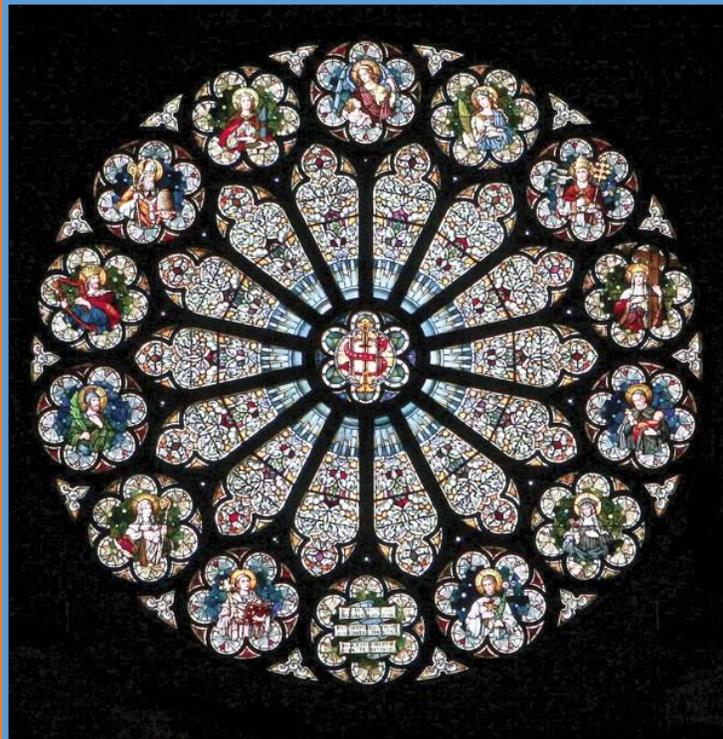


UNIVERSAL CALL TO HOLINESS

By Msgr. Lawrence Moran & Ronald J. Eldred



In this document are discussed the meaning of holiness; growing in holiness; the Catholic Church as channel of grace; the Doctrine of Grace; stages of holiness; means to achieve holiness and union with God; the sacraments and holiness; Theological and Cardinal Virtues; Gifts of the Holy Spirit; Fruits of the Holy Spirit; prayer and holiness; works of mercy; our enemies – the world, the flesh, and the devil and how to combat them; how to purify the senses and the faculties of the soul.

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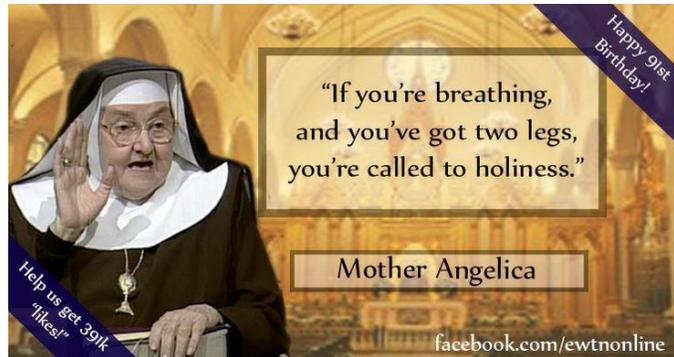
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Mother Angelica of the Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN) used to begin her weekly live broadcast with the statement, “We are all called to be great saints.” This echoes the call to holiness that the Catholic Church has made to the People of God down through the ages. First Jesus called his followers to holiness and after he ascended into Heaven his Apostles continued to call them. In the



centuries that followed, the Fathers of the Church repeatedly called Christians to holiness, as did numerous Church councils. For instance, Vatican Council II states “He [God] has, however, willed to make men holy and save them, not as individuals without any bond or link between them, but rather to make them into a people who might acknowledge him and serve him in holiness,” (Dogmatic Constitution of the Church or *Lumen Gentium*, Chapter II, “The People of God ” 9). Pope John Paul II, who repeatedly preached this theme, said in his General Audience on November 24, 1993 that “The Church is holy and all her members are called to holiness.”

Prior to Vatican II it was assumed that achieving the height of holiness was for cloistered nuns and monks who lived their lives in accordance with the Evangelical Counsels of strict poverty, chastity, and obedience. It was believed that perfect holiness could be achieved only by persons isolated from the attractions and distractions of the world. The great majority of persons outside the cloister who had to constantly fight the world, the flesh, and the devil would have to be satisfied with achieving something much less than perfection. This ignored the fact that countless holy persons over the ages, such as St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, and St Teresa of Lisieux, had taught that the spiritual life associated with prayer and holiness is something that we are all called to—adults, children, and teen-agers alike—and not something reserved only for the religious. Reflecting the change in attitude of the Church after Vatican II, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, “All Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity . . . All are called to holiness Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (No. 2013). Jesus says the words about the perfection of his Father in Matthew 5:48 at the end of the Sermon on the Mount; therefore, the Sermon is our principal guide to holiness. In this essay we are going to discuss the meaning of holiness and how to grow in holiness so that we can achieve sainthood in Heaven forever.

THE MEANING OF HOLINESS

Only God is holy and we are holy only to the extent that we are holy, to the extent God lives in our

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souls. God is holy, because he is whole, perfect, sound, blessed, hallowed, sacred, and complete, possessing integrity, goodness, and righteousness. God possesses these qualities by nature; we possess them only by sanctifying grace, which is the life of God within us. We have God's life in us when the Trinity dwells in our souls. Baptism washes away the stain of Original Sin and makes us Temples of the Holy Spirit. Wherever the Holy Spirit dwells also dwells the Father and the Son. This is known as the doctrine of the indwelling Trinity (John 14:23). We want to emphasize that grace is not God; it is his life within us; it is our participation in his life, our participation in the inner life of the Trinity. As we will see later in our discussion, sanctifying grace restores the holiness and justice lost by Adam and Eve. Sanctifying grace makes us holy; it sanctifies us, as was Adam and Eve before their fall from God's grace. Sanctification is the process of being sanctified, of being made holy.

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Jesus established his Church, the Catholic Church, to help us achieve sainthood and get to Heaven. When Jesus ascended into Heaven, he did not abandon us; he did not leave us orphans as he said he wouldn't. Ten days afterwards at Pentecost he sent his Holy Spirit to institute his One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church—the Catholic Church. He established his Church to continue his presence in the world and to provide us with the means to achieve holiness and get to Heaven. The Church administers the Sacraments, the means with which we receive God's sanctifying grace and actual graces. Jesus deposited all of the graces he earned by his suffering and death in his Church, what is called the Deposit of Grace. Since he is infinite, the amount of grace is also infinite, and every person who has ever lived, is living, and will ever live have drawn, are drawing, or will draw from this deposit.

Although God created us in his image and likeness—with an immortal soul and the faculties of intellect and a free will—we are like him only to the extent that we are holy, only to the degree we are like Jesus. To be holy our will must be in full conformance with the will of God; we must obey his commandments, we must do his will in all things. The Catholic Church provides us with the means to achieve the holiness to which God has called us. The Church teaches that we can rise above our fallen nature and become holy so we can become adopted sons and daughters of God the Father Almighty and brothers and sisters of his son Jesus. The more one brings his or her will into conformance with God's will, the holier he or she becomes, the more like Jesus he or she becomes.

Achieving holiness isn't easy in this wicked world. The Catholic Church provides us with the weapons with which to do battle against the world, the flesh, and the Devil. As we discussed earlier, our journey toward achieving holiness begins with our Baptism. The sacrament removes the stain of Original Sin and infuses us with sanctifying grace. To sanctify means to make holy, so sanctifying grace makes us holy. The other sacraments provide us with the means to achieving greater holiness. After our Baptism, as we become more holy, we grow in friendship with God and God increasingly communes with us in increasingly more intimate ways. Nonetheless, we shall never see God totally as he is—the Beatific Vision—until we are completely purged of our unholiness, which for most of us will not happen until our deaths and cleansing hopefully in Purgatory.

SALVATION HISTORY

To fully understand our need for Baptism and what it does for us, we must have knowledge of Salvation History. We will provide only a brief outline of the subject here. To begin, let's examine what is meant by Salvation History. Salvation History is the story of the creation, fall, and redemption of humankind. Central to this story is the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, whose story includes his conception, birth, life, suffering, death, resurrection, ascension, and second coming. Salvation history is found in Holy Scripture, Sacred Tradition, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, writings of the Church Fathers and Doctors, and the history of the Catholic Church. It is found especially in the Holy Bible and Tradition as interpreted by the Magisterium or teaching authority of the Catholic Church. Salvation history ties everything together for us; it relates the Old Testament with the New Testament.

The Old Testament (Covenant)—The Creation: Our story begins in the Book of Genesis of the Old Testament, which describes how God the Holy Trinity created the universe and all that is



in it in six days and rested on the seventh. The mystery of the Holy Trinity is the most important mystery of our Faith, and the source of all other mysteries. The Holy Trinity is a perfectly happy family consisting of three divine persons that need nothing to fulfill themselves and who live in intimate loving communion. The Trinitarian Family is one of relationships. The Father eternally generates the Son; the Holy Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son, each constituting separate Persons of the Holy Trinity. It is important to remember that the Holy Trinity is only one God consisting of three divine Persons, because they all share the same substance or being, which makes them co-equal in power, glory, majesty, and wisdom and all of them have existed from all eternity.

The Book of Genesis tells us that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth in six days and rested on the seventh. He created everything out of his abundance, out of his goodness, wisdom, and love and a desire to demonstrate and communicate his glory, not out of any deficiency. Of this the *Catechism* states, “God created the world to show forth and communicate

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his glory. That his creatures should share in his truth, goodness and beauty—this is the glory for which God created them” (No. 319).

After having created the heavens and the earth, Genesis tells us that on the sixth day God created the first humans in his image and likeness. Holy Scripture tells us that God said regarding the creation of man, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth” (Genesis 1:26).

Why God created man: God created man to know, love, and serve him so he could be happy with him in Heaven forever. God placed Adam and Eve in an earthly paradise, the Garden of Eden, where they and their children were to till and keep it and cooperate in partnership with him to perfect it (Genesis 2:15). Originally God created our first parents and all of their descendants to be members of his family. They and their descendants were to be God's adopted sons and daughters and to share in the inner life of the Trinitarian Family. The Second Person is the Father's Son by nature; Adam and Eve were his son and daughter by adoption and by grace. God's intention was that they and their descendants were to live in happiness with him forever. They and all of their children were to be the Father's heirs. The natural family, consisting of husband, wife, and children, is patterned after the Trinitarian family; it should be the mirror image of the Trinitarian family.

God created man in his image and like-

ness: To make them worthy of being his adopted children, God created the first human beings, Adam and Eve, in his image and likeness. The *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Bible* tells us that term “image” is a phrase used in Genesis 1:26-27 to designate the special superiority of man over the other works of God's visible creation. This “image of God” is the spiritual part of man's nature, which includes his soul and its faculties of intellect and free will. In these natural perfections man reflects, in a limited and imperfect way, God,



the Infinite Spirit, whose intelligence and freedom are supremely perfect. Man's faculties give him the ability to communicate and have relationships, abilities possessed by the Trinity at the supreme level. Intellect gives man the ability to think and free will the ability to make decisions. We shall discuss below how through sanctifying grace and the infused virtues man's nature is elevated to a supernatural plane of being and acting. The *Catechism* states:

Being in the image of God the human individual possesses the dignity of a person, who is not just something, but someone. He is capable of self-knowledge, of self-possession and of freely giving himself and entering into communion with other persons. And he is called by grace to a covenant with his Creator, to offer him a response of faith and love that no other creature can give in his stead (No. 357).

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Humans are in God's image in that they possess a created immortal spirit or soul; an intellect that is finite, but possessed infused knowledge before the Fall; a human will that is finite, but possessed considerable strength before the Fall. Adam and Eve received three types of gifts from God at their creation:

- **Natural:** What human beings are and have when they are born: a body and rational soul with the faculties of intellect and will.
- **Preternatural:** Includes infused knowledge, absence of concupiscence (integrity), and bodily immortality.
- **Supernatural:** Qualities possessed only by God, but shared with humans in the form of actual and sanctifying grace.

God created man in his likeness: In likeness, God created Adam and Eve in Original Holiness and Original Justice. By holiness Adam and Eve were originally like God who is whole, perfect, sound, blessed, hallowed, sacred, and complete, possessing integrity, goodness, and righteousness. God possesses these qualities by nature; they possessed them only by God's sanctifying grace, which was God's life in them. Because they possessed sanctifying grace and were made holy by the Trinity dwelling in them, they lived at the supernatural level.

By Original Justice is meant that our first parents possessed an intensely intimate friendship with God and lived in harmony with themselves and with the creation around them. Justice is often defined as giving someone his due; to give him what he deserves, what he has coming. Man is most just when he renders to God love and obedience, when he obeys his commandments and does his will. In their original state, Adam and Eve were just with respect to God, thus they lived in a state of Original Justice. Of this the *Catechism* states, "By the radiance of this grace all dimensions of man's life were confirmed. As long as he remained in the divine intimacy, man would not have to suffer or die. The inner harmony of the human person, the harmony between man and woman, and finally the harmony between the first couple and all creation, comprised the state called 'original justice'" (No. 376).

Although life in the Garden of Eden was heaven on earth and Adam and Eve possessed sanctifying grace, experienced perfect natural happiness, and lived in close friendship with God, they did not yet possess the Beatific Vision, the vision of God himself. That was something they could enjoy only after passing a test of their love and devotion to him. He wanted his adopted children to love him by a free choice of their wills. If they had not possessed this ability, they would not have possessed God's image whose will is absolutely free.

Adam and Eve fall from God's grace: Tragically, our first parents lost Original Holiness and Original Justice for themselves and their children by freely choosing to commit the first sin—the Original Sin. God told them they could have everything for their enjoyment in their earthly paradise except the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Tempted by Lucifer in the disguise of a serpent, first Eve then Adam in their pride ate the forbidden fruit. Pride is the worst sin of all, because one guilty of pride is trying to be God. The serpent had tempted them by telling

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them that they would not die if they ate the fruit of the forbidden tree, but instead would be gods, knowing good and evil (Genesis 3:5).

Genesis states of the Forbidden Tree, “The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die’” (Genesis 2:15-17). The *Catechism* says of this tragic event, “The entire harmony of original justice, foreseen for man in God's plan, will be lost by the sin of our first parents” (No. 379).



The terrible consequences of Original Sin: Upon discovering that Adam and Eve had disobeyed his commandment not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, God said to the woman, “I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you. And to Adam he said, Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:16-19). In other words, as St. Paul says, “For

the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). The *Catechism* nicely summarizes what was just quoted from Holy Scripture where it tells us:

Although it is proper to each individual, Original sin does not have the character of a personal fault in any of Adam's descendants. It is a deprivation of Original Holiness and justice, but human nature has not been totally corrupted: it is wounded in the natural powers proper to it, subject to ignorance, suffering and the dominion of death, and inclined to sin—an inclination to evil that is called concupiscence. Baptism, by imparting the life of Christ's grace, erases Original sin and turns a man back towards God, but the consequences for nature, weakened and inclined to evil, persist in man and summon him to spiritual battle (No. 405).

To quote the *Catechism* further on the consequences of Original Sin:

The harmony in which they had found themselves, thanks to original justice, is now

destroyed: the control of the soul's spiritual faculties over the body is shattered; the union of man and woman becomes subject to tensions, their relations henceforth marked by lust and domination. Harmony with creation is broken: visible creation has become alien and hostile to man. Because of man, creation is now subject 'to its bondage to decay'. Finally, the consequence explicitly foretold for this disobedience will come true: man will 'return to the ground', for out of it he was taken. Death makes its entrance into human history (No. 400).

