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## *A Defense of Christianity*

A European politician, in a pronouncement of fairly recent date, stated that Christianity had failed. It did not seem to him that his assertion needed proof. The actual condition of things in his own country and in other countries appeared to him to be ample justification for what he said. Yet the statement, so far from being indisputable, can be shown, on analysis, to betray a gross confusion of thought.

Christianity has not failed, for the simple reason that it has scarcely been tried. It certainly has not been tried on any extensive scale. It could be branded with failure, if having been guaranteed by its Founder to be able to achieve certain definite results, it had been, when put to the test, found wanting. But if Christianity is but imperfectly or incompletely applied to the task of reducing to order the confused issues of human existence, it cannot be blamed for the relative chaos that results. If Christianity, in its integrity, was accepted by all men, and its principles were applied by them, in their efforts to solve the practical problems of life, peace and comparative happiness would be the result. If Christianity were put in practice for one entire day by all men throughout the whole world, then for that day the woes, which afflict mankind, would in great part have ceased. Though all suffering and sorrow would not have ended (Christianity does not guarantee that it would put an end to distress inherent to mortality and the fallen state of men) yet the earth would bear a not too remote resemblance to the Garden of Paradise. To dream of bringing about this happy state of affairs without applying the principles of Christianity to the unraveling of the tangled issues of human existence, is to dream a dream that can never be realized. Many of the world's rulers of today indulge this idle dream. It is not astonishing that the result of the political efforts of such dreamers is but to intensify the existing disorder and to make confusion worse confounded.

As has been said, Christianity cannot be accused of failure: it is European man that can, with strict justice, be accused of failure, because, on the whole, he has failed to respond to the appeal of Christianity. It is more than doubtful if it can be maintained with any truth that, at any time, since the beginning of the Christian



era, any body politic whole-heartedly accepted and applied the full Christian program in the organization and regulation of its life. Doubtless such an application has been made partially and on occasions, even to some considerable extent. But the Christian philosophy of life, in its political and social aspects, was never given full and unhampered play in molding the public life of the nations of Europe, or anywhere else for that matter. There was a time when things were shaping towards this more or less remotely. The condition of public affairs was satisfactory or unsatisfactory according as there was an approach to, or a falling short of, the Christian ideal.

What has been said of social groups is not universally true of individuals. There have been individual men and women who have given a whole-hearted trial to Christianity and have not found it wanting. In their hands it has been a complete and triumphant success. These persons are known as saints. They have illustrated the annals of the Church in all eyes. They understood Christianity to be what it actually is, a divinely fashioned instrument, made for the expressed purpose of transforming human nature. Christianity guarantees this result—this divine transformation of humanity—if it be applied to the work. It asserts that it is equipped with ample resources to bring this process to a successful issue. It does not guarantee this result if inadequately used, or if ill used; and ill used it must be, if it is not wholly accepted or if it is badly understood.

The Saints accepted Christianity whole-heartedly. In their case there was no failure. They became exactly what Christianity guaranteed to make them, supermen in the highest sense of the term. They became transfigured with a transfiguration symbolized by that of Christ on the Mount. They became human beings—more human than others, and yet human beings who diffused rays of the divinity. They are people who have permanently benefited mankind. Their spirit and their works survive them and serve as an enduring leaven in the mass of humanity. The good they did was not interred with their bones. They were eminently great, and Christianity was the source of their greatness. In others, be they individual persons or groups of persons, Christianity succeeds in a measure that corresponds exactly with the degree in which it is accepted. Unfortunately, to subscribe to Christianity is not the same as being integrally a Christian. To be this one must accept the Christian standard of values. If this is not done fully, elements of disorder and distress necessarily invade the life of the individual and of society. The failure to achieve an existence that is satisfying must not, in these circumstances, be laid at the door of Christianity, while forgetting Christian values in practice. This is the failure not of Christianity, but the failure of men to be Christians.

