings. It can be unconscious even of the most painful affictions. (SJC)
2. There is a difference between raptures, ecstasies, flights of the spirit and other elevations. I leave all that to St. Teresa. She has written well about them. (SJC)
3. Once, when I fell into ecstasy, those who did not know me thought I was suffering from vertigo. (SCG)
4. Whoever attains to these holy ecstasies of divine love can find nothing on earth to satisfy them after they come back to themselves. (SFdeS)
5. I grew in my love for God. Sometimes I experienced true transports of ecstasy. (STL)

Group Discussion:

1. Can you see the great variety of manifestations? Can you also see God seizing control, part by part?
2. Why does the body become immobile? Why does the soul not want to return to normal life?

6.18 - THE THREE PHASES OF ECSTATIC UNION

There are three phases of ecstatic union – simple ecstasy, rapture and flight of the spirit.

Phase One – Simple Ecstasy

Simple Ecstasy is like a fainting spell. It produces a painful but delightful “wounding” which results from the felt presence of the Spouse. The soul wants to experience this presence continually (by its own activity) but it cannot do so. The soul suffers when deprived of this favor but the enjoyment is more delightful than the Prayer of Quiet.

“The soul feels herself wounded but she does not know how or by whom. She prizes this wound and never wants to be healed. She complains to the Spouse that he is present but will not show himself.” Because of this “wounding”, the delight of Ecstatic Union is greater than in of the Prayer of Quiet. There is also a sense of affliction when God withdraws this favor. At this point, supernatural revelations begin to happen.

Phase Two – Rapture

God seizes the soul with a violence and carries her off, as if on eagle’s wings. She does not know where He is taking her. Her weakness brings a fear, which mingles with her love.
In this rapture, God completes the spiritual espousal. He also shuts down the senses (because the person could die by seeing himself so close to God). After the rapture, the will is inebriated and totally occupied with God. It wants to do penance and complains to God when there is nothing to suffer.

**Phase Three – Flight of the Spirit**

These flights of the Spirit are so impetuous that the soul seems to be severed from the body. Resistance to them is almost impossible. “It seems as if the soul has been to another world and has received a light different from all earthly lights. It is totally impossible for her to understand this wonder. In a single instant, she learns many things. If she spent years in thinking she could not remember one-thousandth of them.” (Teresa)

Ecstasy’s great gift is holiness, even a heroism of life. “If the soul’s conduct does not visibly display the ecstasy of action, then raptures do not make the soul more pleasing to God.” (St. Francis deSales)

**The Four Effects of Ecstatic Union**

Ecstatic Union has four main effects. First, the soul gains detachment. God brings the soul to the highest point of a fortress so that it sees the nothingness of all creation. In this detachment, the soul would like to give up its free will. Second, the soul gains great sorrow for its own sins, solely because they hurt God. Third, she gains a tender vision of the humanity of Christ and of Mary. By bestowing these visions in her imagination and in her intellect, God buries the soul in humility. Fourth, God bestows patience to undergo passive trials. Because of its longing for God, the soul feels it has been pierced by a fiery dart. This martyrdom of soul and body is relieved only by God’s inebriating delights.

The saints say:

1. The rapture of love happens in the will when God touches it with sweetness. (SFdeS)
2. During the flight of the spirit, the soul’s spirit is taken, with great violence, into communion with God. The body is abandoned. All bodily acts and senses are suspended, absorbed in God. (SJC)
3. These wounds are secret touches of love which penetrate the soul like an arrow that burns with love. (SJC)
4. Pierced by the Beloved’s arrow, the soul seeks relief but finds none. No matter what it does, the pain increases. There is no remedy. (SJC)

**Group Discussion:**

1. Why would the soul prize a “spiritual wound”? Why does God rapture a soul?
2. Discuss the four main effects? Are they beyond human attainment?

**6.19 - SPIRITUAL BETROTHAL (ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS)**

The two highest stages of divine union are Spiritual Betrothal and Spiritual Marriage. John of the Cross has written extensively on both. This chapter provides his statements
concerning *Spiritual Betrothal*, which will help those souls who have experienced the Dark Nights.

**Spiritual Betrothal**

1. God brings about Spiritual Betrothal by a vivid vision of the Beloved.
2. The soul does not have perfect tranquility in Spiritual Betrothal because the sensual parts with their imperfect habits are not totally subdued.
3. The soul enjoys the Bridegroom’s visits but also suffers from his absences.
4. It also suffers from affliction in its lower faculties and from the devil.
5. Although the soul delights in her union with the Bridegroom, images trouble her memory and desires trouble the sensual faculties.
6. Because her love for the Bridegroom is vehement, the pain of his absence is also vehement. Contact with creatures increases this pain.
7. The soul still experiences terrors and fears (from God or the devil).
8. After this Spiritual Betrothal, the soul receives many divine communications.
9. Spiritual Betrothal cannot compare with the Spiritual Marriage which is a complete transformation into the Beloved.
10. Only after the soul spends some time in Betrothal does God call her to Marriage.
11. This betrothal is a progressive work, done slowly within the soul.
12. Both the will of God and the will of the soul are satisfied. Neither fails the other.
13. During the betrothal the bride must keep all her love, thoughts and actions directed to the Bridegroom.