As a result of their original sin, Adam and Eve fell from God's grace and were driven out of the Garden of Eden into a world of suffering and sorrow, death and destruction. When they were banished from the Garden, they entered into a world of darkness and despair, a world where war, famine, disease, pestilence, natural disasters, accidents, civil disorders, crime, and terrorism were to abound, a place where hatred, suffering, sorrow, death, and destruction were to triumph. It was not long before one of their sons committed the first murder in history; Cain, killed his brother, Abel. Worst of all, they no longer lived at the supernatural level, because the Trinity no longer dwelled in their souls; they were what we Catholics would call in state of mortal sin, their souls were dead because God no longer dwelled in them. They and all of their descendants would live only at the natural level.

How Original Sin affects man's image to God: In the fallen state, all human beings inherited diminished intellects and weakened wills as well as the desire to sin, called concupiscence, and to experience the wages of sin, which is death. They were no longer children of God or shared in the inner life of the Holy Trinity. They and all of their children were no longer the Father's heirs until redeemed by Christ. In the fallen state, all human beings inherited diminished intellects and weakened wills as well as the desire to sin, called concupiscence, and to experience the wages of sin, which is death. At death the soul is separated from the body and the body decomposes. The soul will be reunited at the end of time with a glorified body for those who are already in Heaven or going there. Even after committing Original Sin, humans still possess the image of God, because they were not totally corrupted when our first parents committed Original Sin.

Of the three types of gifts Adam and Eve had received at their creation, the natural gifts of intellect was diminished and of free will weakened. The preternatural gifts of infused knowledge, integrity, and bodily immortality were lost for good. The biggest loss of all was the loss of the supernatural gift of God's sanctifying grace, the very loss of God's indwelling in their souls.

How Original Sin affects man's likeness to God: Because of their sin, Adam and Eve no longer possessed the likeness of God, for they were no longer holy. God is holy and they were no longer holy because God no longer lived in their souls. Because human beings had lost their innocence and were no longer holy, they were no longer like God; however, they were still basically in God's image, that is, they still had immortal souls, which possessed intellect and free will (although weakened by sin). They were no longer children of God or shared in the inner life of the Holy Trinity. They and all of their children were no longer the Father's heirs. However, there was still hope, for it was in the father's plan to send his son into the world some

day to redeem humankind, to once again make them his children

Why did all of Adam and Eve's descendants inherit the stain of Original Sin? Some would say that this doesn't seem fair. In this regard, the *Catechism* says:

How did the sin of Adam become the sin of all his descendants? The whole human race is in Adam 'as one body of one man'. By this 'unity of the human race' all men are implicated in Adam's sin, as all are implicated in Christ's justice. Still, the transmission of original sin is a mystery that we cannot fully understand. But we do know by Revelation that Adam had received original holiness and justice not for himself alone, but for all human nature. By yielding to the tempter, Adam and Eve committed a personal sin, but this sin affected the human nature that they would then transmit in a fallen state. It is a sin which will be transmitted by propagation to all mankind, that is, by the transmission of a human nature deprived of original holiness and justice. And that is why original sin is called 'sin' only in an analogical sense: it is a sin 'contracted' and not 'committed'—a state and not an act (No. 404).

Original Sin destroyed the harmony between God and man, the inner harmony of the human person, the harmony between man and woman, and the harmony between our first parents and all of creation.

By their original sin, Adam and Eve lost their friendship with God and their place in the Trinitarian Family. Since they were banished from God's Family and disinherited, all they had to pass on to their descendants was the stain of Original Sin. Since by disobedience our first parents lost Original Holiness and Justice, we the children inherited the stain of their Original Sin, for they no longer possessed these qualities to pass on to us. In spite of this man remained in God's image, but was “deprived of the glory of his likeness.”

Humans still possess the image of God, although damaged: Even after committing Original Sin, man still possesses the image of God, because unlike the fallen angels who were cast into Hell when they rebelled against God, man was not totally corrupted when our first parents committed Original Sin. The angels possessed intellects so far above humans, and wills so much stronger, that God didn't give them another chance. Because human beings had lost their innocence and were no longer holy, they were no longer like God; however, they were still basically in God's image, that is, they still had immortal souls, which possessed intellect and free will. In this regard, the *Catechism* states, In spite of this “man remains 'in the image of God,' in the image of the Son, but is deprived 'of the glory of God,' of his 'likeness’” (No. 705). However, Original Sin diminished their intellects and weakened their wills, and they were to suffer from the urge to commit actual sin, which is called concupiscence. Moreover, in the fallen state they were subject to suffering, sorrow, and death. Yet God still loved them and considered them redeemable, capable of being freed from the power of Satan and the slavery of sin.

In other words, after the Fall, human beings remained in God's image, still possessing immortal souls with the faculties of intellect and free will (although reduced in capacity because of the

effects of Original Sin), but they no longer possessed the likeness of God, for they were no longer holy. As a result, they lost God's friendship (justice). Moreover, they lost their place in the Trinitarian Family; therefore, they were no longer supernatural children of God and no longer possessed the privilege of inheriting eternal happiness.

Reasons for hope: Although humans had fallen from grace and had lost God's friendship, God continued to love them, so much so that it was in his plan—His divine providence—to one day send his Son into the world to redeem humankind. Redeem means to pay for something, and in this instance we mean that Jesus Christ paid for all of the damage caused by Original and actual sins. It was Jesus Christ, the son of God the Father, who restored the dignity of man by becoming a man himself. It was He who made it possible for man once again to become holy and friends with God, to once again become children of God the Father.

Salvation History is the story of God's plan to restore mankind to the Trinitarian family, to make human beings once again children of God, i.e., sons and daughters of the Father and brothers and sisters of his son Jesus. The Catechism says, "The Son Himself became man and assumed the human image and restored it in the likeness of the Father by giving it again its Glory." By taking on the image of man, Jesus was to restore man's likeness to its original glory. As it says in the Mass, he came to share in our humanity so that we might share in his divinity.

Why did God allow sin to enter the world? The *Catechism* asked this precise question:

But why did God not prevent the first man from sinning? St. Leo the Great responds, 'Christ's inexpressible grace gave us blessings better than those the demon's envy had taken away.' And St. Thomas Aquinas wrote, 'There is nothing to prevent human nature's being raised up to something greater, even after sin; God permits evil in order to draw forth some greater good.' Thus St. Paul says, 'Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more'; and the Exsultet sings, 'O happy fault, . . . which gained for us so great a Redeemer!'" (No. 412).

I used to teach religion in the St. Patrick Middle School, and I asked my 8th Grade students that question. One of my students answered very perceptibly that God let Adam and Eve sin so that he could one day show the human race how much he loved them by sending his only begotten Son into the world to suffer and die for their salvation (See John 3:16). One of our classrooms at John Paul II Catholic High School where I taught until retirement has above one of the boards, "The worst thing that ever happened caused the greatest thing that ever happened, for us."

God's covenants with a Chosen People: After the Fall, God began to gradually reveal himself to humankind. To begin the process of restoration of the human race to the Trinitarian Family, he made covenants or agreements with a chosen people, the Israelites. The story of the old covenant is found in the Old Testament of the Bible. In the old covenant God promised to make the Chosen People a great and numerous people, provide them with land, and make them prosperous if they, in turn, worshipped him as the one true God and obeyed his commandments. God's revealed his commandments to Moses at Mt. Sinai, the Ten Commandments. The covenant was sealed by sacrificing animals. In the Old Testament God was preparing the world for the re-

demption of the world when he was to send his only begotten Son to save us.

The Chosen People invariably broke their covenants with God when they prospered. God repeatedly sent prophets to remind them of their covenants with him, instruct and encourage them, call them to repentance, and to warn them what would happen to them if they didn't repent, which they seldom did until punished. After a period of punishment, they usually returned to God for a brief while, but as soon as they prospered again, the sordid cycle started all over again. Much of the Old Testament is taken up with describing these cycles of prosperity, backsliding, warning, punishment, and repentance. In time God tired of this repeating cycle and began to reveal through his prophets, such as Isaiah and Daniel, that he would one day send a Messiah who would save his people from their sins.

New Testament (Covenant): The prophecies of the Old Testament were fulfilled by the New Testament, the New and Everlasting Covenant. The New Testament is the story of the redemption of mankind. It describes the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ into Heaven. God had always kept his side of covenant relationships, but the Chosen People rarely kept theirs. The only way that humans could keep their end of the covenant was for God himself to become a man and make a new and everlasting covenant on their behalf. The New and Everlasting Covenant, sealed by the Blood of the Lamb, our Lord Jesus Christ, and made present at each Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, fulfills the covenants of the Old Testament, the covenants that God made with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David. God promises in the new covenant to provide faithful Christians the blessings described in the Sermon on the Mount, the Last Supper, and elsewhere in the Gospel. If we obey his commandments, our eternal reward is Heaven.

The Incarnation: The Holy Trinity, next to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, the Incarnation is the most important doctrine of the Catholic Faith. The Incarnation occurred when the Word became Flesh and dwelled among us. The prophecies of the prophets were fulfilled hundreds of years afterwards when the angel of the Lord, Gabriel, announced to the Blessed Virgin Mary that she was to conceive and bear a son who would save the world (Matthew 1:20-25, Luke 1:26-37). At her consent, the Word (the Second Person of the Holy Trinity) was made Flesh and dwelled among us (Luke 1:26-38); in other words, the Word became incarnate (from the Latin *incarnare*, which means to make flesh).

St. John begins his Gospel with the words: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father" (John 1:1-2; 14). John is here talking about the Incarnation, which means to embody or be made of flesh. At the Incarnation, Jesus Christ united his divine Person with a human body and soul. Thus, he possesses two natures, human and divine. The union of his divine and human natures is called the Hypostatic Union. This means that his two natures, divine and human, are united in one Divine Person. He is true God and true man. It is very important to stress here that even though Jesus possesses two natures, he is only one person, the same Person as the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. He possesses only divine personhood; he does not possess human personhood. He shares his divine intellect and will with the Father and the Holy

Spirit; otherwise, if each of the persons of the Holy Trinity had separate intellects and wills, there would exist three separate gods, not one. This is what Jesus meant when he said, "I am in the Father and the Father in me" (John 14:10) or "I came from the father" (John 15:28) or "[He] who sees me sees him who sent me" (John 12:45).

The Incarnation was the most important event that ever occurred in history, because every event before was affected by it and every event that followed until the end of time was or will be affected by it. In fact, we even ascertain our time from the birth of Jesus Christ: before Christ, B.C., and *Anno Domini*, A.D. (in the Year of our Lord). The Incarnation was so important, because it raised the dignity and worth of every single human being. Being created in God's very image had already given humans inestimable dignity and worth; the Incarnation even raised this dignity and worth even further yet, because God himself had become a human, making it possible for all humans to elevate their status to the supernatural level, of course, by adoption and by grace, not by nature. Because God created us in his image and likeness, it gives us the motive for loving and caring for others. In fact, Jesus commanded us to love one another as he loves us (John 15:12), which is a tall order. It is much greater order than loving our neighbor as ourselves, because our capacity to love others depends on the degree to which we love ourselves. An added reason for loving others is the Redemption of humankind, because God loved the world so much that he sent his only Son into the world to redeem it (John 3:16). Moreover, the Incarnation increases our worth and dignity even further yet by restoring us to God's family.

Why did Jesus Christ become man? Jesus became a man for the following reasons: to restore us to God's Family; to elevate our human nature so we can share in his divinity; to redeem us by suffering and dying on the Cross; to suffer and die for our sins; to show how much he loves us; to give us hope; to set for us an example of perfect holiness and virtue; to help us reach perfection; and to give us an example and motive for loving others.

Nonetheless, the Incarnation did not automatically restore humankind to God's likeness. We are made friends with him once again only at Baptism, whether of water, blood, or desire. The restoration of God's friendship is logically called justification, because it restores the justice lost by Adam and Eve by their original sin. Baptism makes us right with God as our Protestant brothers and sisters would say. Before Baptism we were dead to sin. At Baptism we died to sin and were given new life in Jesus Christ (Romans 6). Also, Baptism makes us holy, because God the Trinity, who is holiness itself, comes to dwell in our souls (John 14:23).

THE ROLE OF BAPTISM IN OUR LIVES



Baptism restores us to God's family; it makes us children of God the Father and brothers and sisters to his son Jesus. It is through grace that we participate in the inner life of the Trinity. In Baptism we receive sanctifying grace, which is the life of God within us; it is our participation in the life of the Trinitarian Family; it is the Holy Trinity dwelling in our souls. The *Catechism* says that grace “is our participation in [God's] life. It introduces us into the intimacy of Trinitarian life: by Baptism the Christian participates in the grace of Christ, the Head of his Body. As an ‘adopted son he can henceforth call God

‘Father,’ in union with the only Son. He receives the life of the Spirit who breathes charity into him and who forms the Church” (No.1997).

Another way of conceiving of grace is our participation in God’s life. Grace is like a beam of light from God that penetrates our souls. It has been said that Jesus Christ himself is the sacrament, “because he gave his life to save mankind. His humanity is the outward sign or the instrument of his Divinity. It is through his humanity that the life of the Father and the Holy Spirit come to us as grace through the sacraments. It is Jesus Christ alone who mediates the sacraments to allow grace to flow to mankind.”

Jesus instituted his Church and gave us his Apostles and their successors to shepherd his flock after his Ascension into Heaven. The Church—Christ's Mystical Body—itself is a sacrament through which God's graces and mercy flow. The Apostles and their successors, the bishops and clergy down through the ages, minister the seven sacraments, including Baptism, to help us lead good lives in this world, and to help us reach Heaven in the next.

St Paul tells us that before baptism we were dead to sin. At baptism we died to sin and were given new life in Jesus Christ; we were born again. In this regard he states:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For he who has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him. For we know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus (Romans 6:3-11).

Sanctifying Grace: When one is baptized, he or she receives Sanctifying Grace. To sanctify means to make holy. Only God is Holy, so we become holy only to the extent that God dwells in our souls. Sanctifying grace is that which makes us holy. God infused sanctifying grace into our souls at baptism. Sanctifying grace is the life of God within us; it is our sharing in God's life. We become temples of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Trinity comes to dwell in our souls (John 14:23). Our baptism gives us the privilege of sharing in the inner life of the Holy Trinity; we truly become members of God's family by adoption and by grace. We become adopted children of God the Father and sons and daughters of his son Jesus Christ. Jesus shared in our humanity so that we could share in his divinity.

Our friendship with God began at our baptism. It is then that we experienced the infusion of Sanctifying Grace and began to live at the supernatural level. At baptism we experience several effects, which are explained below.

- **Removal of Original Sin:** Baptism removes the stain of Original Sin inherited from our first parents.
- **Temples of the Holy Spirit:** By washing away the stain of Original Sin, baptism prepares our souls for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Wherever the Holy Spirit dwells also dwells the Father and the Son. This is known as the doctrine of the indwelling Trinity. In this regard, Jesus said, "Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him" (John 14:23). St. Paul speaks of the indwelling Trinity several places. For example: "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If any one destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and that temple you are" (1 Corinthians 3:16-17). In another place he says, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own" (1 Corinthians 6:19). And in another, "Guard the truth that has been entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us" (2 Timothy. 1:14).
- **Supernatural life:** Sanctifying grace elevates the human soul from the natural to the supernatural level, even above the angelic level, because the sanctified soul participates in God's very nature.
- **Just and pleasing to God:** Sanctifying grace restores holiness and justice lost by Adam and Eve. Sanctifying grace makes us holy; it sanctifies us, as was Adam and Eve before their fall from God's grace. Sanctification is the process of being sanctified, being made holy. Sanctifying grace also justifies us; it makes us friends with God and restores the harmony between us and God lost by our first parents. Justification is the process of being justified, which establishes harmony between us, God, our neighbor, and the creation around us.
- **Members of Christ's Mystical Body:** We become members of the Mystical Body of Christ, the Catholic Church at baptism. The Church is God's family.

