

# Devout Life Teachings – Part III

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## Part III: The Illuminative Way

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### 3.01 – CHRIST THE LIGHT

St. Catherine of Genoa was a married woman with a very difficult husband. For five years she was entangled in the world. One day, when she went to confession and she was lifted to the highest summit of perfection in a single moment. She could never explain this road of perfection because she had never walked it.

The Sunrise

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

Why Called Illuminative?

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

Jesus’ Mortal Life

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

In the Middle of All History

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

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

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

## The Risen Jesus

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

## Some Saints

Saints always provide the best examples. St. Paul was killing Christians until he met the Risen Jesus. After that, he became the great apostle.

Peter was leaving Rome in fear when the Risen Jesus said those famous words, "Quo vadis?" (Where are you going?). He returned to Rome and accepted martyrdom.

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

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

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

The saints say:

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

Group Discussion:

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

## 3.02 – MAKING JESUS YOUR LORD

On December 27, 1673 (the feast of St. John), Our Lord appeared to St. Margaret Mary. He invited her to sit next to him as the Beloved Disciple had done at the Last Supper (resting on Jesus' heart). Jesus took her heart and put it within his own. Then, He placed

her heart (burning with divine fire) back in her breast. After that, she belonged to Him totally. That gift can be yours. Jesus wants you totally for Himself.

### False Lords

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

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

### An Example

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

### Who is Boss?

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

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

### The Saint on a Pedestal – St. Simeon the Stylite (390-459)

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

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

The saints say:

1. *Many have renounced Satan but they have not chosen Jesus as king. (SFdeS)*
2. *Jesus is like a king observing you from the mountain to see if you are fighting as his*

*soldier. (SLdeM)*

3. *3. My best remedy is to fix my mind on Jesus. (STA)*

4. *4. Many consider themselves as Christ's friends but they know him very little. (SJC)*

Group Discussion:

1. *1. What "false lords" have been enshrined on your pedestal? Are any still there? Do you want to remove them? What freedom came when you dethroned them?*

2. *2. Was there ever a moment when you accepted Jesus as your Lord? Do you experience his protection over you? Are you willing to set aside all that hinders his lordship over you? Do you want Jesus to be your Lord?*

### **3.03 – DISCOVERING YOUR IDENTITY IN CHRIST'S LIGHT**

Earthly and Heavenly

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

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

Experiences and Decisions

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

Always Follow Christ's Light

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

Living in the Light – St. Agnes (d304)

Agnes was beautiful, rich and sought in marriage by many young noblemen, even though she was only 13 years old. Agnes had her identity in Christ and she told these young suitors that she had consecrated her virginity to a heavenly husband. Her suitors went to

the emperor, believing that the threat of death would change her mind. She stayed firm in Christ and was sentenced to beheading. St. Ambrose wrote, "She went to her execution more joyfully than other brides go to their wedding." She knew who she was – the bride of the King of Kings.

#### A Final Note

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

The saints say:

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

#### Group Discussion

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

### **3.04 – LISTENING TO GOD**

#### **(THE INSPIRATIONS OF GRACE)**

##### Killing the Prophets

Jesus cried over Jerusalem saying, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you kill the prophets and stone those sent to you" (Mt.23:37). Jerusalem killed many prophets sent by God, including Jesus! God sends prophets to you, also. These are his inner inspirations, the good desires that invite you. As you make progress, God increases these desires. He speaks to you like a father. He is proud of you because you are trying to be his child. So, he tells you what to do. Inspirations come from external causes (like a homily or book, or a conversation). At other times, they come to you directly (inside you). Following these promptings is critical.

##### A Summer Inspiration

God placed a very important inspiration in the heart of a young seminarian. When he told his pastor, he received a clear direction. "Serve God at the newly formed Spanish Center." The whole direction of that seminarian's life depended on that inspiration and that advice. Accepting God's enlightenments leads to more light. In the final stages, God's light will totally dominate you (with your consent). Begin now to respond.

### Growth in Following Inspirations

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

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

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

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

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

The saints say:

1. *1. In this world we choose either eternal life or eternal death. There is no middle ground. (SFdeS)*
2. *2. Your future is in the hands of an infinitely good Father who will gladly reveal his plan. (FJdeC)*
3. *3. God's will is infinitely powerful and kind to all who follow it unreservedly. (FJdeC)*
4. *4. The soul must see that the only serious business in the world is to follow God's will perfectly. (SJdeC)*

5. *When I tried to run away from these interior inspirations, God said that on Judgment Day he would demand of me a great number of souls. (S. Faus.)*

Group Discussion:

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

### **3.05 – MOTHER TERESA AND ST. MARGARET MARY**

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

Mother Theresa

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

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

St. Margaret Mary

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

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

Third, God led her to a vow of perpetual chastity. "Without knowing their meaning, God's Spirit had me say over and over again, 'I consecrate to you my purity, and I make you a vow of perpetual chastity'."

As she entered the Visitation Convent at Paray-le-Monial, her inner life was a great drama of one soul always saying "yes" to God. After saying "yes" so often, she could never say "no". "I could not in any way withdraw from God's light which acted within me. Despite all my efforts, I could not disengage myself or prevent his workings. He had taken a deep possession of me".

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

### A Superficial Light

Some souls receive God’s light and begin to work for him, sometimes quite successfully.

However, when exterior success comes, they abandon their devout life. They cease to seek God’s inspirations and their work becomes superficial. Please remember. God wants to guide you and you must follow God’s inspirations until death.

The saints say:

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

Group Discussion:

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

### 3.06 – LIGHT FOR Your Call

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

#### My Father’s Teaching

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

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



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

#### A Bad Situation

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

#### A Plea

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

The saints say:

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

Group Discussion:

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

### **3.07 – THE LIGHT OF GOD WITHIN YOU**

In 1175, a 22 year old man from a noble family (St. Bernard of Clairvaux) had trained at the best university. Suddenly, he found a stirring within to leave everything behind. No one could dissuade him from this sudden change in direction. A few weeks later, he and 31 others (whom he brought along) went to St. Stephen, the abbot at Citeaux. With this decision, a new wave of prayer and devotion entered the Church. Bernard, and his

miracles, changed the history of Europe. He settled gigantic disputes. He established popes and emperors. All turned to him and sought his advice. The monasteries were filled again.

### Inspirations in Prayer

That story highlights three essential truths.

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

### The Importance of Inner Inspirations

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

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

### St. Peter Canicius (1521-1597)

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

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

### Jesus Your Light

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

The saints say:

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

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

Group Discussion:

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

### **3.08 – THE LIGHT OF AFFECTIVE PRAYER**

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

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

More Quickly & Regularly

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

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

Maintaining Affective Prayer

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

Finally a Fire

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

Close the Doors

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

St. Philip Neri (1515-1595)

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

The saints say:

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

Group Discussion:

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

### **3.09 – Praying Always – (Recollection)**

Personal Growth into Affective Prayer

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

God Within

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

## Praying Always

This path into recollection is very simple. First, you meditate. Then, you move quickly into affective prayer. By these religious feelings, you realize that God is everywhere. Finally, God takes you into yourself (St. Teresa's inner castle) and you experience God's indwelling through your Baptism.

Brother Lawrence is the best example. He felt closer to God during the day, than when in chapel. When he went on retreat, he experienced dryness. When he returned to his normal duties, he experienced God's closeness.

## Formal and Informal Prayer

You must pray formally (in your times of prayer) and informally (always aware of God's presence). You enjoy God in two ways.

1. By formal prayer you will have deep experiences of God.
2. By informal prayer (pausing and lifting your heart to God) you will enjoy a constant sense of his presence. (People often saw Pope John Paul II prostrate in prayer during his working hours.)

## The Prayer of God's Presence

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

## Brother Lawrence

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

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

(Go to the next chapter for more quotes.)

## In Practice

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

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

The saints say:

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

Group Discussion:

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

### **3.10 – BEING IN GOD'S PRESENCE – BROTHER LAWRENCE**

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

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

A Quote From Brother Lawrence

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

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

The saints say:

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

Group Discussion:

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

### **3.11 – THE HUMANITY OF JESUS**

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

Scriptures

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

### The Change

When Philip asked, "Lord, show us the Father", Jesus responded, "Philip, whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'. Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?" (Jn.14:9-10)

In the Old Testament, God forbade the Israelites to make any image. In the New Testament, God Himself made the perfect image, the humanity of Jesus. Jesus is the living image of God. "What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked upon and touched with our hands concerns the Word of life." (1Jn.1:1). Religious experiences must lead you to the humanity of Jesus. Just stay there. Go no further. In Jesus, dwells the full light of God. As Jesus said, "Whoever sees me, sees the Father".

### The Christmas Crib

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

The saints say:

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

Group Discussion:

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

## 3.12 – ASCENDING WITH JESUS' HUMANITY



## The Risen Jesus

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

## The Ascended Jesus

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

## Two Clear Teachings

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

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

## Power and Importance of Christ's Mysteries

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

The saints say:

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

Group Discussion:

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

## 3.13 – THE PRAYER OF INTERCESSION

Seeing the Mysteries of the Kingdom

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

## The Grace of Anticipation

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

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

## Saving Souls From Hell

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

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

## St. Francis deSales

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

The saints say:

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

Group Discussion:

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

### **3.14 – A MYSTIC’S EXPERIENCE OF THE TRINITY**

#### The Foundation of All Devotion

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

#### A Mystic’s Experience of the Trinity

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

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

#### The Father

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

#### The Holy Spirit

Six years later, the Father said to her “Look to the right”. She saw a silhouette, but still no identity. The Father said, “I am leading you”. The figure came closer and she saw a heart beating. The figure entered into her but did not pass through. A voice said, “Call me

KASHA, lover of your soul". The Spirit became very real to her as the Bridegroom of Mary and the Third Person of the Trinity. Later, her spiritual director said she had experienced spiritual marriage. Now, her ministry could come to its fullness.

## Conclusion

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

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

Brother Lawrence says:

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

The saints say:

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

Group Discussion:

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

## 3.15 – RETURNING TO YOUR FIRST FERVOR

## St. Teresa

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

### Leaving Love Behind

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

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

### Lukewarmness

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

### Your First Love

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

The saints say:

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

Group Discussion:

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

### **3.16 – THE INTERESTS OF JESUS**

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

#### A Story

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

#### Our Hearts

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

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

#### Jesus’ Special Friends

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

#### St. Benedict Biscop (628-690)

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

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

The saints say:

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

Group Discussion:

1. *1. What are Jesus' interests in your life? Do you try to serve his interests? How successful have you been?*
2. *2. What would be your own "vital interests"? Can you list these? Are you willing to sacrifice them for others, and for Jesus' interests?*

### **3.17 – FEAR IN SERVING JESUS**

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

Overwhelmed by the Task

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

God's Work

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

## A Special Story

When she was a little child, St. Frances Cabrini fell into a river and almost drowned. She was always afraid of water. Later, she founded the successful Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart and was quite content to establish her schools and houses all over Italy. However, a bishop told her to go to America. She consulted the Pope himself, Leo XIII, "Not to the East, but to the West", he said. This poor saint, deathly afraid of water, spent the rest of her life crossing the Atlantic Ocean innumerable times. Before sanctifying America, she had to conquer her fears.

The saints say:

1. *1. I was always impeded by fears until I resolved not to worry about my poor health. (STA)*
2. *2. God has given me the grace of having no fear. I will do my duty at any cost. (STL)*
3. *3. Mary will rid your heart of all fears. (SLdeM)*
4. *4. Why should you be a coward? Our King is all-powerful. (STA)*

Group Discussion:

1. *1. What hold does fear have over you? Have you allowed your fears to stop you from serving Jesus?*
2. *2. Are you growing more fearful or less fearful? What helps you to cast aside your fears? Where have you won victories over your fears?*

### **3.18 – THE NEW TESTAMENT LETTERS**

In the purgative stage, the devout soul should read the gospels because they were written to invite people to become disciples. After a while, you will want to read the New Testament letters because they were written to show devout souls how to make progress. St. Paul wrote to a unique audience. His communities contained baptized believers who had received the Holy Spirit and were awaiting Jesus' return. These early Christian communities had fashioned a new lifestyle and were living as if "the world was passing away". Such people had never existed before in history (not even in the most fervent days of Israel).

These believers had experienced fervor, accepted personal discipline, formed a devout community, and sought the interests of Jesus. The letters make little sense for anyone without a devout life. For the devout soul, the letters are logs for your spiritual fire.

These sacred authors and their new believers had their hearts afire, waiting for the King to return. If you read them with a fervent heart, your inner fire will leap up. Try to memorize some of the verses and feed your inner fire all day long.

The saints say:

1. *1. God still writes on the hearts of the devout the same words that he wrote in Scripture.*



(FjdeC)

2. *2. The Bible is God's mysterious utterance and its words are drops from God's ocean.*

(FjdeC)

3. *3. If you give your whole attention to God's word, you will not worry about your spiritual advancement. (FjdeC)*

4. *4. I was reading Paul's letters and I discovered my call when I came upon his words, "I shall show you a still more excellent way" (1Cor. 12:31). This was the way of love. (STA)*

Group Discussion:

1. *1. What letters have you read? What is your favorite letter? What are your favorite verses?*

2. *2. Do you have a set time and a regular place to read the letters? Are you committed to New Testament reading?*

## Part B: **GOODNESS OF LIFE**

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### **3.19 – PRACTICING IN THE VIRTUES**

You experience God by receiving his consolations. You serve God by practicing the virtues. Religious experiences are God's gifts. Virtues are your response to these gifts. In the Illuminative Stage, you begin a "season of refreshment" (Acts 3:20), a precious time which must not be squandered. The seeds of affective prayer must bring forth a harvest of virtues. Jesus said, "I work during the day, for the night comes when no one can work" (Jn.9:4). The Illuminative Stage is the day, a time filled with abundant light. Your work during this day is to acquire solid habits, so your spiritual house can withstand any trial."

Good Habits Buried Within

God has a purpose for every season of life. At every stage, we must acquire new virtues which prepare for the next stage.

A skilled artist fulfills his tasks easily because he has good habits, the lessons he learned as an apprentice. He takes these habits for granted and even forgets how he developed them. Yet, every time he plies his trade, these forgotten habits serve him well, allowing him to create his masterpieces.

This is the secret of the saints. They cultivated good habits for years. Buried deeply in their spirit, these virtues allow them to create masterpieces of holiness. Let's begin cultivating virtues with the three evangelical counsels (poverty, chastity and obedience).

