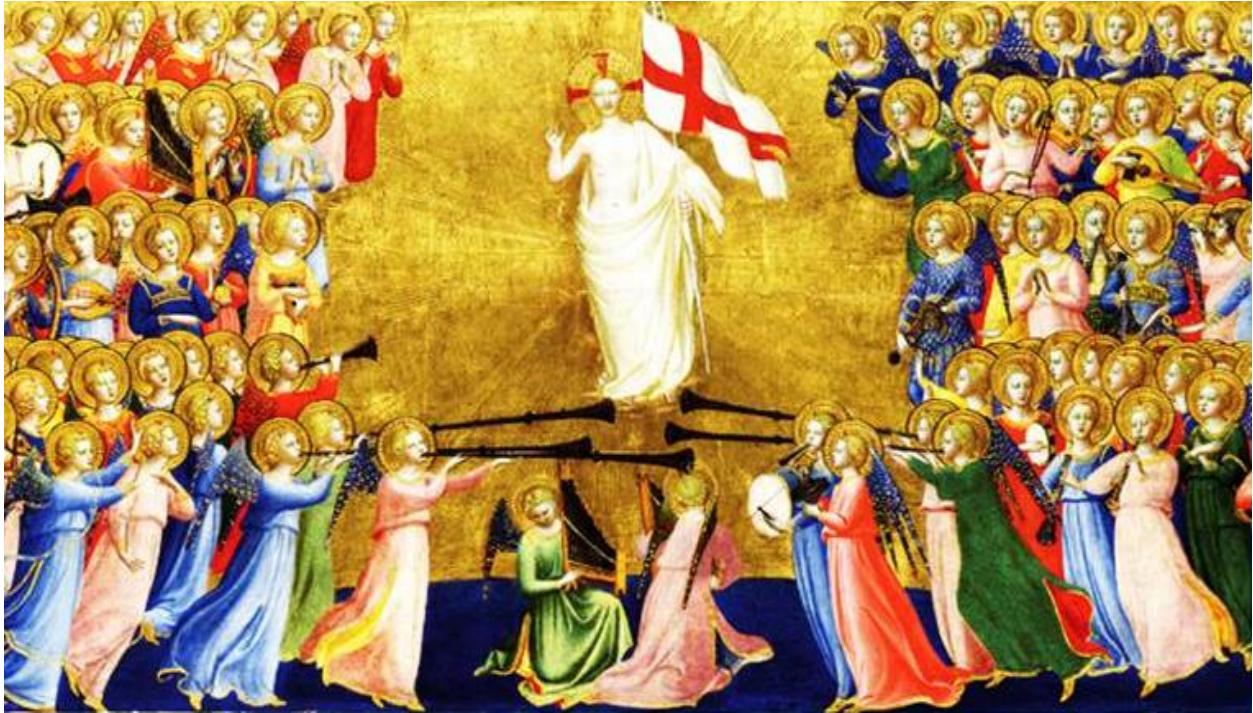


A SCHOOL OF CATHOLIC SPIRITUALITY



WHEN THE SAINTS GO MARCHING IN

1. Many consider themselves as Christ's friends but know him very little. (St. John of the Cross)
2. Jesus is like a King, observing you from the mountain to see if you are fighting as a soldier. (St. Louis de Montfort)
3. When Jesus is your Lord, He will teach you many things. (St. Teresa of Avila)
4. If you can find everything that is good in God's will, why search elsewhere? (Fr. de Caussade)
5. I wish everyone understood that it is very easy to reach sanctity. (St. John of the Cross)
6. His Majesty can teach everything in one minute. (St. Teresa of Avila)
7. While picturing Christ, I would unexpectedly experience His presence. (St. Teresa of Avila)
8. I felt I was God's Queen and I used my new title to ask the King for every possible benefit. (Little Flower)
9. God writes on devout hearts the same words He wrote in Scripture. (Fr. de Caussade)

WHEN THE SAINTS GO MARCHING IN

OVERALL PURPOSE

We are trying to respond to the plea of St. John Paul II for “Training in Holiness” and “Schools of Prayer.”

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MEET THE SAINTS

1.

MONKS AND MENDICANTS

ANTHONY, BASIL, BENEDICT, FRANCIS, DOMINIC

The Early Church

From the New Testament, we learn the fervor of the Early Church. The early Christians accepted a new way of life, experienced the power of the Holy Spirit and suffered persecution and death to preach the gospel to the whole world.

However, as the church was accepted, the fervor cooled off. The church became, as in our day, part of the culture, passed on from one generation to another.

To restore fervor, God raised up some special saints who formed the first monasteries. The greenhouses of the devout life which, even today, offer Catholics an invitation to prayerful solitude.

Impacting the Church

The Church has many canonized saints. Some were bishops, like John Neumann. Some founded religious orders, like Katherine Drexel and Elizabeth Ann Seton.

Some saints, however, impacted the whole church for centuries, especially in fostering a devout life. Let's meet the principal foundations of the Devout Life.

1. **St. Anthony of Egypt** (251 – 356, 105 years) is the forerunner of Eastern monasticism. At 20 years of age, he heard the gospel at Mass say "Go, sell all you have and follow me." Anthony was rich because his deceased parents left a large inheritance. He sold everything, gave to the poor and then worked for his living.

He asked an elderly hermit to guide him and then became a hermit himself. Because many became his disciples, he founded the first monastery, a collection of hermit cells. He was an active hermit, counseling many people and travelling to solve Church disputes. Because St. Athanasius wrote a biography of St. Anthony, he influenced the whole Christian world.

2. **St. Basil** (330 – 379) was born into a cultured, aristocratic and deeply Christian family in Pontus, Asia Minor. His grandmother, parents, one sister and two brothers are all venerated as saints. They were part of a devout, ascetical group. He was ordained a priest at 35 and a bishop at 40.

He deliberately formed little spiritual communities, adopting St. Anthony's rules and introducing psalm-singing (a central part of monasteries today). Basil made sure to join the monasteries with the bishops to guarantee a unity of holiness and authority within the Church.

Basil is the founder of Eastern monasticism and the inspiration for St. Benedict, the founder of Western monasticism. Over a five year period, Basil wrote rules for monks that Eastern monasticism follows to this day. He emphasized community life, liturgical prayer and manual work.

3. **St. Benedict (480 – 543)** He was born in central Italy and went to Rome to study. Deeply influenced by Eastern monasticism, he became a hermit. However, hundreds of disciples came, so he formed them into 12 deaneries of 10 each at Subiaco. After 25 years, he founded the famous Monte Cassino monastery and completed his Rule, borrowing much from St. Basil and St. Augustine.

Because his rule was flexible, various kinds of monasteries with diverse apostolates began. His work perdures today, 1600 years later in all the Benedictine groups that follow his teachings (and in so many monasteries that use his wisdom). He is the founder of Western Monasticism.

The Mendicant Orders

In the 12th century, new forms of devout life began. The members did not live in monasteries but lived in communities while preaching to the world.

4. **St. Francis of Assisi (1181-1226) and St. Dominic (1170-1221).**

Although contemporaries, they probably never met. Yet both founded what we call “Friars”. The Franciscans stressed poverty. The Dominicans stressed study and preaching (OP – Order of Preachers).

Like many saints, Francis was born into a rich family. Francis loved wealth and life. At 20, however, he became a prisoner of war which led to a serious illness. Still, at 23, he was preparing for war again when he had a series of religious experiences – a vision, a meeting with a leper, and Jesus’ voice telling him to “rebuild my church.”

At 27, he saw the road to follow, basing his life upon Jesus’ instructions to the 12 apostles to preach and take nothing because the worker is worthy of his keep. Mt 10:5-14 became his guiding light. Soon, many disciples joined him. He wrote his rule which Pope Innocent III approved when Francis was 29. His friars preached everywhere, causing a strong penitential movement.

By 35, Francis saw his Franciscans spreading everywhere, including missionary activity. On September 14, 1224, Francis received the 5 wounds of Jesus (Stigmata) on Mt. Alvernia. Jesus also promised him that his order would last to the end of the world. (So if you want job stability, become a Franciscan).

Devotion had flowed out of the monastery and into groups which were close to people and daily life.

5. **St. Dominic** (1170-1221)

Born in Spain, Dominic hoped to be a contemplative in a monastery, but two journeys into Northern Europe showed him the great threat to the Church from the Albigensian heresy.

Many fought this heresy by force, but Dominic saw the great need for good teaching. He gathered a few companions as itinerant preachers, going to each town. In 1214 (age 44), Dominic realized that he should form his companions into a religious community.

At Toulouse (France) the bishop asked him to preach in the whole diocese. The pope confirmed the group (1217) and for the next 4 years, Dominic expanded the group to other dioceses, including Rome. His priests became professors at Paris and Beligra. He also styled his group according to the Franciscan model.

He made his priests study, write and preach (e.g. St. Thomas Aquinas, a Dominican). He, personally, undertook extensive preaching which led to his early death (51).

Dominic loved truth, spent long hours in prayer, was firm in decisions but filled with sympathy and enthusiasm. His love for God included tremendous love for others.

His genius created this new model linking a prayerful life with God to an active ministry seeking the salvation of all. He often wept while preaching or celebrating Mass. He tried "to speak only of God or with God." He always began his homilies with a Hail Mary and had that prayer said frequently during the homily.

Conclusion

We rejoice in a Catholic Church which holds on to rich traditions. Even in our modern world, if a person wishes to be devout, they can enter a monastery or join a religious order. The gifts of Anthony, Basil, Benedict, Francis and Dominic remain in our midst.

Discussion Questions:

1. *Do you see the great value of the Catholic Church which conserves the spiritual riches of past centuries?*
2. *What "modern movements" have helped you spiritually?*
3. *Have you taken advantage of the "old" and "new" riches?*

MEET THE SAINTS

2.

THE GREAT CARMELITE SAINTS

TERESA OF AVILA, JOHN OF THE CROSS

The Carmelites

In the 12th century, the Carmelites (Brothers of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel), began at Mount Carmel (which the prophet Elijah made famous). In a little over 100 years, the Carmelite order was extinguished because the Latin Kingdom was defeated. (Carmelites returned to the Holy Land in the 17th century).