- **Adopted children of God the Father:** We became adopted children of God the Father and brothers and sisters of his son Jesus at baptism. Regarding this St. Paul said, “You did not receive a spirit of slavery leading you back into fear, but a spirit of adoption through which we cry out, ‘Abba!’ (i.e., Father). The Spirit himself gives witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Romans. 8:15-16).
- **Brothers and sisters to Jesus:** Since we become adopted children of God the Father at Baptism, we also become brothers and sisters to his son Jesus.
- **Coheirs with Christ:** Since sanctifying grace makes us participators in the divine life that Christ completely possesses, it follows that we are his brothers and sisters, for as St. Paul tells us God has predestined us "to share the image of his Son, that the Son might be the first-born of many brothers" (Romans 8:29). God loves us the way he loves his son and looks at Jesus as our brother and grants us the same heritage as he possesses.
- **Heirs of Heaven:** As God's children we became heirs to Heaven, for in this regard St. Paul says, “But if we are children, we are heirs as well: heirs of God, heirs with Christ” (Romans. 8:17). Moreover, on adopting us as his children, God infuses sanctifying grace into our souls, giving us a participation in the divine nature itself.
- **Capacity for supernatural merit:** We must be in state of sanctifying grace in order for our good works to earn merit toward eternal life. Supernatural merit requires the possession of the supernatural life. While in the state of mortal sin, our good works earn us nothing with respect to eternal life; however, by good works we can earn actual graces that motivate us to return to God's family.
- **Intimate union with God:** Although we are united to God before our baptism in a natural manner by virtue of his essence, presence, and power, sanctifying grace increases this union to an infinitely higher level of union, which is participation in the divine life itself. Sanctifying grace creates a loving relationship between God and us and makes us his friends and adopted children, for, "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him" (1 John 4:16).

In summary, sanctifying grace transforms the soul, making it capable of joining the infinite knowledge and love of God. This ability begins in this life at our baptisms. Baptism cleansed us of the stain of Original Sin and made us temples of the Holy Spirit. The Trinity came to dwell in our souls. This made us adopted children of God the Father and brothers and sisters to his Son Jesus as well as heirs to Heaven. We are members of God's family, his Church. However, we can achieve full union with God only in the next life, and then only after our souls have undergone whatever cleansing that might be necessary in Purgatory. But since the vision of God is infinite, and we are finite, we have unlimited capacity to increase sanctifying grace in our souls. We can do this by a lifetime of study and meditation on the Faith, a frequent reception of the sacraments, the development of the virtues, the performance of the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, continual prayer and penance, and loving God with our whole hearts, minds, souls, and strength.

Achieving Heaven fulfills our longing for God. To quote the great St. Augustine in this regard, “O God you have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they rest in you” (Confessions^{1,1}). We often look forward to getting or achieving more things, foolishly thinking that they will satisfy us, but we soon tire of them or find them less satisfying than when we get or achieve them. Anticipation is always greater than realization. Nothing less than God himself can really satisfy us. Only those who go to Heaven will rest in peace. Those who fail to achieve Heaven and go to Hell never find rest.

Baptism is absolutely necessary for salvation: The Nicene Creed that Catholics profess at every Holy Sacrifice of the Mass states: We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. John the Baptist told the crowds that the one who was coming after him would baptize not with water alone, but with water and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:15-16). The Bible says, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark. 16:16). Jesus said to the Pharisee, Nicodemus, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3-5). He also commands his disciples to proclaim the Gospel to all nations and to baptize them (Matthew 28:19). The *Catechism* tells us that “The Lord himself affirms that Baptism is necessary for salvation. It states that “In accordance with the Lord's will, it is necessary for salvation, as is the Church herself, which we enter by Baptism” (No.1277). It states elsewhere that “The Church does not know of any means other than Baptism that assures entry into eternal beatitude; this is why she takes care not to neglect the mission she has received from the Lord to see that all who can be baptized are ‘reborn of water and the Spirit’” (No. 1257). Numerous other places in the Bible make reference to the need for Baptism (For examples see: Titus 3:5; Acts 2:37-38; 1 Peter 3:21; Acts 22:16; Romans 6:4; Gal. 3:27; Hebrews 10:22).

Baptism by Desire or Blood: The Church teaches that for those, through no fault of their own, who do not undergo baptism of water can achieve God's sanctifying grace and membership into his family by a Baptism of desire or of blood. The baptism of desire applies both to “those who, while wishing to be baptized, die before receiving the sacrament” and “Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do His will as they know it through the dictates of conscience” (Constitution on the Church, Second Vatican Council). The *Catechism* states, “For catechumens who die before their Baptism, their explicit desire to receive it, together with repentance for their sins, and charity, assures them the salvation that they were not able to receive through the sacrament” (No. 1259). Furthermore, “Those who die for the faith, those who are catechumens, and all those who, without knowing of the Church but acting under the inspiration of grace, seek God sincerely and strive to fulfill his will, can be saved even if they have not been baptized” (No. 1281). Regarding the Baptism of blood, the *Catechism* says:

The Church has always held the firm conviction that those who suffer death for the sake of the faith without having received Baptism are baptized by their death for and with Christ. This Baptism of blood, like the desire for Baptism, brings about the fruits of Baptism without being a sacrament” (No. 1258). The Baptism of blood refers to the martyrdom of those believers who were killed for the faith before they had a chance to be baptized. This

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was a common occurrence in the early centuries of the Church, but also in later times in missionary lands. The baptism of blood has the same effects as the baptism of water.

GROWING IN HOLINESS

The holiness we receive at baptism is just a start to our growth in holiness. Let's use an analogy to illustrate our point. Let's imagine that our souls are like containers that when full will hold only so much grace. This means at baptism the container holds all of the grace that one is capable of holding at that moment. However, since God is infinite there is still room for indefinite increases of his grace. This means that the size of the container can grow as we grow in holiness, as we acquire more of God's life in us. Assuming that we are in the state of sanctifying grace at our deaths, the size of the container, that is the amount of grace that we possess at that time, will determine the amount of happiness that we will forever experience in Heaven.

Mary, Full of Grace: Unlike Mary who was full of grace at her conception, we are incapable of this because of the stain of Original Sin on our souls. Baptism removes the stain, but we still have to suffer the consequences of a wounded human nature. Because she was to become the mother of God, it was only fitting that she be perfect in every way, therefore, she was conceived without any stain of Original Sin; she was immaculately conceived. Moreover, she was so full of God's grace that she never committed an actual sin during her life. In fact, she never even committed an imperfection, because she always chose the best of good choices when confronted with several of them. The Catholic Church teaches that Mary was "full of grace" at her conception. This means that she had the maximum capacity of grace or the life of God in her soul at that moment. But since that vision is infinite, there was still room for indefinite increases even in one who is full of grace at the start. Using our analogy of the container representing the soul, her container simply got larger throughout her life. Her growth in holiness was exponential growth, or 2, 4, 16, 32, 64, and so on into infinity, instead of arithmetic growth, which is 1,2,3,4,5 etc., as only we are capable.



Because she was to become the mother of God, it was only fitting that Mary be perfect in every way, therefore, she was conceived without any stain of Original Sin; she was immaculately conceived.

Of course, God does not grow in us; he is infinite; he has no potential for growth. In Scholastic terms he is pure act, he simply is, with no potency, no potential for growth. If God could grow, he wouldn't be perfect. So what does it mean to say that we grow in God's grace? Our way of conceptualizing a growth in grace is that growing in grace means a fuller participation in God's life, the life of the Holy Trinity. When the Trinity dwells in our souls we are said to be in a state of sanctifying grace; God's life is within us and we can participate in his life, in the inner life of the Holy Trinity. In fact, we can't grow in grace without possessing sanctifying grace; our good deeds

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have no merit without grace.

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Practically speaking, the growth in holiness means that as one becomes more holy, he or she acquires more of the infused theological virtues of faith, hope charity, more of the moral virtues of prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude, more of the gifts of the Holy Spirit of knowledge, understanding, wisdom, counsel, and the others. At Baptism God infuses into our souls the virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity. These are known as the Theological virtues. We will define and discuss the meaning of these terms later in this essay, but for now it is enough to know that the infusion of these virtues first happens at Baptism. However, during the early times of our lives these virtues lie dormant and the capacity for growth increases as we grow physically, mentally, emotionally, and above all spiritually. In other words, the size of our containers is expanding as well. This gives us the capacity for more grace, more Faith, Hope, and above all Love, love of God and neighbor.

Furthermore, at Baptism we receive an infusion of the moral virtues of Prudence, Justice, Temperance, and Fortitude and all of the virtues that flow from them. These are called the Cardinal virtues, because all of the other virtues hinge on them. Cardinal derives from the Latin *Cardo*, meaning hinge. Although these virtues exist and operate at the natural level, which is the natural law, the law of God written on our hearts, they are also infused virtues existing and operating at the supernatural level when we possess God's grace. We will also discuss these virtues below in the essay.

Moreover, at Baptism we receive the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, which are Knowledge, Understanding, Wisdom, Counsel, Piety, Fortitude, and Fear of the Lord. The Sacrament of Confirmation is like a booster shot that reinforces and raises these gifts even to a higher level. Also we will discuss the gifts below in the essay.

As we said at the beginning of this discussion, this is our way of conceptualizing a growth in Sanctifying Grace. As we grow in God's grace, we achieve more of the Theological virtues, the Cardinal virtues, and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. When one achieves these virtue and gifts at a high level, with the help of God's grace, he or she is said to be living a life of heroic virtue. The main thing that is investigated at causes for beatification and canonization is the degree that one has lived a life of heroic virtue.

In summary, at Baptism God infuses into our souls the theological virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity, the Cardinal or moral virtues of Prudence, Justice, Temperance, and Fortitude, and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit of Knowledge, Understanding, Wisdom, Counsel, Piety, Fortitude, and Fear of the Lord. The infusion of these virtues and gifts first happens at Baptism.

Sanctifying grace makes humans even greater than the angels: Angels were created naturally superior to man. They have greater intellects and stronger wills than we. The good angels that remained faithful to God when Lucifer rebelled were rewarded by being made sons of God and experiencing the joys of Heaven. However, humans who are sanctified and justified are elevated from the natural to the supernatural level of existence. In this sense they are equal to, even greater than the angels. Why is this so?

The key is the Incarnation. When the Second Person of the Holy Trinity became a man, he came to share in our humanity so that we might share in his divinity. When we are baptized we receive the full benefit of Jesus' redemption. When we have the stain of Original Sin washed from our souls by the waters of Baptism, we become temples of the Holy Spirit and the Trinity comes to dwell in our souls. God living in our souls is what we call grace. It is our participation in God's life. Our baptism makes us adopted children of God the Father and brothers and sisters of his son Jesus, who is both human and divine; he is the Godman. This makes us heirs to Heaven.



Sanctified humans are even greater than the angels. Those who are sanctified and justified are elevated from the natural to the supernatural level of existence. In this sense they are equal to, even greater than the angels.

Although the angels are created like us in God's image and likeness, and they too are part of his family, they cannot enter into as close a relationship with God as we can. We can become more like God by acquiring more of his life in us, more of his grace by living holy and virtuous lives. When humans become holy enough they achieve union with God, then God assumes their body and soul until they become one with him. Yet unlike eastern mystical religions when the individual finds the center of his being where the god within him lives (i.e., his being is annihilated and he becomes one in being with the universe), the divinized Christian maintains his personality and individuality. In other words, the personality of the divinized Christian is enhanced and affirmed, whereas the divinized Hindu or Buddhist is believed to no longer exist as a separate being; his personality simply ceases to exist as he becomes absorbed into the divinity.

Divinization of Humans: The Church Fathers speak of the divinization of human beings. For example, St. Irenaeus said that Jesus "became what we are, so that he might bring us to be what

he himself is.” This statement gives rise to the statement that Jesus shared in our humanity so that we might share in his divinity. In this same manner, St. Athanasius said that the Word, “became man so that we might be made God.” St. Basil the Great describes the effect of the gift of the Spirit by saying that the Christian is “made God.” And St. Augustine said that Christians are deified by grace. Although what the Fathers said about the divinization of man is true, they were not using the word “God” in precisely the same way one uses it when saying the Holy Trinity is God, which is probably why they said “man is made God”, and not that “he is God.”

God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, Jesus Christ, became like us in all things but sin. In this sense God is like us for by his Incarnation he possesses a human body and soul. The angels do not enjoy this benefit; this resemblance to God. If man is even greater than the angels, we believe that it is this fact that would make him so. The best example of perfect virtue and holiness is this sinless God-man, Jesus Christ. To the extent we become like him we become godlike, we become divinized. Of course most of us, hopefully, will achieve this status only in Heaven where our souls will be united with glorified bodies much like that of our Risen Savior and the Blessed Mother. Then we will be truly “gods.” But keep in mind that we shall become “gods” only because we will be filled with God's grace, his life within us, not because of any merits of our own, not because we will have been transformed into a divine substance. We will always remain creatures, created substances or beings, but creatures whose nature have been elevated to the supernatural level by the divine indwelling.

Quoting St. Augustine the *Catechism* says of the divinization of man that “the justification of the wicked is a greater work than the creation of heaven and earth, because ‘heaven and earth will pass away but the salvation and justification of the elect . . . will not pass away.’ He holds also that the justification of sinners surpasses the creation of the angels in justice, in that it bears witness to a greater mercy” (No. 1994).

You might still wonder, what does it mean that humans can become god, that they can be divinized? The closer one achieves union with God, the more godlike he becomes. One must be purified before he can achieve union with God. Our union with God began at our baptism. At that time we became members of his Mystical Body—the Catholic Church—and to share in the life of the Holy Trinity. At that time, we became adopted children of God the Father and sons and daughters of his son Jesus, and as a result members of his family. However, because of the consequences of Original Sin, baptism does not restore us completely to the Original Holiness and Justice possessed by Adam and Eve. This is true because our diminished intellect, weakened wills, and our urge to sin called concupiscence. Just as we must be purified in Purgatory before we can experience union or intimate friendship with God in Heaven, we must be purified before we can achieve a closer union with him in this life as well. To experience union with God, one must become holy—to become more like Jesus, our example of perfect holiness and virtue. We can do these things only with the help of God's grace. As we grow in holiness we are gradually purged of sin and attachments to the things of this world. God gives only in proportion to our ability to receive his gifts. The holier we become the greater receptacle we become for God's infusion of grace.

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The holier one becomes the more he becomes like God. This does not mean that he is literally becoming God, but that although he remains a creature, he is becoming more and more integrated into the life of the Trinitarian Family. Another way of putting this is that the holier one becomes, he possesses more and more of God's grace, his sanctifying grace, the grace that makes him holy, the grace that makes him more like God. Grace then is the life of God within us, it is our participation in his life. The more grace that one possesses, the more godlike he becomes. Since God is infinite, there is no limit to the amount of grace that one can possess. The Blessed Mother is full of grace, as holy as a human being can become. All other saints only approximate her holiness, because they started their journey toward union with God and Heaven from a state of Original Sin, which Mary did not possess, because she was immaculately conceived. The amount of grace that one possesses at death will determine his or her capacity for happiness in Heaven. Humans are most godlike when he achieves union with God either in this life or in the next. The more one achieves union with God, the more he shares his divinity with us in the form of grace.

Achieving union with God in this life and for eternity requires that we strive to be perfect as is our Heavenly Father (Matthew 5:48). Jesus is our model of perfect holiness and virtue. He is perfect by his nature. Mary was perfect because she was full of God's grace. Countless other saints throughout the ages achieved union with God by following Jesus' example. We too can become closer to perfection by overcoming mortal sin, venial sin, and imperfections with the help of God's grace. Achieving holiness and union with God is sainthood.