Three Models of Virtue

Three Jesuit saints were born in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. All were known for their purity and becoming saints quickly, St. Aloysius Gonzola (23 years old), S. Stanislaus Kostka (18 years old) and St. John Benchmans (22 years).

Aloysius came from a rich family and had to resist his father's pressure so he could enter the Jesuits. He always wanted to become perfect quickly, so he practiced heroic virtue. When a plague broke out in Rome, he served the sick and caught their disease. He wrote to his mother not to be sad for he would welcome her to heaven.

Stanislaus was from a politically important family in Poland. When the Jesuit Provincial did not want to accept him into the Order for fear of his father, Stanislaus walked 350 miles from Vienna to Rome, was accepted into the Jesuits by St. Francis Borgia, and died 9 months later.

John was from Belgium. He was studying at a Jesuit school when he read the life of St. Aloysius, which turned his heart to the priesthood. He, too, went to Rome to study and, like Aloysius, he died of a contagious disease.

All three lives prove that the ladder of virtue can be climbed quickly if we maintain the eagerness of youth.

The saints say:

1. *1. Although I enjoyed many divine favors, I was still a beginner in virtue. (STA)*
2. *2. We cannot build towers without the foundations of virtues. (STA)*
3. *3. If we keep the commandments, God is obliged to give us salvation. (STA)*
4. *4. We must practice virtues but not always in the most excellent way. Heroic virtues are only counseled, not commanded. (SFdeS)*
5. *5. The essence of the virtues is the will of God. (S. Faus)*

Group Discussion:

1. *1. Do you see the value in establishing good habits? Are they within your reach? Are you motivated? Do you have a plan how to proceed?*
2. *2. What virtues do you practice? What virtues do you lack? What virtues would you like to practice?*

### **3.20 – POVERTY**

Jesus was born poor and died poor. He said, "The foxes have lairs and the birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (Lk.9:58). To some, he said "Go, sell everything and give to the poor" (Mt.19:21; Mk.10:21; Lk.18:22). To the apostles He said, "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." (Lk.18:25).

The Saints and Poverty

All the apostles and the early disciples took Jesus' teaching on poverty very seriously. After Pentecost, the newly baptized "had all things in common" and "would sell their property and possessions" (Acts 2:44-45).

St. Barnabas sold his property and put the money at the feet of the apostles (4:37). St. Paul used his skill as a tentmaker so he did not ask money for himself.

A few centuries later, St. Anthony inherited his father's possessions. At Mass, he heard Jesus words, "Go, sell all you have and give it to the poor". He did just that and thousands followed him into his life of evangelical poverty.

Eight hundred years later, another rich young man named Francis began to give away the clothes in his father's tailor factory. When his father dragged him before the Bishop, Francis took off all his clothes and left Assisi behind. Soon, many others joined Francis in his poverty. The question is, "Where do you begin in practicing poverty?"

### Where to Begin

Begin by tithing. Give ten percent of your income to God. This is clear biblical teaching. If you do this, God will help you to make correct financial decisions. You will get out of credit card debt and put your finances in order. In contrast, clinging to possessions has two bad effects. You do not trust God and your heart becomes hardened to people's needs. Practicing poverty allows your money to help others. Because you help others, God will give you many blessings.

### Two Stories

1. Thirty years ago, a rich couple went to Haiti for a vacation. Although living in the tourist hotel, they saw many who were mired in poverty. When they returned home, they reevaluated their lifestyle. They changed. Their neighbors thought they had gone insane, but the extra cars and the extra luxuries were all sold. They committed themselves to a lifetime of helping the poor.
2. The original founders of the Carmelites were so committed to poverty that they lived totally by the food given to them each day. At night, they gave away all the extra food. In this way, they would have nothing left and would need to beg again. Each day, they trusted God for their food.

Poverty is an inner fire that drives you to simplify your lifestyle. It has no external rules. Do everything under the guidance of your director.

### St. John the Almsgiver(550-619)

At 50, John was a rich widower who had buried all his children. Because he helped the poor, he won everybody's respect and was made the Archbishop of Alexandria.

Immediately, he asked for a list of the "masters", by this he meant the poor. He took the 7500 poorest people under his protection. When he found 80,000 pieces of gold in his church treasury, he distributed the money to hospitals and monasteries.

When his stewards complained, he told them the following. When I was young, a beautiful woman (representing charity) appeared and said, 'If you be my friend, I will lead you to the king'. He spent his eleven years as Archbishop, as a great friend of Queen Charity and of the poor.

The saints say:

1. *1. There is not enough paper and ink to describe the evils that come from rejoicing in earthly goods. (SJC)*
2. *2. How happy to see a soul saved on judgment day because they gave alms. (STA)*
3. *3. For Christ's sake, seek to be detached from everything in this world. (SJC)*
4. *4. A detached soul has a generosity to serve God. (SJC)*

Group Discussion:

1. *1. Do you set aside 10% for God's works? Do you see the importance of helping the poor?*
2. *2. Can you live a life of detachment? Do you understand what is needed? Can you see how detachment frees you to love God and people?*

### **3.21 - CHASTITY**

Because the world is drunk on sexual pleasures, writing about chastity is like preaching sobriety in a bar. The problem is this. Years ago, people tried to be chaste because sexual acts could lead to human conception. Now, contraception has removed that motive. If contraception does not work, abortion is available. With all these options, the world challenges the Church to defend its teachings on human sexuality. Fortunately, Pope John Paul II has responded to this challenge by writing, *Theology of the Body* and *Love and Responsibility*. This chapter outlines the Pope's thoughts in these two books.

#### **Theology of the Body**

"In the beginning", Adam accepted Eve as his equal, saying "At last, bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. This one shall be called woman". The man and woman were both naked, yet they felt no shame (Gen 2:23-25).

This biblical story outlines "sexuality from the beginning" (as God created it) before sin poisoned the relationship.

1. *1. Man and woman are equal.*
2. *2. Each accepts the other fully.*
3. *3. They have a passionate relationship. They "cling" to one another.*
4. *4. Their relationship is in order. They feel no shame in their nakedness.*

The Disordered Sexuality

Sin shatters this “beginning” order and the third chapter of Genesis describes these changes:

1. 1. The man blames the woman (3:10).
2. 2. The wife sees her husband as “master” (3:16).
3. 3. The marital passions have become “sexual urges” (3:16).
4. 4. They feel shame in the relationship and need clothes (3:21).
5. 5.

This is the disordered sexuality that the world foolishly accepts as normal. Only chastity overcomes this disorder and restores the correct personal relationship between man and woman.

### The Restored Sexuality

The Jews could not accept Jesus’ teaching against divorce because Moses allowed that practice. Jesus said that Moses was confronting disordered sexual practices that resulted from their “hardness of heart”. Jesus’ goal was to restore sexuality as it was “from the beginning” when “God made them male and female” (Mk.10:6). By Christian chastity, the sexual drive is reordered and correctly integrated into the human personality.

### **LOVE AND RESPONSIBILITY**

In this book, Pope John Paul II does not quote the bible much. Instead, he uses philosophical arguments, based upon the dignity of the human person.

Human sexual activity is not the same as animal sexuality. Sexual relations between a man and woman are personal and must preserve the dignity of the persons. Only chastity safeguards the personal dignity of the couple. Again, I will summarize the Pope’s thoughts:

1. 1. The male/female relationship contains three levels of attractions:
2. a. the bodily attraction (the lowest level),
3. b. the romantic attraction (a higher level) and
4. c. the personal attraction (the highest level).
5. 2. Most male/female relationships begin with the romantic attraction which leads the couple to spend time with each other. They find themselves caught up in a very emotional and personal drama.
6. 3. A disordered sexuality misuses romantic love and seeks bodily union before marriage. Seeking sexual relations before marriage is love of the body and not love of the person.
7. 4. If the couple is chaste, their romantic love ascends to the personal love. Chastity frees them to love each other as persons, not just as bodies.
8. 5. When two people reach the level of true personal love, they are candidates for a lifelong, faithful marriage. In marriage, all three attractions (bodily, romantic and personal) are active and strengthen each other.

## Conclusions

The Pope describes “love for the person”:

1. True personal love can be expressed sexually with only one person. So, it is faithful.
2. True personal love perseveres in “good times and in bad”. So it is permanent.
3. True personal love must be open to conception and not closed in on self. So, it is procreative.
4. Marriage is the only atmosphere which can adequately welcome children. Any other arrangement (like cohabitation) is too frail.
5. God instituted marriage (Gen. 1 and 2). Through marriage, couples receive God’s permission for their sexual activity.

St. Margaret of Scotland (1045-1093)

Of noble English birth, Margaret and her family had to flee to Scotland from the Court of King Edward. Seeing her virtues, King Malcolm of Scotland fell in love and married her. Her influence as queen mother was astounding. Malcolm became a great king, encouraging good priests and good teachers trained in the Catholic faith.

She had eight children. Three sons became kings of Scotland. Her daughter married King Henry I of England and was called “good Queen Maude”. She is a great example of holy married love.

The saints say:

1. *Guided only by sensual pleasure, man degrades himself and lives like the animals. (SFdeS)*
2. *Control your senses. Otherwise, you cannot enjoy the full divine presence. (BL)*
3. *By tasting the Spirit, the devout soul can live chastely. (SJC)*
4. *Our inner desires are at war. By Christ’s Blood, this war can cease. (STA)*

Group Discussion:

1. *Was the Pope’s teaching clear to you? Did you accept it easily or did you struggle with it? Did it enlighten you and give you a different outlook?*
2. *Where does the Pope’s teaching clash with the world’s viewpoint? Which seems better to you? Which is easier? Which is healthier?*

### **3.22 – THE SAINTS AND CHASTITY**

There are two groups of saints. Some are known for purity from their earliest years. These include Aloysius Gonzaga, Gerard Majella, Dominic Savio and innumerable others. Some saints are well-known for recovering their chastity, like Mary Magdalene, Augustine (who fathered a child out of wedlock), Charles de Foucauld and many, many others. The saints differ greatly, but sanctity always demands a total commitment to a chaste life.

## Two Stories

The life of Thomas Aquinas contains a powerful example of purity. His family opposed his becoming a Dominican and tried to change his mind. To entice him, they sent a beautiful woman to his room. Thomas grabbed a fire brand and the woman quickly fled. The dispute was finished.

The great modern example of purity is Maria Goretti. At 12 years of age, she was killed by Allesandro, who wanted sexual relations. After her death, she appeared to him in prison and brought about his conversion. He attended her canonization.

### St. Catherine of Sienna (1347-1380)

By a mystical experience, Jesus claimed Catherine as his own when she was just six years old. However, as she reached adolescence her family demanded that she fix her hair and dress in fashion. For a while she accepted their demands, but then decided to cut off her golden brown hair. In response, the family harried her. She bore these difficulties with patience until her father relented and allowed her to follow her call.

At 19, Jesus and Mary appeared to her. Our Lady lifted up her hand and Our Lord put a wedding ring on her finger. Her original consecration now led to great tasks for the Church.

### The Little Flower's Mother

Marie-Azelie Guerin had eight children. The three boys died in infancy. She bore these tragedies with great faith, saying that her personal sufferings were little, compared with her sons' heavenly glory.

Eight years before her death, she contracted cancer. Yet, she conceived and gave birth to her youngest, the Little Flower, four years before her own death. Her devotion led to great sacrifices for her family.

### An Important and Amusing Story

Zelie Guerin (the Little Flower's mother), lived with her parents in Alencon, France, with seemingly no thought of marriage. One day, as a young man (Louis Martin) walked by, God said to her, "that man will be your husband."

That night, she told her parents that she was going to get married. She had to acknowledge that she did not know the man's name or address and that he had no idea of his future bride and wedding.

Believing God, the parents discovered who the man was, and invited him to a party. Six months later, they were married. He had studied to be a priest for a while and believed that they should live as brother and sister. After a few years, Zelie took him to a priest who convinced him that having children was the better path for him.

## A Dissolute Culture

Early Christianity faced great problems in preaching chastity. The Jewish culture accepted divorce. Men committed adultery but only women were accountable for their adulterous behavior. Pagan cultures (like Corinth), were known for their debauchery. Yet, Paul preached the highest level of purity to those who had been quite tolerant of sexual license. Jesus and St. Paul never closed their eyes to the problems. They spelled out clear ideals, and encouraged believers to chastity, even amid great difficulties. Hopefully, the following chapters will do the same.

The saints say:

1. *1. A soul which is striving for this chastity must pray or it will never attain it. (S Faus)*
2. *2. When sinful desires guide the soul, it is like being led by a blind man. (SJC)*
3. *3. The flesh lost its state of innocence and now it wars against the spirit. (SCS)*
4. *4. God's grace seizes our hearts but never takes away our liberty. It's power entices but never forces. (SFdeS)*

Group Discussion:

1. *1. What attitudes among your friends support chastity and which attitudes tear it down?*
2. *2. What aspects of society cause you the greatest difficulties with chastity? Are there any aspects that support chastity?*

### **3.23 – CHASTITY IN PRACTICE**

Christian chastity has sound foundations:

1. *1. Sexuality is the deepest part of our being a person. We are male or female at the core of our existence.*
2. *2. Sexual attractions exist so that people marry and have children.*
3. *3. The modern culture has pushed back the age of marriage. As a result, young people experience sexual drives but have no marriage partner.*
4. *4. This can lead either to self-gratification, (especially for young men) or to sexual activity before marriage.*
5. *5. Even for married people, a disordered sexuality leads to sexual gratification away from the marital act, and to infidelity.*
6. *6. The modern world views Catholic chastity as impossible, unreal and out of touch. It has a "bad name", when really it has great wisdom.*

Needed Decisions

The devout soul in the illuminative stage must be committed to the following:

1. *1. Avoid all illicit sexual acts that involve another person. A devout soul must not draw someone else into their sin (even if the other person is quite willing).*
2. *2. Eliminate, as much as possible, the innumerable external sexual stimuli.*



3. 3. Limit, as far as possible, all illicit internal images and feelings.
4. 4. Avoid self-gratification (masturbation).
5. 5.

For men, this latter will be the most difficult. A devout soul can walk away from an illicit sexual partner and can put pornography aside. However, he cannot walk away from his own body and his sexual drive. He must use the sacrament of confession faithfully. Priests usually are very understanding of the person's struggle against solitary sin.

St. Francis of Assisi

Like everyone, Francis experienced sexual temptations. Like a saint, he did all he could to overcome them. On one occasion, the temptations were so strong that he threw himself among thorns to win the victory.

