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Year III, Volume II.

## ***The Devotional Life of a Catholic; Pt. II.***

### ***“The Sign of the Cross”***

We have already studied the Sacraments. They are, you will remember, outward signs of inward grace given us by Jesus Christ. In addition to them, there are in use in the Church lesser signs or visible rites, not as important as the Sacraments, yet based on the same principles and sanctioned by the blessing of the Church. They are called sacramentals and may be defined as any object set apart and blessed by the Church to excite good thoughts, increase devotion, and thus to remit venial sin. They are like Sacraments because they are a means of grace; but they differ from Sacraments because they only produce grace indirectly through the suffrage of the Church, and by causing devotion in the mind of the user. We can deal here with only a few of the sacramentals. In all, however, they form six categories.

The most frequently used sacramental and one of the most important is the Sign of the Cross. It takes various forms, all having in common the gesture of tracing two lines intersecting at right angles to indicate symbolically the figure of Christ’s Cross. But, most usually, the Sign of the Cross means the cross made upon oneself from forehead to breast and shoulder to shoulder while the words “In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, Amen” are said. The right hand is raised to touch the forehead, the breast, the left shoulder and the right shoulder in turn while the words are said.

Such a gesture is obviously a profession of Faith. It reminds us of the Blessed Trinity by the words that are used. It reminds us of the death of Christ, by the very form that is used. So it indicates belief in the most basic doctrines of Christianity—the Unity and Trinity of God, the Incarnation, and the Redemption of men by the Eternal Son of God.

The Sign of the Cross dates from apostolic times. In the second century Tertullian wrote of it as follows: “In all our travels and movements, in all our coming in and going out, in putting on our shoes, at the bath, at the table, in lighting our candles, in lying down, in sitting, whatever employment occupieth us, we mark our foreheads with the Sign of the Cross.” Of the Cross as a gesture of blessing, St. Cyril of Jerusalem wrote in the 4<sup>th</sup> century: “Let us then not be ashamed to confess the Crucified. Be the Cross our seal, made with sleep, when we lie down and when we awake; when we are traveling and when we are at rest.”



Today the Sign of the Cross is used continuously in our worship—over 50 times in the Sacrifice of the Mass, 14 times boldly by our fingers on our brow and in everything; over the bread we eat and the cups we drink, in our comings in and in our goings out; before our in administering Baptism, regularly in the Divine Office and as a symbol of blessing: it appears on almost everything used in God’s service—altars, linen, churches, books, etc. In our personal devotions we should make it, morning and evening, before and after all our prayers, before and after meals, in temptation, in bodily dangers, before every important action or undertaking.

A patriot signifies his loyalty by saluting his country’s flag. Catholics manifest their loyalty to Christ by making the Sign of the Cross. It is a sign of faith, as we have seen; it is also a sign of hope, a reminder that all blessings come to us by way of the Cross, and of charity, symbolizing our love of the God who died for us on the Cross.

The Saints have called the Sign of the Cross “a reminder of the price of our redemption,” for Christ redeemed us on the Cross; “the book of God’s wisdom,” because it shows the greatness of His love, the malice of sin, the misery of hell, and the value of souls before God; and “the mirror of virtues,” for through His Cross Jesus gives us such examples of humility, patience, forgiveness, obedience, courage, and generosity.

Therefore, we should never be afraid of making the Sign of the Cross; we should always make it with reverence, devotion, and care; we should think often of its meaning and we should always respect the cross in any form.

## “Holy Water”

When they enter a church, Catholics first go to a font or basin containing Holy Water, dip their fingers into it and make the Sign of the Cross on their persons.

This Holy Water is ordinary water to which a little salt has been added and which has been blessed by a priest in the name of the Church.

There is abundant evidence that blessed water has been used in the Church from early times. St. Epiphanius records that at Tiberias a man called Joseph poured water on a lunatic, having first made the Sign of the Cross and pronounced these words over the water: “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, crucified, depart from this unhappy man, thou infernal spirit, and let him be healed!” Theodoret relates how Aphraates cured one of the emperor’s horses by making it drink water blessed by the Sign of the Cross.

It is now the custom for water to be blessed before the principal Mass each Sunday and sprinkled over the people. The ceremony is called the *Asperges*, because that is the first verse of the Antiphon usually sung while it is taking place. This dates from at least the ninth century.

Salt is added to water during the blessing of it because it is a preservative, and the use of holy water will preserve us against the disease of sins. Used entering the church, it reminds us that we need purifying before we enter the presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament.

Good Catholics always keep a supply of holy water in the home. It is required when the priest brings Holy Communion to the sick, administers Extreme Unction and wishes to perform some special blessing. It is used morning and night, after rising and before retiring, and it is usual to keep it in fonts by the doors of the principal rooms for frequent use. The devout use holy water undoubtedly brings us many blessings from God. It is especially powerful as a safeguard against temptation.



The great St. Teresa tells us this: “I have often found by experience that there is nothing from which the devils fly more quickly and return not again than from holy water. They also fly from a cross, but they return again immediately. Certainly, the power of holy water must be great; for my part, my soul feels particular comfort in taking it, and very generally a refreshment and interior delight which I cannot express and which comforts my soul.”