Achieving holiness and union with God: God made us to know, love, and serve him in this life so we can be happy with him in Heaven in the next life. We must first know him to love and serve him. The more we know him the more we can do these things. We cannot know God directly because of our fallen natures, which makes it harder to know him. We must spend a lifetime getting to know him better. We get to know him better by utilizing the means provided by Jesus with which to achieve union with God. We get to know God better by:

- Studying and meditating on our Faith (his teachings); to acquire knowledge of his teachings
- Receiving the sacraments frequently; the principal means of his grace
- Living virtuous lives; the way to holiness
- Practicing the spiritual and corporal works of mercy; the way to show our love for him
- Prayer; the way to communicate with him
- Penance; the way to make satisfaction for our sins and the sins of others

Above all, we get to know God better by loving him with our whole hearts, minds, souls, and strengths for his own sake and loving our neighbors as ourselves (John 15:12).

The loss and regain of Sanctifying Grace: We lose sanctifying grace by committing a mortal sin, which is the spiritual death of our soul. When one commits a mortal sin, the indwelling Trinity leaves his or her soul. When this happens, the person is spiritually dead. In order for a sin to be mortal it must be a serious matter, one must know that it is a serious matter, and one must act with a free will.

The meaning of sin: According to the *Catechism* “sin ”is an offense against God as well as a fault against reason, truth and right conscience. Sin is a deliberate thought, word, deed, or omission contrary to the eternal law of God” (1849, 1853). In other words, sin is willfully rejecting good and choosing evil. In judging the degree of sin, it is customary to distinguish between mortal and venial sins. “Mortal sin,” the *Catechism* teaches, “destroys charity in the heart of man by a grave violation of God's law . . . Venial sin allows charity to subsist, even though it offends and wounds it” (1855). Sin offends God, because it hurts others and is a rejection of his love and mercy.

Mortal means death and mortal sin means spiritual death of the soul. It destroys the life of grace within one’s soul. When one deliberately disobeys God's commandments—does an act contrary to his will—with full knowledge that it is a serious matter and with full consent of the will and not due to any fear or coercion, he or she commits mortal sin; God leaves his or her soul and he or she dies a spiritual death. The person who has violated his or her friendship with God is no longer God's friend. He or she is no longer in good standing in God's family. One who loses his or her place in God’s family loses his or her inheritance of Heaven. He or she is on the road that leads to eternal death and separation from God forever. God simply will not live where he is not wanted and we can't live with him if we do not want to. Like the dead body, which cannot bring itself back to life, the spiritually dead soul in mortal sin can do nothing to rejuvenate itself; only God can give it life once again.

Regaining God's grace and friendship: Because of God's infinite love and mercy, we can readily regain sanctifying grace once it has been lost through mortal sin; he has made it easy to regain his friendship and our place in his family. We can again become his adopted children in good standing by being sorry for our sins, confessing them, having a firm purpose of amendment, and doing penance to pay for the damage caused by them. Like the father of the prodigal son, God is always waiting with open arms to receive his prodigal sons and daughters back into his family (Luke 15:11-32). God dwells in us as long as we remain in his sanctifying grace. We must be in his grace at our deaths to share in his life forever in Heaven. We can achieve and maintain this holiness only by living lives of faith, hope, and above all love of God and neighbor.

In summary, the fruit of baptismal grace washes away the stain of Original Sin and all personal sins. God infuses sanctifying grace into baptized persons and they become temples of the Holy Spirit. Wherever the Holy Spirit dwells also dwell the Father and the Son. Baptism makes persons sons and daughters of God the Father, brothers and sisters to His Son Jesus, and heirs to Heaven.

Baptism is the sacrament of spiritual regeneration by which a person is incorporated in Christ and made a member of his Mystical Body (the Catholic Church), given grace, and cleansed of original sin. Actual sins and the punishment owed for them are remitted also if the person baptized was guilty of such sins (e.g., in the case of a person baptized after reaching the age of reason). The theological virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity are given with grace as well as the Cardinal Virtues and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. The matter is the water and the pouring of water. The form is the words “I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

THE ROAD TO HOLINESS

What starts us on the road to living a life of holiness and achieving sainthood? We want to preface the answer to this question with a few comments. The Incarnation did not automatically restore humankind to God's image and likeness. In spite of Original Sin, humans still possess the image of God, because unlike the fallen angels who were cast into Hell when they rebelled against God, humans were not totally corrupted when our first parents committed Original Sin. Because humans had lost their innocence and were no longer holy, they were no longer like God; however, they were still basically in God's image, that is, they still had immortal souls, which possessed intellect and free will. However, Original Sin diminished their intellects and weakened their wills, and they were to suffer from the urge to commit actual sin, which is called concupiscence. Moreover, in the fallen state they were subject to suffering, sorrow, and death. Yet God still loved them and considered them redeemable, capable of being freed from the power of Satan and the slavery of sin.

In other words, after the Fall, human beings remained in God's image, still possessing immortal souls with the faculties of intellect and free will (although reduced in capacity because of the effects of Original Sin), but they no longer possessed the likeness of God, for they were no longer holy. As a result, they lost God's friendship (justice). Moreover, they lost their place in the Trinitarian Family; therefore, they were no longer supernatural children of God and no longer possessed the privilege of inheriting eternal happiness.

Now to specifically answer our question, "What starts us on the road to living a life of holiness and achieving sainthood?" We are made friends with him once again only at Baptism (the restoration of God's friendship is logically called justification, because it restores the justice lost by Adam and Eve by their original sin.), for as the *Catechism* says, "The communion of the Holy Spirit in the Church restores to the baptized the divine likeness lost through sin" (No. 734). In this regard, Jesus said, "no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit" (John 3:5).

Dead to sin before Baptism: At baptism we died to sin and were given new life in Jesus Christ. In this regard St. Paul states:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For he who has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him. For we know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus (Romans 6:3-11).

SANCTIFYING GRACE

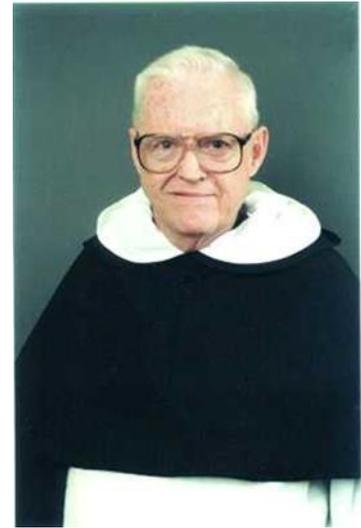
The effects of Baptism: God infused sanctifying grace into our souls at baptism. Sanctifying grace is the life of God within us; it is our sharing in God's life. We become temples of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Trinity comes to dwell in our souls. Our Baptism restores our image to the likeness of God's image and gives us the privilege of sharing in the inner life of the Holy Trinity; we truly become members of God's family by adoption and by grace. We become adopted children of God the Father and brothers and sisters of his son Jesus Christ, and heirs to Heaven. Jesus shared in our humanity so that we could share in his divinity.

The effects of sanctifying grace: If we are to become more intimate with God, that is, if we are to become saints in this life, we must love him for his own sake with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves, for the love of God. Loving God means doing his will, obeying his Commandments. Loving neighbor means putting into practice Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, to practice the spiritual and corporal works of mercy with respect to our neighbor, that is, to do good works. Doing good works for our neighbor puts into practice Jesus' commandment at the Last Supper to love our neighbor as he has loved us (John 15:12).

Sainthood: We think of sainthood as a status achieved only by persons in Heaven, and that's partly true; however, God created us for union—a close friendship—with him even in this life. Of this desire for union St. Augustine said in the fourth century A.D. "O God you have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they rest in you" (Confessions 1, 1).

Loosing Sanctifying Grace: Can one lose the state of sanctifying grace? The answer is yes! We lose sanctifying grace by committing serious sins. Although God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—lives in friendship with us from the time of our Baptism, like all friendships, it must be cultivated. We must spend a lifetime developing our friendship with God. The closer our friendship with him, the more he will increasingly make us aware of his presence and the more firm will be our faith in him and his promises, for he will infuse into our souls the Theological and Cardinal virtues. However, we can lose this divine friendship by seriously sinning. This is true because of the consequences of Original Sin.

Actual Grace: In addition to sanctifying grace, we need actual grace to become and remain holy; i.e., in a state of sanctifying grace. Fr. Jordan Aumann, one of the world's greatest mystical theologians and spiritual directors, defines actual grace as "a transient stimulation or movement by which the soul is prompted [by God] to do or receive something relating to justification, sanctification, or salvation" (Spiritual Theology). In other words, actual grace is a special help or



Until his death in 2007, Fr. Jordan Aumann was one of the world's greatest spiritual theologians and retreat masters. His work dispels the common misconception that ascetical and mystical theology is for the select few. He reminds us that "the real purpose of the study of the spiritual life is not to produce scholars but to form holy Christians."

THE UNIVERSAL CALL TO HOLINESS

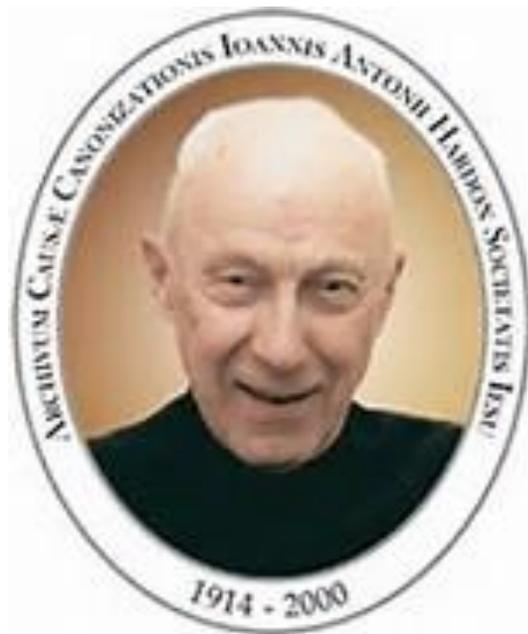
inspirations from God to us to avoid sin and to continue in a state of sanctifying grace. It disposes us to receive the infused virtues (the habits of Faith, Hope, and Charity) for the first time or when we have lost them by mortal sin. In the case of mortal sin, actual grace can stimulate repentance for our sins, cause us to fear punishment, and produce in us confidence in God's mercy. Furthermore, actual grace helps us to put the infused

virtues into action and if in the state of sanctifying grace helps us perfect the infused virtues and grow in the supernatural life. Moreover, actual grace helps us to overcome mortal sin and thus prevent the loss of sanctifying grace and the infused virtues. It does this by strengthening us when being tempted, provides us with an awareness of special dangers, helps us to mortify the passions, and inspires us with good thoughts and holy desires.

THE MEANING OF SIN

What is sin? According to the *Catechism*, sin “is an offense against God as well as a fault against reason, truth and right conscience. Sin is a deliberate thought, word, deed, or omission contrary to the eternal law of God” (1849, 1853). St. Augustine said something to the effect that sin is when we do something contrary to God’s will; we say “My will be done, instead of “Thy will be done”. In other words, sin is willfully rejecting good and choosing evil. In judging the degree of sin, it is customary to distinguish between mortal and venial sins. “Mortal sin”, the *Catechism* teaches, “destroys charity in the heart of man by a grave violation of God's law . . . Venial sin allows charity to subsist, even though it offends and wounds it” (No. 1855).

Mortal Sin: Mortal means death and mortal sin means spiritual death of the soul. It destroys the life of grace within one’s soul. When we deliberately disobey God's commandments—does an act contrary to his will—with full knowledge that it is a serious matter and with full consent of the will and not due to any fear or coercion, we commit mortal sin; God leaves our souls and we die a spiritual death. When we violate our friendship with God we no longer are God's friends; we are no longer in good standing in God's family; we lose our place in his family; we are no longer his adopted children. If we lose our place in God’s family, we will lose our inheritance of Heaven. We are on the road that leads to eternal death and separation from God forever. God simply will not live where he is not wanted and we can't live with him unless we want to. Like the dead body, which cannot bring itself back to life, the dead soul in mortal sin can do nothing to rejuvenate itself either; only God can give it life once again.



Fr. John Hardon was a renowned catechists and retreat master. His *Catholic Catechism* was the standard until the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. He served as a consultant for the drafting of that document. He was also spiritual director to Mother Teresa.

The Restoration of God’s Grace: Can we regain God’s friendship and spiritual life if we should lose it? Fortunately for us we can. Although we can lose God’s friendship and our place in his family by committing mortal sin, we can easily regain his friendship and be reinstated into his family by sorrow for our sins, repentance, and confession. As for the Prodigal son, God is always waiting with open arms to receive his prodigal sons and daughters back into his family. God dwells in us as long as we remain in his sanctifying grace. God must be dwelling in our souls at our deaths to share in his life forever in Heaven. We can achieve and maintain God’s grace only by living lives of faith, hope, and above all love of God and neighbor.

Some unfortunately believe that they can live sinful lives and repent and convert late in life and make it to Heaven. What about this attitude? Those who live in habitual mortal sin are on the superhighway to Hell and will find it extremely difficult to get back on the straight and narrow path to Heaven. Fr. John

Hardon, one of the world's greatest catechists until his death in 2000 says of habitual mortal sin, "If one serious sin can cause such devastating effects, it is not difficult to imagine the deplorable state of those who live in habitual mortal sin. Eventually the habit of sin, like all habits, becomes like a second nature to the sinner, so that it is very difficult to convert to a life of virtue. Rather, the individual will be characterized by one or more of the capital sins: pride, gluttony, lust, avarice, sloth, envy, anger" (*The Catholic Catechism*, Part One: Doctrines of the Faith - VI. The Grace of G). I believe this is why deathbed conversions are rare. Those who live in habitual mortal sin and vice become what they do and seldom see the need to change.

Venial Sin: Venial sin is a lesser sin that does not loose for us God's sanctifying grace (*venia* means pardon). Venial sin is a sickness of the soul, but not one that kills it. Fr. Hardon says that, "The sinner who commits a mortal sin is like the traveler who turns his back on the goal and begins to travel in the opposite direction. But the person who commits a venial sin merely departs from the straight path without abandoning the journey toward the goal" (*The Catholic Catechism*). He identifies three classes of venial sins:

- Those that by their very nature involve a disorder or deviation, although only a slight one, such as a small lie that does no damage to anyone.
- Those that, because of the smallness of the matter involved, constitute only a light disorder, such as stealing a small amount of money
- Those that lack complete deliberation or full consent of the will in matters that would otherwise be serious sins, such as the taking of God's name in vain.

However, Fr. Hardon tells us that we must "distinguish between venial sins committed out of weakness, surprise, or lack of advertence and deliberation, and those that are committed coldly and with the complete awareness that one thereby displeases God. We can never completely avoid the former, and God, who knows very well the clay of which we are made, readily forgives us these sins of weakness. The only thing that one can do about these faults is to try to diminish their number so far as possible and to avoid discouragement." (*The Catholic Catechism*).

Why venial sins are detrimental to the spiritual life: Fr. Hardon lists four effects of venial sins that are especially detrimental to the spiritual life:

1. It deprives us of many actual graces that God would otherwise have given us. This privation sometimes results in our falling into a temptation that we could have avoided by means of that actual grace of which we were deprived. At other times it may result in the loss of a new advance in the spiritual life. Only in the light of eternity—and then there is no remedy—will we realize what we have lost as a result of deliberate venial sins.
2. It lessens the fervor of charity and one's generosity in the service of God. This fervor and generosity presuppose a sincere desire for perfection and a constant striving for it, which are totally incompatible with voluntary venial sin, because the latter implies a rejection of

3. the lofty ideal and a deliberate halt in the struggle for greater holiness.
4. It increases the difficulties in the exercise of virtue. This is a result of the two previous effects. Deprived of many actual graces that are necessary to keep us on the path of the good, and weak in fervor and generosity in the service of God, the soul gradually loses more and more of its spiritual energy. Virtue appears to be more difficult, the effort required for growing in holiness becomes more and more demanding, and the experience of past failures disheartens the soul.
5. It predisposes for mortal sin. This is perhaps the worst detrimental effect of venial sin. This is clearly testified in Scripture when it is stated that he who wastes the little he has is gradually stripped bare (Sirach. 19:1). Experience confirms that the ultimate fall of many souls has been started in this way. Little by little the soul has lowered its defenses until the moment arrives in which the enemy, in one furious assault, conquers the city (*The Catholic Catechism*).