God rewarded this heroic effort. In the Portiuncula Church of Assisi, even to this day, roses grow without any thorns. If these roses are planted elsewhere, they grow their usual thorns. This phenomenon remains a perpetual tribute to the saint's victory over temptation.

The saints say:

1. *1. For every grace I made good use of, God gave me many more. (STL)*
2. *2. Unfortunately, we make weak resolutions. (STA)*
3. *3. The flesh is a frontier which the soul must cross by trampling underfoot illicit desires. (SJC)*
4. *4. Passions remain in us. This leads the soul to exercise virtue and spiritual courage. (SFdeS)*
5. *5. By cultivating the opposite tendency, the soul can correct its natural instincts. (SFdeS)*

Group discussion:

1. *1. How does chastity help to integrate sexuality into your personality? What have been the benefits of trying to be chaste?*
2. *2. What obstacles to chastity can you easily avoid? Which ones are difficult to avoid?*

### **3.24 – PRE-MARITAL CHASTITY**

Premarital Chastity

Young people used to marry much earlier. Most were still living at home on their wedding day. Two modern developments have made premarital chastity very difficult. People marry later and before marrying they have their own apartment/home. These circumstances have led to very high percentage of cohabitation before marriage. The cultural safeguards for chastity have been removed. Culture changes but God's law does not.

## False Views

In our culture, most couples assume that sexual relations are a normal part of dating. As the relationship develops, they feel at liberty to cohabit. Couples preparing for a Catholic wedding might even go off together on vacation. (That used to be called the honeymoon.) Catholic colleges have co-ed dorms. Sexual activity is everywhere and chastity sits on the sidelines.

Those attitudes come from the widescale acceptance of contraceptives (and abortion). The ability to have intercourse without conception (or without birth) removes a primary motive for abstinence. The devout life goes against this culture. The devout person decides to “wait for marriage”. Gaining this goal requires that the couple have a personal spirituality and a mutual agreement to “wait until marriage”. This desire for pre-marital chastity brings a great gift.

## The Greatest Earthly Reward

By “waiting until marriage”, you have a better chance to marry the right person. Dating is a selecting process. Having sexual relations before marriage blinds and entraps. (One partner might use sexual activity to ensnare another. Chastity allows you to evaluate the other person objectively and to break the relationship (with fewer regrets) if this is not the right person.

## False Concepts

Couples falsely believe that their romantic love should lead to the bedroom. This is a total disaster, filled with self-love and twisted emotions. Chastity is absolutely required if the two persons are to keep their eyes open to confront problems.

When you enter a romantic relationship, you must demand chastity (of yourself and the other). God will then give you light to know whether to continue in this relationship or to walk away. Pre-marital relations put out all the lights and place you in darkness, at the very moment when you are making the most important decision in your life – who to marry.

## A Special Gift

Chastity before marriage means you can trust your partner after marriage. If your partner broke God’s law with you, why won’t they do the same with another? Pre-marital chastity is the best preparation for a permanent and faithful marriage.

The saints say:

1. *Nothing is as strong as love or as sweet as its strength. (SFdeS)*
2. *Desires are like discontented children, never allowing their mother to rest. They are like cataracts, which blind us. We call good, evil and evil, good. (SJC)*
3. *Desire awakens, but only love acts. Desire spreads the soul’s wings. Love makes her*

*fly. (SFdeS)*

4. *4. A loving nature contains the danger of loving wrongly. (SFdeS)*

Group Discussion:

1. *1. How do your ideas of pre-marital chastity conflict with the world's ideas? What effect have contraception and abortion had upon couples?*
2. *2. Do you see the connection between chastity and choosing the right marriage partner? What conflicts arise in the dating period?*

### **3.25 – MARITAL CHASTITY**

Marital Chastity

In a good marriage, each partner must practice a great deal of sexual self-restraint. For example, the needed tenderness in love-making comes only from chaste love. In many circumstances (such as illness) true love refrains from intercourse. Also, every marriage has periods which demand total continence (as in the late stages of pregnancy and in times of physical separation). Trying to be pure before marriage pays big dividends toward a good sexual life in marriage.

Marital Thoughtfulness

Within marriage, chastity brings about thoughtfulness, tenderness in lovemaking and an understanding (when intercourse must be postponed). Lack of chastity causes resentment and sometimes even frigidity. Chastity raises the sexual act above the animal level and makes it an expression of true love for the person.

Artificial Contraception

Marital chastity will not use artificial contraception. Pope John Paul II explains the reasons for this teaching.

1. *1. Human sexuality is not animal sexuality because it takes place on the personal level.*
2. *2. The couple must treat each other as persons, especially in the marital act.*
3. *3. The woman's body already contains natural limitations to conception.*
4. *4. She has only a definite number of years to bear children, and, within those years, only certain cycles of fertility.*
5. *5. In choosing to have children or to postpone them, the couple should examine these bodily laws.*
6. *6. To refuse to learn them is to reject God's law, which is built into our bodies.*
7. *7. To respect the woman's body (in its fertility and non-fertility) is the greatest love a husband can have.*
8. *8. Artificial contraception treats the woman's body as a thing, a source of male pleasure.*
9. *9. Respecting each other's bodies is the door to permanency and fidelity. All of the*

Pope's insights are contained in his book, "Love and Responsibility".

### Need for Devout Life

Living up to that ideal demands great sexual sacrifices, which are impossible unless the couple shares a devout life. Using Natural Family Planning during the years of child-bearing requires that the couple have a mutually shared spirituality. They also need a good confessor to guide the couple in their attempts to live out a total marital purity.

### The Good Result

Having all the children that God might send or limiting the number by Natural Family Planning is heroic sanctity, with great results. The relationship has an integrity and a wholeness. To practice Natural Family Planning, the couple must communicate on the deepest level and must constantly show consideration. The price is very high but the personal and marital benefits are also gigantic. This issue is very central to every marriage. The greatest proof of this teaching is the extremely low percentage of divorce among those couples who practice Natural Family Planning.

The saints say:

1. *1. We quickly conform ourselves to whatever we love. (SFdeS)*
2. *2. Love is perfect only when the lovers reach an equality and are mutually transformed into each other. (SJC)*
3. *3. Love is a flame which consumes and always seeks to benefit whomever it cherishes. (SCG)*
4. *4. Love cannot be limited. A limited love is not pure and simple. (SCG)*

Group Discussion:

1. *1. What results from thoughtfulness and tenderness within marriage? From selfishness?*
2. *2. How is God's law built into our human bodies (as Pope John Paul II taught)? Can you see the long-term harm done by artificial contraception? What are its effects?*

### **3.26 – VIRGINITY FOR THE KINGDOM**

Jesus and St. Paul placed before the world an unheard of ideal, virginity for the kingdom. They believed that the Holy Spirit's presence could be so intense that the devout soul could sacrifice even marriage to spread the kingdom.

### Jesus' New Teaching

In the Old Testament, Israel did not esteem virginity because children were God's blessing. When Jesus taught that men could not divorce their wives, the puzzled apostles said, "If that is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry" (Mt 19:10). At that point, Jesus went further and praised those who "renounce marriage for the sake of the

Kingdom" "Whoever can accept this, ought to accept it". (Mt 19:12). What a scene! The apostles cannot accept the permanency of marriage and Jesus talks about a permanent commitment to virginity.

### The New Power

Jesus wanted his disciples to practice virginity because He would send the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. By the Spirit's power, his disciples would be faithful in permanent marriages and, in some cases, would even sacrifice marriage itself. By a devout life, the person can practice chastity within marriage, and in some cases, totally renounce sexual activity for the kingdom. Virginity frees the person to accept a call to contemplation and to serve the kingdom.

### St. Agnes (d.304)

She consecrated herself as a virgin but her riches and beauty attracted many men. She told them all that she had a heavenly husband. They denounced her as a Christian to the Roman governor, hoping to shake her resolve.

The judge, at first, used promises, then threats and finally, torture. At 13, she was martyred. Over the centuries, she has become the Christian symbol of virginity for the kingdom.

### St. Rose of Lima (d. 1500)

Because Rose was beautiful, her parents wanted her to marry, so they could benefit financially. However, Rose had taken St. Catherine of Sienna (1347 – 1380) for her model, seeking to be a Bride of Christ. Because she sold flowers to help her parents, they allowed her to live in the hermitage she had built. Both were satisfied.

The saints say:

1. *1. When we began to say our vows, Jesus appeared with a golden band around his waist. He removed it and put it around my waist. Since then, I have had no attacks against the virtue of chastity. (S. Faust.)*
2. *2. Love is never idle. It is always in motion, throwing out sparks of love. (SJC)*
3. *3. This nuptial robe of love is the shortest and safest way to the kingdom. (SCG)*
4. *4. The infinite God desires infinite love. (SCS)*

Group Discussion:

1. *1. Are not all called to virginity, at least for a period of time? Discuss the value of perpetual virginity in serving the kingdom.*
2. *2. What value do you see in virginity? What is its real goals? Does the world accept it or reject it?*

### 3.27 – THE HOLY SPIRIT’S SEXUAL REVOLUTION

At Pentecost, the Spirit brought about the true “sexual revolution”. Single disciples lived chastely. Married disciples were faithful to their spouses. Some believers, like St. Paul, even permanently renounced marriage for the kingdom. A whole new tradition of chastity for the kingdom arose within Christianity. For 2000 years, many consecrated souls have embraced this tradition of consecrated virginity. St. Paul’s teaching is clear:

Paul’s Teaching (1Cor.7: 25-28)

1. 1. A believer who wishes to marry commits no sin.
2. 2. However, because “the world in its present form is passing away”, a believer should be intent upon the Lord.
3. 3. When people marry they “are divided”. Besides thinking of the Lord’s interests, they must also think of their spouse.
4. 4. An unmarried person is “concerned about the things of the Lord, so they can be holy in both body and spirit.”

Practical Thoughts on Virginity

1. 1. Most believers are called to marriage. This is their “perfect way” to reach heaven.
2. 2. This special call to virginity comes from the Holy Spirit in two ways.
3. a. Some are touched deeply by God and accept an inner call to virginity.
4. b. Others are attracted to the priesthood or religious life. To accept this call, they accept lifelong virginity, believing that they can live this discipline.

Virginity and Religious Experiences

A person called to virginity must have a life of daily religious experiences. Only these religious experiences make virginity for the kingdom easy to accept. While experiencing God, the person does not feel they are “missing out”. There are no “inner regrets.” Without religious experiences, there is a great void. To be psychologically healthy, virginity for the Kingdom requires religious experiences. Practicing virginity without prayer is like trying to plant a tree in a desert and expecting it to bloom. It won’t.

In the early 1970’s, hundreds of young people were touched by the Holy Spirit. Many of these entered religious life and faithfully serve the Church. Many even considered embracing a single life in the world. The point is this. Religious experiences were leading them to a commitment to Jesus which, in some cases, included a commitment to perpetual virginity. Whether single or married, a soul touched by devotion embraces Jesus’ gospel message of chastity.

St. Columban (540-615)

St. Columban was born in Ireland and as a young man had a difficult struggle to be pure. In fact, a number of beautiful young women caused him many temptations as they sought his affections. He admits that he was grievously tempted to yield.

Instead, he sought the advice of a holy religious woman who said, "Do you think that you can avoid these women? Look at Samson with Delilah and David with Bathsheba. Turn away from this river of temptation." Columban took this advice seriously. He became a monk, later a missionary to Europe and the founder of great monasteries. All because he cherished purity.

The saints say:

1. *1. When once I love, I love forever. (STL)*
2. *2. Passing by, Jesus saw that I was ripe for love, and I wanted to love him passionately. (STL)*
3. *3. Love includes all vocations. Because it is eternal, it embraces every time and place. (STL)*
4. *4. "My God, I love you with all my heart" is not just an expression. It impels your soul to lay hold of God, with emotions beyond all description. (BL)*

Group Discussion:

1. *1. Why is a devout life needed for Christian purity? What is the Holy Spirit's role in sexual purity?*
2. *2. Why would a person committed to virginity feel "they were missing out"? How is that void filled?*

### **3.28 – OBEDIENCE**

"He was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross". (Phil 2:8)

Adam and Eve said their "no" and began man's separation from God. Mary said her "yes" to the angel Gabriel and began man's reconciliation with God.

Hearing the Right Voice

Obedience comes from a Latin word meaning "to listen to". A person obeys the voice which they listen to. In the world, you listen to many voices. By devout obedience, you listen to God's divine voice. The apostles listened to God when they were hauled before the Jewish authorities. They said, "Is it right for us to obey you rather than God?" (Acts 4:19) Obeying God, they defied the authorities and continued to preach.

In the purgative way, obedience extended to God's Ten Commandments. In the illuminative stage, obedience reaches all of your decisions. A child of the light walks in total obedience.

A Saint

St Aloysius Gonzaga, a Jesuit seminarian, was playing chess at recreation. Knowing his holiness, a friend asked, "What would you do if you knew you would die within this hour of recreation?" "I would just continue playing chess, for this is God's will for me". Every moment, the devout soul seeks only one thing, to say "yes" to God's will. When your obedience becomes a total "yes" to God, you are like Jesus, "consecrated in truth" (Jn.17:19). Jesus said, "A son can only do what he sees the father doing" (Jn. 5:19).

### The Church's Voice

A final note. The devout person obeys the Church's voice. When Satan tries to destroy devout souls, they must trust the Church. Just do what the Church teaches. Obey your confessor. That is all God asks. When devout souls hear these words, they are filled with peace. The darkness is swept away and they see the road clearly.

Fear only one thing. Fear your free will that can say "no" to God. Obedience forms a habit of saying "yes" to God. As this grows stronger, your "no" fades away. As the devout soul stops listening to many voices, the Master's voice grows clearer.

### Who Can Destroy You?

The saints feared no one but themselves. They realized that they could say "no" to God's will. St. Vincent DePaul used to say, "God, please do not trust Vincent". You are the only one who can destroy yourself, when you say a "No" and not a "Yes" to God's will.

### St. Gerard Majella (1726-1755)

Gerard joined the Redemptorists and was professed by its founder, St. Alphonsus Liguori. Everyone saw his great holiness that included ecstasies, levitations and supernatural knowledge of people and events.

However, to everyone's surprise, a woman accused Gerard of inappropriate sexual behavior. He said nothing and lived under suspicion for three months until she admitted her lies. Gerard explained to St. Alphonsus that he was just obeying the rule that a religious was not to excuse himself. Alphonsus admired the great obedience but said that, at times, that rule does not apply.