**The saints say:**

1. *The soul and God are the two contracting parties in this spiritual betrothal.* (SJC)
2. *During this betrothal, God uses the Holy Spirit’s choice ointments to make the soul’s yearnings extreme and delicate.* These ointments are the proximate preparation for union. (SJC)
3. *If these preparatory unctions are so sublime, what will the actual possession of the Beloved in Spiritual Marriage be like?* (SJC)
4. *By these touches, the soul is purified to receive this union once and for all. This is the Divine Betrothal between the soul and God.* (SJC)

**Group Discussion:**

1. Why is Spiritual Betrothal not perfect? What sufferings are included?
2. What are its blessings? Why is it a progressive work of God? What are the soul’s duties?

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6.20 - THE BITTER STAGE - DARK NIGHT OF THE SPIRIT

This spiritual espousal culminates in the Dark Night of the Spirit. Because the sensual faculties (imagination, memory and sensual intellect) are already somewhat purged, God’s contemplative fire attacks the **spiritual intellect** and **spiritual will**. This is the worst of all trials, when the soul believes God has totally abandoned it. The soul even questions its eternal salvation and can become convinced that it is damned forever. Imagine the pain of this devout soul. It loves only God and seeks only to live with him forever. Yet, the soul believes that all of
its love will be unrequited. This experienced separation from God is painful because the soul desires only God’s presence.

The sufferings of the Dark Night of the Senses (experienced by many) are as nothing compared to the agonies of this second night (experienced by few). However, after this second night all the sufferings are over. The purging is complete. The soul lives at the border of heaven and tastes heavenly glories which John of the Cross describes in detail in Spiritual Canticle and Living Flame of Love.

**Time Frame**

There are two questions concerning time. First, when do these nights begin? Second, how long do they last? Both depend on the individual. Obviously the Little Flower had experienced both nights by her death at twenty-four. St. Teresa of Avila became a religious at twenty-one, but at twenty-four, was still in the midst of what she calls her “sinful years”.

Also, much depends on the person’s call. Someone called to the contemplative life would probably experience the dark nights earlier. Someone involved in great activity wouldn’t be prepared for these trials until years later.

How long these nights last is also disputed. One writer (Cardinal Bova) says that Francis of Assisi spent two years; St. Teresa, eighteen years; St. Claire of Montefalco, fifteen years; St. Catherine of Bologna, five years; St. Magdalene of Pozi, five years (followed by another sixteen years). However, these figures probably include the two dark nights and the period of respite in between.

The saints say:

1. Some few will later enter the second formidable dark night of the Spirit to reach divine union. Only the smallest number enter this because the night of the senses lasts a long time. (SJC)
2. The pain is deep and causes vehement spiritual groans, which at times receive vocal expression. When the pain is severe, the soul dissolves into tears. (SJC)
3. The spiritual appetite is empty but God’s favors have not yet come, so the soul’s thirst is worse than death. (SJC)
4. God leaves their understanding dark, their will dry, their memory empty and their feelings bitter. (SJC)

**Group Discussion:**

1. Why does God bring about such intense suffering? What is the cause of this suffering? Does this teaching reveal anything about your powerful faculties of intellect and will?
2. Do you admire the great Fortitude of the saints to endure these sufferings for years? Do you know anyone who has gone through these dark nights?
6.21 - THE EFFECTS OF THE SECOND DARK NIGHT

Freedom From Imperfections

The first night of the senses purified the soul, enabling it to enjoy the Prayer of Quiet, of Full Union and of Ecstatic Union (Spiritual Betrothal).

This second dark night sets the soul free from many imperfections. These include:

1. Habitual imperfections which are deeply imbedded habits.
2. A dullness of mind which subjects the soul to distractions.
3. A certain pride (resulting from spiritual consolations).
4. A false boldness with God that comes from a lack of reverential fear.
   All of these are removed in the Second Dark Night.

The Trials Themselves

This second night touches all four internal senses. The mind enters into darkness. The will becomes dry. The memory forgets. The affections are painful.

The Mind

Just as a strong light dazes weak eyes, so God’s brilliant divine light paralyzes and tortures the mind. Death itself seems a welcome deliverance. The soul experiences a painful sense of being annihilated, because the infused light reveals the holiness of God and the sinfulness of the soul. It seems that hell is ready to swallow the soul forever.

The Will

Deprived of all joy, the soul believes that her sufferings will last forever. To sustain the soul, God sends periods of relief and peace. Then, the devil counter-attacks, causing the soul to believe that God has justly forsaken her.