Here is one of the prayers used by the priest in blessing water: “O God, who for the benefit of mankind has made use of the element of water to signify so many and so great mysteries, mercifully hear our prayers and impart the power of Thy blessing to this element prepared by manifold purifications, that this Thy creature may receive the effect of Thy divine grace, for the chasing away of devils and the curing of diseases; and whatsoever shall be sprinkled with this water in the houses and places of the faithful may be freed from all uncleanness and delivered from all evil. Let no pestilential spirit reside therein, no infectious air remain about. Let the snares of the hidden enemy be removed, and may whatever is found to be opposed to the safety or repose of those dwelling therein be banished by the sprinkling of this water; that the welfare we seek by the invocation of Thy Holy Name may be given to us, and that we may be protected from all manner of attacks, through Our Lord, Jesus Christ.”

## ***“Genuflections”***

After taking Holy Water from the font near the door of the church, Catholics choose their place, but before entering the pew, they genuflect on the right knee. This is an act of supreme reverence and adoration to Jesus ever present in the Holy Eucharist and reserved in the tabernacle on the altar. If the Blessed Sacrament is exposed on the altar, as at Benediction, they kneel on both knees and bow profoundly before taking their usual place.

After genuflecting, they enter the pew, kneel, make the Sign of the Cross, and begin their prayers. Kneeling, incidentally, is the attitude adopted in prayer from the earliest days of Christianity, following the example of Christ, who, in Gethsemane, “knelt down to pray” (Luke22:41). St. Stephen, “kneeling down...cried aloud, Lord, do not count this sign against them all” (Acts7:59). Similarly, St. Peter “went on his knees to pray” (Acts9:40), and St. Paul “knelt down and prayed with them all” (Acts20:36). Eusebius, in his *History of the Church*, relates how the knees of St. James had become callous as those of a camel through continual kneeling in prayer. Genuflecting, like all the other outward acts of religion, is a sacramental with power to sanctify us and bring us nearer to God.

## ***“Statues”***

A feature of most Catholic Churches is the presence of statues or images of Our Lord, His Holy Mother and the saints. Of course, Catholics are not so foolish as to pray to images. What their attitude really is, is explained in this quotation from the official decree of the Council of Trent: “The images of Christ and the Virgin Mother of God, and of the other saints, are to be had and kept especially in churches, and due honor and veneration are to be given them; not that any divinity or virtue is believed to be in them, on account of which they are to be worshipped, or that anything is to be asked of them, or that trust is to be reposed in images, as was done of old by the Gentiles, who placed their hope in idols; but because the honor which is shown them is referred to those whom the images represent; in



such wise that by the images which we kiss, and before which we uncover the head, and prostrate ourselves, we adore Christ, and we venerate the saints whose likeness they bear.”

It is true that the First Commandment of God seems to forbid the Jews to make any image. “Thou shalt not have strange gods before Me. Thou shalt not make to thyself a graven thing, nor the likeness of anything...” But it is clear that the emphasis is in the first and last clauses—“no strange gods,” “thou shalt not adore them” Yet, even if the prohibition were absolute, it would not bind Christians, for positive Jewish law was abrogated by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. However, it seems that this prohibition to make images was not generally

understood in an absolute sense by the Jews themselves, for there were images in the Temple—the brazen serpent, the golden cherubim, the carved garlands of fruit and flowers and trees, the carved lions which supported two basins and the King’s throne. Later, Jews appear to have returned to the strictest possible interpretation of the First Commandment and so the idea arose that the Jews never had any images. Yet, in addition, to those already mentioned in the temple, they certainly used images in their cemeteries and catacombs.

The first Christians undoubtedly used images. In fact, the catacombs are the cradle of all Christian art. When the persecutions eased, the art of the catacombs found its way into the churches and so the present day practice of honoring images arose. It is quite wrong to suggest that the early Church was in the slightest way prejudiced against the use of images or pictures. They were there and they were taken for granted as being helpful towards spiritual perfection. On the other hand, it is impossible to believe that these heroic men and women who died amidst most terrible tortures rather than indulge in the idolatry of the Romans, practiced idolatry themselves. Pope St. Gregory the Great, writing to an Iconoclast Bishop (i.e. one who wished images to be destroyed), expressed the true Catholic sentiment most admirably: “Not without reason has antiquity allowed the stories of saints to be painted in holy places. And we indeed entirely praise thee for not allowing them to be adored, but we blame thee for breaking them. For it is one thing to adore an image, it is quite another to learn from the appearance of a picture what we must adore. What books are to those who can read, a picture is to the ignorant who look at it; in a picture, even the unlearned may see what example they should follow; in a picture they who no letters may yet read. Hence, for barbarians especially, a picture takes the place of a book.”

The statues in Catholic churches, then, are given a relative honor; that is, they are honored, not for what they are in themselves, but because of whom they represent. A child who kisses her mother’s picture is simply showing true affection for her parent. (One, who bows before the chair of state in the House of Lords, is honoring the King, not the chair). So the Catholic kneeling before the shrine of Our Lady is only honoring the shrine because it represents the Immaculate Queen of Heaven; he adores neither the shrine nor the Blessed Virgin, for adoration is reserved for God alone.