The saints say:

1. *1. A disobedient soul will win no victories even if the Lord Jesus Himself, in person, were to hear his confession. (S.Faus)*
2. *2. If a soul stops being guided by the compass of obedience, it strays into the desert where the waters of grace quickly fail. (STL)*
3. *3. For thirty years, Jesus gave more glory to His Father by being obedient to Mary than if he worked his greatest miracles. (SLdeM)*
4. *4. How can any child obedient to Mary (God's wise director) go astray from eternal life? (SLdeM)*



Group Discussion:

1. *1. What "voices" do you listen to? Who is influencing you by their words?*
2. *2. Where do you hear God's word? How strong is his word in you? What are the effects of obedience to God's words?*

### **3.29 – THE MORAL & THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES**

Your human nature contains many natural powers (the five senses, and the interior powers of imagination, memory, intellect and free will). Your baptismal nature gives you many supernatural powers (called infused virtues). Your natural powers increase automatically. Your infused virtues grow only by personal devotion.

Three Stages of Virtues

In the purgative stage, these infused virtues are weak (hampered by habits of sin). In the illuminative stage, they awaken and assert their influence. In the unitive stage, the gifts of the Holy Spirit lifts these virtues to a level far beyond your own power.

Father Tanquerery writes, "God dwelling in our souls gives us a supernatural organism which enables us to perform God-like acts". This "organism" is the moral and theological virtues infused at Baptism. The saints highlight four moral virtues (prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance) and the three theological virtues (faith, hope and charity).

These seven virtues are powerful seeds bringing forth a gigantic harvest of good fruits. Let's study all seven.

An Outline of the Seven Virtues

*The Moral Virtues* (putting order in your Christian life)

Prudence – choosing wisely

Justice – giving to others what is owed to them

Fortitude – gaining strength to overcome obstacles

Temperance – moderating the attractions of sensual pleasure

*The Theological Virtues* (uniting you with God)

Faith – by which you believe what God has revealed

Hope – by which you trust that God will fulfill his promises

Love – by which you unite yourself with God

The saints say:

1. *1. You will never regret the difficulties in gaining the virtues. (STA)*

2. *2. The King of Glory will be united with us only if we try to attain the greatest virtues. (STA)*
3. *3. Faith points to the Promised Land. Hope provides Manna. Only Charity leads us. (SFdeS)*
4. *4. Baptism must sow a vigorous seed of all the virtues in the soul. (STL)*

Group Discussion:

1. *1. Do you find yourself growing in the virtues? What ones do you practice well? What others do you need?*
2. *2. Do you understand the distinction between moral virtues and theological virtues? They are all infused. What is an infused virtue?*

### **3.30 – PRUDENCE**

Over three hundred years ago, a brilliant student at the University of Paris looked forward to a great career (as a professor). One day, an older man joined the young students. He, too, at one time had dreamed of a great career (as a soldier). However, after the light of God had led him into two years of prayer, his priorities changed from soldier to priesthood. That is why he came to study. The young man was St. Francis Xavier. The older man, St. Ignatius of Loyola. Both had prudence. Francis had an earthly prudence that led him to teach. Ignatius had a supernatural prudence that led him to holiness. Ever so slowly, Francis set aside his earthly dreams to accept Ignatius' goal of holiness.

A Letter

Years later, while in India, Francis wrote these words to Ignatius, "Again and again, I have thought of going to the universities of Europe, especially Paris and crying out like a madman. Many people here in India are not becoming Christians because there is nobody to preach. I wish they would work as hard at this as they do at their books and so settle their accounts with God for the talents he has entrusted to them". These words come from supernatural prudence.

Different Goals

The difference between worldly prudence and supernatural prudence is their goal. Worldly prudence judges everything by earthly goals. Supernatural prudence raises its eyes to heavenly goals.

Jesus contrasted these two goals. "What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul?" (Lk.9:25). He told his disciples, "Seek first the Kingdom of God and all these things will be given you besides" (Mt 6:33).

Earthly prudence often conflicts with supernatural prudence. People put great store on their bank accounts but Jesus says "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth." People can be crafty and self-seeking but Jesus says, "Become like a little child."

## Hearing A Different Voice

By supernatural prudence, the saints all shared the same goal. They wanted to hear Jesus say to them, "Well done, good and faithful servant. Inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." (Mt 25:34) The saints always asked, "How does this present decision affect eternity? How will I see this decision when I come before Jesus? Will I be happy or sad that I chose it?"

## The Goals of the Master

Prudence reshuffles your values. Worldly riches fade. God's kingdom becomes the pearl of a great price. The saints shaped their decisions by this new wisdom.

Another image will make the point. Only Jesus sees the world as it really is. The rest of us have an upside-down view. Unfortunately, when Jesus speaks, we think his world view is upside-down. By supernatural prudence, we gain Jesus' world-view. We wonder, "Why didn't I see this before? Why didn't I see this when I was younger?" Don't worry. God still has enough time to make you perfect.

## A Final Word

Jesus told a parable about the rich man and the beggar, Lazarus. The rich man had lots of earthly prudence. After all, he saved his money and dined in luxury every day. However, this "prudence" was no prudence at all. He ended up in hell. If he had supernatural prudence, he would have asked Lazarus to dine with him. He would have washed his sores and given him a place to sleep. At this point, his friends would question his earthly "prudence". However, his supernatural prudence would have gained a place right next to Lazarus in Abraham's bosom.

## St. Katherine Drexel

She was a rich and beautiful debutante, but also filled with the greatest supernatural prudence. She saw the need for Catholicism among the African-Americans and among the Native Americans (through a Philadelphia priest who became a bishop).

She asked Pope Leo XIV to send missionaries to the United States. He replied, "You must found your own congregation". (She was a lay person at the time.) Prudence made her set aside her earthly riches and found the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament.

The saints say:

1. *1. The soul must see that the only serious business in the world is to follow God's will perfectly. (FJdeC)*
2. *2. The world sees someone as wise who is a keen businessman and turns everything to his own profit. (SLdeM)*
3. *3. A soul with prudence does not prize highly what the world cherishes. (STA)*
4. *4. Always remember. Time passes quickly. This shows the uselessness of the world's*

*wealth, which worldly people give up much sleep to gain. (STA)*

Group Discussion:

1. *1. What prominent people are naturally prudent but supernaturally are fools? When have you been supernaturally foolish in your decisions? When did you seek after the wrong goal?*
2. *2. Are you becoming supernaturally prudent? How does this new prudence shape your decisions?*

### **3.31 – JUSTICE**

St. James describes a believer who brings forth no acts of justice. "If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day and one of you says, 'Go in peace, keep warm and eat well' but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it?" (2:16) This injustice contrasts with the justice practiced by Saint Joseph.

The Example of Joseph

St. Joseph had a dilemma. His fiancé, Mary, was pregnant and Joseph was not the father. Matthew writes, "Joseph, her husband, since he was a just man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly" (1:19). Joseph had this dilemma because "he was a just man".

If he were selfish, he would do whatever he wanted. However, being just, Joseph found himself in the middle. He had accepted both his obligations to God (as manifested in the Mosaic Law) and his obligations to Mary (the one whom he loved). So, he "decided to divorce her quietly", thus fulfilling his obligations to both God and to Mary.

How important was this decision! Not exposing Mary to public shame allowed Joseph to marry her when he learned of her virginal conception. His decision not to have Mary killed, was even more important. The Messiah would have died within her.

Three Types of Justice

We must practice justice toward God, others and the community (social justice). Practicing justice toward God is based on God's rights over us. Jesus said "render to God what is God's" (Mt.22:21). "What is God's?" The atheist answers "Absolutely nothing". The cynic says "Very little". The believer says, "Very much". The saint says "absolutely everything". For the saints, God is "all in all". He has done everything and we are all debtors, totally unable to repay God.

When God took Teresa of Avila to hell and revealed her place there, she realized how much she owed him. When God multiplied his spiritual favors, she exclaimed, "I am deeper in debt to you every day". We are all debtors. Without Jesus, we were headed toward a grave of total death. But "When we were dead in our sins, God brought us to life with Christ" (Eph.2:5).

## Justice to Other Persons

Justice is as extensive as human relationships. Children and parents must be just to each other. Employers must be just to employees (and vice versa). So must friends and spouses. Everyone, in every relationship, must be just. Justice respects everyone as a person, demanding both kindness and thoughtfulness.

A priest works with a poor Spanish-speaking community. Helping them is really his greatest privilege. They owe him no debt. He owes them so much. The priest always has telephone messages to return. In his debt to the people, the messages from the poor Spanish always get responded to before the messages.

People talk much about charity (which extends to few) and overlook justice (that involves everyone). "O devout soul, open your eyes to all the demands of justice. Open your heart to all the opportunities for justice and you will earn the same praise as St. Joseph. 'He was a just man'".

## Social Justice

Cardinal Helder Camara of Brazil had a powerful saying about social justice. "When I relieve poverty, I am called a saint. When I question the economic systems that create poverty, I am called a Communist".

For centuries, cultures lived in isolation. Now, global communication has awakened everyone to the great inequalities. However, the awakening hasn't reversed a situation that grows worse daily. Political solutions fail. However, personal initiatives seem to have success, sometimes on a wide scale.

Decades ago, President Carter saw the problem of river blindness caused by the bite of a fly in underdeveloped countries. When he sought a solution, a scientist at Merck developed a medicine (Mectizan) which stopped and prevented the disease. The company treated everyone free of charge.

## Practicing Justice

Who knows where your devout life will lead you? Let this virtue of justice awaken you to the inequalities of human existence. Ask a simple question, "What can I do to soften the hardships of human existence?" Then you will not just say "Keep warm and eat well." You will try to restore justice to the earth.

## St. Stanislaus Kostka (1550-1568)

Stanislaus became "perfect in a short time". (He died at 18.) By accepting injustices, his life was a long series of suffering imposed by others.

First, his brother bullied him. This caused him to grow close to death. Then, he wanted to enter the Jesuits, but his father threatened him. He had to leave Poland and go to Rome where St. Francis Borgia saw his holiness and accepted him into the Jesuits. Upon entering any church, his face became like fire and at Communion he went into ecstasy.

By his acceptance of injustice, he won out over many harsh personalities. Learning of his death, his brother repented of his actions and became a Jesuit himself. His vocation was the fruit of Stanislaus' suffering for justice's sake.

The saints say:

1. *1. Justice is a love which serves God. Therefore, it treats all men fairly. (SFdeS)*
2. *2. God could have demanded our service without any salary because we owe him a thousand debts. (SFdeS)*
3. *3. As the soul grows richer and richer, she falls deeper and deeper in God's debt. (STA)*
4. *4. Justice is not something that stays shut up in one's heart. (STL)*

Group Discussion:

1. *1. When are people unjust to you? When are you unjust to others? Is justice the highest virtue? Is it often overlooked?*
2. *2. What rights do other people have? Do you respect their rights? Do you feel any call to social justice? Do people claim their "rights" and not accept their "duties"?*

### **3.32 – FORTITUDE**

Getting You to the Finish Line

Every devout life faces a "test of time", the difficulty of continuing on a path of daily sacrifice until death. To help you "to get to the finish line", God infused fortitude into your soul, the power to be faithful to God until the very end. Let's study some saints.

The Saints

The most famous early martyr was St. Ignatius of Antioch, (d.107). On his way to Rome to die, he wrote letters to various churches, begging them not to hinder his death. "I am writing to all the churches to let it be known that I will gladly die for God, if only you do not stand in my way. I plead with you. Show me no untimely kindness. Give me the privilege of imitating the passion of my God."

He was also aware of his own fears that could turn him away from the prize. He wrote, "When I see you, if I should then beg you to intervene in my behalf, do not believe what I say. Believe instead what I am writing to you now."

St John Brebeuf, the Jesuit martyr, knew that "getting to the end" would be extremely difficult in his mission to the Indians. He wrote, "I vow to you, Jesus my Savior, that as far as I have the strength, I will never fail to accept the grace of martyrdom. I bind myself

this way for the rest of my life. I will have neither permission nor freedom to refuse opportunities of shedding my blood for you. On receiving the blow of death, I shall accept it from your hands. May I die only for you." That death blow came on March 16, 1649, after hours of cruel torture.

### Daily Fortitude

Daily fortitude is often greater than martyrdom. Look at the fortitude of Pope John Paul II in the Solidarity crisis. Early in his pontificate, the Pope had committed his papacy to the success of Solidarity. Then came the military crackdown. Seemingly, all his plans were in ruins. What inner questioning and doubts must have arisen? How many lonely moments? By fortitude, he stayed with his direction and was vindicated by the complete collapse of Communism. A fitting reward for his fortitude.

### Staying with the Course

Whether it is John Brebeuf, Ignatius, or Pope John Paul II, fortitude is the virtue which keeps the Devout Soul on course. John Brebeuf writes, "I bind myself in this way for the rest of my life".

The above examples are fortitude in grand enterprises. For now, bind yourself to fortitude in your devout life. Do not turn away from your daily mental prayer and your daily growth in the virtues. Don't forget. Fortitude completes the task and doesn't walk away when obstacles appear. The devout life is not earthly greatness (which makes you well-known). It is God's greatness (which makes you live forever). Don't quit. You have only one lifetime and one finish line. Just get there.

### Jesus' Greatness

Jesus revealed the secrets of his passion to Luisa Picaretta. She writes that the final 20 minutes on the cross were the worst of all. When Jesus was so close to the goal, the finish line seemed so far away. Only by fortitude, could Jesus proclaim, "It is finished". Our greatest hope is that we will say the same sentence some day.

The saints say:

1. *1. Don't lose your courage. Otherwise, you will lose many blessings (STA)*
2. *2. Be persuaded that you have a long way to go. (FjdeC)*
3. *3. To stay firm in a torrent, to sail through turbulent seas, to be calm in a dangerous countryside, are miracles which Mary works for her children. (SLdeM)*
4. *4. Let the Lord test you. He knows how to do it well. (STA)*

Group Discussion:

1. *1. What times in your life did you need fortitude? Did you ever give up and not persevere in some task?*
2. *2. What present goals do you have that require fortitude? Do you have friends that*

*support you? Can you stand alone, when needed?*

### **3.33 – TEMPERANCE**

God created our inner desires for pleasure. However, these appetites often overflow their banks and take control of our lives. Temperance vanquishes these overflowing powers by moderating your appetites.