Fortunately, some Carmelites had migrated to England and then spread to Continental Europe. In Europe, they changed from living in a monastery to becoming mendicant friars (like the Franciscans and Dominicans).

In the 16th century, their religious observance had declined. So, God raised up Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross to reform groups of women and men contemplatives.

John's reform led to a separate Carmelite Order called "discalced" (no shoes). John was much younger and greatly influenced and encouraged to reform the men as Teresa had done for the women.

Teresa of Avila (1515 – 1582)

Teresa was born near Avila of a large aristocratic family with Jewish ancestry. Her grandfather came to Avila so his children would marry into noble families. Her father married and had two children but his wife died. Then, he married Beatriz, who gave birth to Teresa.

Fifteen years later, her mother died, leaving 10 children with Teresa as "the most beloved of all". She had a beauty that lasted until her final years.

She was introverted, affectionate and able to adapt to all personalities. Besides having many skills (like needlework), she had great courage. (At 7, she and her brother set out for Moorish territory to be beheaded for Christ. An uncle caught up to them).

At 12, caught up in natural attractions, her fervor dwindled and she thought of marrying. When her mother died, Teresa asked Our Lady to be her mother. Her father sent her to a convent school (16 years old) where she regained her devotion. At 20, she decided to enter the convent. Since her father opposed this, she went by night to the Carmelite convent at Avila. However, she grew ill and went to an uncle's house to heal. There she read a book on mental prayer that delighted her. At 24, she fell into a coma and was thought to be dead, but got healed (although with paralyzed legs for 3 years).

For the next 18 years, she lived in mediocrity, but with some mystical experiences.

At 39, (in 1554) she had her profound conversion experience “While looking at Christ hanging poor and naked on the cross.” With her sins, she saw herself as a Mary Magdalene. Suddenly, without any worthiness, her mystical experiences increased. Some people didn’t believe they were valid because her life had been far from holy. However, Saint Peter Alcantara encouraged and directed her (even after his death). For the next five years, she was the object of gossip and ridicule.

In 1560, (45) she decided to found her own convent, secretly obtaining a house in Avila for herself and 13 others. The town was in an uproar and the bishop, who originally backed her, changed his mind. The new convent had strict enclosure and total dedication to contemplative prayer. The sisters lived in faith, believing if they were true to God, He would provide their needs. Soon, 16 more convents sprung up. She did great penances and, at the same time, enjoyed great mystical gifts while being an excellent administrator.

In 1567, she met a newly ordained Carmelite priest, John of the Cross, whom she convinced to collaborate with her in reforming the men’s order. As with the women, the men resisted this new movement. (The full story of his difficulties is detailed later).

After her death, her body remained incorrupt (General Franco kept her arm by his bed until his death in 1975).

Her Writings

Her style is witty, fresh, with lots of clever quotes. She wrote 3 important books. Enjoy especially her Autobiography which is an easy read.

Her masterpiece is The Interior Castle (a disguised autobiography of her own mystical experiences). She pictures the devout life as a journey into your own soul, with God at your very center. The soul must pass through seven rooms (mansions) to attain divine union.

She wrote Way of Perfection for her sisters, but the advice is practical for everyone trying to be perfect.

St. John of the Cross (1542 – 1591)

St. John founded the Discalced Carmelite friars. He was born near Avila to very poor parents, contrasted with Teresa who came from an aristocratic family. (Saints come from all cultures). John’s father had married a humble silk weaver and was disowned by his rich parents. Unable to adjust to the great poverty, his father died shortly after John’s birth.

Working as a nurse’s assistant, he served the poor and sick with total joy. Besides working at the hospital, he studied at the Jesuit high school. At 21, he entered the Carmelites and proved to have an excellent mind for theological studies. In 1568, with two others, he adopted the primitive Carmelite rule, which was austere and contemplative but included preaching and hearing confessions. Wearing sandals, these new Carmelites were called “Discalced” (no shoes).

At 25, returning home for his first Mass, he met Teresa of Avila, who was embroiled (the best word) in trying to reform the Carmelite nuns. She enlisted this newly ordained priest to reform the friars.

The reformed order of men grew quickly but original approval was removed. There was to be “no expansion”. At this point, other Carmelite priests who disagreed with John, had him kidnapped and put in jail in a Carmelite priory in Toledo as “disobedient”. (He claimed that he was obedient to the papal nuncio).

He lived 9 months in almost total physical darkness (besides the spiritual trials). The jail was cold in winter, stifling in summer. John was both starved and beaten (to get him to leave the Order). He managed to escape to Teresa’s convent. During these months, he wrote his great spiritual poems.

He then began to found new friaries, became rector of the Carmelite College (Balza) and was elected to the governing board of the new Order. In this 3 year period (1579 – 1582) he composed his 4 great books, taking the soul from the beginning stages of the devout life to the greatest heights of mystical union. Each book is really a commentary on his earlier poems. (Poetry is often the best way to describe experiences).

1. The Ascent of Mount Carmel (Purgative to Active Unitive stage)
2. The Dark Night of the Soul (the beginning mystical purgation)
3. The Spiritual Canticle (describes the love of the soul for Christ and of Christ for the soul).
4. The Living Flame of Love (describes a soul at the highest attainable level)

In 1582, Teresa (his great protectress) died, and John suffered persecution from every side until his death, 9 years later. (Just 49)

Conclusion

Teresa and John lived in a very important epoch. The Church had suffered many losses from Luther’s Protestant Reformation and had responded with the decrees of the Council of Trent. These new reformed Carmelites were powerful instruments in Church renewal. Their writings have had an equal impact. They provide the intellectual foundation for the Devout Life.

Discussion Questions

1. *God raised up two people (Theresa and John) during a Church crisis. Whom is He lifting up today?*
2. *They were effective because people believed in them and followed. Are you ready to follow great spiritual leaders?*
3. *They formed a “Carmelite stream of spirituality.” Do you understand the various Catholic streams?*

MEET THE SAINTS

3. BRINGING THE DEVOUT LIFE INTO THE WORLD

IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA – FRANCIS de SALES

Monks live totally in God's face. Although the Friars of Dominic and Francis lived and worked in the world, they still were religious. "The devout life" was for these religious, but not for laity. Teresa and John of the Cross reformed monastic life.

Two saints had new ideas. St. Ignatius saw his priests as soldiers, free to go where needed. Francis de Sales championed the lay person. Every person should live a devout life.

St. Francis de Sales (1567 – 1622) championed that idea with his classic "Introduction to the Devout Life" (1608) originally letters written to a devout woman that became an instant best-seller. Finally, the great gift of the Devout Life became accessible to all.

Let's begin with St. Ignatius.

St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556)

At 17, he left home to serve a nobleman. He gambled, womanized and fought battles. At 25, the nobleman lost his position, so Ignatius joined the army. At 30 years of age, he was wounded by a cannonball which broke one leg and injured another. Because he fell dangerously ill, he went to confession and promised to be a Knight of St. Peter.

During his long period of getting better, he read the life of Christ and of the saints. One night, he had a vision of Our Lady (several hours) which filled him with joy, but also shame about his past sins. At this point, he vowed perpetual chastity and dedication to a spiritual life.

He stayed at a Spanish monastery at Manrese for 11 months, helping the sick. He was deeply influenced by a book "Manual of the Spiritual Life", and the Imitation of Christ (Thomas a Kempis). Although he suffered through inner darkness and physical sicknesses (caused by his austerities), he eventually gained a peace that lasted his whole life (because he tried to do only God's will).

His goal was to preach in the Holy Land, but when he arrived, the Turkish violence caused him to return to Europe and 11 years of study, culminating at the University of Paris. There, he influenced Francis Xavier and 5 others to live in poverty and chastity. They planned to go to the Holy Land and, if that were impossible, to put themselves at the service of the pope. War broke out, and Ignatius had a vision saying, "I will be favorable to you in Rome." So, he placed his group in the hands of Pope Paul III (1538). Then, he formed the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) in 1539 (48 years old). He remained at Rome. The others set out in missions to Europe and elsewhere. He founded the Roman and the German college in Rome. His genius saw the Jesuits as active but based deeply upon daily mental prayer.

Writings

Ignatius made two important contributions to the Devout Life.

1. The Ignatian Method of Mental Prayer -

He studied the monastic tradition of prayer and put all of the needed elements into a method that his priests could use every morning. Although other forms of meditation exist, this method dominates most spiritualities.

2. The Spiritual Exercises – To introduce his novices into the spiritual life, Ignatius wrote this 30 day retreat, based upon his own experiences at Manresa. Ignatius is a great psychologist who was able to experience God and to tell others how to gain the same gift.

The Ignatian Method

His Jesuits were not monks. They did not have all day to read the gospels, meditate on them during manual labor and then come with hearts ready to pray. Ignatius squeezed all these functions into a meditation process with five parts.

1. The imagination focuses on a gospel scene.
2. The intellect thinks about this action (wood for the fire).
3. As the imagination and intellect are filled, the heart pours out its feelings (affections) in personal mental prayer.
4. These prayers lead to good resolutions.
5. A single thought should be used to recall the meditation during the day.

Ignatius was a great spiritual psychologist, studying first what God had done in him and then writing it down so God can do his work in us. The daily meditations provided by Flame of Love use the Ignatian method.

St. Francis de Sales (1567-1622)

Francis is the eldest of 13 children born to noble parents. At 10, he received Communion and bound himself to monthly Communion (an unusual practice) because he wanted to be a priest.

Between 15 and 21, he studied intensely and centered his life on the Eucharist and on Mary. He also made a promise of perpetual virginity.

At 22, he studied law but also obtained a spiritual director. When he graduated (24), his father wanted him to marry. Francis, however, was ordained for a parish in Geneva, Switzerland where Calvinism had caused so many to leave the Church.

He undertook the difficult task of evangelizing an area where the church had been suppressed. After 4 months of failure, Francis began to write short pamphlets, defending Catholic truths and pointing out the Protestant errors. (These pamphlets are now printed in a book Controversies). He also debated Calvinist ministers.

