

Devout Life Teachings – Part II

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Part II: The Purgative Stage

2.01 – 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?

2.02 – 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?

2.03 - 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?

2.04 - 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?

2.05 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?

2.06 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 than the acts of the intellect?

2.07 – 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?

2.08 – 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?

2.09 – 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)
4. 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:

1. Begin by reading the New Testament, especially the gospels and the Acts of the Apostles.
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.
4. Make just one resolution. Read the New Testament every day.
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 on.

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.)

1. How frequently do you go to confession? What difficulties do you experience? What blessings come?
2. 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, iPods, 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?

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 deSales

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)
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 can never 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?

2.38 – COMPLETING THE PURGATIVE STAGE

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?

Congratulations on getting this far!