The Memory and Affections

Prayer is impossible. The memory cannot even attend to temporal matters, because all the faculties are tied up. The experiences are like those of hell. The results are the same as purgatory.

“This blessed night darkens the mind to give it light and humbles the soul in order to raise it up. It empties the soul of natural likings so it can divinely possess all things.” (John of the Cross)

The Effects

After the night is over, the effects are clear:

1. During the trial, the soul loved God in its highest part but did not know this. Now, God shows the soul that her love has been ardent.
2. In the trial, the piercing light revealed all the soul’s sins and imperfections. Now, this light shows all that the soul will gain as a reward.
3. The soul struggled greatly in the trial. Now, the soul has gained strength and is determined to neglect nothing that serves His glory.

4. The soul is now ready to climb the ten stepping stones of divine love (described by John of the Cross) which lead to the transforming union.

The saints say:

1. This night prepares the soul for an inward peace and tranquility which surpasses all understanding. (SJC)
2. The night draws the spirit away from its ordinary experiences to bring it closer to divine understanding. (SJC)
3. God makes the soul die to all that is not God so the soul can be clothed in the new man. (SJC)
4. Once purged the soul can receive the highest divine light. (SJC)

Group Discussion:

1. Even in these trials, can you see God’s special actions?
2. Discuss the zeal of God who has one goal for your lives – that you would be purified so you can enjoy union with him.

6.22 - THE TEN STEPS OF MYSTICAL LOVE

The following short outline comes from the simplified version of the Dark Night of the Soul (Chapters 2.20 and 2.21).

John of the Cross teaches that infused contemplation is a ladder with ten steps. This ladder takes the soul up to God “to steal the treasure of heaven” and allows the soul to descend to great humility. The soul is “always ascending and descending” because “Perfection is a perfect love for God and an emptiness of self”.

He lists these effects (calling them ten steps) and teaches that he does not know the exact nature of each grace. The steps are from the lowest to the highest.

1. The soul languishes, like a sick person. Losing all its desires, it quickly seeks the second step.
2. The soul seeks God ceaselessly, like Magdalene who went to the tomb and waited there. By loving God, the soul is recovering its health.
3. The soul has such a great zeal that it sees all its accomplishments as nothing. She is like Jacob who willingly worked seven more years to gain Rachel.
4. The soul experiences continual suffering because it so much wants to retain God’s love.
5. The soul experiences vehement desires to be united with the Beloved and every delay is oppressive.
6. Full of hope, the soul runs swiftly to God, touching Him, again and again.
7. The soul becomes vehement in its boldness, setting aside its own judgments and refusing to retreat. The soul acts this way only when the King invites her.
8. The soul seizes God and lays hold of Him. The soul climbs to this level but cannot remain long. Otherwise they would possess glory in this life.
9. The soul burns sweetly because of its union with God. Words cannot describe her riches.
10. The soul is totally assimilated to God by a clear and direct vision. This happens only in heaven. These souls do not go to purgatory. Love has totally purged them.

The saints say:
1. How can this soul, which feels so unworthy of God, have the strength, boldness and daring to journey towards union? Love gives it strength. (SJC)
2. The bride’s heart will be destroyed if she had no hope to attain union, so she does not despair. God makes her thousands of promises. (SFdeS)
3. When St. Stanislas Kotska was fourteen he often fainted from divine love. Only cloths soaked in cold water could assuage the burning he felt in his heart. (SFdeS)
4. When Philip Neri was 80 years old, Divine Love so inflamed his heart, that his heart broke the fourth and fifth ribs so he could breathe. (SFdeS)

Group Discussion:
1. Can you see that the Devout Life is a constant ascent toward God? What have been the stages of your own ascent?
2. How have you experienced God acting in you? Are you grasping how active God is on your behalf?

6.23 - MOTHER THERESA’S DARK NIGHT

For years, Mother Theresa of Calcutta enjoyed great divine favors. In the power of her love for Jesus, she willingly obeyed his will to leave her congregation (the Sisters of Loretto) and go into the slums of Calcutta (December 1948). As soon as this work began, she went from light to darkness, a state that perdured for the rest of her life.

She could not even explain this to her confessor. So, he asked her to write a letter to Jesus. Eleven years into this trial, on September 3, 1959, she wrote the following:

“Dear Jesus:

Who am I that you should forsake me? The child of love has become the most hated one, thrown away as unwanted and unloved. I call and I cling, but no one answers. No one. I am alone, unwanted, forsaken.

Where is my faith? There is only emptiness and darkness. How painful is this unknown pain, pain without ceasing. I do not dare to utter the thoughts of my heart, for that would cause untold agony. I am afraid to uncover the many unanswered questions within me. These seem like blasphemy, if there be a God.
Please forgive me. I trust that all will end in heaven with Jesus. However, when I raise my thoughts to heaven they return like sharp knives and hurt my soul. The word love brings nothing. I am told that God loves me but the reality of emptiness is so great that nothing touches my soul.