After 4 years of success, the temporal ruler decided to help the Catholic religion and many Churches were reopened. He established a group of priests to combat the Protestant reformers. As a result, the majority of people again became Catholic.

At 35, he became the bishop of Geneva. His primary concern was to form his priests and to form parish groups to teach the young. For 20 years, he worked tirelessly, opening new Churches and visiting all his parishes.

Writings

Introduction to the Devout Life is his most important masterpiece. It actually was letters he wrote to laypeople to help them to be devout. They were so popular that he gathered the material into this book.

The book enjoyed immediate success because it contrasted with all the other books (which told people that they had to withdraw from the world to be holy). His style is warm, clear and filled with charm. It even helped to develop modern French.

His second book, **Treatise on the Love of God**, was deliberately written as a sequel, meant for those who had made progress.

The Visitation Sisters

Unfortunately, St. Francis was too far ahead of his time. With St. Jane Chantel (whom he directed), he founded the Sisters of the Visitation, modelled upon Our Lady's visit of charity to Elizabeth. These women would have religious vows but also would engage in works of mercy. It was too early. The church could not envision what we now call "active religious". So Francis had to discontinue these active works and the Visitation sisters became totally contemplative.

St. Vincent de Paul saw what happened and 25 years later, called his religious women the **Daughters of Charity**, thus beginning the religious communities with active apostolates.

Discussion Questions:

1. *Can you see how God moved the "Spiritual life" out of the monastery and into the world?*
2. *Still, we all need some external structures. What helps you to grow spiritually?*

MEET THE SAINTS

4.

SAINTS WHO POPULARIZED DEVOTION

St. Margaret Mary Alacoque – St. John Eudes –

St. Theresa Liseux – Fr. Jean de Caussade

St. Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647 – 1690)

The first, and possibly greatest fruit of St. Francis de Sales Visitation Order was Sister Margaret Mary. She was the 5th (of 7) child of a family esteemed by the nobility. However, her father died when she was 7. After 2 years at a boarding school, she returned home. Her mother and she spent 15 painful years dominated by relatives who claimed control over their house.

When Margaret grew to maturity, her mother wanted her to marry so the mother could be cared for. This conflicted with the vow of chastity that she had taken at an early age. Fortunately, at 24, she entered the Visitation Sisters. Prior to that, she was already enjoying great mystical experiences without knowing what they were. She wrote that she wished someone would teach her mental prayer (when she was really in its highest stages). She is one of the Church's greatest mystics and saints.

St. Francis de Sales, himself, had a great devotion to the Sacred Heart and wanted all the sisters to practice that devotion. However, the revelations to St. Margaret took that devotion to its highest level and greatest popularity. Margaret experienced much suffering because so many did not believe her. Toward the end, she was well accepted and given positions that trained other sisters.

St. John Eudes (1601-1680) – Preparing for the Revelations

He was a diocesan priest, a contemporary of St. Margaret (but they probably never met). He prepared for these revelations by founding the Sacred Heart Fathers and, especially, by his book, *The Sacred Heart*.

Heresy of Jansenism

Jesus revealed the love of the Sacred Heart because the Church was fighting the Jansenist heresy which over-emphasized the holiness of God and concluded that people should refrain from frequent Communion because they were unworthy. They also fashioned a cross with Jesus' arms lifted to heaven (rather than outstretched embracing everyone), which taught that Jesus' love was narrow, not meant for all.

This heresy was pernicious. Despite many decades of Church efforts, it kept taking different forms to escape condemnation. Then, Jesus Himself opened His Sacred Heart to this saint and welcomed all into His mercy.

Jansenistic piety was rigorous, believing that human nature was corrupt. Sacramental absolution was invalid unless the person had a perfect love for God and a person could receive Holy Communion only if they reached a certain level of perfection. They saw Jesus as a severe Redeemer and saw themselves as a religious elite.

This heresy was widespread and unable to be controlled by Church teachings. So, Jesus revealed this Sacred Heart devotion to St. Margaret Mary.

The Revelations

Margaret Mary entered The Visitation Order in 1671. From 1673 to 1675, Our Lord appeared and revealed His Sacred Heart, providing a great antidote against Jansenism. He asked Catholics to receive Holy Communion on the First Friday and made the 9 promises, including the great promise of making 9 consecutive First Fridays. Because few believed her, Jesus promised to send “my perfect friend”, St. Claude de La Columbriere S.J. He accepted everything, and through him, the Jesuits undertook the Sacred Heart Apostolate.

St. Therese of Liseux (Little Flower) 1873-1897

No saint has so influenced modern spirituality as the Little Flower because a whole host of saints have developed the new and Divine Holiness.

She was the 9th child of parents who themselves are now canonized. Five girls survived. Two brothers and two sisters died before Therese was born. Her mother had cancer for 4 years before the birth and died 4 years later (a tremendous shock to Therese).

Because her mother had difficulty nursing, Theresa spent her first year with a wet nurse (whom she naturally thought was her mother). When she was 4, her mother died. Therese was plunged into 8 years of sadness and deep sensitivity. Therese called this her “winter of trial”. Finally, from 13 to 15, she had her conversion period that led to her entering Carmel. At 10, she contracted a strange illness and spent 3 months of convulsions, hallucinations and comas. Our Lady miraculously healed her instantly. As the family gathered around her bed, the statue of Our Lady of Victories smiled at her.

She writes about her conversion experience at 13 after returning from Christmas midnight Mass. Her father made a remark about how the festivities centered about Therese. Usually, she would be deeply hurt and pouting. Instead, she accepted the great grace. Her sister, Celine wrote, “I was witness to that sudden change.” Therese had always been religious. She said that from 3 years of age she never refused God anything but her Christmas experience at 13 marked a new stage.

At 15, she wanted to enter Carmel. The sisters wanted to accept her but the priest superior wanted her to wait until 21. So, the family went to Pope Leo XIII and, Therese, even though told to be silent by the guards, asked the Pope. He told her it would happen if God's will.

She did enter at 15 and spent 9 ½ years, which were made very difficult because of a temperamental superior. Therese stayed hidden, totally devoted to her devout life. Many of the nuns had no idea of her holiness until her book Story of a Soul, was published.

Final Sickness

Eighteen months before her death, she contracted tuberculosis. On Holy Thursday, she first experienced blood in her mouth and rejoiced that her death was inevitable. In these months, she was racked with pain and many temptations against faith. She wrote "Never allow any poison to be near a sick person", and "I did not think it possible to suffer so much." Her final words, "My God, I love You." These final months are recorded in a book "Final Conversations."

Her Little Way

Her spiritual genius brought forth a spirituality of "Little Way", which placed Catholic spirituality in a new setting of a child who accepts all the daily tasks in a personal friendship with God. Her "Little Way" has brought forth an army of new saints, attracted by and formed by her teachings.

Fr. Jean de Caussade (1675 – 1751)

Fr. de Caussade is not a canonized saint and he didn't even write a book, but his "Abandonment to Divine Providence" is a great classic and helps everyone. Father Caussade was the spiritual director to cloistered Visitation Nuns to whom he wrote many letters, all on the theme that God's Will contains His providence and we should see every circumstance (no matter how terrible) as God's provident care.

Fortunately, the sisters saved all his letters, put them in some order (as chapters of a book) and published the book after his death. Please read the book (or simplified version). Fr. Caussade is a real genius who gives everyone his gift – to see every moment and trial as God's will and never worry.

Discussion Questions:

1. *How familiar are you with the "Sacred Heart" devotion. Have you enthroned that image in your home?*
2. *Do you know (and/or practice) St. Therese's "Little way"?*
3. *Do you read spiritual books? (see: www.devoutlifelibrary.org)*

FOLLOW THEIR ROADMAP

5.

LEARNING THE BASICS

UNDERSTANDING THE DEVOUT LIFE

The Road to perfection has three stages – Purgative, Illuminative and Unitive. Each has two parts – prayer and goodness. These four short talks cannot cover the Unitive stage. The book, *The Devout Life* (see website) teaches about all the stages.

When a young man or woman enters a seminary or religious congregation, they receive a large set of teachings concerning “The Devout Life”, (a phrase popularized by St. Francis de Sales). These are not secret teachings. However, they are not usually given in the parish setting. These four talks provide the basic teachings given to seminarians and religious.

Devotion means attachment to God. Devotions are acts of prayer or spiritual reading. “Devotions” are used for various vocal prayers and novenas. Devout Life is much more. It is a complete surrender to God and has many parts, (because the human person is complicated). The Devout Life is based upon the saints’ teachings and is called Catholic Spirituality. As you will see, a Devout Life goes far beyond being a practicing Catholic.

Mental Prayer

A Devout Life demands mental prayer. Vocal prayer is not enough. Mental prayer engages all the person’s powers – imagination, intellect, feelings and will, absorbing the person in God. Having a devout life demands that you practice daily mental prayer.

Our Culture

Our culture is an enemy of Mental prayer, which flourishes best in silence, and its greatest enemy is our culture which steals silence from us by the endless electronic experiences that saturate our lives.

When someone enters the seminary or convent, they gain the needed hours of silence. By a devout life, you will prize the needed hours of silence.

A Conversion Experience

Beginning a devout life demands that you embark on a spiritual searching for God. Then, there comes a special moment called “a conversion experience”. The bible says, “Draw close to God and He will come close to you.” As the person tries to come close to God, suddenly God comes close to them, giving the person a new experience of His presence. After this moment, the person must be faithful.

Gathering With Others

This conversion experience can happen alone or with others. Some people experience this personal conversion and they must look for others as companions on the journey. Others www.flameoflove.us

join a group (like Flame of Love), and then have a personal conversion. The Devout Life requires both, a personal experience of God and a joining with others.

Not Knowing

Ignorance is a big hindrance. Some do not know to seek a personal experience of God. Others have experienced this moment, but did not grasp its importance. Others are not supported in their experience or do not know what to do next. These teachings try to fill that gap.