The life of the follower of Christ is bound to be filled with contradiction and inconsequence, unless he is clearly aware of what Christianity is for, what it guarantees to do, and what promises it holds out. Amidst the clamor and tumult rising from the social and economic disorders so widely prevalent at the moment, the real message of the Gospel of Christ can, with difficulty, be heard. The enemies of Christianity—and many of them, very likely, are enemies only of what they conceive Christianity to be—attacking it, either as being the cause of evils

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from which the nations are suffering, or at least, as not playing its due part in striving to remedy these evils. There is a certain amount of tragic irony in seeing Christianity blamed for those evils, which have arisen from the abandonment of Christian principles. For from the corruption of the Christian social structure, due to the great schism of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, emerged those germs of economic theory and practice which have been in subsequent times so prolific in fruits of economic evils. Men were not aware at the time that, in replacing the living authority of Christ with private judgment, they were actually abandoning Christianity, they were not aware of the logical implications of their revolt. Retaining much of what materially belonged to Christianity; they believed themselves to be formally Christians. The logical consequences of their premises derived from this revolt, are becoming perfectly clear now. Their errors in doctrine reacted on the organization of human life, in a way they could scarcely have foreseen. The economic, social, and political principles that issued from their dogmatic positions contained, in germ, the social, economic, and political evils which afflict Western civilization today.

When man has declined in spirituality, it is natural that he should find his material needs to be the most insistent and the most important. Contemporary Western man feels more intensely his economic than his spiritual distress. Aristotle accurately remarks that a person is prone to make happiness consist in a condition of things which is the direct opposite to a misery from which he happens to be, at the moment, suffering. To a man suffering from dire poverty, wealth and happiness. To the dispossessed multitudes cut off from the sources of wealth by the operation of modern industrialism, happiness appears to lie in free access to the world's goods and secure possession of them. They are taught by their guides to believe that Christianity blocks the path to economic security and are roused to fierce anger against it. The folly and injustice of this attitude has just been pointed out. It is the extreme of perversity to blame Christianity for what has followed from the abandonment of Christianity. It is not Christians who are responsible for the woes that afflict humanity. It is men, who, whether they call themselves Christians or not, apply to the solution of life's problems and to the regulation of life's conduct, principles that deviate from the principles taught by Jesus Christ. They are responsible to the exact degree of that deviation.

But this is not the only point to make. The defenders of Christianity, in the ardor of their defense, are prone to be drawn away into a position dictated by their adversaries. When, for instance, the Church is bitterly assailed for not remedying the economic evils, the Christian apologist hastens to point out all that the Church has done in this sphere of action. What the Church has done, and is doing is immense, undoubtedly. But it must not be forgotten that her primary concern is with spiritual interests to be regulated by man's own thoughts and inventions. Social, political, and economic problems can be solved by the exercise of human reason and by the right use of human will. The Church, the living voice of Christianity, does not wish to supersede, but to stimulate, human activity. She contents herself with giving directions which will prevent the activity from taking



courses which she knows, with her divinely infused wisdom, will ultimately militate against man's good. She desires that man should himself exert his faculties to the full to secure, by human designing, a satisfactory arrangement of human affairs, and such a measure of temporal well-being as is feasible.

This attitude is not one of haughty aloofness from, or cold indifference to, men's earthly cares. It is dictated by a sovereign respect for those inborn possibilities of development, which can be evolved by man's use of his own powers. She has a notable precedent for it in the attitude of her divine Founder. A contemporary of the Savior's urged Him to leave aside for a moment His labors for the establishment of the Kingdom of God, and devote Himself to something more immediately practical, the settlement of an economic dispute. "Master" he said, "speak to my brother that he divide the inheritance with me." Here there is a very characteristic situation. When things go to men's satisfaction, they are quite willing to dispense with the guidance of God. But when, left to their own resources, they have thoroughly mismanaged their affairs, then they turn to Him, that is, to His living voice on earth, to put order into the confusion they have created. More likely than not they upbraid the Church and assail her as being responsible for the existing disorder. The Church could reply to the appeal and the calumny in the words of Jesus: "O man, who hath appointed me judge and divider over you?"

For men, as a rule, have but shown themselves too eager to manage their own temporal affairs. They resent what they call the Church's interference. This resentment culminates in a deliberate exclusion of the Church from the Councils of peoples. Even at the best of times, when States were not yet professedly secularist, what jealousy, was always manifested with regard to the action of the Church in secular matters! How slow men were to take Her advice! How Her efforts for procuring the temporal welfare of men were hampered, thwarted, and resisted.