Did I make a mistake in blindly surrendering to the Sacred Heart’s call? The work is His not mine. I don’t feel a single temptation to claim anything in the work. The whole time I am smiling. Sisters and people think faith and love are filling my being and that union with God absorbs my heart. Could they but know that cheerfulness is a cloak covering my emptiness and misery.

However, the darkness and emptiness are not as painful as my longing for God. I fear that this contradiction will unbalance me. O God, what are you doing to one so small? Is this the way you imprint your Passion on my heart?

If this brings you glory, if you get a drop of joy from this, if souls come to you, if my suffering satiates your thirst, then, here I am Lord. I accept all to the end of my life and I will smile at Your Hidden Face – always.”

This letter speaks for itself. Nothing more needs to be said!

The saints say:

1. God’s spiritual light is so immense that it blinds the soul more as it gets nearer. (SJC)
2. In these dark waters the soul is actually hidden and well protected because it is so close to God. (SJC)
3. These severe purgations happen to few souls. Those lifted to the highest degree are the most severely purged. (SJC)
4. Divine things appear dark to the soul. The clearer the light, the more it blinds. This is God’s “ray of darkness”, a great supernatural light. (SJC)

Group Discussion:

1. Mother Theresa is internationally known as an active person of charity. Does this letter reveal her inner life?
2. What parts of the letter touched you most? Was she not always smiling? How difficult to cover over the inner trials!

6.24 - TRANSFORMING UNION (SPIRITUAL MARRIAGE)

Nature of Transforming Union

God’s final goal is a transforming union which prepares the soul for the heavenly Beatific Vision.

This intimate union is called spiritual marriage. The two lives (God and the soul) are blended. “It is like rain water falling into a spring. Once mixed, the rain water and the spring
water cannot be distinguished.” (St. Teresa) The ecstasies and raptures cease (or are few). The soul enjoys a great security. She is certain of God’s love for her.

**Contrast of Unions**

The other unions were transitory. This union is permanent and indissoluble. St. John of the Cross believes that the soul is “confirmed in grace”. St. Teresa is not so sure. “The soul is secure as long as God holds her in his hand and she does not offend him. Even if the state continues for years, she does not see herself as secure.”

**Teresa’s Two Visions**

Jesus introduced Teresa into this final, seventh mansion by two visions. First, Teresa experienced a vision (in her imagination) of Jesus’ humanity “just as he was after his resurrection”. Jesus said that “she should take care of his affairs and he would take care of her affairs … ‘not only because I am your Creator, your King and your God but because you are my true spouse’”.

She then had a vision in her intellect. “God communicates to the soul in one instant such a great secret that she feels excessive incomparable delight. He manifests to her the glory of heaven, in a way more sublime than any vision. The soul becomes one with God. More cannot be said than this.”

After Jesus introduces the soul to this seventh mansion, the Three Persons of the Trinity manifest themselves in an intellectual vision, coming directly upon the soul in a cloud of extraordinary brightness. The Three Persons are distinct, but by a communication of knowledge the soul knows they are one substance and one God.

**The Trinity**

Teresa wrote, “What others know by faith, this soul understands by sight. All Three Persons speak to her and make her understand Jesus’ promise that He, the Father and the Holy Spirit would dwell in the soul that loves him and keeps his word (Jn.14:23). To experience these words is so different from just believing them. The soul is astonished. These words never leave her. She clearly sees that the Three Divine Persons are in her (Teresa’s) deepest recesses and she perceives their company in herself.”

**The saints say:**

1. God makes the soul his friend and is happy to have the soul rule him. It is reciprocal. He does what the soul asks and the soul does what he commands. (STA)
2. Having attained all that it can receive, the soul appears to be God. (SJC)
3. The soul is not just united to the fire but becomes one living flame within the fire. (SJC)
4. The soul’s acts are absorbed in the Holy Spirit. In this state, the soul performs no acts by itself. All the soul’s acts are divine, coming from the Holy Spirit. (SJC)
Group Discussion:

1. How does Spiritual Marriage compare with heavenly glory? Does it reveal some of the mystery of heaven?

2. Discuss that in heaven all the souls enjoy Spiritual Marriage? How do the mystics, by their experiences, make heaven more real?

6.25 - THE EFFECTS OF THE TRANSFORMING UNION

The soul now totally forgets itself and seeks only God and His glory. She abandons herself into God’s hands and is indifferent to all that is not God. In ecstatic union, she wanted to die. In this transforming union, whether she lives or dies is unimportant. “All her thoughts are on pleasing the Lord and expressing her love. Good works always come from this.” (Teresa)

The soul thirsts for sufferings, but with no anxiety. “If God wants them to suffer, they are content. If he does not want them to suffer, they are content. They experience great joy at being persecuted. They have no hatred, but only affection, toward their persecutors.”

“They do not seek consolations. If they are alone, they are content. If they are involved in helping others, they are content. They have no aridities or troubles. They want only to praise the Lord, because they remember only his tenderness.”