The Saints of the Devout Life

We have already studied the important saints who fostered the devout life, St. Anthony (251– 356), St. Basil (329-379) and St. Benedict (480 -543) who formed monasteries where people lived devoutly. Later, St. Francis (1181–1226) and St. Dominic (1170-1221) formed active congregations. St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556), the founder of the Jesuits, required a daily hour of mental prayer. The great champion of devotion among the laity was St. Francis de Sales (1567–1622) who wrote “Introduction to the Devout Life”. He knew that God gave lay people the gift of mental prayer and that everyone, in every state of life, could be devout.

Importance of Religious Feelings

Feelings are important (remember your romantic love!) Something filled with feelings seems very real (whether important or unimportant). In devotion, God uses your feelings as a bridge inviting you away from living only in the world of senses to living in God’s world of the Kingdom. These religious emotions are stirred by mental prayer and convince you that God wants you to “come and see”.

Two Kinds

Religious feelings can be like a thunderstorm or a gentle rain (probably you will have both). In some moments you are overwhelmed by God. At other times, you feel his gentle presence. Both are important.

These religious feelings are sensual (like tears), emotional (like joy, peace, sorrow for sin) and intellectual (a clearer idea of God). As you make progress, these experiences will change, grow deeper and last longer.

God’s Plan

God gives you these religious experiences to draw you away from worldly and sinful experiences. When you begin a devout life, you are immersed in the world. At the end, you are surrounded by God’s Kingdom. That is the purpose of a Devout Life.

Keeping Your Fervor Alive

Beginning religious experiences are called fervor. God lights a fire inside. You are a heated room and you must keep the windows closed. Fervor is God's match which lights your heart (the candle). Keeping the candle lit requires your total commitment to a devout life.

Feelings and Fidelity

Religious feelings are God's gifts. Fidelity is your response to the gift. Feelings and fidelity go together. Faithful souls experience religious feelings and the feelings help them to be faithful.

A Taste for Spiritual Things

These feelings provide a joy in religious practices. The sacraments come alive. Visiting the Blessed Sacrament gives peace. We gain a desire for spiritual reading. These gifts are called "a taste for spiritual things."

Not Selfish

Many could see this personal devout life as selfish and self-centered. However, how can you serve others when you are not close to God? Look at those who served the world – the Little Flower, Padre Pio, Pope John Paul II, St. Faustina, Mother Theresa. Who would call them selfish? Their active life depended on their prayer life.

Interior Life

Another name for devout life is the Interior Life. God lives in the center of the baptized and wants the soul to experience His inner presence.

Needing a Guide

Tobit gave this advice, "My son, find yourself a trustworthy man who will make the journey with you." (Tobit 5:3). The Devout Life is a road of perfection and you need a guide. At least, find a regular confessor to whom you bring your questions. The saints had many experiences (some good and some bad) with their guides but they always obeyed them and were rewarded.

Good Friends

You cannot walk this road alone. You must seek out good friends who share your desires to live devoutly. Also, be a good friend and help others to be devout. This will be the most important task of your life. The Flame of Love Movement is a great help.

Rule of Life

Religious live by the bell. When it rings, it is "God's voice", telling them at each hour what they should do. In the world, you cannot live by a bell, but you should have a Rule of Life,

a schedule which you work out (with your spiritual guide) to make sure you fulfill your duties of prayer and work.

Holy Persons

A special bonus would be to have a close friendship with a holy person (probably a little older than you). If God sends someone like this, benefit from the friendship.

The Four Last Things

The great motivations to be devout are the Four Last Things – (Death, Judgment, Heaven and Hell). Years ago, parishes held week-long missions and the missionary would stress these four topics, leading people to renew their Catholic life (and get to confession).

These Four Realities have one theme. They teach that we only get one chance and we live only one life. Ending up in heaven or hell is totally our choice. So, let's take the path to God.

The Decision

Jesus said, "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Mt 5:48). The Devout Life is the road to this perfection and to get on this road you must make a decision. Even a Catholic filled with sins, if they make the decision to be perfect, is on the road. Without making such a decision, you will go nowhere. Years from now, you will probably be further away from Jesus.

Time Marches On

You cannot stop. Time marches on. During these talks, you will get a lot of teaching but with few results unless you firmly decide, "I will follow Jesus". If you desire a Devout Life, then stop right now and ask for it. Say this prayer:

"Dear Jesus, you are speaking to me. Your hand and your voice invite me to come and follow you. At this moment, I say 'yes'. I will follow you, Jesus, all the days of my life."

That is enough. You are on the road. If you liked the prayer, write it down and say it every day. Your decision leads to a road with three stages, purgative, illuminative and unitive. Each stage has two parts (prayer and goodness). The next three talks outline our journey.

Discussion Questions:

1. Have you experienced a "Religious Conversion", a special moment that changed your life?
2. Do you have a "taste" and a "relish" for spiritual realities?
3. Are you "on the road"? Do you have good friends or a spiritual guide to walk with you?

FOLLOW THEIR ROADMAP

6. GETTING STARTED ON THE ROAD (PURGATIVE STAGE)

The road of perfection has three stages, purgative, illuminative and unitive. To walk, you must use two legs, mental prayer and goodness of life. Each of the three stages has a definite quality of prayer and a quality of goodness.

Purgative is the stage of beginners, who use Meditative prayer and strive to obey the commandments.

Illuminative is the stage of someone who has made progress. They use affective prayer and they imitate Jesus, the Light of the world.

The Unitive stage is marked by oneness. Souls use the prayer of simplicity and experience the Spirit's sanctifying powers.

As you make progress, everything gets easier. In the beginning, you will work hard to pray and to live in grace. Later, you will find prayer easy and goodness attractive. At the end, God does the work and you just allow the Spirit to act. This talk explains the beginning Purgative Stage.

Purgative Stage

Meditation

In mental prayer, you use all your powers of imagination, memory, intellect and will. But, how to get started? St. Ignatius, the great genius, developed a method called meditation which invites you to imagine a gospel scene, to think about it with your intellect, and to reach out to God by personal prayers called affections.

Beginners need a book of written meditations to get them started. (Fortunately, we have such a book).

Being Absorbed

Absorbed means that your thoughts and feelings are taken up with the gospel scene. Distracted means your mind is wandering. When absorbed, leave aside the written meditation. When distracted, read it to get re-absorbed.

Making Your Meditation

You must be faithful each day "to make your meditation". Soon, you will feel you are "catching on" and accomplishing something.

Same Place – Same Time

Make your meditation as soon as possible in the day. If you can meditate in the same place and same time every day, you will speed the process (arriving early for daily mass is excellent).

Two Purposes

Meditating will gain two goals. You will gain the ability to spend a definite time (10 – 15 minutes) engrossed in a gospel story. Second (and more important), you will begin to realize that Jesus is everywhere.

Formal and Informal Prayer

You pray formally when you are praying and doing nothing else. You pray informally when you speak to Jesus during the day while doing your daily tasks. Formal prayer takes place in Church. Informal prayer takes place in the world. You absolutely need both forms.

Recollection

Recollection means that all day long you try to keep a guard over your thoughts, turning them often to God. Absolutely important.

Now, you know these five terms:

1. Mental prayer – a personal speaking with God
2. Meditation – the first stage of mental prayer
3. Formal prayer – Talking to God while doing nothing else
4. Informal prayer – praying all during the day
5. Recollection – not letting the mind wander but “collecting your thoughts” for God.

This hard, spiritual work will give you great blessings:

1. You experience God’s world (the Kingdom) for an extended period (10-15 minutes)
2. You become aware that God is everywhere. “In Him, you live and move and have your being.” (Acts 17:28)
3. You enter the door of religious experiences.
4. Most important, you become aware that Jesus dwells in your soul by grace.

Method of St. Ignatius

Because he wanted his Jesuits to be active soldiers, St. Ignatius of Loyola developed a meditation method for them to use each morning before performing their active ministry. (He asked an hour each day for meditation). This requires four acts:

1. The imagination pictures a story from the gospels.
2. The intellect ponders the spiritual truths associated with that story.
3. The will makes acts of devotion.
4. The emotions flow towards Jesus.

How to Use the Meditation Book

1. Set aside 10-15 minutes
2. Be in a prayerful setting (Church if possible)
3. Read the gospel slowly
4. Ponder the few thoughts (intellect)
5. Read the prayers (affections) and experience their power.
6. Talk to God (the goal)
7. When you have nothing more to say, start over again with Thoughts

If faithful each day, you will find (to your delight) that the time passes quickly. You are catching on! Keep going.

Spiritual Reading

Spiritual reading feeds our minds. Then, our hearts can pray easily. Always be reading some spiritual book. Start with the lives of the saints. Let reading be a joy. If a book is too dry or hard, put it away. One book will lead to another. Having a habit of spiritual reading is a great grace.

Devotions

The four basic, daily devotions are Mass, Rosary, mental prayer and spiritual reading. Spread them out over the day. Somedays, you won't get them all in.

Goodness of Life

Detachment

Jesus wants you to experience Him. However, if your mind is caught up in worldly news or your heart is captured by other interests, then God's prayer gifts are limited. Try to be detached from television, video games, newspapers, gossip, etc. (not easy but worth the daily effort).

Addictions

Addictions are gigantic, powerful attractions. They put a hole in your devout bucket and no matter how much spiritual water you pour in, nothing will be left. If you have any addictions, work first in removing them.

Simplify Your Lifestyle

Jesus always preached, "Change your lives."

Money

Look at what you don't really need. Help the poor. Make sure you tithe. Find a new spirit of generosity. Your money is important to God. You cannot take it with you but you can

send it on ahead (by helping others). The poor don't need us, we need them. They are the door to heaven. The rich man could have gone to heaven if he had helped Lazarus, the beggar.

Time

You cannot store up time. You get 24 hours and every day you have to spend them. Use every hour well. You will never, never get time back. You must use it now.

Bodily Mortifications

The heavy mortifications that you read in the saints are not for you, but little mortifications should be – Can you do a bread/water fast on Monday until 6:00 PM? Can you take Decaf instead of Caffeine (well – at least sometimes).