The gradual silencing of the voice of Christianity in the Councils of the Nations is the evil of the chaotic conditions of modern civilized life. This issue was inevitable for though the Church's wisdom is primarily in the domain of the world to come, yet, She is wise, too, with regard to the things of this world. She is not for the world, and yet she is able and ever ready to act as if she were equipped specially to procure the temporal goods of men. She is able and willing to give men direction in temporal matters, which if followed will result in temporal prosperity. She is too wise to promote unreasonable utopias, from which all suffering and toil will be banished. She can give prudent directions as to how to devise measures for the mitigation of inevitable hardships, and the elimination of unnecessary evils. If rulers and ruled alike listened to her voice, the authentic voice of Christianity, what a change would come over the world! It would not cease to be a vale of tears, but would cease to be a vale of savage strife. It would not become an earthly paradise, but would become an earth where man's dreams of a satisfying order of things could be realized.



But when all this has been said, it remains true that the sphere of activity in which the Church's efficacy is to be tested, is not the sphere of economics. That is not her province. There nothing more than relative success can attend human efforts, whereas, on the other hand, in that work which it properly belongs to Christianity to accomplish, no failure can attend on its efforts. The function of Christianity is not to reform or devise economic or social systems: her function is to reform and to transform the economists themselves. The Church, the organ of Christianity, is well aware that a change in social conditions unaccompanied by a change in the disposition of men, will but result in the substitution of one set of wrongdoers for another. "And the last state of men becomes worse than the first." (Matt.12: 45). The Church undertakes to change men, not systems. She knows that if men become what they ought, systems will become what they ought. The dictum of her divine Founder remains her own and voices her wisdom as well as her experience. "Seek first the Kingdom of God and His justice and all these things shall be added unto you," (Matt.6: 33, Luke 12:31).

There is so much clamorous abuse of the Church for not remedying social evils, that both her friends and her enemies gradually have their minds dulled to the apprehension of what the Church's essential function is in the world. But it must be repeated that the creation of satisfactory social conditions is far from being the primary, much less the only aim of Christianity. What that aim is; what promise Christianity holds out to men; what it guarantees to effect for them; what means and processes take the form they actually assume; and finally, what a wondrous life, satisfying every desire and aspiration, it infallibly provides for men, if men will only consent to make use of the resources it puts at their disposal—in a word—to set forth the real message of Christianity, its promises, its methods, and its guarantees, is the purport of these pages.

In Christendom today, conflicts regarding particular points of the Christian dispensation have come to an end. The battle in the realm of the spirit is now waged on a narrow front. It is the value itself of the Christian notion of human character and of the Christian ideal of life that is challenged. The world is dividing itself rapidly into two hostile camps, one combating that ideal outright, and the other defending it with what might be termed a dogged tenacity. The protagonists of the Christian ideology of human existence, are rapidly shrinking in number. They know that they are not fighting a losing battle, but they undergo all the agony of mind of men who feel that they are fighting against overwhelming odds the fight cannot be lost, but individual losses can be heavy.

In this strife, where all Christian values are called in question, the best vindication of the Christian ideal is its bold, uncompromising expression. Such an expression may not be without its effect on the enemies of Christianity, and may not be without its utility for those who are loyal to Christianity. It is possible that the sincere among the former have but a disoriented idea of what they attack, and that many among the latter have an imperfect view of what they defend. Many are misguided men who in their revolt against the Christian ideal of human character and the Christian rule of life, are not in revolt against that ideal itself, but what they



conceive it to be. It is hard to say how far Christians themselves are responsible for this state of affairs. Not only inadequacy in the practice of Christianity, but also a faulty presentation of its values, is apt to rouse antagonism in the sincere and the reflective. The Christian ideology of life is so coherent, so logical, so simple yet so mysterious, so accommodated to the average man as well as to the most highly gifted, and finally so soul satisfying that, when adequately presented, it must readily recommend itself to all men of sincere and good will. It alone among all other ideologies, faces the problems offered by human existence and gives an answer to them. Contrasted with the Christian ideology of life and life's experiences, all the theories that conflict with it and set themselves up in opposition to it, must appear barren, ignoble, and utterly incapable of satisfying the aspirations of the human spirit. On the other hand, for those who rally to the standard of Christ, a clear and explicit notion of what Christianity really means, must have the effect of strengthening their hands and confirming their resolutions in the defense of the values to which they give their allegiance.