## *“Relics”*

Sometimes, especially after evening devotions, the members of the congregation in a Catholic church, come to the altar for veneration of the relic of a saint. On Good Friday it is customary to venerate the relic of the True Cross, on which Christ died.

The practice of venerating relics can be traced back to at least the second century. After St. Polycarp had been burned at the stake, his disciples “took up his bones, which were more valuable than precious stones and finer than refined gold, and laid them in a suitable place,



where the Lord allows us to assemble in gladness and joy to celebrate the birthday of his martyrdom.” St. Jerome explains this practice: “We do not worship, we do not adore, we do not bow down before the creature rather than the Creator, but we honor the relics of the martyrs in order the better to adore Him whose martyrs they are.”

Instances of the same spirit are exceedingly common—a mother fondly treasures a lock of her dead child’s hair; nations preserve the pens with which treaties are signed; in fact, museums all over the world offer thousands of examples of a spirit which has always prompted Christian people to venerate whatever belonged to the saints of God or was closely associated with them.

We must not forget that throughout the history of the Church many wonderful miracles have been wrought through the use of relics, thus proving that their veneration is approved by God. Moreover, images have been made at the expressed command of God and His Mother. St. Margaret Mary, to whom Jesus revealed His Sacred Heart, told us that He wanted an image of His Heart to be enthroned in every home; Our Lady asked St. Catherine Laboure to have a medal struck according to the design that was revealed to her. This has since been known as “the Miraculous Medal”, and through it many wonders have been wrought.

## ***“The Way of the Cross”***

On the inside walls of most Catholic churches will be found fourteen pictures of scenes from the Passion and Death of Christ, each of which is placed above or below a wooden Cross. The crosses are known as the Stations of the Cross. The devotion of the Stations, known also as the Way of the Cross, consists in walking round the church and visiting each of these fourteen Stations, meditating for a few moments at each on the events it recalls to our minds. The pictures are there to help us in this meditation.

Of course, the Way of the Cross, like all the lesser devotional practices of Catholics, is quite optional. The greatest possible freedom is allowed where personal and private devotions are concerned. What suits one, may not suit another. No one could possibly take up all the particular devotions which different people have found helpful and which are approved by the Church. Devotion (in the singular) is more important than devotions (in the plural).

However, the Way of the Cross is particularly recommended, and it usually forms part of the public devotions of the Church during the season of Lent. It brings to our church the spirit of those who, throughout the ages, have, actually or in desire, visited the Holy Land and the places particularly associated with the sufferings of Christ. As early as the fifth century we hear of shrines being created in Europe intended to represent the more important shrines of Jerusalem, but it was only after a thousand years that the practice became fairly common. Encouraged by the Church priests began to introduce the Way of the Cross, as we know it, about the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, largely through the inspiration of that great Franciscan preacher, St. Leonard of Port Maurice.

Like most of the popular devotions of the Church, the Way of the Cross is richly indulgenced. “The faithful who with at least a contrite heart, whether singly or in company, perform the pious exercise of the Way of the Cross, when the latter has been legitimately erected according to the prescriptions of the Holy See, may gain a plenary indulgence as often as they perform the same; another plenary indulgence, if they receive Holy Communion on the same day, or even within a month after having made the Stations ten



times; an indulgence of 10 years for each Station, if for some reasonable cause they are unable to complete the entire Way of the Cross.” (Racolta, 1944).

The method of making the Way of the Cross will usually be found in Catholic prayer books, but there is no need to adhere to any strict formula. Visit the Stations in turn, meditate on each and try to make acts of love and sorrow.

### ***“The Use of Devotions”***

There are many other devotions which could be described here, but considerations of space make further elaboration impossible. Experience within the Church will soon reveal the strength and beauty of Catholic devotional life.

Nevertheless, first things must come first. Holy Mass and the Sacraments stand apart as the official channels of grace, for which no multiplicity of devotions can supply. Frequent, even daily attendance at Mass, with the reception of Holy Communion, ought to be the aim of every devout Catholic. Other devotions will soon find their due place, especially that to the Holy Mother of God, the channel of all grace to men, and so of life to our souls.

Patience is necessary as one grows in the spirit of Catholic devotional life. Many things which, at first, seem unattractive, may, in later years, be found to be full of significance and may then make a profound appeal. It is certain that as the years pass by one’s appreciation of the popular devotions of the Church can only grow. Their strong emotional appeal, their simplicity, their associations and their practice by many together make them most efficacious means of raising the mind and heart to God.

The Rosary, the Way of the Cross, the use of the Scapulars, the Angelus, Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, the dedication of each succeeding month, the orderly progress of the liturgical year, the veneration of particular shrines—these and many other practices are all approved by the Church, a loving Mother, with the sole object of bringing her children nearer to God. Their very multiplicity may be a distraction, but there will be little danger if it is always remembered that devotions are not an end in themselves, but only a means to the end, which is perfect devotion to God, through Jesus Christ, Our Lord, and Mary, His Mother and our Mother.