Peace

Don't get scared. By trying to be devout, you will view your past actions differently. (How did I do all those things?) Please – don't let your past be a burden. Use a general confession – once!

Demonic World

Talk 10 will give more extensive teachings. Here are some basic pointers.

1. If a person makes no spiritual efforts, Satan has many doors.
2. When beginning to live a devout life, you will experience Satan trying to discourage you.
3. He will emphasize what you are leaving behind and exaggerate the sacrifices you will have to make.
4. He will bring up your past sins to discourage you.
5. Especially, he will use your times for prayer to flood your imagination with his thoughts.
6. At all costs, he wants you to turn back and to forsake your road to perfection.
7. Use Confession to defeat him. God will give the priest the right words. Just obey him.
8. At some point, make a general confession. After this, close the door and never, never go back.
9. Just live from confession to confession.
10. St. Francis de Sales said, "It is evil to commit sin but it is very holy to confess them."

Discussion Questions:

1. *Do you know what "meditation" means? Do you "meditate" every day.*
2. *Are you aware that God is everywhere? Are you "awakened" to His presence?*
3. *Do your religious experiences move you to live more devoutly?*

FOLLOW THEIR ROADMAP

7.

MAKING PROGRESS IN PRAYER (ILLUMINATIVE STAGE)

Beginning Thoughts

Prayer and Goodness

In this stage, the mental prayer becomes easier and less complicated. Your personal goodness means you imitate Christ's virtues.

Progress in Mental Prayer

In the beginning, God's spiritual world seemed far away and spiritual realities unreal. The sensual, experiential world claimed all your attention.

By using a meditation book, doing spiritual reading and giving time daily to prayer, Jesus' Kingdom becomes familiar.

Progress comes as meditation becomes affective prayer. You pray less with the intellect, and more in the feelings, and the will. (Also, easier and more enjoyable).

After a while, you might not need words. Let your imagination just rest in a gospel scene, or in a quiet experience of God's presence. This is the prayer of simplicity, also called, God's loving presence.

Value

This simplified prayer has many advantages. The person enjoys the prayer, can easily prolong it, and prays much better during the day. They "take Jesus with them" into their daily life.

God's action in prayer becomes more evident. He fills the imagination with some picture, touches the intellect with an understanding or delights the will with light.

A Storehouse of Spiritual Images

The person's mind builds up a storehouse of images which move the soul right into prayer. Blessed Lawrence wrote, "I keep myself with God at the center of my soul." And "Jesus taught me to pray. He kept me absorbed and I felt no distractions."

Jesus Your Light

Soon you will die, and Jesus will be your Judge. The best advice I can give you is, "Become a good friend of the Judge", (the goal of this Illuminative Stage).

Discover Your Identity

When God created you, (the moment of your conception), He knew the person He wanted you to become. Call it “God’s blueprint”.

Everyone seeks their earthly identity (their career and spouse). You also must discover your heavenly identity, the person God intends you to be.

At first, this is very complex. However as you make progress, the plan simplifies. Jesus is the light of the world, who enlightens everyone coming into the world. If you reject Jesus, you condemn yourself to darkness (no matter how successful you are).

Summary of Teachings

Jesus becomes your light only by daily mental prayer. (Sorry – no other road exists). You can foster your mental prayer by spiritual reading, shutting out the world and finding time for prayer. Be generous. After a little generosity, you might find many feelings in prayer. You have become like boy scouts who can produce a fire by rubbing sticks together. Once the fire starts in your heart, keep it safe. Shut the other doors.

Some Hints

Steady Fervor leads to a special gift. You realize that Jesus is all around you. Even more, you realize that Jesus lives inside you by grace. You begin to pray always. Whether you are in Church or not in Church, you live in Jesus all day long.

You pray in two ways – formally (in Church) and informally (in the world). The two blend together and feed each other.

God’s Presence

At last, you have arrived at the supreme gift of mental prayer. You live every moment in God’s presence. You think of God all day.

One part of Meditation is called “Affections”. These personal prayers are often accompanied by feelings and images, which are the real kernel of mental prayer. Mental prayer becomes very sanctifying when affections take up most of the time. Later, words, feelings and images will simplify into a higher form of prayer (Unitive Stage). Right now, God is placing a fire in your heart.

The Humanity of Jesus

Through the gospel stories, Jesus’ humanity takes center stage (the rosary mysteries). Keep Jesus in the center. He is the Way to the Father.

The Prayer of Jesus

You will begin to “pray as Jesus did” because Jesus wants to pray again, but this time, using your faculties. When you read the gospels, and Jesus is praying, let him say the same words in you.

Regaining Your Fervor in Prayer

Time wears everyone down, even the most resolute person. A time will inevitably come when you will no longer have your original spark. You renounced the world but it creeps back in.

You have lost your “first fervor”. How do you get it back? God will help you by inner desires and external opportunities. These are even more vital than your original grace of conversion. When God calls you back to fervor, say “yes” immediately.

The Culmination – Devotion to the Sacred Heart

By now, your head is probably swirling with so many aspects to devotion. Jesus simplified the whole process when He appeared to St. Margaret Mary and to St. Faustina. Brother Lawrence wrote, “If love is the goal of the spiritual life, why focus on anything else?” A great question. So, on December 27, 1673 (the feast of The Beloved Disciple) Jesus invited Margaret Mary to sit next to Him. For 18 months, He amplified that first revelation, showing her His heart of flesh. When her superiors had trouble believing these revelations, Jesus said to her, “Do not worry, I will send you my perfect friend.” (What an honor, to be called Jesus’ perfect friend). Soon, a new confessor, St. Claude de la Columbriere, S.J., arrived. He protected the revelations which slowly came forth.

All the great saints teach that the humanity of Jesus is the only way to the Father and Jesus’ heart, pierced on the cross, completes that teaching. Don’t look anywhere else except Jesus’ heart. The greatest entrance to His heart is Mary’s Immaculate Heart.

Conclusion

Vocal prayer is like a person who does not know how to swim. They can only stand on the floor of the pool. They say words but their minds cannot soar to Jesus’ heart. By using mental prayer, the person soars, leaves the ground. Jesus can fill their inner faculties with many different blessings, calling the soul into a prayer of His wordless presence.

Discussion Questions:

1. *The goal of mental prayer is to join you with the humanity of Jesus. Do you experience His presence?*
2. *Do you daily pray the mysteries of the rosary?*
3. *While praying, what do you experience/feel? Peace – joy – warmth- Jesus’ nearness?*

FOLLOW THEIR ROADMAP

8.

PROGRESS IN VIRTUE (ILLUMINATIVE STAGE)

Interests of Jesus

We all have “self interests” (what we want out of life). Devotion shifts the focus. We no longer ask what Jesus can do for us but what we can do for Jesus. All the saints heard Jesus speak. To Francis Xavier, “Go to India”. To John Brebeuf, “Go to Canada”. To Mother Cabrini, “Go to America”. What a blessed day when you hear Jesus say “Go. Do this”. When you want only the interests of Jesus, you will hear him speak within. Just “Do whatever He tells you.” said Mary to the waiters at Cana. Just do it. You don’t know what road is beginning.

Imitating Jesus – the Light of the World

In the Purgative stage, the soul had to free itself from sins and addictions. Where to go now? Now, it is ready to imitate the virtues of Jesus.

Religious Experiences

Practicing virtues are your response to God’s favors given through spiritual feelings. Jesus said, “I work during the day. When night comes, no one can work.” (Jn 9:4) Don’t wait. Work on practicing virtues now. You do not know how much daylight you have left.

What are virtues? They are the habits of goodness, gained by constant effort. A skilled artist easily creates a masterpiece but only after years of hard work that formed his habits. Practicing virtues is your hard work in becoming a skilled artist.

Two Sets of Virtues

Virtues come in two forms, the moral and the theological. The moral virtues (prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance) shape your life. They allow the theological virtues (faith, hope and charity) to unite you to God. Each of these 4 moral virtues subdivide into a whole array of many virtues with other names. Let’s study these 4 virtues.

Moral Virtues

PRUDENCE

St. Francis Xavier considered himself very prudent. He was a brilliant student in Paris with a promising teaching career. He changed when an older man, St. Ignatius of Loyola, came to the university. Francis gave up his teaching career because he discovered God’s call to India. Many of his friends called him “foolish”, but Francis had found a greater wisdom, the providence of God’s Kingdom.

Jesus contrasts the two prudences of earth and heaven. “What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul?” (Lk 9:25) He explicitly says, “Seek first the Kingdom of God” – Don’t worry. “All these things will be given you besides.” (Mt 6:33)

A Different Drummer

By Jesus’ prudence you listen to a different voice. The saints always asked “How will this decision affect eternity? How will I see this question when I come before Jesus?” Only Jesus has a correct view of human life. The rest of us are “upside down”. King Henry martyred St. Thomas More, who said, “I am the King’s good servant, but God’s first.” Thomas, not Henry, had true prudence.

JUSTICE

Everyone highlights love and charity, but they forget that the foundation of love is justice. Justice is based upon the truth that everyone has rights which must be respected. When we see everyone as a person, created by God and meant for heaven, a deep respect for the human person grows in our hearts which forces us to see what is just and right.

By justice, we render to God what is God’s and to everyone what belongs to them. Justice and fairness must order all relationships. If they do, then you can practice charity. Don’t forget. You only arrive at Charity by first practicing justice.

St. James speaks harshly of a believer who does not practice justice. “What good is it to say “Go in peace” and not provide the necessities of the body.” (Jas 2:16) Justice changes all relationships – employer to employee, parents to children, spouse to spouse.

FORTITUDE

A baseball team scores no runs for men left on base and a football team gets no points for a ball on the one yard line. We have to get to the finish line. Each devout life faces “the test of time,” persevering until death. Jesus promises heaven to those who “persevere to the end.” That is fortitude.

Martyrdom

St. Ignatius of Antioch (d 107) was martyred in Rome, but he feared that he would back down. St. John Brebeuf S.J. knew that the Indians would torture him, so he took a vow to shed his blood.