No More Raptures/Ecstasies

“The raptures cease. There are no more. If ecstasies or flights of the spirit come, it is seldom and never in public. In this seventh mansion, God and the soul sweetly enjoy each other in profound silence.” (Teresa)

In this enjoyment, the soul still has an ardent but discreet zeal. She is both Mary (intent on the Lord) and Martha (zealous in good works inspired by love). “Our Lord does not regard the greatness of the work but the love that animates it.” (Teresa)

If God invited them, Teresa wanted her nuns to enter the seven mansions. They were never to force their way in. “Do not use any violence to enter. God loves humility. So, consider yourselves unworthy to enter even the third mansion. If you do this, you will gain God’s good favor to enter the fifth mansion. If you serve him there, He may in time admit you to the seventh mansion reserved for Himself”.

The saints say:

1. Neither the soul alone nor God alone bring about the flame’s movements. The Holy Spirit and the soul work together. (SJC)

2. Having attained all that it can receive the soul appears to be God. (SJC)

3. The soul loves by the Holy Spirit whose will is now one with the soul’s will. (SJC)

4. These glimpses of glory are not as stable, perfect or continuous as they will be in heaven. (SJC)

Group Discussion:
1. What strikes you in this description of the soul’s oneness with God? Does not God bring all things to completion?
2. Are there not little gifts? Gifts that fit your present capacity? Reread the chapter, and see what you would like.

6.26 - SPIRITUAL MARRIAGE (ST JOHN OF THE CROSS)

The following are quotes from St. John of the Cross describing Spiritual Marriage, the greatest blessing available to the soul on earth.

1. The soul lives God’s life, not its own. Yet, even in spiritual marriage, this is not as perfect and complete as in heaven.
2. The sensual parts lose their imperfect habits and are totally subdued.
3. All afflictions (from the lower faculties and from the devil) cease.
4. Spiritual Marriage is gained only when the soul is cleansed of all imperfect habits.
5. The soul must have courage and exalted love to experience this strong, close embrace of God.
6. The Bridegroom commands all vain distractions to cease. He brings the understanding, memory and will to perfection.
7. By his sweetness and courage, He subdues all the soul’s passions and faculties.
8. Every door is open to the soul. She can abandon herself whenever she wants to the sleep of love.
9. The Bridegroom/Shepherd delights to have the perfect soul on his shoulders and hold her in an embrace of union. He leads the soul into the bridal chamber.
10. God and the soul surrender the entire possession of themselves to each other.
11. By a participation that is as great as possible, the soul becomes divine and God.
12. God and the soul are so closely united that what is divine is communicated to the soul. God and the soul seem to be God without any essential change.
13. Both God and the soul want this perfect state. The soul never wearies until it has reached this goal.
14. The marriage enjoys only one love – the love of the Bridegroom.
15. Once the soul is lifted to Spiritual Marriage, she is God’s consort.
16. The Bridegroom reveals his secrets and hides nothing from her.
17. Mostly, he reveals the mysteries of His Incarnation and Redemption.
18. Evil spirits fear this soul like they fear God Himself. In this divine union, they do not assail the soul and do not dare to appear.
19. Both the soul and the Beloved rejoice in their mutual beauty.
20. In glory and appearance the soul seems to be God and God the soul. This union baffles all description.
21. God loves the soul and brings it to Himself, so that He can make the soul his equal.
22. In Spiritual Marriage, God communicates Himself directly, not by angels or by natural capacities.
23. The soul enjoys the intimate love of the Bridegroom.
24. After Spiritual Marriage, the soul understands the highest wisdom hidden in God.
25. In heaven, the soul would not be happy unless it loved God as He loves the soul. In Spiritual Marriage, this happens even before death (but it is not the same as heavenly glory).
26. The soul does by participation what the Father and the Son do by nature. They breathe the Holy Spirit.
Group Discussion:

1. Which of the above amazes you the most? What gifts would you want?
2. Do you see that these blessings are totally from God? Do they open your eyes to his plan for you? After reading this, would you ever want to miss out on heaven?

6.27 - MYSTICAL LOVE (ST. CATHERINE OF GENOA)

Mystical Love Described by St. Catherine of Genoa (1447-1510)

Catherine of Genoa wanted to enter religious life, but when her father died, her plans were changed. At sixteen, she married a man who was domineering and unfaithful. She was patient with both these traits. She writes that she “led a worldly life for five years”. One day, while going to confession, God immediately gave her the highest mystical graces. She reached perfection without walking the road. For the rest of her life, she experienced an inner purgatory on earth and the highest gifts of divine love. This chapter quotes her beautiful images of a soul in the passive mystical stage. Her whole book (in simplified version) should be read.