(Taken from *Why the Cross* by E. Leen)



### ***Sermon by Fr. Martin Stepanich O.F.M.;*** ***“Supernatural Hope”***

When we receive sanctifying grace at Baptism, or regain it through the sacrament of Penance, we also receive, automatically, various supernatural virtues. One of these supernatural virtues is hope, a supernatural hope.

Hope is one virtue that really brightens up our lives. It cheers us up, because it fills us with confidence that we will one day attain everlasting happiness. It likewise makes us feel more sure that, with the help of God's grace, we will overcome all the obstacles to our eternal salvation and do all the difficult things that may be required of us.

But why all this confidence? If we look at ourselves, is there reason to be so confident? No, there isn't. The reason for all this confidence is God. One look at ourselves can make us very discouraged. We see in ourselves much moral weakness, spiritual weakness. We see our strong inclination to sin, together with a decided distaste for virtue. We see how much we prefer our own will to the will of God and of His Church. We know how we think and act as if we are wiser even than God Himself. Factors such as these inspire little hope of eternal salvation.

But the thought of God cheers us up, because if we go along with Him and work hand in hand with Him, He will see to it that we arrive at our eternal destination safely, despite all our weaknesses. He knows our weaknesses, but He also knows just the right remedy for them. That's why He gave us the sacraments, which were meant to be a source of supernatural strength. That's why He gave us all that advice about prayer and about self-denial and penance and about the



practice of virtue. In all these things, He has hidden His divine grace, without which we cannot be saved.

So all our hope is bound to be in God, who had provided all the means of salvation. He can give us all that we need, and He wants to do it, because He looks out only for our good. It is His almighty power and His boundless goodness that are the basis for hope.

This hope of which we are speaking, is supernatural hope. It is possessed only by those who are in the state of sanctifying grace. For those who are in mortal sin, hope loses its supernatural character. With the loss of sanctifying grace, everything supernatural is lost and, therefore, also supernatural hope. It can be regained only through sincere repentance and a sincere confession of sin in the sacrament of Penance.

Yet there are those who do not even attempt to regain it. Haven't you heard people talk as though they have given up hope of saving their souls? We have heard hardened sinners say that they know they are headed for hell, but that there's nothing they can do about it. Actually, they have given up trying. They do not want to give up their sinful habits and they do not intend to do so.

There are those, e.g., who are slaves to various vices, such as drunkenness, impurity, greed, and dishonesty. And there are those who have given up the practice of their Catholic religion and cannot be persuaded to come back to the Church. Others are entangled in bad marriages and refuse to have things straightened out. Such as these have no hope of salvation, as long as they remain in their sins and refuse to repent.

But God continues to hold out hope for them. He is slow to anger and slow to revenge. As it is written in the Book of Tobias in the Old Testament, He constantly calls out to the sinner to repent, "Be converted therefore, ye sinners, and do justice before God, believing that He will show mercy to you. (13:8)."

(given in Chicago, Ill on December 21, 1958).



## *The Sacrament of Confirmation*

### *"Purpose and Definition"*

For our consideration of the significance of Baptism, it will be evident that it is the duty of every baptized person to try to live up to his dignity as a sharer in the Divine Nature, a temple of the Holy Ghost, a brother of Christ, a cell of the Mystical Body. Anyone who has tried, knows that this is not easy. To live as a real Christian in the modern pagan world, to resist continually every kind of temptation, to maintain always a thorough Christ-like outlook is a task which requires special help from God. That help that He gives in a special Sacrament called Confirmation.



## ***“The Minister”***

The ordinary minister of Confirmation is a bishop but under certain circumstances, such as danger of death, a parish priest may administer the Sacrament. The practice of reserving the administration of Confirmation, under normal circumstances to the bishop, dates from the Acts of the Apostles. As we shall see more fully in a moment, when Philip the Deacon had converted Samaria, he baptized the converts, but it was the Apostles who went specially to confirm them.