(Excerpts taken from *This is the Faith* by Francis J. Ripley; published by *Catechetical Guild Educational Society*; *Nilil Obstat & Imprimatur* given January 25, 1951)

## ***Sermon of Fr. Martin Stepanich O.F.M. The Apostles Creed Pt. VI: Life Everlasting***



The Son of God had completed His work on earth. He had come to save that which was lost. He gave His life, in order that man might find life, not only a short span of life, but a life that has no end. By His death, He reopened the gates of Heaven that men might enter therein and enjoy forever the life which He gained for them.

So death might no longer reign supreme, He crushed the power of death by His glorious resurrection. He subjugated the powers of darkness whose kingdom is the kingdom of death. Then, when His work on earth was at an end, He bade farewell to the Apostles and departed from them to the eternal Kingdom of



happiness, which was prepared for all those who love and serve Him. There He now awaits each one of us to come to Him and receive the reward of life everlasting. The purpose of our existence on earth is eternal life.

The belief in everlasting life has existed among all men at all times. There is no nation, not even a savage tribe among which there is not a belief of some kind of life in the next world. Now, what does eternal life mean to us, especially to us who possess the true faith?

We know that everything that exists in this world has some purpose.

Everything that is done by men is done for a purpose or for a reason. That is why the children constantly ask their father or mother the question: Why? Why, Daddy? If you tell the children that there is no reason, they will not be satisfied. But if you do tell them the reason, they will say: oh!

St. Francis of Assisi once asked a bricklayer: "Brother, what are you doing?" The man replied: "I am working. I work all day." "Why are you working?" "To earn money." "Why do you need money?" "That I may buy bread." "And why do you want bread?" "Well, that's interesting," answered the bricklayer. "That I may live, of course!" "And why do you live?"

That is the important question. Let each one answer that question for himself. Surely, man's life has some purpose. The purpose of a watch is to tell the time. A house is built that it may provide shelter for men. Apple tree grows that it may produce apples. Everything, then, has a purpose.

Should man be the only creature without a purpose? Man is the noblest of all God's creatures. Hence, his purpose here on earth must be nobler than that of any other creature. And where is this purpose to be found? Is it here in this world? Perhaps it is to gain wealth? Now, riches are certainly not the worthy object of a being with an immortal soul such as man has. Riches do not satisfy man. The more wealthy men are the more wealth do they desire. They are never at peace. They must guard their wealth with fear that thieves may come and take their wealth from them or, at least, they lose it through some misfortune or other. And when man dies, what happens to his wealth? He cannot take it with him. He must leave everything to his heirs. He earned his wealth with much labor and his heirs enjoy the fruits of his labors. Can all men become wealthy? Most men do not and cannot become wealthy. Why then should they live on earth if they cannot acquire riches? Certainly, riches cannot be man's purpose in life. There must be something else.

Is it perhaps pleasure and enjoyment? It cannot be, for most men do not spend their lives merely seeking pleasure and enjoyment. And what of those who have pleasure and enjoyment? Are they satisfied? They are not. On the contrary, they are more dissatisfied than a hard-working man who finds little time for enjoyment. They are often in bad humor, discouraged, and gloomy.

Or perhaps, man's purpose is to acquire honor and a great name for himself. That would seem to be a little more reasonable, but still it is not sufficient. What about those millions who live unknown and unsung, who quietly do their duties every day of their lives? The laborer goes to his work every day; the humble housewife performs her daily tasks about the home; the young maiden consecrates her life to the service of God in the obscurity of the convent; the businessman sits behind his desk day after day. Such as these struggle here on earth for 25, 50, or 75 years, and then disappear from among men, hardly leaving a trace of their existence. If a great name is the purpose of life, then why did such people as these live at all? Can you bear the thought that human life is nothing more than the



attainment of a great name? What will it profit you if they write your life on dead paper, or carve your statue in dead stone or cold bronze? What you want is life.

If the purpose of life is not of this world, then it must be in the next. It must be something that is worthy of man's efforts. It must be something that satisfies man completely. It must be something which lasts forever. And man finds all this if he raises his eyes beyond the things of this earth and looks up to Heaven. Then everything becomes clear to him. Then he knows why he lives. Then he realizes that this life is just the beginning.

Almighty God did not create man for this short, earthly life. He created him for a life of unending happiness. That man might seek this happiness; the Creator placed into his heart a desire for it. That is why St. Augustine, the great bishop of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, wrote: "Thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord, and our hearts will not rest until they rest in Thee."

(Sermon given at Franciscan Monastery, Washington, D.C., November 8, 1942)

### *Prayer: The Road to Sanctity.*

St. Paul, writing to the Christian converts, addresses them as persons called to be Saints. It is clear from this mode of address that, in the eyes of the Apostle, the vocation of every Christian, as such, is that he be a saint. To the Apostle's mind this calling, once one had been baptized, is inevitable. To evade it to the end is not merely to risk but actually to incur everlasting unhappiness. Startling as this thought is, there is not needed much reflection to see that its truth cannot be gainsaid. Nothing "unsaintly" can find a place in heaven. What is definitely and by irrevocable choice "unsaintly" is forever excluded from the presence of God, and this is necessarily so by the very nature of things. It is not consequence of a stern, arbitrary, and, if He chose, revocable decree of banishment issued by God that the unholy soul simply could not exist in heaven. It would shrivel up in a veritable agony. It could no more exist there than could a dry twig in a blazing furnace. Light is not more incompatible with darkness than the sanctity of God with what is unholy. It is the infinite purity, the perfect sanctity of God that makes heaven impossible for the unsaintly. Since eternal happiness depends on sanctity, it is important to have a very clear notion of what it consists in and of a way by which it is attained.