#### Two Appetites

Two appetites are very essential, the attraction to nourishment (to preserve your own life) and the attraction for sexual activity (to preserve the human race). Previous chapters taught about chastity. This chapter will focus on moderation of food and drink.

#### Matt Talbot

Matt Talbot spent his free time in the bar, a slave to the addiction of alcohol. One day, by God's grace, he had no money. Strangely enough, his friends refused to buy him a drink and the owner threw him out. At that moment, Matt Talbot visited the priest to take the pledge of sobriety. How did he stay sober for the rest of his life? He began by rising early and attending Mass. Then came the religious experiences and the solid virtues. Finally, there were the heroic deeds of hours of prayer. These are the familiar steps to perfection. For Matt Talbot, the important virtue was temperance.

#### Moderation in Food

Although moderation in food is not as dramatic, some fasting is an essential part of devotion. Even science realizes the value of limiting daily calories. For years, the evidence has been plain. Monks and cloistered religious, who limit their food, live many more years than others. As the world clamors for longer and healthier lives, science says that the only provable cause of longevity is a limitation of daily calories (a solution we don't like to hear).

#### Where to Begin?

Temperance should begin with snacks (eating between meals) and with alcohol consumption (limiting even the legitimate use). After these are accomplished, the soul must begin some form of fasting.

#### A Personal Story

For years, a priest was aware of Our Blessed Mother's request (at Medjugorje) that her followers fast on bread and water (on Wednesday and Friday). He sought out a brother priest (Father Robert Faricy, S.J.) who kept that fast. Fr. Faricy said, "Fasting is a gift. Do you want the gift?" The priest said, "Yes". Fr. Faricy just prayed for the gift, giving no



rules and no advice. Yet, after that prayer, the priest found himself fasting on Wednesday and Friday. He feels no different on these days because the body adjusts and accepts the imposed limitation upon its cravings.

### Some Suggestions

1. 1. Make healthy choices and put aside foods that are not good for your body.
2. 2. Restrict yourself to eating at meals.
3. 3. At each meal, make some little sacrifice. (It is easier to do this at the beginning of the meal.)
4. 4. Be strict with yourself concerning wine, beer and even caffeine.
5. 5. Making little sacrifices of food (that can happen so often in the day) is very important.
6. 6. Fasting at special times (like Lent) causes some physical weakness. However, this translates into increased patience and spiritual humility.
7. 7. Do all your fasting under obedience to your spiritual guide.
8. 8. Fasting does not need to be heroic. Its purpose is to remind you that you belong to God.

### Your devout life

These four moral virtues (prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance) get your life in order. However, you need the three theological virtues (faith, hope and charity) to unite your soul with God. The following chapters explain these theological powers.

### The saints say:

1. *1. We can weaken these appetites but never destroy them. They live with us and will die only when we die. (SFdeS)*
2. *2. Attachments to appetites make a soul inconsistent in serving God. (SJC)*
3. *3. A soul with disordered desires cannot appreciate God's things. (SJC)*
4. *4. God works powerfully when the soul keeps nothing back. (STA)*

### Group Discussion:

1. *1. Concerning food and drink, what temptations do you encounter? What in your lifestyle needs to change?*
2. *2. Have you tried to fast? Are you afraid of fasting? Do you want to begin?*

### **3.34 – FAITH – SWITCHING ON THE LIGHT**

Dan Lord, S.J., a famous priest author, came from a devout home. However, during college years he read many rational philosophers. One morning, he woke up and had no faith. He had lost all belief in the supernatural world. Fortunately, through a slow process of reading religious authors and discussing Catholic beliefs with a Jesuit priest, he regained his faith. One morning, he realized that he once more believed in God's kingdom. The light went back on.

Faith is a supernatural light which lets us believe that God is the Father who created us, the Son who redeemed us and the Holy Spirit who sanctifies us. He is a God who wants us to live with him forever.

### The Fatima Children

We actually live in two worlds, the world of earth which we can see and the world of heaven that we cannot see. By faith, our spiritual eyes see this invisible kingdom of Christ and allow it to exercise power over us.

Our Lady allowed the three children of Fatima to see this invisible world. One month, she promised to take them to heaven. The next month, she showed them hell. They said that they would not have survived the vision of hell except that Our Lady assured them that they were going to heaven.

### Two Examples

Father Bob Bedard, a Canadian priest and founder of the priest congregation, Companions of the Cross, details a special faith moment. When he was seventeen, his father asked him to attend a mission. One night, the priest was describing eternity, "Imagine an iron ball the size of the earth and a little dove flying around it. Every thousand years the wing of the dove touches the iron ball. The length of time which the wings would need to totally wear away all the iron would not even be the beginning of eternity." Bob certainly believed in eternal life. However, that example made eternity very real for him, totally affecting the rest of his life.

Three years later, while studying pre-dentistry at college, he began his 22 minute walk from home to class. During these 22 minutes, the truths of faith again filled his mind. By the end of his short journey, he was wondering, "Why am I not a priest?" His faith had awakened him again. He discovered God's call,

### Awakened to Living Faith

In 1972, two women attended a conference on the Holy Spirit's power. During one talk, they grew frightened. Both had experienced a great light of faith and did not know what was happening.

One woman said, "I am overwhelmed with God's presence and all I can say is, 'God, you are so good.'" The other said, "All I can think is 'God, you are so great and I am so small'". Faith had opened their eyes to the reality of God, With progress in devotion, faith will open many new doors for you.

### St. Martin of Tours (371-397)

St. Martin of Tours was a soldier, who cut his cloak in half for a beggar. That night Christ appeared to him and said, "Martin, you are still a catechumen but you covered me with this garment." His faith was so alive that he could no longer kill anyone. When he told

the Roman general, he was accused of cowardice. He replied, "I am not afraid. I will stand alone and unarmed in the line of battle". The general had Martin thrown in jail and, then, discharged from the army. His burning faith immediately led him to convert his family and found a monastery.

Ten years later, the people of Tours demanded that he become their bishop. Faith had led him to baptism, to the monastery, and to his task during his final 26 years of life of guiding the people to Jesus, whom he had first seen as a beggar.

The saints say:

1. *1. I could not believe that there were people without faith. I was convinced that they did not mean what they said when they denied the existence of another world. (STL)*
2. *2. When God finds a soul full of faith, he pours out a river of graces. (BL)*
3. *3. Faith laughs at calamities and sees God's will in them. (SFdeS)*
4. *4. I have made more acts of faith in the past year than in all my life. (STL)*

Group Discussion:

1. *1. What faith struggles have you had? How did you overcome them?*
2. *2. How real to you is God's kingdom? How has your awakened faith changed your life?*

### **3.35 – FAITH OPENS GOD'S DOORS**

In 1971, faith had led a young man to a very special door that was about to open. Feelings within him were so strong that he found himself saying, "All that I am. All that I have. All that I will be is tied up with what is behind that door." Life is a series of doors. Faith alone can lead us to God's special doors.

An Example

A young man was searching for answers when he was invited to go to Medjugorje. He came back filled with faith, but still not knowing God's plan. Then he saw a television ad inviting him to a Young Adult Prayer Group. Before Medjugorje, he would have changed the channel. Now, faith filled him with spiritual interests. Of course, he would respond. Without knowing it, he was really entering the door of the priesthood. To get him there, God used the doors of Medjugorje, the television ad and a young adult prayer group.

At Baptism, God infused faith into your soul. Allow this faith to enlighten everything and your whole life will change.

Three Causes of Faith Loss

Jesus asked "When the Son of Man comes, will he still find faith on this earth? (Lk.18:8) In the modern world, so many have lost their faith. The causes are multiple. I will list three.

One cause is immorality. When people break God's commandments, they generally lose their desire for God. A second cause is the attractions of the world. When people become engrossed in their career, in the good times, in the excitement of what the world offers, faith fades from their hearts. A third cause is life's trials. Suffering can burden and confuse even good people. Immorality, worldly attractions and personal trials are faith's three enemies. The devout life curbs immorality, pulls the soul away from the world, and gives hope in the middle of trials. Hope is our next chapter.

St. Edmund (841-870)

Edmund became king of East Anglia. He was wise and cheerful and guided the English countryside for the rest of his life, always instilling the Catholic faith.

Unfortunately, the Danes constantly attacked England. In 869, Edmund had to retreat to a castle. The Danes sent proposals that Edmund refused to accept because they betrayed the Catholic faith. So, in 870, he was martyred for the faith he so zealously spread.

The saints say:

1. *1. My faith is so strong that I think I have lost it. Earth seems to be fading away and the day of heaven is dawning. I no longer need to believe. I am seeing. (BL)*
2. *2. God's work is done stitch by stitch on his side of the tapestry. We see only the needle and the thread. Only when the work is complete, will God show us his side of the masterpiece. (FjdeC)*
3. *3. When Mary helps you, your faith will be so great that even extraordinary graces will be granted. (SLdeM)*
4. *4. By letting my faith be tempted, God has greatly increased my spirit of faith. (STL)*
5. *5. We know God through his creatures but this is like looking at his feet. Faith alone allows us to gaze at his face. (SFdeS)*

Group Discussion:

1. *1. To what doors has your faith led you?*
2. *2. Discuss the obstacles mentioned above. What other obstacles do you experience?*

### **3.36 – HOPING TO GET TO HEAVEN**

A 96 year old man was deeply troubled because his 97 year old wife had to be hospitalized. At this point, they had been married 73 years. The future was uncertain. All he kept saying was, "We are almost there. We are almost there." Everyone knew exactly what he meant. All during their marriage, they had lived for heaven. Now, "they were almost there". What lay ahead? How would the two of them make it to the end?

While faith deals with earth, hope keeps our eyes on heaven. It's one purpose – to keep our hearts fixed on heavenly glory. Let me recount the great stories of hope in the new converts, Saints Perpetua and Felicity.

## The Martyrs of Carthage

Perpetua was a noble woman. Felicity was a slave. Both were catechumens. They were imprisoned with their instructor, Saturus, who decided to baptize them. The pregnant Felicity gave birth while waiting to be martyred. The story of their sufferings and death was so remarkable that it was commonly read at mass in the African Churches. These newly baptized converts were filled with hope. Their only goal was heaven. The eyewitness account reads as follows:

Perpetua saw that Felicity was prostrate, so she lifted her up and they stood together. They went toward the gate, where Ructicus, another newly baptized, greeted them. Perpetua asked, "When are we going to be led to the beasts?" Only when she saw the marks of violence on her body and dress did she realize that it had already happened. She then called her brother and said, "Stand firm in faith. Love one another. Do not fear because of our sufferings."

Saturus encouraged the soldier, Prudens, to Christian faith. "Here I am and (although covered with blood) I have not yet felt any wild beast." Saturus said to Prudens "Do not let these things frighten you. Rather, let them strengthen you." Then he asked for Prudens' ring. He soaked it in his own blood and returned it as a keepsake, leaving him a sacred remembrance. He said, "Now believe with your whole heart. I will be killed by the leopard in one bite." In fact, the leopard's bite caused so much blood to flow, that the other Christians proclaimed, "Washed and saved. Washed and saved", meaning he had received a second Baptism of blood.

The people wanted the martyrs to die in the center of the arena. Without being asked, they moved to the center and completed their witness, giving each other the kiss of peace. All received the deathblow in silence. Saturus was the first to die. Perpetua had to guide the shaking hand of the inexperienced gladiator to her throat. "Such a woman could not have been killed unless she willed it." These saints were all new believers, recently baptized, yet so filled with hope that nothing could block their way to heaven.

The saints say:

1. *1. Why should we, blind creatures, not place all our hope in God's hands? What could be more secure? What safer refuge exists? (FJdeC)*
2. *2. In the beginning, the soul must remember that human life is short, earth is empty and heaven has eternal value. (STA)*
3. *3. Desiring heaven is honorable, as is fearing to lose it. (SFdeS)*
4. *4. Let us begin our journey to heaven. We can discover every road and all the doors are open. (FJdeC)*

Group Discussion:

1. *1. How did the story of the new believers, Perpetua and Felicity, help you?*
2. *2. Do you think much about getting to heaven? Are you ever filled with anxieties that*

*you will not enter the Communion of Saints?*

### **3.37 – HOPE’S FIVE EARTHLY BLESSINGS**

Let’s highlight the earthly blessings that come from hoping for heaven.

You answer your deepest questions.

Every person searches for meaning, asking, “Why was I born” and “What’s the purpose of my life?” Hope provides the answers. “You were born for heaven” and “Your purpose goes beyond this world.” You are immortal, made for a life that does not fade. Hope gives parents reasons to have children. By giving birth, they cooperate with God in filling heaven.

You see earth quite differently.

By focusing on heaven, you see earth differently. You don’t fear getting old. You aren’t consumed with collecting earth’s toys. You don’t try to make earth your permanent home. By hope, you realize, “I’m just passing through. On my way, so to speak.”

By hope, you no longer fear death.

You no longer fear sickness, aging or everything that can kill you. Jesus says, “Do not be afraid of those who can destroy the body” (Mt 10:28). People without hope like to avoid cemeteries. They are painful reminders that life passes away. The saints welcomed death. It had always been their finishing-line.

Your anxieties are lessened.

You are not consumed by daily anxiety. Jesus said, “Your heavenly Father knows what you need. Seek first His Kingdom and all these things will be given you besides” (Mt 6:31-32). God made you for heaven and he will supply all you need to reach the final line.

You are not lost in the universe.

Hope says that you are not an unknown person who just happened to be born. You are not a lost star. You are not one among 6,000,000,000 people. You are a unique human person loved by God and created for his purpose. Without supernatural hope, billions of people walk in an emotional darkness but “now you are light in the Lord.” (Eph. 5:8)

Consoling the Sorrowing

Losing a loved one is always difficult. However, as the person of hope experiences that darkness, they frequently ask, “How can anyone who has no faith or hope go through this?” No need to respond. The person’s own hope was already consoling them.

The saints say:

1. *1. God is our guide, taking us across an unknown country in the dark of night. Trust his*

*skills to bring you to heaven. (FdeC)*

2. *2. In heaven, our souls will plunge into God. Our infinite desires, never fulfilled in this world, will dissolve in God's presence. (SFdeS)*
3. *3. Say the Rosary every day and Mary will take you to heaven to see Jesus. (SLdeM)*
4. *4. I felt that one day I would live forever in a more beautiful country. I was like Christopher Columbus who sensed the existence of a new world. (STL)*

Group Discussion:

1. *1. What are your deepest hopes? What is your purpose? Does human life have meaning for you?*
2. *2. Do you see how quickly life passes, or, do you try to make earth your permanent home?*

### **3.38 – THE GREATNESS OF CHRISTIAN HOPE**

A Chance to be President

To picture the magnitude of Christian hope, imagine that you successfully run for mayor and then, with a favorable political climate, were elected governor. In a few years, your name reaches the national scene and you have a chance to become President. In seeking the most powerful office in the world, you are experiencing a unique hope. You never dreamed of being the President of the United States.