The bishop administers the Sacrament of Confirmation by praying that the Holy Ghost may come down upon those who are to be confirmed; and by laying hands upon them, and making the Sign of the Cross with chrism on their foreheads saying at the same time: “I sign you with the sign of the Cross, and I confirm you with the chrism of salvation; in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.”

Confirmation can be administrated to all baptized persons and only to them. The present discipline of the Church demands that they have the use of reason.

## ***“Anointing with Chrism”***

Chrism, the oil used in Confirmation, is made of olive oil and balsam, or balm, and is blessed by the bishop on Holy Thursday. The olive oil comes from the olive tree which, since the dove brought back a branch of it to Noah in the ark, has been regarded as the emblem of peace and plenty. Olive oil has always been considered as giving strength to those to whom it is applied. It was used for this purpose especially by the Romans before their battles. It saturates and spreads, it is frequently used for burning and illumination and it softens and smoothes. It is therefore, a very fitting symbol of the effect of Confirmation which strengthens the will against spiritual enemies, diffuses the Holy Ghost over the power of the soul, gives light to the understanding and facilitates the observance of God’s Law.

Mixed with the olive oil is balsam which is given from the Terebinth tree and other plants. It exhales a fragrance and is said to heal and preserve from putrefaction. So Confirmation enables the soul to manifest the sweet odor of virtue and it heals the wounds of sin and preserves from its corruption. That Confirmation is a true Sacrament—an outward sign of an inward grace instituted by Christ—is defined by the Council of Trent.

## ***“Confirmation in Scripture”***

It is clear from the New Testament that Christ promised to give His followers the Holy Ghost for the purpose of strengthening them in the profession of their faith. “When they bring you to trial before synagogues, and magistrates, and officers, do not consider anxiously what you are to say, what defense to make, or



how to make it; the Holy Ghost will instruct you when the time comes, what words to use.” (Luke 12:11-12).

“The Holy Ghost will come to you, and you will receive strength from Him; you are to be My witnesses in Jerusalem and throughout Judaea, in Samaria, yes, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8). “I will ask My Father and He will give you another to befriend you, one who is to dwell continually with you forever...the Truth –giving Spirit.” (John 14:16). Earlier, St. John himself remarks that Our Lord “was speaking” here of the Spirit, which was to be received by those who learned to believe in Him; the Spirit which had not yet been raised to glory.” (John 7:39)

The Apostles and Cornelius the centurion received Confirmation in extraordinary ways and not through the Sacrament, as we may read in the Acts of the Apostles. But St. Peter told the people that the gift of the Holy Ghost was not meant to be extraordinary but was promised to all the followers of Christ. “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, to have your sins forgiven; then you will receive the gifts of the Holy Ghost. This promise is for you and your children, and for all those however far away, whom the Lord our God calls to Himself.” (Acts 2: 39). Clearly, the gift of the Holy Ghost was to be a normal thing in the Church, What more natural than to suppose that it would be conferred by a Sacrament?

That such was the case is clear from a study of some incidents in the story of the early Church given by St. Luke in the Acts of the Apostles; “And now the Apostles at Jerusalem, hearing that Samaria had received the word of God, sent Peter and John to visit them. So these two came down and prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost, who had not, as yet, come down on any of them; they had received nothing so far except Baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then the Apostles began to lay their hands upon them, so that the Holy Ghost was given to them.” (Acts 8:14-17).

Later we are told how St. Paul came to Ephesus. “He met some disciples there and he asked them, was the Holy Ghost given to you, when you learned to believe? Why, they said, nobody even mentioned to us the existence of a Holy Ghost.” Paul, knowing that if they had ever been baptized, they would had heard of the Holy Ghost, soon discovered that the only Baptism they had received was that of St. John the Baptist. So, “they received baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus; and when Paul laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came down on them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesized.” (Acts 19:1-7).