Fr. Jordan Aumann says that “Deliberate venial guilt is a disease that slackens the spiritual powers, lowers a man’s resistance to evil, and causes him to deviate from the path that leads to glory. It places obstacles in the way of virtue and reduces fervor for the things of God” (*Spiritual Theology*).

Other types of human weaknesses: Mortal and venial sins are acts that are intrinsically evil. Even though they may be small matters, venial sins are still by their nature evil acts. There is another class of behaviors due to our human weaknesses called imperfections. These are situations in which one chooses the lesser of two good actions. In other words, either choice is good and the choice made does not cease to be good even though it could have been a better choice. Nevertheless, Fr. Hardon states that “the imperfections are detrimental to the spiritual life and impede the flight of the soul to sanctity (*The Catholic Catechism*). The perfect example is the Blessed Mother. She was not only free from Original and actual sin, but she always made the better of two good choices when given the opportunity. She was able to do this because she was full of God’s grace. Living a life of perfect virtue as did our Blessed Mother requires that we strive to eliminate even imperfections from our lives. Jesus himself said to be perfect as is our Heavenly Father (Matthew 5:48). He would not have said this if it were not possible.

HOW TO ACHIEVE PERFECTION

Achieving perfection seems like an almost impossible task. How can it possible be done? We grow in holiness only with the help of God's grace. As we grow in holiness we are gradually purged of sin and attachments to the things of this world. St. Teresa of Avila tells us we can grow in holiness only to the extent that we can detach ourselves from the things of this world and attach ourselves to the things of Heaven. God gives only in proportion to our ability to receive his gifts. The holier we become the greater receptacle we become for God's infusion of grace.

Detachment is needed to achieve holiness: To be holy requires that we rid ourselves of sin, imperfections, and needless attachments to the things of this world. In other words, if we desire to be holy we must detach ourselves from anything that doesn't lead to God. The objective is to empty ourselves of selfishness, greed, lust, hatred, anger, spiritual laziness, and above all pride so God can fill us with his grace. Moreover, the more we practice the virtues of patience, humility, obedience, and love the holier we will become, and the holier we become the higher we will ascend in our prayer life, and the higher our prayer life the closer we will achieve union—a close friendship—with God.

How can we detach ourselves from the things of this world and keep our eyes on the things of Heaven? St. Teresa of Avila tells us to keep our thoughts constantly on the vanity of all things and to fix them on eternity and heavenly things. Moreover, cultivate an active prayer life, because prayer furthers detachment and detachment furthers prayer. Persons too much attached to the things of this world, those constantly caught up in the affairs of this world, will never find time for prayer or even see the need for it. There is an old saying that goes "Those who are holy pray and those who pray are holy."

Although we are to try to detach ourselves from the things of this world, it is true that what God has made is good. While it is true that we must become less attached to the things of this world in order to prepare ourselves for the infusion of God's grace, detachment doesn't mean that the things of this world are necessarily bad in themselves; after all, God gave them to us for our welfare and enjoyment. Detachment means not to seek things for themselves, but instead for the love and glory of God and the love and benefit of others. Jesus never became indifferent to the things of this world; in fact, it is his divine providence or plan that we embrace his creation by helping him to improve it by our stewardship.



St. Teresa was one of the greatest saints of all time. She was born at Avila in Spain in 1515. She entered the Carmelites and made great progress in the way of perfection and was granted mystical revelations. Wishing to share in the spiritual renewal of the Church of her time, she began to live her religious life more ardently and soon attracted many companions, to whom she was like a mother. She also helped in the reform of the friars, and in this had to endure great trials. She wrote books which are renowned for their depth of doctrine and which showed her own spiritual experiences. She was made a Doctor of the Catholic Church for her spiritual writings and declared a saint for her achievement of union with God. She died at Alba in 1582.

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Humility is needed to achieve holiness: Humility is said to be the most important virtue needed to achieve perfection. St. Teresa especially emphasized the cultivation of the virtue of humility, the greatest of all the virtues, because all of the rest of the virtues depend upon humility. The humble person always puts God first, then his neighbor. The opposite of humility is the greatest sin of all, which is pride, for wasn't it pride that led to the downfall of first Lucifer and then Adam and Eve? Isn't it pride that causes most of the evil present in the world today, because proud people believe holiness is a weakness and don't believe they need others. St. Teresa believed that pride militated against holiness and stifled obedience to God.

Holiness isn't a very popular word in our modern society. Some say that it is a sign of weakness. To the contrary, holiness isn't a sign of weakness, but of strength. It's true that many people have come to associate it with weakness, like being a "Miss Goody Two shoes" or a "wimp" or a "sissy," but in fact the opposite is true. Jesus certainly wasn't a "wimp" or a "sissy"; he was as manly and outspoken a person that ever walked the face of the earth, while at the same time being the holiest and most humble person who ever lived. In fact, he was so outspoken that some have accused him of being the most arrogant person who ever lived; all that stuff about being God you know and having the "nerve" to tell others how to live their lives. It takes far more courage to turn one's other cheek as Jesus taught and did than it does to become angry and strike out at someone when provoked. Moreover, who else would have had the courage to come into the world for the sole purpose of suffering and dying for every human being who ever lived?

THE STAGES OF HOLINESS

Catholic spiritual writers over the centuries have identified three stages of spiritual progress or perfection that we must undergo on the ascent to holiness and union with God. The three stages of holiness or perfection are the Purgative Way, the Illuminative Way, and the Unitive Way. Each of these, in order, involves becoming progressively more intimate with God, for as *The Catechism* states, “Spiritual progress tends toward ever more intimate union with Christ” (No. 2014). We shall briefly look at each of these stages, in turn:

The Purgative Way: The Purgative Way is the stage of spiritual development when one decides that he or she is going to try to lead a life in accordance with the will of God, to obey his Commandments. Father John Hardon, S.J., defines the Purgative Way “As the primary stage of mental prayer, according to the teaching of Sts. Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross. The soul’s chief concern in this stage of perfection (or mansions as St. Teresa calls the stages of spiritual development) is an awareness of one’s sins, sorrow for the past, and a desire to expiate the offenses against God” (*Modern Catholic Dictionary*). The purgative way is comparable to what St. Teresa calls the first three mansions on the upward climb to spiritual perfection. The principal form of prayer in this stage is verbal prayer, although persons may be becoming novices in mental prayer. To simplify our discussion, we will discuss these types of prayer in another essay.

The Illuminative Way: Father Hardon tells us that the Illuminative Way is an “intermediary stage between purification and union on the path to Christian perfection . . . the main feature of the Illuminative way is an enlightenment of the mind in the ways of God and a clear understanding of his will in one’s state of life” (*Modern Catholic Dictionary*). The person who has reached this stage of perfection in the spiritual life practices both verbal and mental prayer and begins to experience various degrees of contemplation or experiences of union with God.

The Unitive Way: The Unitive Way is the third and final stage of Christian perfection beyond the Purgative and Illuminative Ways. Of this stage Father Hardon says, “Its principal feature is a more or less constant awareness of God’s presence, and a habitual disposition of conformity to the will of God. Although commonly regarded as the last stage in the spiritual life, it is recognized that the three traditional levels of progress in holiness are not chronological. They may be present, in greater or less degree, at any point in a person’s growth in sanctity” (*Modern Catholic Dictionary*). The person who has reached the unitive stage prays ceaselessly by employing all of the forms of prayer, verbal, meditative, and especially contemplation. Contemplative prayer is a



St. John of the Cross with his good friend, St. Teresa of Avila. St. John of the Cross called spiritual trials “dark nights of the soul,” something he experienced for many years of his life, as did St. Teresa of Avila. In spite of the numerous trials that confronted them, they just kept climbing toward their goal of Heaven. He is considered one of the greatest writers in Spanish and was made a Doctor of the Church for his spiritual writings..

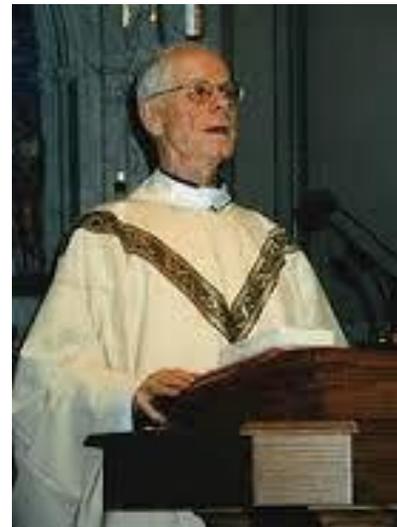
form of prayer that God provides for those who are especially holy and enjoy a close friendship with him. We will discuss the types of prayer when we discuss prayer in another essay. Both verbal and meditative prayer can be the occasion for the infusion of God's grace in contemplation.

Praying without ceasing: St Paul tells us to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). How can this be possible? St. Paul's injunction to pray without ceasing does not mean that the person at this stage of spiritual development goes around mumbling vocal prayers all of the time. In fact, persons in the Unitive Way probably say fewer verbal prayers than persons at less developed stages of holiness. Because they are living their lives in full conformance with God's will and have a constant awareness of his presence; they are living in union with God. Because they are in such close union with God, their lives become a ceaseless prayer.

Reaching the summit of holiness in this life: Few of us ever reach the heights of holiness in this life, what St. Teresa called the highest mansion (the seventh) and St. John of the Cross fittingly called the summit of the mountain (Mt. Carmel). The summit is a place where the will of the person achieving this degree of perfection is one with the will of God; he or she has entered into the innermost life of the Trinity. This is what it means to say that we share in the divinity of God. St. Thomas Aquinas told his sister when she asked how she could achieve holiness and union with God that the only reason we don't reach the top is that we don't desire it enough; we don't try hard enough to reach it. When one reaches the summit, he or she has achieved as intimate a relationship or friendship with God as is humanly possible in this world.

Do persons who reach the summit of perfection enjoy the vision of God, the Beatific Vision? The answer is “No!” Because of our sinfulness, we are unworthy, better yet we are incapable of seeing God as he is in all of his glory and majesty; consequently, a veil separates God from us. We cannot see him as he is until we are completely purged of our sinfulness and repaired the damage caused by our sins. Only a few people achieve this level of union with God in this life, and even they don't see him as he is—the Beatific Vision—until they die and are taken to Heaven. The great majority of persons who eventually make it to Heaven aren't purified enough in this life to deserve seeing God at their deaths, so they must undergo a period of purification before he fully reveals himself to them. For those who become holy enough in this life, God can penetrate the veil that separates him from them in contemplative prayer, but he does not fully reveal himself to them because of their wounded nature, no matter how much healed with God's sanctifying grace.

The principal benefits of achieving union with God in this life: Many associate union with God with various types of mystical experiences, such as ecstasy, rapture, levitation, auras, locutions,



Fr. Thomas DuBay, was a well-known retreat master and world renowned expert in the spiritual life, tells us in his *The Fire Within* that every normal adult has a sense of "oughtness" that he did not acquire and he cannot shake off. He says that it is imperious in its demands and it operates whether he is observed by other human beings or not. After some actions he feels happy and after others he feels guilty, and he cannot easily strip himself of the feelings.

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visions, stigmata, fragrances, bilocation, apparitions, private revelations, and the like, and so they might be. Each of the preceding listed experiences is associated with a highly intense union with God whereby the faculties of the will, intellect, memory, and imagination are absorbed by God. Does this mean that one at this height always has mystical experiences? No! Ordinarily, only saints who possess heroic virtue and lead extraordinarily holy lives experience these extraordinary types of mystical experiences, and many if not most of them don't. For example, one of our greatest modern saints, St Teresa of Lisieux, had very few such experiences of this sort. Nonetheless, all of us are called to holiness in this life and each of us is capable of experiencing a close friendship with God if we become holy enough, enough like Jesus. We can do this only by doing God's will and with the help of his grace, which he offers us freely. Some of the principal benefits of reaching the summit identified by Fr. Thomas Dubay in his book *Fire Within* are as follows:

- Peace and refreshment of mind and soul
- Heroic virtue; the ability to practice virtue in an extraordinary way
- Innocence of evil
- Cessation of inner suffering
- Cessation of imperfections
- Remarkable delight in God's creation
- A constant awareness of God's presence
- All actions are performed for God
- Fullness of joy

The main thing to remember is that these gifts are purely gifts from God; we do not deserve them, but we can cooperate with God's grace to receive them. God offers each of us the grace to lead holy lives; however, we must use our will to make the decision to accept it. We can prepare for the infusion of God's grace by emptying ourselves of vices and sin.

In summary, all of us are called to the summit of holiness, even in this life, not just religious and clergy. A woman can achieve holiness by fulfilling her duties as a wife and mother. A man can achieve holiness by being a good father and husband and providing for his family. A teenager can be holy by obeying his or her parents, being obedient to his or her teachers, and by being kind to his or her classmates. Union with God can be established by performing well the duties that he has placed upon us. Mother Teresa of Calcutta stressed the importance of each of us performing our day-to-day duties well. St. Teresa of Lisieux taught us her "Little Way," which is to do ordinary things for the extraordinary love of God; that is for the love and glory of God and the love and benefit of our neighbor.

Our main goal in life should be to achieve and maintain union with God. To achieve union with God requires holiness. Jesus is our model for holiness, because he is holy; therefore, being holy means being like Jesus. The closer we become like Jesus, the more like God we become, the closer to the image of God created in our souls. We must establish and maintain God's friendship in this life if we hope to enjoy his friendship for eternity. Jesus calls us all to holiness, to sainthood. By doing so we become his brothers and sisters and adopted sons and daughters of his Father. Being the Father's sons and daughters make us heirs to Heaven.

PRAYER AND HOLINESS

To become a saint one needed to achieve holiness, and achieving holiness means to be like Jesus. By becoming holy one can achieve sainthood, which is union with God in this life and for all eternity. To achieve holiness one needs to do the following: practice the Theological and Cardinal virtues; receive the Sacraments frequently; perform the spiritual and corporal works of mercy; and lead an active life of prayer and penance.

The relationship between prayer and holiness is the focus of this section. The two go together; one cannot exist without the other. Those who are holy pray and those who pray are holy; in fact, prayer is one of the principal means with which to achieve holiness. Through prayer we receive the graces from God to practice the works of mercy and to grow in the virtues. Our objective is to learn to practice one to achieve the other. Through prayer we can achieve union with God. The closer we come into union with God, the more God communicates with us.

Our prayer life reflects the intimacy of our relationship with God just as our conversations with our parents, siblings, and friends reflect the intimacy of our relationships with them. Just as we must go through progressive stages of intimacy with them as our relationships grow, we must go through an increasingly intimate relationship with God.

The Catholic Church has accumulated a vast wealth of knowledge about prayer and holiness over the centuries. Prayer has a systematic structure and we hope to provide you with some of the most important knowledge you need with which to pray well.

Types of prayer

Since holiness brings us into closer union or friendship with God, it's natural that we should desire a more intense relationship with him as we progress in holiness. Prayer is the principal means with which we communicate with God. Peter Kreeft, a noted contemporary Catholic philosopher says that prayer is a relationship with God, it is talking and walking with him (*Prayer: The Great Conversation*). The *Catechism* tells us that “prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God” (No. 2559). I believe that it was St. Teresa of Lisieux who said that prayer is nothing more than a conversation with God.