What is sanctity? The philosophers, aiming at making clear what a thing is, very often prepare the way by pointing out what it is not. This procedure is a great help towards the acquisition of clear ideas, and can be applied in the present enquiry with some advantage. By very many, sanctity would be very probably be defined as that which renders a person eligible for canonization. Such a definition would be too exacting. Those who are placed on the roll of honor of the Church and are offered to the veneration and admiration of the faithful are heroic saints. The process of canonization reveals the elements of heroic, not of ordinary, sanctity. In an army it is not only those decorated with the official insignia of valor who are good, brave, and trustworthy soldiers. In God's army the official saints are the especially distinguished. There are multitudes of others who make good the vocation of which the Apostle speaks and verify in their lives the notion of Christian holiness. Therefore, sanctity is not to be limited to heroic sanctity.



Neither may sanctity be confounded with ethical perfection. One cannot be a saint without having all the qualities that go to make a man, but those moral perfections that constitute the perfect ethical man, in the natural sense, do not constitute a saint. Christian sanctity is a supernatural thing. To know what it is, recourse must be had to the eternal source of the supernatural, namely to God Himself. God is the supreme Saint. Holy is His Name. He is Sanctity Itself, and therefore, the exemplar and prototype of all sanctity. The holiness that is not modeled on His is not veritable holiness. Hence it was that Jesus said to the multitudes: “Be ye perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect.” It is as if He said, “You must be saints, and if a man is to be a Saint, he must be like Jesus.”

In what does God’s Infinite Holiness consist? It consists in His Infinite Charity, that is, in His Infinite Love of God. This statement needs a little explanation. God is Holy, not for the reason that He loves Himself but because that which He does love with an Infinite intensity is what merits to be infinitely loved and chosen for its lovableness. God Himself embraces in Himself all that verifies the notion of Good. He loves that Infinite Good and in that lies His Infinite Holiness. He loves, proportionately, every created participation of that all-complete Good. He loves these created reflections of the Infinite Good, not for themselves, but as being ectypes of that which is the object of His Infinite complacency. In that lies His Holiness and He loves Himself in these things.

For men and angels also, sanctity lies in the love of that which is worthy of most supreme love. It is synonymous with the love of God, and is measured by that love. It is scarcely necessary to remark that this love of God is not a sentiment, a feeling, or an emotion. It is a motion of the will, not of the sensibility. (True love, is not in the emotions but in the will, and the emotional movements that often accompany it must not be mistaken for it. St. Thomas gives the true notion of love when he says that to love is to will that good should befall a person.) It consists in a deliberate election, choice and preference of the Supreme and Infinite Good, above all things else. God, the Infinite Good, as revealed by faith, is made the supreme object of desire to the rejection of the claims of all other goods that can be selected in His stead and substituted for Him as an object to which the will should adhere. This adherence of the will to God is nothing else but the conformity of the human will with the Divine; man wills the same things that God wills; he rejoices in what pleases God and is saddened by what displeases Him; he does God’s holy Will with all the care and accepts from His hands the daily cross. This total surrender to and conformity with the Divine Will implies that the Soul has willingly yielded to the attractiveness of God, and this willing yielding is love. That man is a Saint from whom the attraction of God is supreme above all other attractions. To be a Saint is to be effectively enamored of the beauty of God, to desire nothing which would conflict with that desire of God. As for God Himself, so also for man, the love of the Supreme Good carries with it a love of every created participation of that Infinite Good. But that created good must not be loved for itself. It must be cherished because it is of God, and because its beauty is a reflection of His.



Among these created participations of the Infinite Good which is God, one of the fairest is the supernatural perfection of a rational creature. God made man to be man. He made him to be something more. By the infusion of Sanctifying Grace He made him to be a being whose moral excellence should be touched with divinity. The man of God's design in the actual order of things is one whose soul should be equipped not only with the moral but also with the theological virtues. The human participant of the Infinite Good is one in whom exists Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, Temperance, along with Faith, Hope, and Charity.

The state of soul realized by the possession of these virtues is good and an object of desire. Aiming at sanctity means aiming at a life in which all these virtues are steadily and constantly operative.

Jesus Christ was the man who realized this ideal in all its perfections. He was, in a supreme measure, prudent, just, brave, and temperate. Instead of Faith and Hope He possessed from the first their consummation in Vision. (Since Faith and Hope are virtues belonging to the state of the wayfarer, in heaven, belief will have found its perfection in knowledge and Hope will have passed into possession.) In Charity, that is ardent love of God, the Infinite Good, Jesus Christ, could not be rivaled. In Him, human perfection, as planned by God, was fully and perfectly realized. God could look upon this handiwork of His Divine Spirit and say that 'it was Good.' As such, it was an object, a thing, lovable and to be desired. Jesus could, and did, love His own moral and spiritual perfection. But He did not make it an object of desire for its own sake. It was God that He loved in this perfect earthly mirror of God's Beauty. If He wrought in His life and in His actions such a perfect masterpiece of moral and spiritual excellence, it was not for the sake of, or because He was drawn by the attraction of that moral excellence itself. He did it because it was God's Will that He should do so. God's Will is identical with Himself. To seek God's Will perfectly in all things is the same as to pursue the Supreme Good in all things. This Jesus did. He did not exercise virtue for virtue's sake, but because He apprehended it as God's Will. Through and in the act of virtue He as man kept united with God, His Supreme Good.