Daily Fortitude –

Can be greater than martyrdom. Look at the lonely moments of Pope John Paul II when his plans for Poland were seemingly crushed by Russian troops invading Poland.

Fortitude keeps us on the road to perfection in spite of obstacles. By fortitude, you don't turn away from your devotion or your daily tasks. Fortitude completes the task. Don't quit. You have only one lifetime and one finish line. Get there.

A final note. Jesus told Elizabeth Kindelmann that his final 20 minutes on the cross were the worst of all. What fortitude Jesus practiced!

TEMPERANCE

God created pleasures so we get nourishment and procreate. He gave us passions so we seek those pleasures. Sometimes, however, these mighty rivers overflow and destroy everything. By temperance, the soul moderates these passions so they serve God's purpose.

Drinking

Alcoholism causes gigantic problems. In Ireland, Matt Talbot spent his free time and money in bars until, one day, he ran out of money and was thrown out of the Irish pub. He went to the priest and took the pledge. How did he stay sober? He rose early. Went to mass every day. Prayed for many hours and made many physical sacrifices. The familiar steps to perfection. Temperance led Matt to sainthood, a great example for so many.

Food

Moderation in food is not as dramatic but applies to everyone (not just alcoholics). Science agrees that limiting calories is the only sure way to live longer. (Notice how many monks live so many years).

Our Lady (both at Medjugorge and to Elizabeth Kindelmann), asked for fasting on bread and water. Medjugorge on Wednesdays and Friday. To Elizabeth on Mondays until 6:00 PM (No need to combine these requests).

How to Fast

1. Don't get overwhelmed.
2. Ask for the gift (and accept it fully)
3. Start slowly – Try to fast on Monday. Do this every Monday.
4. On other days, make some small sacrifices – like not snacking in between meals.
5. From time to time, give up what you really like – as caffeine or some delicacy.

Our Lady sees your heart and your constant efforts. In all honesty, trying to fast is more a mental problem than a stomach desire.

Some Suggestions:

1. Make healthy choices and put aside foods that are not good for your body.
2. Restrict yourself to eating at meals.

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

CHASTITY

Temperance's other restraint deals with sexual desires, but the world doesn't believe in any chastity.

Church's Teaching

Married Couples

1. Sexual activity and sexual pleasure are for married couples.
2. This sexual activity has 2 purposes. First, the procreation of new life and second, the strengthening of the marriage relationship.
3. Married couples cannot use artificial means to limit pregnancies, but they certainly can use what God created, i.e. the woman's body is only fertile on certain days.

Single People

1. Although extremely difficult, single Catholics should not ask another person to engage in sexual activity.
2. Every Catholic should practice personal purity in thoughts, words and deeds.
3. A chaste Catholic will avoid pornography.
4. Many young Catholics, especially men, have great temptations to personal sexual pleasure by themselves. Obviously, this is quite different than involving another person.
5. Important final note – Priests are very understanding of sexual sins of all kinds. Go to confession frequently.

Theological Virtues

The moral virtues form our lives but only faith, hope and charity unite us to God.

FAITH

By supernatural faith, we live in 2 worlds – the one we see and the one we cannot see. By faith, we allow this unseen world, Jesus' Kingdom to have power over us.

Even more, we trust God. Jesus put these two parts together. "Seek first the Kingdom of God and all these things will be given you besides." When we live by faith, God promises to provide.

Some Examples

Fr. Dan Lord was a famous Jesuit author. In college, he read books that robbed him of his faith. He woke up one day and did not believe in God. By good reading and counsel from a priest, he regained faith. One day, he realized that he believed again. He went from light into darkness and back into light.

Our Lady showed the three children of Fatima the suffering of hell. Lucy writes that fortunately Our Lady had already promised them that she would take them to heaven. These visions filled the children with faith. Heaven and hell became very real to them.

By Faith, the soul knows that heaven is real, that Hell is real, and that God is real. Faith teaches that God is a loving Father who is always helping them to get to heaven.

Losing Faith

Today, many people lose their faith. There are three main causes.

1. Immorality – By serious sin, the person loses their desires for God.
2. Worldly attractions – God’s world seems insignificant compared to these daily amusements.
3. Trials and Sufferings – These burdens can confuse even good people, especially if prolonged and severe. Many use their sufferings to grow in faith.

HOPE

Faith sees earthly life in God’s Light. Hope looks to heaven itself. Hope brings five blessings.

1. Hope answers your deepest questions. You know why you were born. You are immortal and you will live forever.
2. You see earth quite differently. You are not anxious about “having everything”. Earth is not your permanent home.
3. You do not fear death, or getting old. The saints welcomed death. It was the finish line.
4. You are not consumed by daily anxieties. “Your heavenly father knows what you need.”
5. You are not lost in the universe. You are not some unknown person among 6,000,000,000 others. You are unique, created and loved by God.

Two Sins Against Hope

(Despair and Presumption)

Despair

Despairing is a complete loss of any hope of getting to heaven. Despair causes a person to believe that their sins are greater than God’s power to forgive. The remedy is easy. Read St. Faustina’s diary regularly (we all need to do this!) It is filled with Jesus’ promises like: “He who

trusts in my mercy will not perish.” “When you approach the confessional, I am waiting for you there.” And “I am more generous to sinners than to the just.”

Presumption

Presumption is just the opposite of despair. The person believes they will go to heaven no matter what sins they are committing. If you asked people “Do you think you are going to heaven?”, many would say “I am a good person, of course I am going to heaven.” This is cultural presumption. Even without any religious practice or any attempt to keep the commandments, people have no fear of hell. The saints lived in holy fear but now everybody on earth has no fear. Losing your soul and going to hell have been erased from our memories.

A culture of fervor is quite different. Devout people know they are sinners but trust that God will show them mercy if they just make some efforts.

Expectations of Jesus

The saints suffered the most when they let Jesus down. St. Theresa of Avila described the moments when she failed Jesus. “I looked into his eyes and saw Jesus’ disappointment.” He was not an “everything is alright” Jesus. Jesus expects us to be sorry for our sins and to make efforts to love Him.

Hope always keeps searching. Hope leads the person to multiple moments of finding what Jesus expects.

CHARITY

Fire in Your Belly

In the business world, people must have a “fire in their belly.” They don’t just “show up for work”. They accomplish great things. You, also, must have the fire of charity in your belly. She is the Queen and she comes to take charge of your life.

Peter – Do You Love Me

In the gospels, Peter had a somewhat checkered career, culminating in his greatest sin – denying Jesus 3 times. After the Resurrection, Jesus asked Peter one question, “Do you love me?” That was the only question. At this point, Jesus has one question for you, “Do you love me?”

The River Within

Within every person, God has placed a stream of consciousness, which is filled with your dreams and feelings. We are mysteries even to ourselves. Charity must take control of this inner stream or self-love will ruin our life.

The Saints and Romantic Love

The saints loved the Song of Songs, (a collection of love poems) because only romantic love can describe our life with God. Augustine wrote, "O Beauty, ever ancient ever new, late have I loved you." When God intrudes, a divine romance begins that outstrips all the romantic novels.

Little Flower

The Little Flower was always searching for her call. One day she read, "There remains faith, hope and love. The greatest of these is love." (Cor 13:13). She had found her call – to love. She wrote, "The heart is the most important organ. When it stops, there is no more life." She made herself a victim soul – not to God's justice – but to His love.

Kindness – Love's Greatest Power

Kindness is a tiny virtue but we get a chance to practice it so often. Kindness comes in 3 forms – thought, words and deeds.

First, think kindly of everyone you meet every day. Second, never hold back a kind word. A kind word from a Christian Brother, "You have a great ability to write", planted a great seed in this author's heart. Do you remember hearing kind words spoken to you?

St. Theresa wrote "Kind deeds are a greater proof of holiness than working miracles." Mother Theresa wrote also, "Just be kind to one another."

Also, don't forget to be kind to yourself.

Discussion Questions:

1. *Which virtue attracted you?*
2. *Which do you find difficult?*
3. *Can you see the difference between the moral virtues that put your life in order, and the theological virtues which unite you to God?*

MARCHING WITH THE SAINTS

9. BECOMING A DISCIPLE BY MAKING JESUS YOUR KING

1. You have learned about the saints who formed the devout life and their theory. These talks focus on the practical, helping you to get up and running (or at least walking) the road of perfection.
2. In the gospels, many were part of the crowds but few became disciples.
3. Being a disciple was not a closed group open only to the chosen.
4. All were invited to be disciples but only some made the decision. Some people said, “Lord, did we not eat and drink with you? Did you not preach in our city?” Yes – but they made no decision to “sell all and follow” and be a disciple.
5. The crowds liked the miracles. They rejoiced that the food multiplied and loved to hear Jesus preach, but they were “window-shoppers”. They wanted their freedom to come and go.
6. For example, the rich young man never became a disciple because he wanted to hold on to his possessions.
7. The disciples were different. They saw their friendship with Jesus as the pearl of a great price and the treasure hidden in the field. With joy, they sold all they had to be Jesus’ friend. (Mt 13:44-53).
8. The decision had great effects. Many times, Jesus taught the crowds but then would go into a house and taught the disciples in a deeper way.
9. After a while, Jesus taught only the disciples. Once Jesus traveled in a hidden way through Galilee because he wanted to instruct only the disciples. (Mk 9:30-31)

Your Decision – Where is Jesus in Your Life?

10. Picture a circle with 3 crosses. One outside the circle. One inside the circle. One at the circle’s center.
11. The circle is your heart. The cross is where you have placed Jesus in your life.
12. The world has 6 billion people. All have Jesus at one of these three places. For some, Jesus is outside their heart. They have no love for or interest in Jesus.

13. For others, Jesus is inside but not at the center.
14. For some, Jesus means everything. He is at the heart of their whole day.
15. Perfection is getting Jesus to the center. It begins with a decision to make Jesus your King and then you spend your whole life placing Jesus on the throne of your heart.