Most of us think only in terms of one type of prayer—verbal or vocal; however, experts in mystical theology, such as St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa of Avila, and many others classify prayer into three types: verbal, meditative, and contemplative. St. Teresa of Avila further divides meditative prayer into ordinary meditative prayer and affective prayer. Moreover, she and others identify a form of prayer intermediary between meditative and contemplative prayer called the prayer of simplicity. Vocal and meditative prayer are also called ascetic prayer, because they involve one's own efforts and contemplative prayer is called mystical prayer, because it comes entirely from God. Although it isn't this simple, verbal prayer has been associated with the Purgative stage of holiness, meditative prayer with the Illuminative stage, and contemplative prayer with the Unitive

stage, all discussed above in this essay. We shall briefly look at each of the types of prayer below, in turn.

Verbal (Vocal) Prayer: First let's look at the type of prayer with which you are most familiar, verbal or vocal prayer. It is the most elementary type of prayer. This is the type of prayer that we associate as a conversation with God, the angels, or the saints, and is formed by words (*Modern Catholic Dictionary*). The *Catechism* tells us, "Vocal prayer is an essential element of the Christian life. To his disciples, drawn by their Master's silent prayer, Jesus teaches a vocal prayer, the Our Father. He not only prayed aloud the liturgical prayers of the synagogue but, as the Gospels show, he raised his voice to express his personal prayer, from exultant blessing of the Father to the agony of Gethsemani (No. 2701). Verbal prayer has been associated with the Purgative stage of holiness discussed in in the preceding section, but you shall see that the relationship between prayer and holiness is more complicated than that.

Verbal prayers are found in the liturgy and public gatherings and are commonly said in private prayer, both formal and spontaneous prayer. Formal prayers are the ones we learned as a child: the Our Father; Hail Mary; Glory Be; Memorare; Hail Holy Queen; Acts of Faith, Hope, Charity, and Contrition, and the Apostle's Creed. Spontaneous prayers are the one's we say in our own words as the need arises.

For verbal prayers to have meaning, we must say them with attention and devotion. Attention engages the intellect and devotion the will. Devotion means from the heart, for devotion has to do with the love we have for the one with whom we are communicating—God. For our prayers to be effective we must think about to whom we are speaking and what we are saying. Moreover, we must mean it. Saying prayers without doing these things is simply repeating mindless or empty words.



Sam Anthony Morello, OCD, is a Carmelite priest, and currently superior at Marylake Monastery near Little Rock, AR, is a world renowned expert in Carmelite spirituality.

Sam Anthony Morello, OCD, a Carmelite priest, says of St. Teresa of Avila in this regard, "The saint wants us to say our prayers well! She asks that we repeat the words with understanding. She wants us to say our prayers attentively. Reciting our vocal prayers well is already mental prayer; there is no distinction between mental and vocal prayer when vocal prayer is truly made one's own (see *Way*, 24). For Teresa the first lesson in learning to meditate is to say one's vocal prayers with attention and affection." (*Lectio Divina and the Practice of Teresian Prayer*). St. Teresa taught that verbal prayer could lead to contemplative prayer, which as we shall see below is a

more intimate union with God. If said devoutly, verbal prayers can cause the mind to begin to reflect on the meaning of the truths contained therein, which is the first step in meditative prayer, a higher form of prayer than verbal prayer.

Vocal prayer can be a rich source of truth for meditation or mental prayer if we apply our intellect

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to being aware whom we are addressing and to think about the meaning of the words we are saying. The Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be, and other formula prayers are rich in the truths of the Faith. These prayers together with Sacred Scripture are the foundation on which all genuine prayer is built. These sources provide us with the essential truths on which to meditate.

Meditative (Mental) Prayer: You are probably more familiar with this type of prayer than you think. In fact, you probably practice it every day and don't know you are praying. Any time you are trying to understand the proper course of action with respect to the will of God, you are in a sense praying. You could make these prayers more effective by improving the conditions for praying: becoming more aware that God is always and everywhere present; recollect your disposition by minimizing outside distractions and calming the emotions; and by intending that the meditation be a conversation with God. Meditative prayer has been associated with the Illuminative stage of holiness, but verbal prayer plays a role in this stage as well.

The objects of meditative prayer: Fr. Hardon says of meditative prayer that the “the objects of meditation are three: mysteries of faith; a person's better knowledge of what God wants him or her to do; and how God wants to be served by the one meditating” (*Modern Catholic Dictionary*).

Meditative prayer has three steps with which we must be familiar, which are as follows:

- Use your reason to understand a spiritual truth.
- Examine our lives in light of this truth.
- Apply this truth to our lives.

What does all of this mean in practical terms? In regard to the first, spiritual truths, or mysteries of faith, are found above all in Sacred Scripture, Tradition, and formula prayers, such as the Our Father. Furthermore, the writings of the Church Fathers and saints contain commentary on the truths contained in these sources. Moreover, numerous theologians, historians, and philosophers have written well on the truths of the Faith. And don't forget the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

Once the truth is understood, the second step is to ponder its meaning in our lives. This should arouse love of God and neighbor, for the goal of meditative prayer is Christian action; therefore, the third step in meditative prayer should transform our lives in Christ.

Prayer is meaningless if it doesn't motivate one to action with respect to loving God and neighbor. Prayer should lead us to action, it should result in an increase in our love of God and neighbor. Loving God means obeying his commandments, doing his will; loving neighbor means putting into practice the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. Doing these things make us more holy and draws us nearer to God.

How to perform meditative prayer

To better help you perform meditative prayer, the *Catechism* states, “The mind seeks to under-

stand the why and how of the Christian life, in order to adhere and respond to what the Lord is asking. The required attentiveness is difficult to sustain. We are usually helped by books, and Christians do not want for them: the Sacred Scriptures, particularly the Gospels, holy icons, liturgical texts of the day or season, writings of the spiritual fathers, works of spirituality, the great book of creation, and that of history, the page on which the ‘today’ of God is written” (No. 2705). In other words, we are praying when we think or meditate on the truths found in these and other sources with respect to what it means for us to do the will of God. Next we shall consider methods of meditative prayer.

***Lectio Divina*—Praying over the Scriptures:** A method of meditative prayer that you should learn is *Lectio Divina*, which means Divine Reading or praying over the Scriptures or some other religious writings. It was a method of prayer used by the early monks and desert fathers of the Church and refined by St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, St Ignatius of Loyola, and other spiritual directors.

Fr. Kenneth Baker describes the method of *Lectio Divina* in the simplest terms in his wonderful book *Inside the Bible*. The method is as follows:

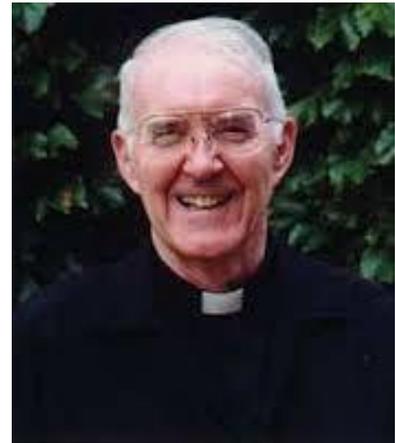
- Select a passage of the Bible.
- Be aware of the presence of God.
- Read and meditate on the passage.
- Respond with acts of faith, hope, and love.

Sam Anthony Morello, OCD, provides us with a more detailed explanation of *Lectio*, which follows:

- ***Lectio*** itself, which means reading, understood as the careful repetitious recitation of a short text of Scripture
- ***Meditatio*** or meditation, an effort to fathom the meaning of the text and make it personally relevant to oneself in Christ
- ***Oratio*** which means prayer, taken as a personal response to the text, asking for the grace of the text or moving over it toward union with God
- ***Contemplatio*** translated contemplation, gazing at length on something.

He says that the idea behind this final element is “that sometimes, by the infused grace of God, one is raised above meditation to a state of seeing or experiencing the text as mystery and reality; one comes into experiential contact with the One behind and beyond the text. It is an exposure to the divine presence, to God’s truth and benevolence.”

Fr. Morello says that the word of God gradually moves from the lips in *lectio* to the mind in



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meditatio, and into the heart in *oratio*. This sets the stage for *contemplatio* or contemplation, which we will discuss below in this essay. By this process one slowly begins to see what the scriptures are saying and to transform one's life. Morello says of this process "Repetitious reading places the biblical word on the lips. Meditation puts the word in the mind. Prayer takes it to the heart. And then, by the mystical grace of God, contemplation engraves the word in the depths of the spirit. All of this should lead us to action for the love of God and neighbor.

The Bible provides the best book for private prayer: Morello defines *Lectio Divina* as "dwelling on a scriptural text in the divine presence for the sake of radical change in Christ. Yet again, we could say that *lectio* is making one's own a small selection, phrase, or word of the Bible, in pursuit of greater faith, hope, and charity." The best way to feed prayer is to ponder the words of Scripture. He says that Carmelites and other Christians make a great mistake in trying to practice the presence of God without sustaining it by the word of God. He says that we need to learn to pray over God's word. He quotes St. Teresa as saying, "Any sentence or phrase or word of scripture, repeated over and over or recited very carefully, is vocal prayer; and that word or vocal prayer is drawn from her favorite book, the Gospels. In short, Teresa's teachings on vocal prayer and on the use of the Gospels come together in the practice of praying over the Scriptures. This makes for a most substantial prayer life." (*Lectio Divina and the Practice of Teresian Prayer*)

Morello tells us that St. Teresa advocated the use of sacred images as well as reading in our prayer life. Images were especially helpful to her because of her difficulty in picturing what she had never seen.

The focus should be on Jesus in meditative prayer: Morello tells that St. Teresa especially emphasizes the importance of focusing on Jesus in meditative prayer. Some of her principles in this area are that: 1) meditation's best subject and object is the biblical Christ in his life, death, and resurrection; 2) one's prayer is best habitually (though not exclusively) centered on Christ; 3) the sacred humanity of Christ is the most adequate mediation for initial growth in prayer and the best assurance of and preparation for the gift of contemplation. Jesus is our friend and teacher who will teach us the virtues of love and humility that can draw us all the way into the bosom of the Blessed Trinity. Morello says that "contemplation is a short cut to the perfection of the virtues and to union with God."

Affective prayer: As you become more experienced in meditative prayer on your road to spiritual progress, your communication with God should get simpler as it did with St. Teresa and the holy Cure D' Ars, St. Jean Baptiste Maria Vianny. This means fewer words and less reflection. At this stage of your spiritual development, your prayers should move more and more from the mind to the heart in your love for God and neighbor. Love is the greatest of all affections, which is why this simplification of prayer is called affective prayer. Meditation enlightens the mind with God's transforming truths and affective prayer—which is a higher development of meditative prayer—draws the will into union with God's will.

The prayer of simplicity: The prayer of simplicity is the highest stage of mental prayer. One reaches this stage through meditation that enlightens the mind of God's truths and transforms

the heart into affective prayer that draws the will into closer union with God's will. Thought becomes even simpler than affective prayer during meditation and the will becomes calm. During the prayer of simplicity the soul achieves peace of mind and heart before God.

Those who are fortunate enough to reach the level of the prayer of simplicity have achieved a very close relationship with God; they have become quite holy by using the methods that God has provided them: frequent reception of the sacraments; practicing the Theological and Cardinal virtues; performing the spiritual and corporal works of mercy; doing penance for one's own sins and the sins of others; and prayer. Up until now much of the effort has been theirs (of course with God's grace), however, now it is entirely up to God. At this stage, God, if he chooses, can penetrate the veil that separates us from him in contemplative prayer.

How to perform contemplative (mystical) prayer

Many associate contemplative or mystical prayer with various types of mystical experiences, such as ecstasy, rapture, levitation, auras, locutions, visions, stigmata, fragrances, bilocation, apparitions, private revelations, and the like, and so they might be. Each of the preceding listed experiences is associated with a highly intense union with God; the faculties of the will, intellect, memory, and imagination are absorbed by God during infused contemplation. Ordinarily, only saints who possess heroic virtue and lead extraordinarily holy lives experience these extraordinary types of mystical experiences. Contemplative prayer is closely associated with the Unitive stage of holiness.

Nonetheless, each of us is capable of experiencing more ordinary contemplation if we become holy enough, enough like Jesus. To be holy our will must be in full conformance with the will of God; we must obey his commandments, we must do his will in all things. The more one brings his or her will into conformance with God's will, the holier he or she becomes. One achieves holiness only by practicing the Theological and Cardinal virtues routinely; receiving the Sacraments frequently; performing the spiritual and corporal works of mercy regularly; and leading an active life of prayer and penance.

By contemplation God penetrates the veil that separates us from him: Because of our sinfulness, we are unworthy; better yet, we are incapable of seeing God as he is in all of his glory and majesty; consequently, a veil separates God from us. We cannot see him as he is until we are completely cleansed in Purgatory of our sinfulness and repaired the damage caused by our sins. Only a few people achieve this level of union with God in this life, and even they don't see him as he is—the Beatific Vision—until they die and are taken to Heaven. The great majority of persons who make it to Heaven aren't purified enough in this life to deserve seeing God at their deaths, so they must undergo a period of purification before he fully reveals himself to them. For those who become holy enough in this life, God can penetrate the veil that separates him from them in ordinary or extraordinary contemplative prayer.

We know of no better definition of contemplative prayer than the one of St. Teresa of Avila that is

quoted in the *Catechism*, which states: “Contemplative prayer . . . in my opinion is nothing else than a close sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with him who we know loves us” (No. 2709).

Benefits of contemplative prayer: Very few of us will get close enough to God in this life to experience extraordinary mystical contemplation: locutions, apparitions, and the like. However, each of us is fully capable of receiving ordinary contemplation; a constant awareness of God’s presence and the like. Below are listed some of the principal ordinary benefits of reaching the summit of holiness discussed in Fr. Dubay’s the *Fire Within*:

- Peace and refreshment of mind and soul
- Heroic virtue; the ability to practice virtue in an extraordinary way
- Innocence of evil
- Cessation of inner suffering
- Cessation of imperfections
- Remarkable delight in God’s creation
- A constant awareness of God’s presence
- All actions are performed for God
- Fullness of joy

The main thing to remember is that these gifts are purely gifts from God; we do not deserve them, but we can cooperate with God’s grace to receive them. God offers each of us the grace to lead holy lives; however, we must use our will to make the decision to accept his grace. We can prepare for the infusion of God’s grace only by emptying ourselves of vices and sin. Persons who are striving to be holy will develop an intellectual awareness of his presence, and the more holy they become, the more God penetrates the veil that separates them from him through their senses of sight, hearing, and smell and not just their minds.

God always initiates contemplation: One can prepare oneself for the intimacy of contemplation, or as St. Teresa says seek him “whom my soul loves” by leading a holy life, but the union always comes from God’s initiation, not ours. There is nothing that we can do to bring union about, except to lead good and holy lives, for union is a gratuitous or free gift from God. Ordinarily one must make a mental effort by vocal or meditative prayer to be aware of God’s presence. In contemplation God initiates one’s awareness of his presence. The holier one becomes, the closer one achieves union with God, the more one becomes aware of God’s presence in his or her life.

Love for God should be our motive for union with him: It is proper to seek a close relationship with God, but it should be for the love of God and not for any possible mystical experiences that we might receive. It is a violation of the virtue of humility to desire or seek extraordinary mystical experiences—“consolations” as St. Teresa called them—for it would be a submission to the sin of pride to do so. One who seeks union with God for consolations is more motivated by pride than love. God can allow the veil between himself and us to be penetrated at any time, but only when he chooses and under his conditions. We should practice patience and humility as we leave it to God to reveal himself or console us when, where, and how he chooses.