The instances give us the full revelation of a Sacrament. We see a divine gift being communicated by man to men with divine results following automatically. It is, in fact, clear that there existed in the Church at the time, a normal rite for conferring the Holy Ghost, which was distinct from Baptism. Now only God could institute such a sign; hence Confirmation must have been given to the Apostles by Jesus Christ, the God-man.

Just as Catholics today use many different words to describe the Sacraments and make many allusions to them, which are understood by all, even though they



do not define exactly what they are, so in the early Church we find similar allusions. If a priest today urges his people not to delay the spiritual births of their children everyone knows he is speaking of Baptism. So when the early Christians spoke of “the laying on of hands,” “receiving the Holy Ghost,” “sign,” “seal,” “chrism,” “unction,” “Character,” “Confirmation,” they would be understood to refer to the Sacrament of Confirmation. All the words in that last list were in common use before the end of the first century, a fact which adds much weight to our conviction that the Holy Ghost was conferred by an external rite in which “signing and sealing” were concerned.

Thus St. Paul could write to the Corinthians: “It is God who gives both us and you our certainty in Christ; it is He who has anointed us, just as it is He who has put His seal on us, and given us the foretaste of His Spirit in our hearts.” (II Cor. 1:21-22). Again: “In Him, too, you learn to believe, and had the seal set upon your faith by the promised gifts of the Holy Ghost.” (Eph.1:13). St. John refers to the anointing of the Holy Ghost: “The Holy One has anointed you, and now nothing is hidden from you.” (V.27).

## ***“Confirmation and Tradition”***

Turning from Scriptures to the writings of the earliest Christians we find that even in the third century Confirmation was regarded as a normal rite of the Church, the same as that administered by the Apostles to Philip’s converts in Samaria. It is a rite distinct from Baptism, consisting of imposition of hands, anointing and accompanying words, by which the Holy Ghost was conferred on those already baptized and a character or seal impressed upon their souls.

Tertullian, that useful witness as friend and critic to Catholic practice and belief at the end of the second century and the beginning of the third century, offers strong evidence for the existence and sacramental nature of Confirmation.

“After having come out of the laver (font), we are anointed thoroughly with a blessed unction according to the ancient rule...The unction runs bodily over us, but profits spiritually...Next to this, the hand is laid upon us through the blessing, calling upon and inviting the Holy Ghost.” Again: “The flesh is washed that the soul may be made stainless. The flesh is anointed that the soul may be consecrated. The flesh is sealed that the soul may be fortified. The flesh is overshadowed by the imposition of hands that the soul may be illuminated by the Spirit of God.”

St. Cyprian is equally clear: “Two Sacraments preside over the perfect birth of a Christian, the one regenerates the man, which is Baptism, the other communicating to him the Holy Ghost.” Referring to the Confirmation of the Samaritans in Acts, Cyprian writes: “It was not fitting that they should be baptized again, but only what was wanting, that was done by Peter and John; that prayer being made for them and hands imposed, the Holy Ghost should be invoked and pour forth upon them. Which also is now done among us; so that they who are baptized in the Church are presented to the bishops of the Church and by our prayers and imposition of hands, they received the Holy Ghost and are perfected



with the seal of the Lord.” The Truth is more than clear. Confirmation has existed in the Church with all the essentials of a Sacrament from the time of Christ and of the Apostles.

## ***“The Effects of Confirmation”***

The primary effect of Confirmation is a great increase of the divine life of grace in the soul and consequently a closer and more intimate union with God who dwells there. Secondly, the sacramental grace is strengthened and is substantially the same as that received directly from the Holy Ghost on the First Pentecost, and it brings with it the Gifts of the Holy Ghost in fuller and more perfect form than that in which they received at Baptism. Further, it bestows a right or claim to those spiritual helps or actual graces which will enable us to lead holier lives undeterred by human respect or other worldly obstacles.

By Confirmation, then, one receives in a special way the Holy Ghost, who is the light, the love, and the strength of God, guiding our path through life, inflaming our hearts and enabling us to overcome all difficulties. He makes us soldiers in Christ’s army, ever fighting against the devil, the world and the flesh and ever ready to profess our faith, to suffer for it, to persevere in it at no matter what cost, and to radiate it.