The spiritual life is sometimes spoken of as the seeking after perfection. If this be understood to mean that the man aiming at spirituality is to set before him his own perfection as an object after which he is to strive, it is apt to lead to serious mistakes in the spiritual struggle. It is true that the development of a full spiritual life involves in its attainment man's perfection; yet it is not precisely at this perfection that he must aim, but at God. God is the final end of man and therefore the object after which he must strain in all his spiritual and moral endeavors. The spiritual life may be more clearly, simply and correctly described as the "cultivation of intimacy with God" and, ordinarily speaking, the soul may cultivate that intimacy, and how it is to overcome the obstacles it encounters in its efforts to become intimate with its Creator. God has smoothed the path for the human soul by becoming man. To become intimate with God, the soul has to become intimate with Jesus Christ, who is like to the soul in His Humanity, like to it in all things except sin. Man can grow in friendship with God by growing in friendship with One Who is fellow-man. The spiritual life is the process of growth in charity that is in love of Jesus Christ, true man and yet true God. This love not only binds the soul to Jesus, but has the intrinsic effect of assimilating it to Him, transforming it to His likeness. "But he who is joined to the Lord," writes St. Paul, "is one Spirit."



It is to be observed that the Savior in tracing for men the path they were to tread in order to enter into this union with Him, did not point to Himself saying, "Behold in Me the pattern of, and the living object lesson in every human virtue, prudence, justice, courage, kindness, truth, and the rest." He did not say, "Seek to acquire all these virtues which you see in their perfection in Me and then you will become My intimate friends." He said, "Learn of Me for I am meek and humble of heart." One has only to be humble after the model of Jesus and all else will follow. How this is so is not immediately apparent; for the full implications of the virtue of humility are not readily seized. Humility consists in making God all and oneself nothing in one's life. [It is, to use a phrase expressive, but perhaps, of unfortunate associations.] "God over all." It is the practical acceptance of St. Michael's battle cry: Quid ut Deus! Who is like unto God! It is the complete obliteration of all the false claims of self, in face of all pervading sovereignty of God. All that is required on the part of the Christian to make perfect his calling, is to efface himself before God. Hence it is that the whole burden of the Savior's teaching to men is the practice of self-abnegation. Self-abnegation is something much larger than either suffering or mortification. The instructions on prayer that follow are an exposition of the mode by which this conquest of self is carried to a final and successful issue. Prayer, properly carried out, will have as its effect the gradual revelation to the soul of this disease of self-love which so intimately penetrates the very fibers of its being as to pass unobserved by the person that does not lead an interior life. In prayer the soul gradually draws into radiant purity and truth of the soul of Jesus. It becomes bathed in and penetrated through and through with that radiance; and in this splendor all in it that is of self and not of God, all that is in it unlike Jesus, stands clearly revealed to that soul's own gaze. When this unlikeness is purged away by the action of suffering and the sacrament of the Eucharist, then the close union of the soul with God takes place.

Prayer, mortification, and silence prepare the soul for the action of the Blessed Eucharist. Once the obstacles are cleared away from the soul this great Sacrament of union accomplishes in its perfection that which is its special effect, namely the creation of a union of spirit between the soul and Jesus. Prayer prepares the way for this, for prayer that is good must have as its effect the gradual growth of self-abnegation. The presence of self-love is the great obstacle to the action of grace. Prayer reveals the presence of this self-love and secures the aid of God to its extermination. The grace of Jesus flowing to the soul through prayer and the Sacraments carries out this process of extermination. As the Christian soul empties of self, it fills up with God, not merely with some thought or aspect of God as visualized by a self-centered spirituality or even as revealed in creature reflections, but with God as He is in Himself and as He reveals Himself to "little ones". To be filled with God is to be perfect with the very perfection of our heavenly Father, but this happy result is conditioned by the soul's practical application of the means explicitly stated by Our Divine Guide and Exemplar. "Learn of Me that I am meek and humble of heart". It is no narrow or particular sense that God is said "to resist the proud and to give grace to the humble."

In these words of the Apostle is revealed the connection, not logically immediate, between humility and spiritual perfection. Humility is not fortitude, nor temperance, nor yet charity. But where it exists, all these will exist. For the Christian supernatural virtues, the only ones that avail for union with God in this life and in the next, are not acquired but infused. God gives them. They are communicated with grace. They grow with grace and are proportioned in their perfection to the measure of grace. God gives grace generously to the humble. To each He gives according to the measure He had predestined, which is not the same for all. But each one in his individual case receives according as he is more or less



perfectly disposed to receive. As humility is perfect so is the disposition perfect. The perfect humble man will flourish in all virtues. He will be fearless, temperate, kind, loving and all the rest. He has not to accomplish acts of temperance to have the virtue of temperance. He has it already in virtue of grace and in a strength proportioned to that grace. The acts merely give a greater facility in the exercise of the virtue and dispose the soul for a further increase of grace. So it is in the case of the other Cardinal virtues and in the case of the Theological virtues.