The Christian Hope

That hope (as great as it is) pales in comparison with Christian hope. Hoping to be president has two difficulties. First, you might not win. Secondly, if you do, you will only serve a few years. Hoping for heaven is different. If you run, you will certainly win. Also, you will enjoy endless years living with Christ. Paul writes, "The runners in a stadium all run to win a perishable crown but we run for an imperishable one" (1 Cor. 9:24-25).

Why don't more people run for heaven? The problem is distance. Death seems so remote and most don't believe death will ever arrive (at least not in their lifetime). They aren't really interested in what happens after death.

St. Alphonsus Liguori (1696-1787)

By hope, Alphonsus overcame the three great failures of his life. All three marked a turning point.

He began life as a successful lawyer (Never losing a case). At 24, he gave a brilliant speech but overlooked an important part. Seeing his mistake, he said to his opponent "The case is yours". Seeing this loss as God's sign, Alphonsus decided to be a priest.

At 36, he founded the Redemptorist priests, dedicated to preaching to the poor. However, dissensions broke out and the new order did not flourish. Suddenly, new vocations filled the houses.

At 84, he made another mistake and the pope removed him as head of his own community. However, those final seven years were his most important, filled with supernatural gifts and great writings. Every time failure seemingly ruined everything, hope took him off on a new road,

### An Earlier Generation

Life in America before antibiotics was quite different because death happened so unexpectedly. For that Catholic generation, hope in heaven was all they had. Then came World War II. Many young men died or were wounded. How did these families survive? Hope in heaven got them through. The frailty of human life impressed a truth upon that Catholic generation, "Only one thing is important and that is to get to heaven." Catholics in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century lived by hope.

The saints say:

1. *1. Abandon your life to God and he will not abandon you. (FJdeC)*
2. *2. The human person is the greatest creation in the whole universe, made to live eternally in union with God. (SFdeS)*
3. *3. I found perfect happiness in the thought of heaven. (STL)*
4. *4. Even the brightest day finishes with darkness. It is only the first day in heaven that will have no end. (STL)*

Group Discussion:

1. *1. Are you consumed with earthly ambitions or with heavenly hope? Does the greatness of heaven lift up your heart?*
2. *2. What trials have you had? During these times, did you think of heaven?*

### **3.39 – GAINING CHRISTIAN HOPE**

*"He who perseveres to the end, will be saved." (Mt.10:22)*

#### Fumbling the Ball

Not wanting his running backs to fumble, a football coach teaches them to cover up the ball until they reach the goal line. The soul trying to reach heaven knows full well that it can fumble the ball. True hope never relaxes and uses every possible means to gain eternal life. The following 9 secrets are very important:

1. *1. Have devotion to Mary*



Mary is the safe road, the easy way. She softens all trials. She brings help earlier than expected. "Following her, you will not turn away." (St. Bernard) Read the classic books on Mary (True Devotion by St. Louis de Montfort and Glories of Mary by St. Alphonsus). Let Mary become deeply ingrained into your spirituality.

1. 2. Receive Eucharist daily if possible.

Jesus gave you a complete promise. "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life." (Jn.6:54) "Whoever eats this bread will live forever." (6:58) There are no clearer words.

1. 3. Go to Confession Regularly

Confession purges every obstacle. The devil is your accuser but he has no power when you declare your sins to the Church's priest. At Medjugorje, Mary frequently says, "Monthly confession will be the salvation of the West." That is good motherly advice. St. Francis deSales went to confession every day as did Pope John Paul II.

1. 4. Have devotion to St. Joseph.

He is the patron of a happy death, because Jesus and Mary were at his deathbed.

1. 5. Hold on to God's gifts.

In the devout life, God will lead you to little practices of mortification and small acts of piety. Hold on to what God gives. You need them for the journey.

1. 6. Carry very few bags

Carry as little baggage as possible. Your journey is a long one. Leave behind as much as you can. Never think, "It is only a venial sin." Always do the little things.

1. 7. Never worry about the future.

Saint Faustina said that she experienced anxiety only when she thought of the future trials. When your trial comes, God will be there.

1. 8. Never feel secure.

You must distrust yourself and have confidence only in God. That is hope's formula. A great difference exists between peace of soul and smugness.

1. 9. Take no chances

Take absolutely no chances with your eternal life. You might do great things for God. You can raise the dead, found churches and even convert the whole world. But, if you lose your soul, you are a complete failure. There is no reason for anyone on earth to be damned because God wills that all be saved (1Tim.2:4).

There are two sins against hope, despair and presumption. The next chapter explains them.

The saints say:

1. *1. Does not everyone want to return to their own country? So, let us not linger long in this foreign land called earth. (STA)*
2. *2. Since I began to pray, God has given me one grace. I have confessed all my sins, even venial ones. (STA)*
3. *3. At Communion, I frequently see a door into heaven. (STA)*
4. *4. Use both love and fear. Love quickens our steps. Fear makes us look where we are going. (STA)*
5. *5. I am going to remove the veil of heaven so earth will not doubt God's goodness. (S. Faus)*

Group Discussion:

1. *1. What devotional practices listed above do you use? Which ones don't you use?*
2. *2. What advice in this chapter did you find helpful?*

### **3.40 – GOD'S MERCY OVERCOMES DESPAIR**

Every priest has encountered souls who openly say, "I have no hope. I am going to hell". What has entangled their feelings? What has brought them to that point? The story is always very personal, usually dealing with past sins and overwhelming feelings of guilt. Jesus, Himself, attacked these problems when he spoke of his Divine Mercy. The following are Jesus' own words, spoken to Saint Faustina so souls could overcome despair.

Explanation of His Mercy

1. *1. The flames of My mercy are burning Me. I desire to pour them out upon the human race. (1074)*
2. *2. Souls that appeal to My mercy delight me. (1146)*
3. *3. No sinfulness can match My mercy. (1273)*

Words to Sinners

1. *4. By My mercy I pursue sinners along their paths. My heart rejoices when they return. (1728)*
2. *5. Tell sinners that I am always waiting for them. (1728)*
3. *6. I am speaking to them through the remorse of their conscience. (1728)*

Invitation

1. *1. Let the greatest sinners place their trust in My mercy. They have the right, before others, to trust in the abyss of My mercy. (1146)*

2. 2. I am more generous to sinners than to the just. (1275)
3. 3. Let them not fear to approach me. (1275)
4. 4. My mercy works in those hearts which are open to it. (1577)
5. 5. I desire that aching mankind press into My merciful heart. (1588)
6. 6. I cannot punish even the greatest sinner who appeals to My mercy. (1146)
7. 7. Happy is the soul who, during its lifetime, has immersed itself in My mercy. (1175)

#### Confession (Sacrament of Reconciliation)

1. 1. When you approach the confessional know that I am there awaiting you. (1602)
2. 2. I am only hidden by the priest but I myself act in your heart. (1602)
3. 3. Every time you go to confession, My mercy flows down into your heart. (1602)
4. 4. In the confessional, the sinfulness of the soul meets the mercy of God. (1602)
5. 5. Tell souls to look for mercy in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The greatest miracles are incessantly repeated there. (1448)

#### Promises

1. 1. He who trusts in My mercy will not perish. (723)
2. 2. I will justify the soul in My unfathomable and inscrutable mercy. (1146)
3. 3. No soul that has approached me has gone away unconsolated. (1777)
4. 4. All sinfulness gets buried in My mercy. (1777)

Despairing soul, please read Faustina's diary. It was written for you. The following are her own sayings:

Saint Faustina says:

1. 1. *I always looked with one eye at the greatness of my sins. With the other, I looked at God's mercy. (S.Faus)*
2. 2. *I wish I were a priest. Then I would always preach about God's mercy to sinful souls drowned in their despair. (S. Faus)*
3. 3. *God is infinitely merciful. He wants everyone to know this before they die. (S.Faus)*
4. 4. *All of my nothingness is drowned in the sea of God's mercy. (S.Faus)*
5. 5. *I have now learned that Satan hates God's mercy more than anything else. (S.Faus)*

Group Discussion:

1. 1. *Do you focus on your sins or on God's mercy?*
2. 2. *Which of Jesus' sayings recorded above were the most important to you? Which ones surprised you?*
3. 3. *Do you experience despair? Doubts? Fearfulness?*

### 3.41 – PRESUMPTION

When encountering a person for the first time, a priest usually begins by asking, "How is the good Lord treating you?" The Lord gets very high ratings. Almost everyone believes that he is doing well by them.

Another question which the priest would like to ask (and might someday), is "Do you think you are going to heaven?" I believe that the answer will be about the same – practically everybody believes they are heaven-bound. What fuels this optimism? Does it correspond to reality? How would the saints view the question?

### Fear of the Lord

The saints lived in a holy fear which always warned them that, while they were on earth, salvation was never assured. What a contrast! On the one hand, we have people blissfully proclaiming that they are going to heaven and on the other hand, the saints working out their salvation in fear and trembling.

There is a cultural sin of presumption. As devotion decreases, as faith in God wanes, as people withdraw from religious practices, many just believe that they are going to heaven. This is how it has always been. Withdrawn from God, people say, "I am a good person". They have little insight into their sometimes gigantic failings and no understanding of God's holiness.

They don't meditate. They do not consider the four last things. In a sense, they do not even worry about the question, "Am I going to heaven?" Most people who go to hell will go there from presumption. They believe that they are "a good person" and do not really need to use the means provided by God for their salvation. They cast aside religious practices, refuse to listen to Church teachings on the commandments, and have no interest in all the appeals of Jesus to take advantage of Divine Mercy.

### An Era of Faith

Years ago, people were good, (very, very good), but they knew they were not worthy of heavenly life unless they went to Mass, used the sacraments, and kept the commandments. Today, America suffers from the widespread cultural presumption that heaven just comes to everyone and no one needs to make much effort.

### A Picture of Presumption

Dear Reader, you might ask, "Am I sinning by presumption?" Answer the question this way. God has provided certain means to get you to heaven. If you are using those means, then you are not presuming. The means are clear – Communion, confession, prayer (the rosary) and a sincere attempt to keep the commandments. They are the means. Use them and you are certainly not presuming.

The saints say:

1. *If someone had taught me to fear God, I would have grown strong. May this fear of*

- God never be taken from you. (STA)*
2. *2. Not offending God because of a fear of hell is very good. (SFdeS)*
  3. *3. The saints were always on guard. They saw themselves as their own greatest enemies. (FjdeC)*
  4. *4. Our Lord is happy when we get to know our sins and try to realize our spiritual poverty. (STA)*
  5. *5. To be secure, the soul must never forget how weak she is. (STA)*

Group Discussion:

1. *1. Was there ever a time when you just presumed you would be saved, even though your life was not in order? What are the signs of presumption?*
2. *2. How do you see things now? Do you know how to seek God's mercy?*

### **3.42 – THE EXPECTATIONS OF JESUS**

Reading the mystic saints, (like Teresa of Avila, Margaret Mary, Faustina and others), reveals a surprising aspect of their lives with Jesus. Frequently, he reprimanded them and His criticism was always fair. The saints accepted his words as true. Sometimes, their opportunity to do good was over. At other times, the reprimand made them do something to correct their lapse.

These mystic saints did great works for Jesus and he blessed them for their labors. Yet, he expected perfection. His love for them was total and their love was also expected to be total, (in big projects or little sacrifices). To one saint he said, "Where have you been? I have been waiting for you", meaning that a long time had passed since she had prayed. One saint rejoiced in praying before the Blessed Sacrament. Jesus said, "Why are you leaving so soon?"

At the same time, Jesus fulfilled the saint's expectations. St. Margaret Mary was misunderstood by her superior who felt that she was feigning illness. "I don't want to see you in this infirmary for six months". So, Jesus healed her for six months.

Expectations of Other People

Further readings of these saints also reveal Jesus' expectations of others. To the mystics, Jesus would comment on other people, how he thinks about them and whether they are helping or hindering his work. Nothing escapes his eyes.

These stories reveal a certain pattern and a profound affect. Jesus' expectations are always suited to the person. They can always comply with his wishes. Failures are never the last word. The person always gets a chance to make amends. With every person, Jesus has expectations that can and should be fulfilled.

A Real Friendship

The friendship with Jesus is very, very real. He is not an “everything is alright” Jesus. Nor is he a stern, unrelenting task master. He expects perfection. Nothing else will satisfy him. He is ready to do everything to help us love him as he loves us. As you encounter Jesus, you will learn Jesus’ expectations of you.

The saints say:

1. *1. Christ the King looks with pleasure upon the person who struggles with the world, the devil, and temptations because of love for him. (SLdeM)*
2. *2. As I began to dance, I suddenly saw Jesus at my side, racked with pain and covered with wounds. He asked, “How long shall I put up with you and how long will you keep putting me off. (S.Faus)*
3. *3. I behaved towards Jesus like a child who thinks she is allowed to do anything and regards her father’s treasures as her own. (STL)*
4. *4. Brightness filled my room and I saw the face of Jesus. Large tears were falling on my bedspread. He said, “It is to this convent that I have called you, and nowhere else.” (S.Faus)*

Group Discussion:

1. *1. What idea do you have of Jesus Christ? Has this idea changed since joining the group?*
2. *2. Did you realize that Jesus expects total perfection, yet is so patient with you?*

### **3.43 – DON’T STOP YOUR SEEKING**

At times, a young man would pull his car to the side of the road, overwhelmed with a strange feeling. Then, he would cry out to the Lord, “I am missing out. I don’t know what it is, but I know I’m missing out.” This was not a totally empty feeling. He just knew that God expected more of him and he had to keep searching. Your devout life should be filled with these special moments. After experiencing them, God will reveal the next part of His plan.

St. Francis deSales

Francis and his cousin accepted the difficult invitation to win Protestants back to the Catholic Church in Switzerland. The work was difficult, hazardous (their lives were threatened often) and seemingly hopeless. Very few returned to Catholicism. His cousin grew discouraged and returned to his home diocese.

Francis kept searching. He started to write little booklets. They spread all over the country and called thousands back to Catholicism. He is the patron saint of writers.