Catholics in the modern world must be centers from which the influence of Christ will be radiated. Pope Pius XI writing to Cardinal Cerejeria in 1934 said: “The Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation impose—among other obligations, this Apostolate of Catholic Action...Through Confirmation we become soldiers of Christ. A soldier must toil and fight, not so much for himself as for others.” St. Thomas Aquinas elaborated this point nearly seven centuries ago: “ In Baptism man receives power to do those things which pertain to his own salvation, for as much as he lives to himself; whereas in Confirmation he receives power to do those things which pertain to spiritual combat with enemies of the True Faith.” If a majority of the confirmed Catholics in the world today were only living up to their obligations as soldiers of Christ, the spread and growth of the Church would increase a hundredfold and with knowledge of the Gospel would come to men all other blessings God promised to those who seek first the Kingdom of God.

## ***“The Gifts of the Holy Ghost”***

The Gifts of the Holy Ghost are imparted in their fullness in Confirmation. They are enumerated by the Prophet Isaias (11, 2) as follows: Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude, Knowledge, Piety, and Fear of the Lord.

Wisdom enables us to consider the eternal truths, to judge all things by them, to set right value on salvation and the means to it and to relish the things of God. It illuminates the intellect, moderates the passions, rectifies the affections and directs the will. To the soul it brings vigor and energy, facility in well doing, contempt of earthly riches and, most precious of all, union with God.



Understanding is the power of penetrating the hidden meaning of the great spiritual truths. On those who possess it the Gospels make a deeper impression than on others; they appreciate the Sacraments and ceremonies, they love the lives of the Saints, they show the world due contempt and they are able to guide and advise others.

Counsel is the power of deciding prudently about the concerns of God and salvation, a certain readiness of will to do the better things.

Fortitude brings firmness of soul in bearing difficulties for God, courage to profess the Faith and do penance and the energy necessary for perseverance. It makes us patient and steadfast in our trials and temptations.

Knowledge enables us to see and use temporal things in such a way as to help towards our salvation.

Piety is the disposition to serve God with tenderness and devotion and it helps us to practice what religion teaches us, especially about the loving fatherhood of God, the motherhood of Mary, and the Church, the spiritual brotherhood of all the members of Christ and our duty to our relatives and fellow countrymen.

The Fear of the Lord is filial and reverential and is always united with the love of God.

These seven gifts are necessary for salvation. The virtues, of themselves, are not sufficient to raise man to the perfection to which he is called. Their incapacity is remedied by the gifts of the Holy Ghost. They enable us to act correctly in a superhuman way, to bring our actions into line with God's own standards of conduct. They enable us to live our human lives as God would live a human life.

## ***“The Fruits of the Holy Ghost”***

The fruits of the virtues and gifts infused into our souls by the Holy Ghost are also enumerated by St. Paul. They are charity, joy, peace, patience, benignity, goodness, longanimity, mildness, faith, modesty, continency, and chastity. For the sake of completeness a few brief notes are added on each of the twelve fruits.

Charity--The perfection of it, as found in the saints, consisting in deeds, not words.

Joy--happiness from a good conscience, pleasure in doing good, consolation in God's service.

Peace—state of soul at rest with God, others, and self.

Patience—bearing with others without resentment or irritation; resignation amid trials.

Benignity—sweetness of disposition, gentleness, compassion.

Goodness—willingness to serve and oblige; tries to avoid hurting others.

Longanimity—calmness in prolonged trial, perseverance in well-doing, indifference to ingratitude or failure.

Mildness—gentleness, forbearance, meekness.

Faith—not the theological virtue but truthfulness, trust, worthiness, candor, openness, simplicity, and fidelity to promises.



Modesty—external moderation in speech, dress, manner; reserve, unassuming disposition.

Contineny—repression of anger; impatience, and sensuality

Chastity—purity of soul.

We must take care that Confirmation is for us no longer the forgotten Sacrament. If we have not already received it, we must arrange to do so at the earliest possible moment, and to do so worthily after due preparation. We cannot afford to go through life without all the wonderful graces it bestows. For the Church it is the perpetuation of Pentecost, the means by which she keeps alive the power of the Holy Spirit within her members.