False gods

16. We all love Jesus and nothing is so attractive as having Jesus as your King. Just one problem. False gods keep claiming your heart. The strong passions of young adulthood become the ambitions, the avarice, the selfishness of later years. (As we age, they even grow stronger and harder to dislodge).
17. These other kings are false claimants who want to own you.

The Conversion Experience

18. Jesus begins to be your King by a conversion experience.
19. All the saints speak of this conversion experience, a special moment when Jesus became their King. For example, St. Augustine listened to St. Ambrose preach at Milan but he kept putting off his conversion saying, "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow" until one day a child's voice (Jesus) said, "Take and read. Take and read." He opened the bible to Romans 13:11-14. He wept and no longer said "tomorrow."
20. St. Charles Foucauld led a wild life in the French Foreign legion. Returning to France, he accompanied his devout cousin to Church where a priest was hearing confessions. After much prodding, he reluctantly confessed all his sins. On emerging from the confessional he said, "If God has forgiven all these sins, then I should love Him with all my heart." He made Jesus his King, studied to be a priest, returned to Africa as a missionary and was martyred.

Understanding the Experience

21. Conversion is totally God's gift but it helps to know the process. It begins when the person experiences some new desires and hopes that turn them to God. They feel empty (because they know something is missing) but they experience a fullness (the new desire is in their heart).
22. So, they search. They look. A door opens (possibly a retreat). An opportunity knocks (perhaps daily mass). By accepting the invitation, they quicken their search.

23. Fairly quickly, God responds. In a special moment, Jesus comes to them. They have received a gift, (which they were looking for but couldn't even describe). The name for this is a religious experience. God comes close. They know heaven has entered their heart.

What Happens to the Gift?

24. Sometimes this experience dies and fades. Lucy of Fatima saw the Angel of Portugal (1915). She notes that even this experience was fading away. Fortunately, the Angel returned (1916) to Lucy and her 2 cousins. His three visits brought about a permanent conversion that prepared them for Our Lady's appearance.

The Experience and the Risen Jesus

25. America has many strange religions which bring about questionable religious experiences because they set aside the humanity of Jesus. True spiritual experiences center on Jesus as Lord. At the Transfiguration, the Father told Peter, James and John, "This is my Beloved Son. Listen to him." (Mk 9:2)

26. Now, the Risen Jesus "fills the whole universe." God made absolute fullness reside in Him. (Col 1:19) He is everywhere and He wants you to experience His presence.

27. When Philip asked Jesus to show the Father to the apostles, Jesus said, "He who sees me, sees the Father." (Jn 14:9) Perfection comes by knowing Jesus Christ and the power of His Resurrection.

Discussion Questions

1. *Do you feel you are a member of the crowd or a disciple? Where is Jesus in the circle of your life?*
2. *Have you had a conversion experience?*
3. *Do you realize and experience that Jesus is everywhere?*

MARCHING WITH THE SAINTS

10. YOUR THREE OBSTACLES – WORLD, FLESH AND DEVIL

1. When a football player receives the opening kickoff, he faces 2 difficulties. First, he has to run 100 yards. Secondly, 11 enemies are charging toward him. The second is much more daunting.
2. Placing Jesus at the center of your heart, being his disciple, and enjoying a conversion experience are very powerful attractions. But, you have 2 difficulties.
3. You have to run 100 yards, (meaning all the years of your life). Secondly you have three great enemies– the world, flesh and devil.

The World

4. For every devout soul, the world is both a gigantic distraction and, at times, a persecuting enemy.
5. At the end of time, only Jesus' kingdom will exist. For now, we have the two worlds, the world of man and the Kingdom of Jesus.
6. Jesus described the dilemma of his disciples. "They do not belong to the world. I do not ask you to take them out of the world but to protect them." (Jn 17:14-15)
7. The Church exalts the monastic life that helps devout souls to withdraw entirely from the world. Even active religious know they must withdraw every day for prayer and community life.
8. You, however, must find solitude while remaining in the world. The world desperately wants your heart. To get your attention, advertisers spend billions of dollars. This intrusive world now attracts you 24 hours, every day. Television never stops broadcasting. MTV claims to "own our 14 year olds."
9. This is a problem because the good seeds of devotion grow only in the deep soil of inner silence.
10. Your only option is to withdraw as much as possible. Fervor is a fire and if you open your windows, the world will cool off your love.

The Flesh

11. The “flesh” does not mean your body (which is good). “Flesh” means a mysterious power of selfishness present in every human person (except Mary).
12. Within us is a mysterious “No”. That safeguards our selfishness. Even the little baby soon learns the power of that word “No” and adults back off.
13. When we feed this selfishness, it grows into disorders and addictions. St. Paul lists what proceeds from the flesh – like impurities, rage, hostilities, jealousy, envy, drunkenness etc. (Gal 5:19)
14. Paul describes his struggle against this mysterious inner power. “The good I wanted to do, I couldn’t. The evil I didn’t want to do, I did.”
15. Even knowing God’s law just made matters worse. “Who can free me from this power of death?” (Rom 7:24)
16. His answer – “Jesus Christ, Our Lord” Who sent His Holy Spirit into my body.
17. The Holy Spirit and the flesh are at war, and we must decide whether we will live “according to the flesh or according to the Spirit.” (Rom 8:5)
18. The fundamental truth is that “When the flesh grows strong the Spirit grows weak and when the Holy Spirit grows strong, the flesh grows weak”. When one grows, the other weakens, every day and every hour of our life.
19. This mysterious power of the flesh never dies. However, it can be weakened by a growth in the Spirit.
20. The greatest victory of all is over ourselves. Alexander the Great conquered the world but not his alcoholism.

The Devil

21. God created both angels and human beings as persons having intellects and free will. We have a body. The angels do not.
22. We and the angels are similar. We can enter heaven only by a free choice – a yes to God.

23. Since the angels have perfect intellects (not like ours), their first choice is their only choice. Their “yes” will always be “yes” and “No” will always be “no” (not like us who are always changing our minds).
24. All the angels made a decision. They were shown Jesus in his humanity and were invited to accept Him as their Lord. (St. Thomas Aquinas).
25. The “yes” angels entered heaven immediately.
26. The “no” angels were cast out and formed their own “Kingdom of Darkness”, totally opposed to Jesus’ Kingdom and complete enemies of the baptized.
27. Having said “no” to God, they want us to say “no”.
28. Whenever we say “no” to God, they gain some entrance into our lives.
29. Think of a cut in the skin which collects some dirt and eventually becomes infected.
30. This represents the 3 stages of any sin. All sin has these same three stages. For example, a person experiences some feelings of jealousy. As they feed that jealousy, it grows. Finally, they are consumed with jealousy. They have come under Satan’s power.
31. Satan is present in all addictions. The person is no longer “himself” and is “out of control”.
32. Satan especially enters when people seek to enjoy his powers by delving into the occult.
33. Before we commit sin, Satan tells us how pleasant it is. Afterwards, he convinces us that we are unworthy of forgiveness.
34. The best protection is Our Lady who will lead us to Eucharist and confession.
35. Obedience to God’s commandments, the Church’s teachings and the guidance of a confessor will root out Satan’s hold upon us.
36. Much more must be said about deliverance from obsessions and from possession, but they are deeper talks.

Satan and Devout Souls

37. Satan uses different strategies against devout souls. He fills them with anxieties (about serving God enough) and fears (about possible future sufferings). He gets them to do things beyond their strength (so they get discouraged). He twists divine truths so they move into darkness.

38. Remember. The devout soul should always have peace. If you lost your peace, drop everything, go back and find it.

Discussion Questions:

1. *How do you combat the powerful attractions of the electronic world and the pressures from other people?*
2. *Do you now understand the powerful selfishness in all of us?*
3. *Are your eyes open to Satan's power and presence?*

MARCHING WITH THE SAINTS

11. RECEIVE THE FIRE THROUGH MARY

1. John the Baptist identified Jesus as one who “would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire.” (Mt 3:11)
2. Jesus also said, “I have come to cast fire on the earth.” (Lk 12:49). When about to ascend into heaven, Jesus commanded His disciples “Remain here in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” (Lk 24:49)
3. Although the disciples had seen the Risen Jesus, they were not ready to proclaim the gospel. They needed Jesus’ fire.
4. After Jesus’ fire came down at Pentecost, Peter promised everyone who would repent and be baptized, “Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” He added, “To you, your children and all those far off whom the Lord calls.” (Acts 2:38-39), meaning all of us.
5. Our Lady also speaks of the fire of her Flame of Love (Jesus), which “leaps out”. This fire causes her so much suffering that she looks for people to whom she can give the flame.
6. She says that this flame is Jesus Christ Himself.

Mary and the Holy Spirit

7. The New Testament records two special moments of the Holy Spirit coming. At the Annunciation, the fire came upon Mary and formed the physical body of Jesus. At Pentecost, the fire came upon Mary gathered with the disciples, forming Christ’s Mystical Body. (The Church).
8. At Pentecost, Peter promised the people, “You will receive the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). St. Paul asked the twelve disciples of John the Baptist, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?” They said, “We have not even heard that there was a Holy Spirit.” So, he laid hands on them. The Holy Spirit came down and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. (Acts 19:5-7) They were anxious that new believers receive the Spirit.

Consecrating Yourself to Mary

1. In 1715, an unknown priest, St. Louis de Montfort, wrote a manuscript called “True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary.” In his great spiritual wisdom, St. Louis knew he had written a masterpiece and that Satan hated his book.

2. The saint prophesied that the manuscript would be lost and then found, just in time to usher in the Age of Mary.
3. All was fulfilled. In 1842, a de Montfort priest, going through an old cedar chest, unearthed the writing. The Age of Mary was about to begin.
4. Our Lady had already appeared (1830) to St. Catherine Laboure and revealed her miraculous medal.
5. Due to this medal, fervor about Mary's Immaculate Heart increased and led Pope St. Pius IX to declare the dogma of Mary's Immaculate Conception (1854).
6. Four years later, (1858) Our Lady confirmed the pope's decision, telling St. Bernadette at Lourdes, "I am the Immaculate Conception."
7. Many Marian apparitions followed, leading up to the great moments of Fatima and the sun dancing. (October 13, 1917).
8. Since then, Mary has appeared at many recognized shrines on every continent, stressing her Immaculate Heart. We are truly in the Age of Mary.