Keep Searching

Perfection is a road and each stage prepares for the next. However, the next stage only begins if the person keeps seeking. When these opportunities appear, the soul knows why they had to keep seeking. Otherwise, they would never have found.

Our lives receive direction from the duties of our state in life. However, the real directional gifts come from within (by God's inspiration) and from without (from seemingly chance circumstances). The seeking soul always finds them.

The point is this. In the beginning, the soul knows that it must find the road. However, after a while, the soul is tempted to stop searching and to feel that it has found the road. What a mistake! There are always new stages to discover. Keep seeking.

The saints say:

1. *1. Some people discourage this unlimited seeking, saying, "It is dangerous". Do not listen to them. (STA)*
2. *2. We are like the bride, who does not immediately find her beloved and must keep seeking. (SFdeS)*
3. *3. Some people pose as Christians but they do not seek to please God or atone for their sins. (SLdeM)*
4. *4. The soul seeks God as burning lips seek water. (S.Faus)*
5. *5. More than one soul has left the road along which God wanted it to journey. (S.Faus)*

Group Discussion:

1. *1. Are you still searching for God? Where are you looking? What are you finding? Who/what can help in your search?*
2. *2. When, in the past, did you find God? Recount the story.*

### **3.44 – CHARITY – THE FIRE IN YOUR BELLY**

In the business world, "a fire in your belly" describes a young person wanting to get to the top. In the devout life, this fire is the Holy Spirit, who consumes the devout soul with a supernatural charity which others cannot understand. True love is always striving because love is satisfied only for a moment. Then it moves on, seeking what can be accomplished in future moments.

Charity Takes Control

At this point, much of the road to perfection has been travelled. Sins have been put away. Meditation has led to mental prayer. Virtues are planted. Faith has been awakened and hope reaches out for heaven. Finally, charity comes onto the scene. She has been there all along, like a smoldering fire covered over by sins and failures. Now they are removed, and her flame bursts forth. Charity must rule. She is the queen. She alone unites you to the king. Let this fire burn! "Love is as strong as death and relentless as the netherworld. Deep waters cannot quench love nor floods sweep it away" (Song 8: 6-7). The food of this fire is a generous spirit.

The saints say:

1. *1. O Lord, carry me off to the furnace of love. Plunge me into its burning depths so that I can be its ecstatic victim for all eternity. (STL)*
2. *2. My God, help us to experience your love before we die. (STA)*
3. *3. The fire of God's love must never be mingled with any other love. (SJC)*
4. *4. The soul's health is its love for God. When that love is not perfect then the soul's health is not perfect. (SJC)*
5. *5. Nothing can impede divine love. It conquers all difficulties. (SCG)*

Group Discussion:

1. *1. Do you experience a deep fire, a yearning to be one with God? How do you fulfill that desire?*
2. *2. What do you strive for? What holds a priority in your life? Is this the correct priority?*

### **3.45 – DO YOU LOVE ME?**

Peter was just a fisherman when Jesus of Nazareth invited him to be his disciple. His life was filled with many special moments. He showed great faith, proclaiming, "You are the Christ, Son of the living God". He displayed great loyalty, "Lord, you have the words of everlasting life" (Jn.6:68), and great bravery, "Peter got out of the boat and began to walk on the water" (Mt.14:29).

His failures were also great. To the lowly maid, Peter said, "I do not know the man". When the cock crowed, "He went out and began to weep bitterly" (Mt.26:75).

All Set Aside

A moment came, when all of Peter's actions (good and bad) were set aside. Sitting on the shore in Galilee, the Risen Jesus questioned him about the only issue that really mattered, "Simon, son of John, do you love me? (Jn.21:17) Peter understood the importance of this moment. Jesus was giving him another chance. When he replied, "Lord, you know that I love you, he was ready to be the Pope.

Dear soul, Jesus asks you the same question. Listen to those same words spoken within. All your strivings have led you to this point. Jesus is giving you a special moment. "Do you love me?" With the Little Flower proclaim in your soul, "My vocation is love". Now, never turn back.

St. Josephat (1580-1683)

Josephat had the world at his feet. Besides having great skills and a good job, the owner liked him so much that he offered to make him his partner (while Josephat was in his early 20's). In addition, the owner had a beautiful daughter who was in love with Josephat. What more could any young man want?



Josephat loved Jesus so much that he turned away from all those riches to become a monk and a priest. He became a bishop and he loved everyone. However, he was the “man in the middle”, trying to bring about unity with Rome. Tremendously misunderstood, an angry mob threw his body in the river.

The saints say:

1. *1. O God, you love me without me loving you. (SCS)*
2. *2. Whoever does not want to love God more, does not love him enough. (SFdeS)*
3. *3. Love is ingenious. It discovers hundreds of little crosses to bear for Jesus' sake. (SLdeM)*
4. *4. In all your actions, have only the motive of pure love for God. The smallest actions done from love are of more value than great actions done from other motives. (FJdeC)*

Group Discussion:

1. *1. Can you put aside your successes and failures, and open your heart to Jesus' question, "Do you love me?"*
2. *2. Do you love generously? Can you learn to love? Do you believe the Holy Spirit can make you a great lover of God?*

### **3.46 – CHARITY GUIDES OUR AFFECTIONS**

When adolescence bursts upon young people like a mighty river suddenly let loose, they are filled with energy, dreams, ambitions, desires (good and bad). A new affective life breaks forth that will never again accept the restrictions of childhood years. “When I was a child, I thought like a child but now I have put aside childish things”.

The world's ceaseless activity comes from these inner feverish searchings of the human heart. What can harness this river, move its forces in the right direction and make sure it serves God and man? That task is assigned to charity – the queen of all the virtues and the goal of all devotion. Without charity, the soul cannot gain divine union and cannot even overcome its own self-love. Without charity, all is lost – both on earth and in heaven.

Charity alone can guide man's affections to God. If we do not seek God, then this inner ocean of affections will destroy us.

St. Clare of Assisi (1194-1253)

St. Clare was a beautiful young woman who refused to obey her family and get married. At 20, she heard St. Francis preach. She ran away from home, cut off her beautiful hair and wore a penitential habit.

Despite her family's objections, she refused to return home. When her fifteen year old sister, Agnes, joined her, the family decided to physically carry her out of the convent. But, Agnes' body got so heavy they had to put her down. Soon, this fire of love brought

her mother, another sister and many other noble women (who left their riches behind) to the convent. Concerning Clare's great love, Chesterton wrote "Christ was her bridegroom and Francis was her shining knight".

The saints say:

1. *1. Love speaks from the soul's highest point. All the faculties and affections must obey her. (SFdeS)*
2. *2. I found my destiny the moment my soul lost itself in your love. (S.Faus)*
3. *3. I try to have such a love for God that it makes amends for those who do not love him. (S.Faus)*
4. *4. By love, man conquers all evil habits and stands ready to perform every good work. (SCG)*

Group Discussion:

1. *1. Do you find your heart moving toward God? Does this happen often? Were there special moments when you felt powerfully moved?*
2. *2. Where does your inner stream of affections flow? What goals do you have?*

### **3.47 – THE SAINTS AND ROMANTIC LOVE**

It was 1947. An eleven year old boy was sitting on a swing at 4:30 P.M. Most of the kids had already gone home for supper, when she walked over and sat next to him. Being four years older, she had no romantic interest. He just happened to be there on the swing. They talked for about twenty-five minutes and then she left.

At supper that night, the boy couldn't understand the delightful feelings within. Afterwards, he hurried back to the playground for the evening session. She wasn't there. It was his first experience of love. In the next few years, other such moments inevitably happened and he realized that a new world was opening up, a new world of romantic love fashioned by God.

The saints choose the language of romantic love (even with sexual overtones) to speak of their relationship to God. They quote the most sensual of all scriptural books, the Song of Songs. (How this book of thirty two love poems ever got into the Bible is a divine mystery.) Their language of divine union becomes extremely romantic. They even speak of Spiritual Betrothal and Spiritual Marriage (explained in Book Five). In this Illuminative Stage, divine love takes center stage and begins with a divine intrusion.

Augustine's Divine Intrusion

Before coming to Milan, Augustine had led a life of sin. By hearing St. Ambrose preach, he experienced God's invitation to love. Then his inner war began. God intruded but Augustine kept saying, "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow". At 32 years of age, Augustine heard a child's voice say "Take and read. Take and read." Opening the bible,

Augustine read, "It is now the hour for you to awake from sleep. The night is advanced. The day is at hand. Let us throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light" (Rom.13:11-12).

Augustine described this divine intrusion, "You called, you shouted and you broke through my deafness. You breathed your fragrance on me and now I pant for you. I have tasted you; now I hunger and thirst for more. You touched me, and I burned for your peace. When I am united to you with my whole being, I shall be free at last. O Beauty, ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved you."

Let me shout this from the housetops. God wants to intrude into your life and have you exclaim, "O Beauty, ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved you." When God intrudes, a divine romance begins. In the next chapter are two saints who made divine love the center of their devotion.

The saints say:

1. *1. My love tries to equal God's love. This is like a tiny drop of water measuring itself with the whole ocean. (S.Faus)*
2. *2. Jesus places my heart into the fire of his love. Then his Divine Presence invades me and I forget everything else. (S.Faus)*
3. *3. Jesus, may the live coal of your love burn constantly on the altar of my heart. (SLdeM)*
4. *4. My soul is a bottomless abyss and nothing can fill it but God himself. (S.Faus)*
5. *5. After her death, St. Teresa of Avila appeared in a vision and revealed that she had died because God inflamed her with love. Her nature could not handle divine love, so her soul departed to God. (SFdeS)*
6. *6. Is my heart really full of pure love? Are my limitless desires just a piece of foolishness? Tell me, Jesus. You know I want the truth. (STL)*

Group Discussion:

1. *1. How did you react when adolescence opened up the mysteries of romantic love? Did you ever think of God in these terms?*
2. *2. Have you experienced God's call to divine love? How did it happen? How did you respond?*

### **3.48 – THE LITTLE FLOWER AND BROTHER LAWRENCE**

The Little Flower

In her autobiography, the Little Flower was trying to resolve her inner call. She describes her inner quest to find her place in Christ's Mystical Body. Looking at St. Paul's list of ministries, she could find none that fit her situation (1Cor.12:27-31). Although disappointed, she continued to read until her eyes fell upon the sentence, "But I shall show you a more excellent way". Her heart was throbbing. She continued to read, "If I

do not have love, I am nothing. There remains faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love" (13:13). She concluded, "My vocation is to love, for the heart is the most important of the body's organs. When it stops beating, there is no more life".

A few years later, her vocation of love reached its pinnacle. When she read of saints choosing to be victim souls for Divine Justice, she grew frightened. Then, in her unique genius, she thought "Is it not more important to be a victim soul for God's merciful love than for his justice"? So, on June 9, 1895 she wrote her "Offering of Myself to God's merciful Love". (This beautiful prayer can easily be found but don't become a Victim of Divine Love without your confessor's permission).

Wanting to do all under obedience, she went immediately to her sister (who then headed the community). Her sister, not grasping the greatness of this oblation, quickly gave her permission and Therese became a victim soul of merciful love – an oblation that she urged many to make (never to be done without the permission of a spiritual guide). This was her genius. She focused on love and set aside all else.

Brother Lawrence

Brother Lawrence had the exact same simplicity. He wrote, "If love is the goal of the spiritual life, why focus on anything else?"

Brother Lawrence never focused on heaven (to get rewards) nor hell (to avoid punishment). He never thought about judgment and, after confessing his sins, he refused to think about them (an excellent practice). His prayer was the presence of God and his relationship with God was more intense during his work than during prayer. When he went on retreats, he found himself desolate, seemingly away from God's presence. When he returned to his normal routine, he was overwhelmed by divine consolations. He writes, "God deceived me. I entered the monastery to find sufferings and I found only consolation in God's presence.

At this stage, be like Brother Lawrence. "If love is the goal of the spiritual life, why focus on anything else?"

The saints say:

1. *1. Divine Justice demands perfect victims, but Divine Love has chosen me as a victim – feeble and imperfect creature that I am. So, my folly is to hope that your love will accept me as its victim. (STL)*
2. *2. I beg you to choose in this world a multitude of little victims worthy of your love! (STL)*
3. *3. The soul can only understand God by love. (BL)*
4. *4. Pure love is capable of great deeds. It is never broken by difficulty or adversity. Pure love never errs. Its light is strangely plentiful. (S.Faus)*

Group Discussion:

1. *1. How did the stories of these saints enlighten you?*

2. 2. *Do you feel a call to love God? Have you followed this call?*

### **3.49 – THE LOVE OF KINDNESS**

Ascend or Descend

Everyone loves someone or something. Some people love what is above them. Others love what is beneath them. According to what you love, you will either ascend or descend. By the devout life, you ascend to God, to all the angels and the saints. By a sinful life you descend to the animals and the devils. Every human person either ascends to heaven by loving God and neighbor or descends to hell by loving only themselves.

In August 1941, a group of prisoners escaped from the German concentration camp at Auschwitz, Poland. In retaliation, the Germans, wanted to execute ten prisoners, including a Polish sergeant. When his name was announced, he cried out, "What about my family?" A Polish priest, St. Maximilian Kolbe, offered to accept death in his place even though he had never met the man. "Greater love than this no man has, that he lay down his life for his friend" (Jn.15:13).

Loving Your Neighbor

Few of us will be called to the heroic deed of this saint, but all are called to a life of kindness. Kindness comes in small doses. It is a spiritual intravenous needle that slowly but effectively drips God's goodness into your soul. Its three forms are thoughts, words and deeds.

Kind Thoughts

You must think kindly of everyone you meet. You must see goodness in others (and sometimes pretend it is there). By kindness, you must excuse others (as we so often do for ourselves) and you must forgive. Don't forget. Jesus is "the Kindness of God" (Tit.3:4).

Kind Words

Kind words are difficult to say but they have great effects upon the hearer. They dispel fear, overcome darkness, heal wounds and remove conflicts. People's lives have been totally changed because someone spoke a kind word. Years ago, a Christian Brother said to a young man, "You have a great ability to write". The brother praised everything that he wrote. Those kind words planted the seeds of a writing career.

Kind Deeds

Kind deeds are the real test of a devout life. They are a greater proof of holiness than miracles. Mother Theresa wrote to her sisters, "Be kind to each other. I prefer that you make mistakes in being too kind rather in working miracles with unkindness."