(Taken from *This is the Faith* by Francis J. Ripley; published by *Catechetical Guild Education Society*; *Nihil Obstat & Imprimatur* given January 25, 1951)

## ***The Following of Christ; Book II, Chapter XI*** ***“Of the Small Number of the Lovers of the Cross”***

Jesus now has many lovers of His kingdom, but few bearers of His cross. He has many that are desirous of consolation, but few of tribulation. He finds many companions of His table, but few to drink of the chalice of His Passion. Many revere His miracles, but few follow the ignominy of His cross. Many love Jesus as long as they meet with no adversity; many praise Him and bless Him as long as they receive some consolation from Him. But if Jesus hide Himself, and leave them for a while, they either murmur or fall into excessive dejection.

But they that love Jesus for Jesus’ sake, and not for the sake of some consolation of their own, bless Him no less in tribulation and anguish of heart than in the greatest consolation. And if He should never give them consolation, yet would they always praise Him, and always give Him thanks.

Oh, how much is the pure love of Jesus able to do, when it is not mixed with any self-love or self-interest! Are not all they to be called mercenaries who are ever seeking consolations? Do not they prove themselves to be rather lovers of themselves than of Christ, who are always thinking of their own advantage and gain? Where shall we find a man that is willing to serve God disinterestedly?

Seldom do we find anyone so spiritual as to be stripped of all things. For who shall be able to find the man that is truly poor in spirit, and divested of attachment to all created things? *His voice is* (as of things that are brought) *from afar, and from the remotest coasts.*” If a man gives his whole substance, still it is nothing. And if he does great penance, it is but little. And if he attain to all knowledge, he is far off still. And if he has great virtue and very fervent devotion, there is still much wanting in him, namely, the one thing which is supremely necessary for him. What is that? That having left all things else, he also leave himself, and wholly go out of himself,



and retain nothing of self love. And when he shall have done all things, which he knows he ought to do, let him think that he has done nothing.

Let him not make great account of that which may appear much to be esteemed; but let him in truth acknowledge himself to be an unprofitable servant; as the Truth Himself has said: "*When you shall have done all things that have been commanded you, say: We are unprofitable servants.*" Then may he be truly poor in spirit, and may say with the Psalmist: "*I am alone and poor.*" Yet is there no one richer than such a man, none more powerful, none more free; who knows how to leave himself and all things, and to put himself in the very lowest place.

## ***Practical Reflections***

How many Christians adore Jesus, poor in the manger, and suffering upon the cross, who will neither submit to privation, nor endure tribulation for His sake! Yet He was born, and lived, and died in poverty and suffering to teach us to renounce all things, and to bear our crosses with patience; to teach us, by His example, the virtues necessary for salvation; and to merit for us the grace to practice them. What will it avail you to adore Jesus Christ, your Savior, and your Model, if you do not imitate Him and place your whole confidence in Him? Take then the generous resolution of renouncing all things by depriving the senses of all dangerous or unprofitable gratifications; by discarding from your mind all vanity and self-complacency, and all malignity in condemning others; and by stripping your heart of all attachments to self-satisfaction and self-seeking on all occasions. Carry this interior poverty and deprivation even so far as to renounce your own will in all things, to desire only and to accomplish the will of God. It is by thus giving up your whole self to God that you will constitute Him the sole Master and Proprietor of your heart, and by stripping yourself of all things, here, make Him your inheritance forever hereafter.

## ***Prayer***

I conceive, O my Savior, an exalted idea of the bereavement You require of a Christian heart, since You oblige it to yield itself up entirely to You, and to substitute Your love in place of the love of itself. But how far am I from practicing it, how incapable of it of myself! Help me, O Lord, to renounce and to die to myself in all things. Suffer not my heart to seek itself, since You designed it to be entirely Yours. Grant that whenever it is tempted to live for, or seek itself in anything, it may immediately renounce and die to itself, to live only in and for You. Then may I say with Your Apostle: "*Jesus Christ is my life, and it is gain for me to die to all, that I may live only in Him, and by Him, and for Him. Amen.*"

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

*Since this is the first year of the “Mystical Rose”, it would seem only prudent that we explain why we call our newsletter, “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 knowledge of their faith; 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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