God’s Actions

1. I was raised above my natural condition and could not delight in anything. By this unknown method God drew my spirit and absorbed it.
2. God destroyed the body’s animal imperfections and my soul shared in heavenly happiness that I could not comprehend.
3. My soul was seemingly deprived of delight and of the power to love. Yet, my faculties rested in God and were content.
4. True life is found in this hidden love which beings death to human nature.
5. As God’s light increased, my anguish deepened. The light revealed my imperfections and I was overwhelmed by my sinfulness.
6. Seeing I was totally abandoned, God revived me and I confessed my sins with extraordinary contrition.
7. Another of God’s rays refreshed my body. I felt like I was in paradise.
8. It seemed as if my soul was going to leave my body. In this love, I did not fear martyrdom and could endure everything. O secret love! Whoever tastes you, hungers for nothing else, because you contain everything.

Effects Upon the Soul

9. I questioned God, “Why do you love me so greatly?”
10. As I began to delight in spiritual things, God allowed temptations so I would be firm in my ways.
11. God lifted me to a higher state and allowed me to see the work he had accomplished.
12. God infused a hidden love that detached me from other loves.
13. God brought my spirit so close to himself that it no longer communicated with my soul or my body. They experienced nothing.
14. I was a robber claiming God’s spiritual graces as my own.
15. As God afflicted my body, he would refresh my mind. When he assaulted my mind, he would refresh my body. This went on for ten years.

**Pure Divine Love**

16. God gave me a penetrating love which had no delight. This was done secretly and I felt abandoned.
17. God revealed a ray of his glory. This remained within me and I could not withdraw from it.
18. God showed me one spark of his love for man and I was overwhelmed.
20. When I saw how pure love works, all other love seemed selfish.
21. With pure love, I find no rest. I am lost, wounded and captured by God, and must wait for his Divine Providence.
22. I did not see the effects of love. Rather, I saw one drop of love itself. This melted all my faculties. My lips are sealed. I cannot speak.
23. Divine love draws all imperfections into a secret hiding place to purge them. The human heart opens at divine love’s first touch.
24. God had to remove His vehement love so I could stay in the body. Even after God left, I was still absorbed in him.
25. Imperfections cause great pain because pure love cannot tolerate the slightest fault.
26. In pure love, we cannot distinguish God from man because the heart becomes paradise. These souls have a foretaste of heaven.

**The Body**

27. When the task is complete, the soul goes to God and the body goes to the grave.
28. Love destroys the body and absorbs the soul in some hidden satisfaction.

**Totally God’s**

29. God leaves the soul in nakedness. She abandons everything and rests only in God.
30. The heart has become God’s tabernacle. He infuses gifts and the soul feels it is in heaven.
31. How few travel this road of penetrating love which purifies everything.
32. When purified by pure love, the soul realizes that this love is the Holy Spirit.
33. God allures the soul and asks it to accept him. Her own vehement emotions force the soul to speak but her words are not clear.
34. How few experience these actions of God because they are engrossed in earthly projects.
35. A ray of God’s love is blinding, removing all desire for earthly things. It enters the heart secretly and softens it like wax in a fire.
36. The action is God’s but the blessings belong to man.
37. What more can I say? I want to be silent but I have an urgency to speak.
The saints say:

1. The soul enjoys God through God himself (although not as clearly as in heaven). (SJC)
2. The soul is now a heavenly soul, more divine than human. (SJC)
3. Heaven’s King shows himself to be a friend, an equal and a brother, so the soul no longer fears. (SJC)
4. Besides allowing the soul to see him, God also reveals what he is doing within the soul. (SJC)

Group Discussion:

1. What do you find in these teachings that are similar to all the others? What picture of mystical love have you received. Use your own words.
2. Do these descriptions attract you? What happens in your heart?

6.28 - OVERVIEW OF THE PASSIVE UNITIVE STAGE

The picture is clear. The Passive Unitive Stage begins with Infused Contemplation, when God floods the soul with light which causes the Dark Night of the Senses. After enduring this dark night, the soul is prepared for other favors, beginning with passive recollection and leading to the Prayer of Quiet (by which God seizes the will). Then comes the Sleep of Faculties (in which God seizes both the will and the intellect). This prepares for the Prayer of Full Union (in which God seizes all the interior faculties), followed by the Prayer of Ecstatic Union, Spiritual Betrothal, (in which God seizes internal faculties and external senses). This Ecstatic Union leads into the Dark Night of the Spirit. When the soul is totally purified, God takes the soul to himself in the Transforming Union of Spiritual Marriage.

By humility, a love of the cross and total abandonment, the soul consents to God possessing her. Transformed into God, the soul fulfills Christ’s desire, “that they also might be one in us” (Jn.17:21).

Summary

I will repeat the outline of these phases as described in these chapters:

Stage One - Prayer of Quiet (two parts)
   a. Arid (Night of the Senses)
   b. Sweet

Stage Two – Prayer of Full Union

Stage Three - Prayer of Ecstatic Union Spiritual Espousal (two parts)
   a. Sweet
   b. Crucifying – Night of the Spirit

Stage Four - Prayer of Transforming Union (Spiritual Marriage)
Extraordinary Phenomena

The Unitive Way has other experiences which might or might not happen. We call them extraordinary because they are certainly not needed for divine union. These are described in the final chapters.