It is sad that of all those who start out with such confidence and such good will on the supernatural life, so very few attain to any marked degree of spirituality.

The causes of this very general failure are known only to God. They are necessarily inscrutable to us from whom are hidden the secret resistances of the created will. Resistance to grace is the reason of the absence of growth in the spiritual life. Yet it would be hard to say that the resistance is deliberate in the majority of cases. It is quite possible that it may proceed from want of spiritual enlightenment, and that a great number of failures are to be attributed not to bad will but to an imperfect understanding. It is quite possible that the souls do not succeed simply because they employ faulty methods or make a faulty use of good ones. Self-knowledge is needed for growth in the spiritual life. St. Catherine of Sienna stresses this point with great emphasis in her writings. Now perhaps the concentration of the soul's attention on the constituent elements of the virtues that its ambition to attain and of the vices it longs to eradicate may impede the growth of self-knowledge. One who has some experience in dealing with souls cannot fail to remark that very many good and promising beginnings end in disappointment and discouragement. Such a one will observe that, generally speaking, -not absolutely speaking- there is a common cause for this. It is due to the soul's being continually occupied by the symptoms of its spiritual state, by these symptoms being healthy or the reverse. Its gaze ranges over the whole field of the virtues and the whole field of its vices and it brings its own daily conduct into relation with these. It aims at development by striving after the practices of the virtues and by eliminating the activities of the vices. In this it can fail to go to the radical cause of its growth or rather of its absence of growth in virtue. An example from medicine will help to make this clear. When a patient presents himself to a doctor and reveals that he is suffering several kinds of pain and in different parts of the body, there are two courses of action open to the medical man. He may deal with each form of suffering and by the resources of his skill bring alleviation to one after the other. In due time the patient is discharged from the hospital free from suffering, but only to fall back into his old state in a short time. If he has found a very skilled doctor his experience will be different. The expert physician will set himself to find out in his patient the "focus of infection", which is the source of the various ills the sufferer complains of. If this "focus" is discovered and eliminated, the patient leaves the hospital not temporarily but permanently cured. In the spiritual world there is an unerring and divine Physician. It is Christ Himself. He had diagnosed the "focus of infection" in every soul. It is "self" in its varying forms and manifestations. Eliminate this and there ensues necessarily a healthy spiritual life. Hence it is that He preaches self-abnegation in the first place. He preaches it in the second place: He preaches it all the time. On it all depends. Self-abnegation is but humility in action: it is the practical carrying out in action of the precepts of that fundamental virtue.

Jesus is the perfect type of humility in the soul: He is the perfect model of self-abnegation in action. Mental prayer is the means by which the soul grows into the spirit of Jesus, developing in itself "the mind of Christ". If the soul that practices mental prayer does not grow in humility and self-abnegation it is a sign that its prayer is badly made and is not



fulfilling its purpose. It is essential for spiritual progress that one should have a clear vision of the role that prayer has to play in this progress. That role is the development, through loving contemplation of the God-Man, of the fundamental dispositions of the Sacred Humanity. Little by little the soul grows in that basic humility so characteristic of Christ; complete dependence on and loving subjection to God becomes as it were leaven which spreading by imperceptible degrees pervades its every action; it is marked by a self-abnegation which aims at purging from it everything that is not God, so that, “conformed to the image of His Son”, it may live its life in full accord with the designs of Providence in its regard

(Excerpts taken from *Progress through Mental Prayer* By Fr. Edward Leen: Published by Sheed & Ward; *Nihil Obstat & Imprimatur* given July 27, 1935)

## ***The Following of Christ; Bk. I, Ch. XX.***

### ***“Of the Love of Solitude and Silence”***

Seek a convenient time to attend to yourself; and reflect often upon the benefits of God to you. Let curiosities alone. Read such matters as may produce compunction rather than give occupation (compunction is defined as “a strong uneasiness of conscience caused by remorse and feelings of guilt”). If you will withdraw from superfluous talking, and idle visits, and from hearing new things and rumors, you will find time sufficient and proper to spend in good meditations. The greatest Saints shunned the company of men when they could, and chose rather to live unto God in secret.

As often as I have been among men, said one, I have returned less a man. This we too often experience when we talk long. It is easier to keep silence altogether than not to fall into excess in speaking. It is easier to keep retired at home than to be enough upon one’s guard abroad. He, therefore, who aims at inward and spiritual things, must, with Jesus, turn aside from the crowd. No man can safely appear in public but he who loves seclusion. No man can safely speak but he who loves silence. No man can safely be a superior but he who loves to live in subjection. No man can safely command but he who has learned how to obey well.

No man can rejoice securely but he who has the testimony of a good conscience within. Yet even the security of the Saints was always full of the fear of God. Neither were they the less careful and humble in themselves, because they shone with great virtues and grace. But the security of the wicked arises from their pride and presumption, and in the end turns to their own deception. Never promise yourself security in this life, however good a religious or devout solitary you might seem to be.