Consecrations to Mary

9. Marian graces now flood our Catholic Church. Especially important are consecrations to Mary, which release these graces. Consecrating your life will make you a strong chalice able to receive the new wine.
10. A special consecration to Mary concerns the Flame of Love, a revelation given to Elizabeth Kindelmann, a devotion fully approved by Cardinal Erdo in Budapest, Hungary (2009).
11. Elizabeth was born June 6, 1913, preceded by 12 siblings (all twins), none of whom lived to adulthood. Elizabeth's father died when she was 5 and she was raised by her grandparents.
12. She began working at 12, and then tried to enter two different religious orders. Fortunately, at 16, she joined her parish choir where she met and married Karoly Kindelmann.
13. In 1946, her husband died and left her (age 33) to raise their 6 children by herself.
14. In 1961 (age 48) after many spiritual trials, Our Lord and our Lady began to speak to her about this new fire, the Flame of Love.

15. Elizabeth devoted the rest of her life to recording the messages and recruiting priests and bishops (and even the Holy Father) to respond to Our Lady's Cause.
16. Our Lady's promises about Flame of Love are truly extraordinary.
- a. "A torrent of graces will be poured out which have never been given since the Word became flesh."
 - b. "I am going to give my greatest miracle."
 - c. Since the Word became flesh, I have never given such a great moment as the Flame of Love that comes now.
 - d. My Flame of Love is burning. It is so great I cannot keep it any longer within me. It leaps out to you with explosive power. (Mary).
 - e. Nothing like this has existed before. This is my greatest miracle that I will do for all. (Mary)
17. Elizabeth is the match which lights the fire. "You will be the first to whom I entrust this Flame of Love of my heart." (Mary) "I have made you a match. You will light up the whole world." "I will send the Flame of Love into millions of souls."

18. Receiving the Flame

You can receive the flame by consecrating yourself to Mary and asking for this fire. This prayer is most effective when done with others.

Discussion Questions:

1. *Discuss how devotion to Mary allows the Holy Spirit to come in greater fullness.*
2. *Are you familiar with St. Louis de Montfort and True devotion?*
3. *What do you like most about the Flame of Love?*

MARCHING WITH THE SAINTS

12.

JOIN A GROUP AND SERVE OTHERS

To Be Holy

1. In your Baptism, God gave you a spiritual identity, where you belong in His Kingdom. You must seek out your place with others.
2. Those baptized at Pentecost didn't just go home.
3. They joined with others. "They dedicated themselves to the apostles' instructions, the communal life, to the breaking of bread, (Eucharist) and to the prayer." (Acts 2:42).
4. So, after receiving Mary's Flame of Love, you cannot just "go home". You must join with others.

Becoming Holy by Mental Prayer

5. When Jesus was passing by, the blind Bartimeus took his only opportunity and Jesus healed him. But, Bartimeus didn't stop there. He didn't go home. Instead, he saw that he could be with Jesus. So, "he followed Jesus to Jerusalem" (Mk 10:52). He joined Jesus and the apostles on the road of perfection.
6. Don't worry. Don't ask "What is ahead? What will I gain?" Join with others, knowing that Jesus wants you on this road.

Part One – Join With Others

Need For Others

7. Fervor is like a fire. To build a fire you join the logs. To put out the fire, you separate logs.
8. If you practice individualism, feeling no need for others, your fire will certainly go out. (If you join others, you will keep alive your fire).
9. The Little Flower loved the saying, "A brother helping a brother is like a strong city."
10. You live and work within your family, your job and your neighborhood.
11. But, you also need to have a group where you can seek God and serve others.
12. For many Catholics, this need for a community is a new idea. Many go to mass but feel no need to join with others in living out their Baptism. So, let's study God's plan.

God's Plan

13. In the Old Testament, God saved the Jews by forming the community of Israel. Only Israel was prepared to receive God's Son.
14. In the New Testament, Jesus formed His disciples into a community. He spent much more time with them.
15. After rising from the dead, Jesus came to the disciples, not to the crowds. Peter says, "We ate and drank with Him after He rose." (Acts 10:40-41).
16. The disciples, not the crowds, received the Holy Spirit and preached to the world.
17. The Early Church learned from Jesus. The Apostles deliberately formed communities of disciples.
18. Years later, to reawaken the Church to fervor, the great saints (Anthony, Basil, and Benedict) formed communities of religious. God's plan for your holiness always involves your joining with others in a Catholic community.
19. Even in worldly matters, who can serve alone? Every great work demands an enterprise, a group of people dedicated to a single cause. We must learn that lesson.

Overcoming the World

20. Jesus said, "Do not fear, little flock" for "I have overcome the world." Can you conquer the world by yourself? Can you keep alive your fire of fervor when the world's winds are so strong?
21. You absolutely need a group, others who help you and you help them. Only if you gather, can you invite others. Unless you gather, no community exists.
22. Without a small group, everything dies. With a group, a harvest can flourish.

Part Two – You Must Serve

23. Israel has two famous bodies of water – the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. The Sea of Galilee is alive with fish life and supports a gigantic population (most of Israel lives near the Sea of Galilee). The Dead Sea supports no life (it's dead).
24. What is the secret? Water flows into the Sea of Galilee (at the north) and flows out (to the South). This same water flows into the Dead Sea but goes nowhere.

25. The Sea of Galilee is a symbol of a Catholic who receives the fire of fervor and realizes that he/she must serve others. The Dead Sea is a Catholic who only receives, not realizing the importance of serving.

26. Most say, "I don't have time", but if you find something important, you suddenly find time.

The Secrets

Here, we can give just a few hints.

27. For now, serve right where you are – in your family and daily work.

28. Learn what you are good at, (your natural talents). God gives natural abilities so we use them to serve Him.

29. Listen to your hopes and desires. What do you want to do for Jesus?

30. Try to gain new skills, but faith and strong desires to serve, are the foundation.

31. Always stay connected with your parish. God wants you to help people whom you see regularly.

32. The Flame of Love Movement needs you to serve and welcomes whatever help you can give.

33. The easiest way to start is getting trained within a structured Movement.

34. Everybody should also serve in a free-lance fashion. Keep your eyes open for fallen-away Catholics whom you can encourage or good Catholics whom you can invite to share your fervor.

Discussion Questions:

1. *Do you belong to any "faith group"? Do you feel any need to find one you can join?*
2. *Do you see God's plan? He always forms His disciples into some group.*
3. *Do you see how necessary it is to gather with others so you can serve many?*

Don't forget – Our Lady loves you dearly and she will bless even your tiniest efforts.

SPIRITUAL READING

The modern person faces a daily battle. Advertisers spend millions of dollars to gain entrance to your thoughts. Your mind is extremely important and you must choose wisely what thoughts you entertain.

By a devout life, you enter a whole new world filled with the richest of treasures. An important means of enjoying these divine favors is good spiritual reading. This is so important, that this final page is needed so you know what to read for the rest of your life. Let's begin with some basic advice.

1. Always be reading some spiritual book, possibly even two or three – some instructive and others popular, like lives of the saints.
2. Please do not devour spiritual books. It is far better to read a few minutes every day. Some books, like the lives of saints, will be read longer. Be led by the Spirit. See what books attract you and what books are helpful to you at each stage of your spiritual life.
3. Books that help you now might have no attraction in a few years. Books that seem useless to you now might help later on. As you read one book, you will inevitably discover others. Again, be led by your attractions. Never forget, the purpose of spiritual reading is to foster your devout life and to lead you into the spiritual world.
4. Put away controversial books or any book that ruins your peace. It might be a good book, but when you lose your peace, something is going wrong.
5. If you gain a taste for spiritual reading you will inevitably come closer to God and will be much safer on the road to salvation.
6. Possibly, the next piece of advice should have come first. It is extremely important. If spiritual reading leads you to pray and to praise God, then put away the book for a few minutes. You have found living waters. Drink deeply of this prayerfulness. Then, go back to your reading.

The Bible

Read some part of the bible every day. Begin with what attracts you and holds your attention. Mark's gospel and the Acts of the Apostles are good places to begin.

Jesus' Words of Divine Mercy Spoken to Saint Faustina

1. If souls would only listen to My voice when I am speaking in the depth of their hearts, they would reach the peak of holiness in a short time.
2. In the Host is your power. It will defend you.
3. Say unceasingly the chaplet that I have taught you. Whoever will recite it will receive great mercy at the hour of death.
4. Let no soul fear to draw near to Me, even though its sins be as scarlet.
5. I perform works of mercy in every soul. The greater the sinner, the greater the right he has to My mercy.
6. I give great graces to souls who meditate devoutly on My Passion.
7. The souls that say this chaplet will be embraced by My mercy during their lifetime and especially at the hour of their death.
8. When this chaplet is said by the bedside of a dying person, God's anger is placated and unfathomable mercy envelopes the soul.
9. My mercy is a sign for the end times. After it will come the day of justice. While there is still time, let all have recourse to the fount of My mercy.
10. Souls perish in spite of My bitter Passion. I am giving them the last hope of salvation; that is, the feast of My Mercy. If they do not adore My mercy, they will perish forever.
11. Many souls will be saved and sanctified by this work.
12. Pray for souls that they be not afraid to approach the tribunal of My mercy.
13. I am giving mankind the last hope of salvation.
14. I thirst for the salvation of souls.
15. Let the sinful soul have no fear to approach Me, even if they have more sins than all the grains of sand in the world.
16. I will not be a Judge for those who, at the hour of death, spread the honor of My mercy.

FLAME OF LOVE MOVEMENT

The world-wide Flame of Love Movement originated in Budapest, Hungary and is based on the diary of Elizabeth Kindelmann (1913 – 1985). The revelations which she received and her diary were fully approved by Cardinal Péter Erdö, Archbishop of Budapest, in 2009.

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“Spread the effect of the grace of Thy Flame of Love over all humanity.”

(The Flame of Love Prayer)