The saints say:

1. By contemplation, the Lord calls us to his side. We arrive at the end of the road without knowing how. (STA)
2. In perfect contemplation we can do nothing by ourselves. No need to work hard or to make plans. (STA)
3. God is not pleased that so few attain this state. He would be pleased if all reached it. However, he finds few vessels in whom he can do his lofty work. (SJC)
4. Infused contemplation is the way of illumination. God himself feeds the soul without its active help. (SJC)

Group Discussion:

1. Now we are at the end of the road. Look back. How far have you come? How far must you still go? Are you zealous to make the journey?
2. Do you see the need for God’s help? Does this become more evident at the end? Was it not always so?

PART TWO

6.29 - PRIVATE REVELATIONS

By Divine Revelation, God reveals a hidden truth. Divine Revelation is public, when it is for the whole Church (as the Bible). It is private when for a person, a group or a given period of history. Some private revelations have been declared true and valid by the Church (such as Lourdes, Fatima, etc.). This section deals with private revelations not investigated by the Church. In these cases, the discernment is made by the soul and its spiritual director. The purpose of this chapter is to provide guidelines for such discernment.

These private revelations are abundant. The processes for canonization show that God reveals much to his holy ones.

Sources

Revelations have three sources:

1. Visions
2. Supernatural words
3. Divine touches

Visions

Teresa clearly describes three kinds of visions – in the senses, in the imagination and in the intellect.
1. Visions in the senses are called apparitions. The person sees some luminous form, such as of Jesus or Mary. According to St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Teresa, this is not usually the real heavenly body of Jesus or Mary, but a miraculous impression made upon the sense of sight.

2. Visions in the imagination are given while awake or in sleep (like St. Joseph).

3. Visions in the intellect frequently accompany visions in the imagination. They reveal spiritual truths without sensible images.

Some visions include all three experiences. For example, Paul’s vision on the road to Damascus was sensible (his eyes were blinded by light), imaginative (it revealed the traits of Ananias) and intellectual (he understood God’s will).

In some visions, God uses ideas already known by the person. In other visions, God infuses knowledge which the person did not have. Visions can be obscure, manifesting only the presence of the object. Other visions are clear. These last only a short time. Sometimes they are just intuitions which leave deep impressions.

**Supernatural Words**

There are three kinds of supernatural words, classified according to which faculty receives them. Auricular (words are actually heard by the ear). Imaginative (words are received in the imagination) and intellectual (words are perceived directly by the intellect).

**Divine Touches**

Sometimes God touches the soul directly and produces both emotional sweetness and intellectual light.

Some of these touches are quite ordinary. At other times, God touches the superior part of the will in such a way that the mystic thinks that God’s substance has touched the soul’s substance.

*The saints say:*

1. Locutions are a great favor but perilous. They might come from God, from the devil or from the person’s imagination. (STA)
2. True locutions have some signs. First, they have power and authority. Second, they give a great tranquility. Third, some are never forgotten. (STA)
3. Many years might pass but the soul never loses its belief that God will do what he said. (STA)
4. A vision in the imagination is seen with the eyes of the soul. By intellectual visions, the soul sees nothing but grasps indescribable things by a special kind of knowledge. (STA)

**Group Discussion:**

1. Since these phenomena are not limited to mystics, we can ask if you have experienced any of the above. Did you discuss this with anyone, especially a spiritual director? What were the effects?
2. What dangers exist in these extraordinary phenomena?
Attitude Toward Extraordinary Phenomena

All the saints agree that no one should seek these favors. They are not necessary means to divine union (and sometimes are obstacles). St. John of the Cross says that desires for revelations damage faith, become a source of delusion, and show a lack of humility. He denounces spiritual directors who hold the revelations of their penitents in great esteem.

Rules of Discernment

Discernment begins by examining the person who claims to have received revelation. Certain questions are important.

Concerning their human qualities:

1. Is the person well-balanced or given to hallucinations?
2. Does the person possess common sense or are they excessively emotional?
3. Is the person sincere or do they exaggerate?

Concerning their supernatural qualities:

1. Does the person have proven virtue?
2. Is the person humble or does he desire notoriety?
3. Does the person tell these revelations first to his spiritual director?
4. Has the person practiced heroic virtue or gone through the passive trials?

Some people are deceivers. Other people are good, but deceived.

The Revelation Itself

Any revelation contrary to faith or morals must be absolutely rejected. God cannot contradict himself. Therefore, any revelation against a dogma (e.g. there is no eternal punishment) or against morality (e.g. to break a commandment) must be rejected. All revelations which command the impossible should be rejected. In all revelations, a spiritual guide is essential.