The principal condition is that we lead holy lives, something that St. Thomas Aquinas says that we can do if we desire it.

Don't be too intellectual in your prayer life: St. Teresa advises us in her *Life of St. Teresa of Jesus* not to be too intellectual about our prayer life. She tells us not to “tire the intellect, but just to speak with and delight in Him and not wear ourselves out in composing syllogisms. Such acts, she assures us, contain a great amount of sustenance (Morello). In this sense she leads us to “simply look at him who looks at us: I’m not asking that you draw out a lot of concepts or make long and subtle reflections with your intellect. I’m not asking you to do anything more than look at Him” (Morello). The holy Cure D' Ars, St. Jean Baptiste Marie Vianny, once was asked why he sat for long hours before the Blessed Sacrament saying nothing, and he said something to the effect that he and the Lord simply lovingly gazed at one another. These were truly close friendships with God.

God always hears and answers our prayers

God always listens to our prayers and answers them. We must learn to listen to him for he speaks to us in many different ways. Among the ways God can speak to us are: Holy Scripture; writings of the Church Fathers; the lives and writings of the saints; sermons; history; the book of nature; theologians, spiritual directors and confessors; literary writers; sacred music; art, especially sacred art; teachers; parents; friends; relatives; and others. All of these sources are capable of providing us with the truths necessary to transform our lives in Christ.

Like any loving father, God wants to give his children good things, and he has the power to do so. He can do this because he is all-knowing and knows what we need; he is all-powerful and can give us anything he desires. He is so all-knowing and all-powerful that he accounted for all of our prayers from the very beginning of time. He knew what we would ask for and what we would need from the beginning, because he lives in the eternal present; he has no beginning or end; he is as he told Moses in the burning bush, I AM WHO AM.

Have faith and be confident that God will answer all of your prayers, for as the *Catechism* says "Just as Jesus prays to the Father and gives thanks before receiving his gifts, so he teaches us filial boldness: 'Whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you receive it, and you will.' [Mk 11:24 .] Such is the power of prayer and of faith that does not doubt: 'all things are possible to him who believes.' [Mk 9:23 ; cf. Mt 21:22 .] Jesus is as saddened by the 'lack of faith' of his own neighbors and the 'little faith' of his own disciples [Cf. Mk 6:6 ; Mt 8:26 .] as he is struck with admiration at the great faith of the Roman centurion and the Canaanite woman. [Cf. Mt 8:10; Mt 15:28.]" (No. 2610). Below are important passages from the Bible that illustrate our point.

- **Matthew 21:18** “In the morning, as he was returning to the city, he was hungry. And seeing a fig tree by the wayside he went to it, and found nothing on it but leaves only. And he said to it, ‘May no fruit ever come from you again!’ And the fig tree withered at once. When the disciples saw it they marveled, saying, ‘How did the fig tree wither at once?’ And

Jesus answered them, “Truly, I say to you, if you have faith and never doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, “Be taken up and cast into the sea,” it will be done. And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith.”

- **John 14:12** “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father. Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son; if you ask anything in my name, I will do it.”
- **John 16:23** “In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask anything of the Father, he will give it to you in my name. Hitherto you have asked nothing in my name; ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.”
- **Luke 11:5** “And he said to them, ‘Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, “Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him’; 7 and he will answer from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything? 8 I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him whatever he needs. And I tell you, Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!’”

There are conditions that determine how God answers our prayers. For example, he is more inclined to give us what we ask for if we are in the state of sanctifying grace and trying to grow in holiness; if our requests are for the genuine good of ourselves or for others; and if we have complete trust that God will give us what we have asked for. Most important of all, we should never forget to thank God for answering our prayers. Did not Jesus ask “Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” when only one leper returned to thank him for his healing (Luke 17:11-18).

Although God is a loving Father who desires to give his children gifts, he will give them to you in his own time. Moreover, he will never give you something that will harm you, only that which will benefit you, especially that which benefits your eternal soul.

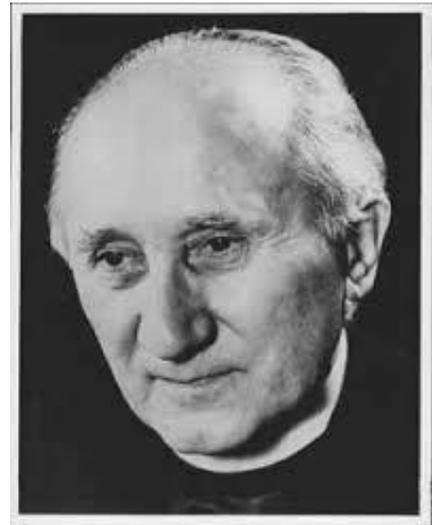
Some Difficulties Associated with Praying

Even if one tries hard, the path to the summit of holiness is difficult to traverse. Achieving holiness and an intense prayer life isn't easy. Nothing that is worthwhile is easy to obtain. Fr. Romano Guardini, said to be one of the most important figures in Catholic intellectual life in the twentieth century, tells us in his book *The Art of Praying: The Principles and Methods of Christian Prayer*, that we have a natural instinct against praying; that prayer is difficult for us to do. We must constantly struggle against our own sinful natures as well as the sin and temptation of the world. The glamour of evil is hard to resist. Even when we are making great progress in the achievement of holiness and an intense prayer life, many trials will come our way. One of the greatest difficulties that people encounter on their ascent of the mountain of holiness is aridity or dryness.

Have you ever experienced an inability to pray or to think about spiritual matters? Or have you ever found it difficult to concentrate on prayer or spiritual matters and are easily distracted? Or have you ever been lukewarm in your religious life and experienced a lack of emotion in spiritual matters? Chances are you have. If these conditions are not the result of sloth (spiritual laziness), they are conditions of what writers on spiritual matters call dryness or aridity. St. John of the Cross called these trials "dark nights of the soul," something he experienced for many years of his life, as did St. Teresa of Avila. In spite of the numerous trials that confronted them, they just kept climbing, with God's help of course.

Why do we experience these periods of dryness, even when we try hard to overcome them? If we experience spiritual dryness when we are trying to be holy and leading an active prayer life, it is God's way of testing us. Moreover, he is telling us that we are in need of further purification. St. Teresa tells us that we can make progress in our spiritual lives and union with God only by overcoming trials. So if you encounter trials along the way, such as dryness, do as St. John and St. Teresa did, and all other saints over the ages did as well, just keep the Faith and keep on climbing.

Always keep in mind—that love of God, or of anyone else for that matter—isn't an emotional thing, but a decision to obey his commandments, to do his will. Jesus didn't promise you an emotional high if you love him. He said if you love me, obey my commandments (John 14:15). The less one receives consolations and revelations on the ascent to the summit, the greater will be one's reward when he or she gets there.



Fr. Guardini's books were often powerful studies of traditional themes in the light of present-day challenges or examinations of current problems as approached from the Christian, and especially Catholic, tradition. He had a lot influence on future popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI.

When to Pray

The hustle and bustle of modern living makes it is hard to find time to pray. As Father Moran repeatedly reminds us, we race rather than pace ourselves through the day. We are so busy that we can't find time for God. How then can we follow St. Paul's admonition to "Pray without ceasing." (1 Thessalonians 5:17)? Does this mean that we must go around all the time saying prayers? Of course not! It does mean that we should develop a constant awareness of God's presence. This can be accomplished only to the extent that one becomes holy, to be like Jesus. The holier that one becomes, the more he or she will be aware of God's presence. Awareness of God's presence is a form of communication with him, a form of prayer.

Naturally, one who is aware of God's presence will want to talk to him as much as possible. At times this means using verbal prayer and at others mental prayer. At a minimum one should say morning and evening prayers and remember him during the day with short prayers, such as "Lord Jesus Christ, son of God, have mercy on me a sinner (or us sinners)," or one of hundreds of others. Furthermore, practice meditation as we read the Bible or say the Rosary daily. Moreover, pray before making decisions, especially big decisions.

We can make a prayer of a lot of regular daily activities. For example, from time to time when we are studying, reflect on the deeper meaning of the subjects that we are studying. There is hardly a subject that we take in school that doesn't have a deeper spiritual meaning, such as history, literature, music, and art, even mathematics and science courses. Furthermore, we can meditate on the things of God while we recreate during hiking, running, walking and the like. Moreover, try meditating when we are on your part-time job as we perform services or create things for others. There is no honest work that can't be performed for the benefit of others and the glory of God. What's more, what better time to pray than when we are performing the spiritual and corporal works of mercy for the love of God and neighbor. Perhaps St. Paul had such activities in mind when he urged us to pray ceaselessly (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Moreover, he meant that we should have a disposition that makes us ready to do God's will at all times.

Preparation for Prayer

Before we pray we should properly prepare ourselves. Much has been written about how to pray by spiritual writers over the centuries, but in order to communicate with God we must be aware of his presence and composed or recollected at a minimum. We simply can't carry on a conversation with God if we are distracted by what is going on around us or have our minds elsewhere. To pray we must learn to free ourselves from attractions or distractions from without and turmoil from within. This calming of the self is called composure or recollection. The person who is distracted by what is going on around himself or herself or is daydreaming is not aware of God's presence. Only the composed person can be fully aware of what is going on around himself; only he is wide-awake, is present, and is ready to communicate with God. As we discussed in our essay on the sacraments, composure is not easy to achieve and maintain because of the attractions in our society and the inner turmoil that modern living causes in us. As discussed there, one must

diligently practice achieving this state of mind, body, and spirit. While praying try to be aware of God's presence and pay careful attention to what you are saying or thinking and mean what we say.

Beware of counterfeit spirituality

God has given us an innate or inborn need for religion and spirituality. However, today we live in a world in which people have become separated from God. This isn't hard to understand in a world where science seems to explain the causes of everything, where technology makes life easier or safer (or more dangerous), where people live in large impersonal cities, where families, neighborhoods, and communities have become fragmented, and where daily life has become a rat-race. Sometimes the conditions listed above are called the "loss of community." In such a world it is easy to forget who God is or even to forget that he exists. People who become separated from God lose their identity; they don't know who they are, why they exist, or what their destiny is. They come to believe that they are helpless before the impersonal forces that surround them. In such conditions they lose hope in anything. Without Jesus all is lost; life is truly one of darkness and despair. Only he is the light that can penetrate and dispel the darkness that enshrouds the world.

Because of the unfulfilled hunger for God that so many experience in our society, many are vulnerable to counterfeit or false spirituality, and there is plenty of it out there to seduce them. Divination such as fortune telling, astrology, numerology, reading tea leaves, Tarot cards, and I Ching are various methods by which people attempt to foretell and control the future. Channeling, Crystals, Ouija Boards and Spiritualism are methods they employ to contact the spirit world beyond. A few practice Wicca, goddess worship, Satanism, and Scientology. Some of these are cults and others New Age spirituality.

Many of these counterfeit forms of spirituality fit in neatly with today's emphasis on the self and the attempt to escape suffering and sorrow. Certain techniques are offered to help men and women find the god within themselves, to realize the potential of their personality, to free themselves of all afflictions, or to find peace of mind and heart. Millions of Americans are attracted by cults and New Age spirituality because of their unfulfilled hunger for God.

Many so-called prayer experts, often calling themselves spiritual directors, are competing with one another for our attention, each claiming to have the correct prayer methods and techniques and way to God. The great St. Teresa of Avila taught us that prayer is communication with God, not a method or technique, and that the starting point of prayer life is not the method of prayer, but the continuing effort to rid oneself of sin, imperfections, and needless attachments.

Unfortunately, many of these spiritual directors are Catholics who claim that their methods or techniques are in the authentic tradition of the Catholic Church. Beware because many of them offer brands of spirituality that are the opposite of authentic Catholic spirituality, the genuine spirituality of St. Benedict, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Dominic, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, St. John of the Cross, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Frances de Sales, St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. Teresa of Lisieux,

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and of course, St. Teresa of Avila. These types of counterfeit spirituality can lead you away from God, rather than toward him.

The Christian ideal is that an intense prayer life should bring one closer to God. But union with God is attained only by combining prayer with holiness. To be holy is to be like Jesus. Holiness is achieved not only with prayer, but also by doing penance, a frequent reception of the Sacraments, a cultivation of the virtues, and by performing the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. There are counterfeit versions of prayer activities that can be dangerous to our faith. Be cautious of certain varieties of the following:

- Meditation exercises
- Imagination prayer exercises
- Prayer services

There are right ways to perform these prayer activities, ways that are in the authentic spiritual tradition of the Catholic Church, the tradition of St. Teresa of Avila and the other saints mentioned a few paragraphs above. We examine some of these in my essay *How to Pray*. Then there are wrong ways to practice them, such as various New Age varieties of spirituality. We discuss these methods in the section of this website *Catechism: Prayer*.

THE MEANS TO ACHIEVE HOLINESS AND UNION WITH GOD

Now that we have found out what holiness is and the stages of development in holiness, how do we go about achieving holiness and union with God? God made us to know, love, and serve him in this life so we can be happy with him in Heaven in the next life. We must first know him to love and serve him. The more we know him the more we can do these things. We cannot know God directly because of our fallen nature, which makes it harder to know him. We must spend a lifetime getting to know him better. We get to know him better by utilizing the means provided by Jesus with which to achieve union with God. We get to know God better by:

- Studying and meditating on our Faith (his teachings)
- Receiving the sacraments frequently; the principal means of his grace
- Living virtuous lives; the way to holiness
- Practicing the spiritual and corporal works of mercy; the way to show our love for him
- Prayer; the way to communicate with him
- Penance; the way to make satisfaction for our sins and the sins of others

We will discuss all of these ways to achieve holiness as the course progresses. Above all, we get to know God better by loving him with our whole hearts, minds, souls, and strengths for his own sake and loving our neighbors as ourselves.

Virtues or good habits

To achieve union with God in this life and to be with him in Heaven forever we must lead virtuous lives. How does living virtuous lives contribute to achieving holiness and union with God? Living virtuous lives is the way to achieve holiness. Only Jesus lived a life of perfect virtue and holiness and he is the standard by which we should observe when trying to be perfect as is his heavenly Father.

What are virtues? Virtues are good habits whereas vices are bad habits. Habit means the ease, readiness, satisfaction, and effectiveness with which human actions are performed. Virtues reside in the faculties of the mind and will and may be acquired by personal effort or infused by God.

Natural and infused virtues: There are two types of virtues: natural and infused. Natural virtues are good habits that we acquire by repetition. Even persons without God's grace can live virtuous lives at the natural level. Infused virtues are good habits infused in our souls by God to “dispose us to act in accordance to the dictates of reason enlightened by faith.” Their possession enables persons to live virtuous lives at the supernatural level. Fr Jordan Aumann says that their purpose is “to supernaturalize the faculties [of intellect and will] by elevating them to the order of grace and making them capable of performing supernatural acts. Without them, or without the actual grace that substitutes for them (as in the case of the sinner before justification), it would be impossible for us to perform a supernatural act” (Spiritual Theology).

The Theological Virtues: Among the infused virtues are the Theological Virtues. God infuses theological virtues directly into the soul. Their immediate object is God. We first receive them at Baptism. There are three theological virtues: faith, hope, and charity. Their possession gives a person immediate union with God. “Faith enables us to know God as First Truth; hope makes us desire him as the Supreme Good for us; charity unites us to him by the love of friendship, so far as he is infinite Goodness.” Another way at looking at the Theological Virtues follows:

- **Faith** is the supernatural virtue by which we believe all the truths, which God has revealed.
- **Hope** is the supernatural virtue by which we firmly trust that God will give us Heaven in the life to come and will provide in this life the means with which to reach Heaven.
- **Charity** is the supernatural virtue by which we love God above all things for his own sake and our neighbor as ourselves, even as he has loved us.