Progress in Kindness

To make progress, you must:

1. Laugh at yourself and refuse to take yourself seriously.
2. Seriously try to love everyone.
3. Place the kindest interpretation on the deeds of others.
4. Realize that everyone is limited in their goodness.
5. Accept diverse personalities
6. Be kind to yourself and put up with your own faults.
7. When you have failed in all the above, begin again.

A hint! When you gain an ease in relating to others you are probably growing in kindness.

Blessed Joan Delanque (1666-1736)

At 25 years of age, Joan inherited her family's house and business. The inheritance caused Joan to become totally immersed in making money, even turning away beggars (whom her mother always helped). She opened her store on Sunday (a scandal to all). Money was her false god, until a devout woman, Frances Souchet, needed a place to stay. In a rare moment of kindness, Joan took her in for a number of years. Slowly, the woman changed Joan. As she changed, God gave Joan visions of the special work of forming a congregation of nuns (the Sisters of St. Anne) to take in orphan children. She went from total selfishness to sainthood by one act of kindness that changed the whole course of her life.

The saints say:

1. *The surest sign of our union with God is to love our neighbor because we cannot be sure that we love God. (STA)*
2. *True charity consists in putting up with all your neighbor's faults, never being surprised by his weaknesses and always being inspired by his smallest virtues. (STL)*
3. *When you see someone else's faults, be sorry for them as if they were your own. (STA)*
4. *Even when the devout soul sees something sinful she does not judge. Instead, she finds compassion and intercedes with humility. (SCS)*
5. *Show a kind face to troublesome people. Go where God calls you, doing your tasks quietly. (FjdeC)*

Group Discussion:

1. *When have you experienced kind words or deeds? How did they affect you?*
2. *Can you put a kind interpretation on the deeds of others? Are you able to say kind words?*

### **3.50 – THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS**

*“One soldier thrust his lance into his side and immediately blood and water flowed out.  
(Jn.19:34)*

## The Humanity of Christ

The great mystical saints always highlighted Christ's humanity. St. Francis of Assisi loved the Christmas scene. Saint Dominic focused on the mysteries of the Rosary. St. Theresa of Avila told her sisters to cling to Jesus' humanity. Because this devotion to Christ's humanity reaches its highest level in devotion to Christ's Sacred Heart, these chapters will highlight the revelations to St. Margaret Mary and to St. Faustina.

### Jesus' Heart

The seeds of the Sacred Heart devotion came through the writings of St. Bonaventure (1221-1274), St. Gertrude the Great (1256-1302), St. Albert the Great (1206-1280), St. Catherine of Sienna (1347-1380) and St. Francis de Sales (1567-1622). The most important preparation came from St. John Eudes (1601-1680) and his book, "Devotion to the Adorable Heart of Jesus". This book provided a theological basis for the great revelations that were to come so quickly.

### St. Margaret Mary

All these saints prepared for the modern devotion to the Sacred Heart revealed by Jesus' appearance to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647-1690). When she was 20, Jesus appeared to her and strengthened her resolve of virginity (so she could overcome her family's pressure to marry). Four years later, she entered the Sisters of the Visitation (which was filled with devotion to the Sacred Heart through its founder, St. Frances de Sales).

On December 27, 1673 (the feast of the Beloved Disciple), Jesus appeared and told her to sit next to him in the Beloved Disciple's place. He told her that she would be his instrument in spreading the love of his heart to the whole world. For eighteen months he amplified this first revelation, showing her his heart of flesh, which is now familiar to all Catholics.

Since many would not believe the words of an uneducated nun, Jesus sent the brilliant St. Claude La Colombiere. He validated these revelations and became the apostle of Sacred Heart devotion.

### Practical Aspects

The practical aspects of this devotion include more frequent reception of Communion, an hour of prayer every Thursday night to imitate Jesus' prayer in the Garden, establishment of the Feast of the Sacred Heart and enthronement of the Sacred Heart image.

Our Lord made twelve promises for those who practice devotion to the Sacred Heart:

1. I will give them all the graces necessary for their state of life.
2. I will establish peace in their families.

3. 3. I will console them in all their troubles.
4. 4. They shall find in My Heart an assured refuge during life and especially at the hour of their death.
5. 5. I will pour abundant blessings on all their undertakings.
6. 6. Sinners shall find in My Heart the source of an infinite ocean of mercy.
7. 7. Tepid souls shall become fervent.
8. 8. Fervent souls shall speedily rise to great perfection.
9. 9. I will bless the homes where an image of My Heart shall be exposed and honored. (The basis for the enthronement).
10. 10. I will give to priests the power of touching the most hardened hearts.
11. 11. Those who propagate this devotion shall have their names written in My Heart, never to be effaced.
12. 12. The all-powerful love of My Heart will grant to all those who shall receive Communion on the First Friday of nine consecutive months, the grace of final repentance. They shall not die under my displeasure, or without receiving their Sacraments. My heart shall be their assured refuge at that last hour.

### Enthronement of the Sacred Heart

Father Matteo founded the Catholic University at Valparaiso, Chile. After years of success, the University burnt down. His priestly work seemed to be destroyed. However, the picture of the Sacred Heart was miraculously preserved. Taking this as God's call, Fr. Matteo began the devotion of having families enthrone the sacred Heart to fulfill Promise 9 – that homes would be blessed.

Many popes blessed this work. Fr. Matteo became the greatest 20<sup>th</sup> century preacher. Over 100,000 priests listened to him preach.

### Today's Apostle

God led Gloria Anson to enthrone the Sacred Heart image in her own home. Her husband and four children, each night, made the preparatory devotions. When her husband, an active alcoholic, enthroned the Sacred Heart in their home, he stopped drinking and began to receive daily Communion. Gloria Anson has devoted decades to preaching the enthronement of the Sacred Heart in everyone's home. (Promise 9).

### Conclusion

The Sacred Heart devotion contains the whole devout life. It appeals to the imagination (so necessary for the beginner), leads to fervor and feelings (needed for the illuminative stage) and provides all that a mystic needs to gain the fullness of divine union. By revealing his Sacred Heart, Jesus fulfilled Teresa of Avila's teaching that every devout soul must cling to his sacred humanity.

The saints say:



1. *1. One day, after Communion, the Sacred Heart showed me that He was the most beautiful, the wealthiest, the most powerful, the most perfect and the most accomplished among all lovers. (SMMA)*
2. *2. I received graces which I had never experienced before, particularly a deep understanding of his passion and death. (SMMA)*
3. *3. He made me repose for a long time upon his Sacred Breast, where he revealed the marvels of his love, those inexplicable secrets of his Sacred Heart. (SMMA)*
4. *4. He asked me for my heart. He placed it in his own adorable Heart. It looked like a little atom being consumed in a great furnace. (SMMA)*

#### Group Discussion

1. *1. Have you made the Nine First Fridays? Which of the 12 promises are important for you?*
2. *2. What aspects of the Sacred Heart devotion appeal to you? Do you find consolation? Is the Sacred Heart an easy image to use for mental prayer?*

### **3.51 – A SPECIAL MINISTRY IN SACRED HEART DEVOTION**

Monsignor John Esseff, a priest of the Scranton diocese, had Padre Pio as his spiritual director. He, himself, was spiritual director to Mother Theresa. Since 1959, he has had a call to spread the devotion of Enthronement of the Sacred Heart. The following is his own description of his call.

#### An Ecstatic Experience

In 1959, parishioners generously paid for a trip to Rome and Lourdes. I used that time to ask Padre Pio to be my spiritual director. While in Rome, I visited St. John Lateran Basilica and entered the Blessed Sacrament chapel. There, I experienced an overwhelming presence of God's Majesty. Unable to stand, I was forced to my knees, and then to prostrate on the floor, trembling and crying before the Blessed Sacrament. God's awesome presence seized me. All I could say was, "What do you want, Lord?" God answered, "Charity." This state of ecstatic prayer lasted for a long time and I was unable to move or even to stir. When I got my bearings, I got up, walked closer to the Blessed Sacrament, was knocked again to the floor, and had the same experience. I wept and cried out, "What do you want, Lord?" "Love", God answered.

I waited for the longest time to hear what more might come. I had a sense of being outside of myself. The ecstasy lasted a long time. Again, I walked closer to the Blessed Sacrament. A third time, I was knocked to the floor. As I lay there, the Lord said two things, "Teach the love of my Sacred Heart", and "Learn more about the pope buried in this chapel."

Pope Leo XIII

After these hours of ecstasy, I would do whatever God wanted. I felt quite dazed. I had entered St. John Lateran in the early morning and now it was late afternoon. As a tour passed by, I heard the guide telling the people that Pope Leo XIII was buried in this chapel. I looked around and saw his tomb elevated on the wall in the Blessed Sacrament chapel. So, I prayed before his tomb.

After returning home, I did as God directed. My research uncovered a curious piece of information. As his final act, Pope Leo enthroned the Sacred Heart of Jesus over the whole world. I now see that Jesus desires to be King of the entire world and I must promote this devotion everywhere.

### Divine Mercy

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Jesus appeared to St. Faustina and revealed the Divine Mercy devotion, explained in the next chapter.

The saints say:

1. *1. Flames issued from every part of his Sacred Humanity, especially from his adorable Bosom, which resembled an open furnace. (SMMA)*
2. *2. My only repose and adoration consisted in remaining prostrate before my God. (SMMA)*
3. *3. His love took everything away because he wanted me to have only the riches that came from his Sacred Heart. (SMMA)*
4. *4. He kept me two or three hours with my lips pressed to the wound of his Sacred Heart. (SMMA)*

Group Discussion:

1. *1. What effect did Msgr. Esseff's story have upon you? Did you ever have an experience of God speaking to you? Did you respond to God's desire?*
2. *2. How do people experience their call? Do you know God's call upon your life? How can you seek to know it?*

### **3.52 – SECRETARY OF DIVINE MERCY**

The revelations to St. Margaret Mary became even clearer when Jesus revealed the Divine Mercy devotion to St. Faustina. The two saints are very similar. Both Margaret Mary and Faustina wrote their diaries under obedience. Both also burned what they wrote and were told to write again. Faustina's Diary is much more extensive than Margaret Mary's, and Jesus' revelations and promises are clearer and greater.

The Divine Mercy revelation shows that we are in a new spiritual age. Jesus' abundant promises and his mercy are falling from the heavens. Any soul in today's modern world has access to this mercy. The following summarizes the central aspects of these revelations.

## The Greatness of God's Mercy

Jesus told Faustina, "Write, 'the greater the sinner, the greater the mercy'. Summon all to confidence in the incomprehensible depth of my mercy for I desire to save all. The well of mercy was opened wide with a lance on the cross for all souls. I do not exclude anyone."

Jesus repeated this appeal. "Know my daughter that my heart is mercy itself. From this sea of mercy, graces pour out upon the whole world. No soul that comes to me departs without being comforted. All misery vanishes in my mercy and every grace (redemptive and sanctifying) stems from this source."

## The Painting of the Image

Jesus asked that a picture be painted of his image with the words: *Jesus I Trust in You*. (327) Sister Faustina writes: "I saw Jesus dressed in a white garment. He held one hand raised in blessing and the other hand was touching his garment at the breast. From under the garment came two rays of light, one red the other pale."

Jesus explained. "The rays represent the blood and water which gushed forth from the depths of my mercy when my agonizing heart was pierced on the cross. The pale rays symbolize the water, which cleanses and purifies the world (Baptism). The red rays represent the blood, which gives new life to the soul (Eucharist). These rays will shield the soul before the justice of my Father. Fortunate are those who live in this shelter, for the justice of God will not reach them there."

Jesus asked Faustina for:

1. A feast of Divine Mercy to be established on the Sunday after Easter. (Pope John Paul II did this.)
2. Preparation for this Divine Mercy Sunday through a Novena of Mercy (beginning on Good Friday).
3. Reception of the sacraments of confession and Communion on this feast (or within eight days).

## The Chaplet of Mercy

On September 13, 1935, a special vision happened. Sister Faustina saw an angel about to punish the inhabitants of a city. While praying, she heard these words: "Eternal Father, I offer you the body and blood, soul and divinity of your dearly beloved son, Our Lord Jesus Christ in atonement of our sins and those of the whole world." This prayer stopped the chastisement and is said on the Our Father bead of the rosary.

On each Hail Mary bead is said, "For the sake of His Sorrowful Passion, have mercy on us and the whole world."

Jesus said "Say this chaplet unceasingly. Anyone who says it will receive great mercy at the hour of death. Priests will recommend it to sinners as a last hope. If the most hardened sinner recited this chaplet even once, they will receive grace from my infinite Mercy. I want the whole world to know my infinite mercy. I want to give unimaginable graces to those who trust in my mercy."

### Main Promises of Divine Mercy

The promises of Divine Mercy to St. Faustina are very extensive and are contained in her Diary. Each day the person should recite the Chaplet of Divine Mercy (said on Rosary beads). Jesus said, "My daughter, at the hour of their death, I defend as my own glory, every soul that will say this chaplet, or when others say it for a dying person, the indulgence is the same". (Diary 811)

Devotion to the Sacred Heart and Divine Mercy is the perfect bridge. They help the soul to cross over from the Illuminative to the Unitive Stage.

### A Ministry to the Dying

In 1936, St. Faustina entered a hospital near Cracow and was placed in a ward where some people died almost every day. Some were peaceful but, for many, there was the tormented agony of a soul far from God. For two months, Faustina would leave her bed and kneel (sometimes for hours) until she saw the person grow calm. She witnessed firsthand the power of Divine Mercy. When the doctors forbade this practice (for her own health), Faustina just prayed from bed and the same graces were given.

The saints say:

1. *As long as a person is alive, he can become a great saint, so great is the power of God's mercy. (S.Faus)*
2. *O Jesus, how great is the fire of purest mercy which resides in your Sacred Heart. (S.Faus)*
3. *O Blessed Host, you contain the Body and Blood of the Lord Jesus as proof of his infinite mercy, especially for poor sinners. (S.Faus)*
4. *Each time I think of God's mercy and the ingratitude of sinners, pain stabs at my heart. (S.Faus)*

Group Discussion:

1. *Compare the Sacred Heart image revealed to St. Margaret Mary and that revealed to St. Faustina?*
2. *What effect do these revelations of God's mercy have upon you? Do we not offend Jesus if we do not believe his promises?*

### **CONCLUSION**

***How great are these works of Jesus! Yet, he invites all to go up higher, into the active unitive stage where the Holy Spirit begins to take charge. Let's keep reading and studying.***