The Effects

Jesus said, “By their fruit you shall know them” (Lk.6:43). A true revelation causes peace, joy and security. A diabolical vision causes sadness and discouragement. True revelations strengthen the soul in humility and obedience. False ones bring pride and disobedience.

“The Lord’s favors bring humility”. (Teresa) True revelation comes with immense gain and interior effects. The devil could never produce such good in the soul or bring about such great desires to serve God. Concerning important revelations, a confessor can ask for a divine sign. This might or might not be given.

A True Revelation With Some False Elements
Because human activity mixes with supernatural revelation, errors can arise. People can mix their own knowledge with the revealed truth. Sometimes, the revelation is misinterpreted. Her voices told St. Joan of Arc that she would be delivered through a great victory, meaning she would suffer heroic martyrdom. Saint Joan thought that she would not be killed.

At other times, the soul retouches the revelation to better explain it. Many who recorded the revelations of saints did this. We should imitate the Church, which first tested the revelations concerning Corpus Christi, the Sacred Heart and the Divine Mercy before accepting them as valid.

The Role of the Director

A spiritual director should not admire the revelations of his penitent but stress the practice of virtue. “At first, it is best to resist these discourses. If they come from God, they will even increase when resisted.” (St. Teresa) “The devil rejoices when he sees a soul seeking these revelations. This gives him many opportunities of planting delusions.” (St. John of the Cross)

The director should be kind and gain more details, so he can pass judgment. “Confessors should not be severe or show contempt. This would shut the door and cause fear of revealing what has happened.” (St. John of the Cross)

Sometimes, a revelation will ask the soul to begin a project. Jesus told St. Teresa to found a convent. She made this known to many other saints and got their advice before proceeding. The visionary must describe everything to a prudent director and follow his instructions.

The saints say:

1. There are four purely spiritual revelations – visions, revelations, locutions and spiritual feelings. These are visions of the soul (intellectual visions). (SJC)
2. God confirms his revelations when the soul consults his spiritual director. (SJC)
3. In the flights of the spirit, while the soul is outside of herself, great things are revealed. (STA)
4. Without the advice of a confessor, the soul must never act on divine revelations. (SJC)
5. To seek God’s favors is to seek self. To seek God is to forsake his favors. (SJC)
6. When the soul rejects visions, God increases his favors to the lowly soul. (SJC)
7. Sublime communications provide no certain proof of his presence, just as aridity does not prove his absence. (SJC)
8. If souls just left everything in God’s hands, they would be eminently perfect. (SJdeC)

Group Discussion:

1. Many private revelations are published these days. Do you read any regularly? What are their effects?
2. Discuss the importance of the spiritual direction.
6.31 - OTHER EXTRAORDINARY PHENOMENA

These phenomena vary greatly. Some manifestations exist as signs to others. Others are seemingly rewards that God shows to his special souls. While the saints manifested many of these phenomena, they never emphasized them, always focusing on prayer and charity. However, they should be described.

Levitation

In levitation, the person is raised off the ground, sometimes to great heights. This manifestation seems to be closely connected with the Eucharistic Real Presence. St. Philip Neri had to say Mass privately because after Communion he would levitate for a couple of hours. The altar boy would leave and place a sign on the door that Father Philip was saying Mass. He would then return a few hours later.

The most celebrated saint of levitation was St. Joseph Cupertino, for whom this frequently happened in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. St. Theresa of Avila writes clearly about her levitations, saying that she taught her sisters to hold her body down when they were in choir.

Levitation anticipates the prerogatives of our bodies in heaven. The devil counterfeits levitation and, during an exorcism, the body might be lifted off the ground.

Luminous Rays

This favor also anticipates the luminous qualities of the glorified body. When in ecstasy, there is a halo around the head or a glow enveloping the whole body. A warning must be given. Those involved in Spiritism regularly see “auras” around the head (like halos). People who claim to see these luminous rays, have often been involved in the occult.

Fragrant Odors

The mystic often gives off a very pleasing fragrance, either during life or at the time of death. This favor was noted about the stigma of St. Francis of Assisi. After death, the body of St. Teresa gave forth a perfume.

Prolonged Abstinence and Vigils

A number of saints went many years without food, except for the regular reception of Holy Communion. Other saints seemed to need very little sleep.

The Stigmata

In September, 1222, while in ecstasy on Mount Alvernia, St. Francis of Assisi received the wounds of Christ (in the hands, feet and side) from a Seraph angel. He carried these wounds until his death in 1226.

These wounds (in some fashion) frequently come to those who experience ecstasies. By these severe sufferings God prepares the mystics to be conformed to the suffering Christ.

The most famous modern-day saint with the stigmata was Padre Pio who suffered this for fifty years (1918 – 1968). The wounds healed right before his death.
Group Discussion:

1. Do you recall any other extraordinary phenomena surrounding the saints? How did the saints themselves view these signs?

2. Which is more important – external signs, external accomplishments, internal fervor?