

Devout Life Teachings – Part I

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[Index for Part I](#)

[Read the Other Parts](#)

Part I: Preparing For The Road

1.01 – ELIZABETH’S SPIRITUALITY

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.

1.02 – 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.

1.03 - THE UNITY PRAYER

Spiritualities

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

1.04 - 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.

1.05 - 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.

1.06 – 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!

1.07 - 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.

1.08 – 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.

1.09 – 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.

1.10 - 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.

1.11 - 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.

1.12 – 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!

1.13 – 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.

1.14: – 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.

1.15: – 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.

1.16 – 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.

1.17 – 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.

1.18 – 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.

1.19 – 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.

1.20 – 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.

1.21 – 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!

1.22 – 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).

1.23 – 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 – 1582) 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.

1.24 – 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.”

1.25 – 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.”

1.26 – 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."

1.28 – 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."

1.29 – 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.”

1.30 – RULE OF LIFE

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.”

1.31 – FORMING A FLAME OF LOVE COMMUNITY

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.

1.32 – 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.

1.33 – 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.

1.34 – 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.

1.35 – 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.

1.36 – 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.

1.37 – JUDGMENT

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.

1.38 - 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.

1.39 – 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.

1.40 - 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, eh transforms her into himself. The soul forgets all else and sees only God.

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

1.41 – 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.

1.42 – 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".

1.43 - 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.

1.44 - 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.

SAINTS

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.