Oftentimes the highest in men’s estimation have been in the greater danger, by reason of their too much self-confidence. And hence it is more useful for many not to be wholly without temptations, but to be very often assaulted, lest they be too secure, lest perhaps they be lifted up unto pride, and even turn aside, with too little restraint, after exterior consolations. Oh, how good a conscience would he keep who should never seek transitory joys, and never busy himself about the things of this world! Oh, how great peace and tranquility would he have who should cut off all vain solicitude, and think only of the things of God and his salvation, and place his whole hope in God!

No one is worthy of heavenly consolation who has not diligently exercised himself in holy compunction. If you would feel compunction to your very heart, enter into your private room and shut out the tumult of the world: as it is written: “*Be sorry in your beds.*” You will find in your room what you will too often lose by going abroad.



In silence and quiet the devout soul makes progress, and learns the hidden things of Scripture. There she finds floods of tears, wherein each night she may wash herself and be cleansed; and so become the more familiar with her Creator, the further she dwells from the tumults of the world. For who so ever withdraws himself from acquaintances and friends, to him will God, with His Holy Angels, draw near. Better is it to lie hidden and take diligent care of yourself, than, neglecting yourself, to work miracles.

Why do you wish to see what it is not lawful for you to have? The world passes away and its concupiscence. The longings of sense draw you to roam abroad; but when the hour has passed away, what do you bring back with yourself but a weight upon your conscience, and a dissipated heart? Oftentimes a joyous going abroad begets a sorrowful return home: and a merry evening makes a sorrowful morning. So all carnal joys enter pleasantly; but at the end bring remorse and death.

What can you see elsewhere that you do not see here? Behold the heavens, and the earth, and all the elements; for out of these are all things made. What can you see anywhere that can last long under the sun? You trust that perchance you will be satisfied; but you will never be able to reach it. If you could see all things at once before you, what would it be but an empty vision? Life up your eyes to God on high, and pray for your sins and negligences. Leave vain things to vain people; look to those things which God has commanded. Shut your door and call upon Jesus, your Beloved. Stay with Him in your room; for nowhere else will you find so great peace.

If you have never left it, nor hearkened to any rumors, you would have remained longer in happy peace. But the moment you delight to give ear to novelty, you must suffer from disquietude of heart.

## ***“Practical Reflections”***

Exterior retirement is not sufficient to engage and satisfy a heart which would really withdraw itself from creatures to be occupied with itself alone; but interior retirement is likewise necessary, which is a spirit of recollection and prayer. A soul which is separated from all the amusements of the senses, seeks and finds in God that pure satisfaction which it can never meet with in creatures. A respectful and frequent remembrance of the presence of God occupies the mind, and an ardent desire of pleasing Him and of becoming worthy of His love engages the heart. It is absorbed in Him alone: all things else dwindle into nothing. It buries itself in its dear solitude, and dies to itself and all things in God: it breathes only His love, it forgets all to remember only Him; penetrated with grief for its infidelities, it mourns incessantly in His presence; it sighs continually for the pleasure of seeing and possessing Him in heaven; it nourishes itself with reading good books, and with the exercise of prayer; it is never tired of treating with God on the affairs of salvation, at least, it humbly supports the irksomeness it may experience; and with a view of honoring His sovereign dominion by complete destruction of sin in itself, it renounces all desire of finding any other satisfaction than that of pleasing Him.

## ***“Prayer”***

O my God, when will silence, retirement, and prayer, become the occupations of my soul, as they are now frequently the objects of my desires? How am I wearied with saying so much and yet doing so little for Thee! Come, Jesus, come, Thou, the only object of my love, the center and supreme happiness of my soul! Come, and impress my mind with such a

lively conviction of Thy presence that all within me may yield to its influence. Come, Lord, and speak to my heart, communicate to it Thy holy will, and mercifully work within it both to will and to do according to Thy good pleasure. Alas! How long shall my exile be prolonged? When shall the veil be removed which separates time from eternity? When shall I see that which I now believe? When shall I find what I seek? When shall I possess what I love, which is Thyself, O my God! Grant, O Jesus, that these holy desires with which Thou now inspire me, may be followed by that eternal happiness which I hope for from Thine infinite mercy. Amen.

### ***The Explanation of Our Mission and of Our Logo***

*Since we have named this newsletter the “Mystical Rose” it would seem only prudent that we explain why we call it, “Mystical Rose”, and why we have designed this Logo at the top of the first page.*

*The title, “Mystical Rose”, is taken from the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Logo of the crown of thorns, with the roses attached, symbolizes Our Lady’s suffering during Our Lord’s Passion and Death. It also symbolizes Her suffering for us, Her spiritual children. The seven roses affixed to the crown of thorns represents the Seven Sorrows of Our Lady.*

*We dedicate this work to Our Blessed Mother and we ask Her to help and guide us, so that we may be able to serve God’s people by printing material that will be spiritually edifying; bringing those who read it to a better understanding of what God requires of them in order to achieve salvation; and a more sincere desire to serve the Living God to the best of their ability.*

*Information about Catholicism is so very necessary in order to live a good life. The world in which we live today is in dire need of that information, in order to save mankind from its own self-imposed ignorance. We hope, by the grace of God, that our newsletter will help to inform.*

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