The three Theological Virtues are interrelated. They are separate virtues, because as Fr. Aumann says “faith can exist without hope and charity (as in one who commits a mortal sin of despair without losing his faith); charity will perdure [endure] eternally in heaven, separate from faith and hope, which will have disappeared (cf. 1 Cor. 13:8); and finally, in this life faith and hope can subsist without charity, as always happens when one commits a mortal sin not directly opposed to faith or hope.” Faith is considered the first of the virtues. In order of origin, faith is the first theological virtue that we experience, then hope, followed by charity. We must first have faith because it is the foundation of hope and both of these are required to have charity.

Love is considered the most perfect of the virtues: St. Paul tells us that the most perfect and the “greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13: 13), because “it unites us most intimately with God and is the only one of the three that perdures [continues] in eternity.” Fr. Aumann tells us that charity is “the measure of supernatural perfection so that one who has attained the perfection of the love of God and of neighbor can be called perfect in the truest sense of the word.” Moreover, he says, “Charity establishes the mutual love of friendship between God and ourselves,” it unites us to God. Moreover, it involves love of neighbor as we love ourselves. St John tells us that God is love (John 4:8); therefore, when he dwells in our souls, when we love, it is God loving through us.

Why is love the greatest of the virtues? Love is the greatest of the virtues, because the other virtues depend upon love. St. Paul says of love (charity, *agape*):

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends; as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For our knowledge is imperfect and our

prophecy is imperfect; but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood. So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (Corinthians13).

The Moral Virtues: The Theological Virtues and moral virtues are first infused into our souls at Baptism. The Moral Virtues can be either infused by God or acquired by repetition. As was just said, the moral virtues are first infused into our souls at Baptism. However, they can also be acquired by repetition. Whereas the infused Theological Virtues have as their object God, the natural or acquired moral virtues have as their object human activities that lead to God. They are acquired virtues, because they develop as the result of human effort and repetition. They are learned habits that dispose the faculties (intellect and free will) of man to follow the dictate of reason.

What then are the infused Moral Virtues? They have been defined as “habits that dispose the faculties of man to follow the dictate of reason illumined by faith in relation to the means that lead to the supernatural end.”

The Cardinal Virtues: Some virtues are the basis for all of the other virtues; all other virtues flow from them. They are called the cardinal Virtues. The Cardinal Virtues are the main categories of the Moral Virtues. They are Prudence; Justice; Temperance; and Fortitude. Cardinal derives from the Latin *cardo*, which means hinge. By cardinal is meant they are primary to human conduct and other virtues flow from them or hinge on them. As I said a while ago, the Moral Virtues can be either learned or infused.

- **Prudence:** Prudence is the virtue of the mind that enables one to decide what is the right thing to do in a given situation. Complementary virtues are good counsel, from which one can profit from the advice of others; common sense, which judges things in accordance with ordinary rules of conduct; and good judgment.
- **Justice:** Justice is the virtue that constantly disposes one to give everyone, including God, his or her due. It involves giving someone what they deserve; what they have coming. Complementary virtues are obedience, which means to obey those in rightful authority; truthfulness, which means to tell things as they really are; gratitude for benefits received; zeal to protect from evil; restitution to repair injuries; and religion with which to worship God. Religion is giving God his due, what he deserves.
- **Temperance:** Temperance is the virtue that enables one to use according to right reason the things that are pleasant and agreeable to the senses. Complementary virtues are abstinence, which is moderation in food and drink for one's spiritual good; sobriety, which regulates one's food and drink according to right reason; diligence, which regulates the desire for ease and comfort; chastity, which controls desire for sexual pleasure in

conformance with reason; clemency, which remits punishment for the guilty; meekness, which restrains anger; modesty, which controls the affections and bodily movements; moderation, which tempers curiosity and excessive desire for knowledge; and humility, with which one considers oneself to be small and undeserving of praise and recognition.

- **Fortitude:** Fortitude is the virtue that inspires one to undergo suffering and to undertake difficult tasks. Complementary virtues are magnanimity, which inclines one to heroic virtue; magnificence, which inclines one to do great things; patience, which keeps one's soul at peace in spite of opposition or difficulty; and perseverance, which enables one to pursue good causes to completion.

Vices or bad habits

We have been discussing good habits; how about bad habits? When we fail to practice virtues, that is good moral habits, we are in danger of replacing them with the opposite bad habits or vices. Bad habits are called vices. One or a few bad acts of a particular kind do not make a vice or bad habit; but a continual practice of particular bad acts becomes habitual, therefore a vice. There exists what are called the Capital Sins. If these were practiced on a regular basis, they would become Capital Vices.

Capital Sins or Vices: The capital sins or vices and their opposing virtues are as follows:

Vices	Opposing Virtues
Pride	Humility
Avarice	Generosity
Lust	Chastity
Anger	Meekness
Gluttony	Temperance
Envy	Brotherly Love
Sloth	Diligence

Below is a brief explanation of each of the capital sins or vices.

Pride: Pride is considered “the original and most serious of the seven deadly sins, and indeed the ultimate source from which the others arise.” It has been defined as, “a desire to be more important or attractive than others, failing to acknowledge the good work of others, and excessive love of self (especially holding self out of proper position toward God).” The best known example of pride is Lucifer’s pride, which caused his fall from Heaven. He enticed Adam and Eve to rebel against God by playing on their pride. They weren’t satisfied to be like God, they wanted to be gods. Pride comes before falling into all sins, because when one sins he or she is putting his or her own will ahead of God’s will.

Avarice or Greed: Avarice or Greed a sin of excess. It is an excessive and insatiable appetite to acquire material wealth in particular, but also power, prestige, privilege, and other worldly things. Having wealth in itself is not sinful, as long as one considers oneself a trustee of God's abundance and uses it for the benefit of others less fortunate. Greed is the root of a whole host of sins, such as stealing, bribery, hoarding, and vandalism

Lust or lechery: Lust or lechery is usually considered "as excessive thoughts or desires of a sexual nature. It is the root cause of many sins, such as fornication, adultery, rape, perversion, incest, and the like.

Anger or Wrath: It has been described as, "inordinate and uncontrolled feelings of hatred and anger." It can lead to a lot of different sins, including revenge, murder, assault, and even in extreme cases genocide.

Gluttony: Gluttony has been described as, "the over-indulgence and over-consumption of anything to the point of waste. In the Christian religions, it is considered a sin because of the excessive desire for food, [which of course is not healthy], or its withholding from the needy." Fr. Hardon says in *Modern Catholic Dictionary* that gluttony is an "Inordinate desire for the pleasure connected with food or drink. This desire may become sinful in various ways: by eating or drinking far more than a person needs to maintain bodily strength; by glutting one's taste for certain kinds of food with known detriment to health; by indulging the appetite for exquisite food or drink, especially when these are beyond one's ability to afford a luxurious diet; by eating or drinking too avidly, i.e., ravenously; by consuming alcoholic beverages to the point of losing full control on one's reasoning powers. Intoxication that ends in complete loss of reason is a mortal sin if brought on without justification, e.g., for medical reasons."



The capital sin of gluttony

Envy or Covet: Envy is like greed in that it is "characterized by an insatiable desire" for something. However, they are different in that, "greed is largely associated with material goods, whereas envy may apply more generally." Moreover, those guilty of the sin of envy resent others who have something they perceive themselves as lacking, and wish the other person to be deprived of it.

Sloth: In religion sloth takes the form of spiritual laziness. More generally it is considered a fail-

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ure to utilize one's talents and gifts. It has characterized as “more a sin of omission than of commission.”

We become what we do. If we assiduously practice virtues (good habits) over our lifetimes, we will become virtuous and holy persons, brothers or sisters of Jesus and children of God the Father, full of God's sanctifying grace and deserving to inherit Heaven. If on the other hand, we practice vices (bad habits) over our lifetimes, we will become wicked persons who will deserve disinheritance from God's family, deserving to spend eternity in everlasting Hell. As with the Theological Virtues, the only thing that I would like to emphasize before we go on to the Gifts of the Holy Spirit is that the Moral Virtues are first infused into us at Baptism.

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Virtue = Good Habits (either acquired by repetition or infused)

Habit means the ease, readiness, satisfaction, and effectiveness with which human actions are performed. They reside in the faculties of the mind and will and may be acquired by personal effort or infused by God.

Natural Virtues

A natural virtue is acquired by repetitive human activity and is a habit of the soul that inclines one to do good. All of the cardinal virtues and the complementary moral virtues listed under supernatural virtues have a natural moral dimension as well. The cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance and their complementary virtues were discovered by pagan Greek and Roman philosophers, such as Plato and Cicero. These acquired virtues can be supplemented and elevated to the supernatural level aided by God's infused grace.

Supernatural Virtues

Supernatural virtues differ from natural virtues because they are directly infused into the soul by God to enable one to act on the supernatural level.



St. Dominic Guzman who lived the virtues to a heroic degree.

Theological Virtues

God infuses theological virtues into the soul. Their immediate object is God.

- **Faith** is the supernatural virtue by which we believe all the truths, which God has revealed.
- **Hope** is the supernatural virtue by which we firmly trust that God will give us heaven in the life to come and will provide in this life the means to reach heaven.
- **Charity** is the supernatural virtue by which we love God above all things for his own sake and our neighbor as ourselves, even as he has loved us.

Moral Virtues

The moral virtues have as their object human activities that lead to God. They are acquired virtues, because they develop as the result of human effort and repetition. The moral virtues can also be infused. The moral virtues are grouped into the Cardinal virtues with the virtues that complement them. By cardinal is meant they are primary to human conduct and other virtues flow from them.

- **Prudence** is the virtue of the mind that enables one to decide what is the right thing to do in a given situation. Complementary virtues are **good counsel**, from which one can profit from the advice of others, **common sense**, which judges things in accordance with ordinary rules of conduct, and **good judgment**.
- **Justice** is the virtue that constantly disposes one to give everyone his or her due. Complementary virtues are **obedience**, which means to obey those in rightful authority, **truthfulness**, **gratitude** for benefits received, **zeal** to protect from evil, **restitution** to repair injuries, and **religion** with which to worship God.
- **Fortitude** is the virtue that inspires one to undergo suffering and to undertake difficult tasks. Complementary virtues are **magnanimity**, which inclines one to heroic virtue, **magnificence**, which inclines one to do great things, **patience**, which keeps one's soul at peace in spite of opposition or difficulty, and **perseverance**, which enables one to pursue good causes to completion.
- **Temperance** is the virtue that enables one to use according to right reason the things that are pleasant and agreeable to the senses. Complementary virtues are **abstinence**, which is moderation in food and drink for one's spiritual good, **sobriety**, which regulates one's food and drink according to right reason, **diligence**, which regulates the desire for ease and comfort, **chastity**, which controls the desire for sexual pleasure in conformance with reason, **clemency**, which remits punishment for the guilty, **meekness**, which restrains anger, **modesty**, which controls the affections and bodily movements, **moderation**, which tempers curiosity and excessive desire for knowledge, and **humility**, with which one considers oneself to be small and undeserving of praise and recognition.

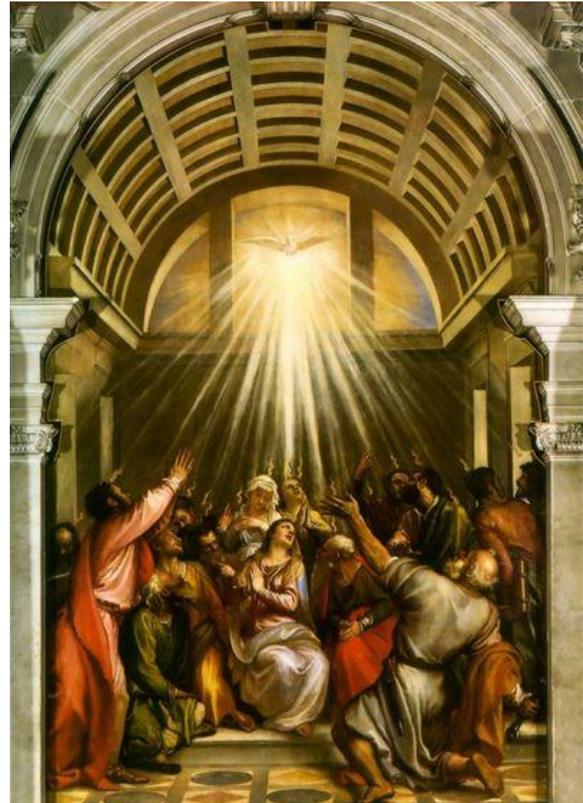
Vices or Capital Sins

When we fail to practice virtues, that is good moral habits, we are in danger of replacing them with the opposite bad habits or vices. The cardinal virtues and their opposite vices are listed below. Although there is a difference between sin and vices, they are often used interchangeably.

Pride	Humility
Avarice	Generosity
Lust	Chastity
Anger	Meekness
Gluttony	Temperance
Envy	Brotherly Love
Sloth	Diligence

GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Another help in leading holy and virtuous lives are the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. What are these gifts? Together with the infused Theological and Moral virtues, a person in the state of sanctifying grace possesses the gifts of the Holy Spirit, of which Isaiah says “There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord” (Isaiah 11:1-2). By the shoot of the stump of Jesse, Isaiah is speaking of the Messiah, the Christ (*Christos*) Jesus Christ. Jesse was David’s father, and Isaiah was prophesying that the Messiah would be a descendent of David of the tribe of Judah. The Gifts of the Holy Spirit are “permanent dispositions in the soul which give the soul the ability to respond quickly and with ease to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. They are called Gifts because they are given to the soul with grace at Baptism and Confirmation” (*Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Bible*). The *Catechism* says that they are “permanent dispositions which make man docile in following the promptings of the Holy Spirit” (No. 1830). The gifts “belong in their fullness to Christ, Son of David” (No. 1831).



All Christians in God's friendship possess the gifts, gifts that are dispensed by Jesus Christ to his brothers and sisters. In this regard, St. Paul says, “Everyone moved by the Spirit is a son of God” (Romans 8:14). The infused gifts of the Holy Spirit disposes the just souls to be moved in accordance with God's will. The gifts are seven in all, beginning with:

- **Knowledge:** Knowledge involves knowing the truths of the Faith. Fr. Jordan Aumann says that knowledge helps “to judge rightly concerning the truths of faith in accordance with their proper causes and the principles of revealed truth.” Fr. John Hardon says of knowledge, that it, “enables us, through some form of relish and warmth of charity, to judge everything from a supernatural viewpoint by means of lesser causes. Closely tied in with this gift is the lesson of past experience, after a person has reamed the emptiness of things created and the hollowness of sin.”
- **Understanding:** Fr. Aumann says that understanding gives us a deeper insight and penetration of divine truths held by faith, not as a short-lived enlightenment, but as a permanent insight. Fr. Hardon tells us that understanding is a “supernatural enlightenment given to the mind for grasping revealed truths easily and profoundly.” It gives us

insight into the meaning of what we believe.

- **Wisdom:** Of wisdom, Fr. Aumann says that it gives us the ability to “judge and order all things in accordance with divine norms [rules] and with a connaturality [inborn] that flows from loving union with God.” Fr. Hardon says of wisdom, “it makes the soul responsive to the Holy Spirit in the contemplation [given to us by God] of divine things and in the use, so to speak, of God’s ideas for evaluating every contingency [possibility] in the secular and spiritual order.” Wisdom gives us a certain divine contemplation of the truths contained in the articles of the Creed.
- **Counsel:** Fr. Aumann states that counsel renders, “the individual docile [easy to teach] and receptive to the counsel of God regarding one’s actions in view of sanctification and salvation.” Fr. Hardon states that counsel, “is a special gift that assists the mind and perfects the virtue of prudence by enlightening a man on how to decide and command individual supernatural acts...Its proper object is the right ordering of particular actions, after the gifts of knowledge and understanding furnish the general principles.”
- **Piety:** According to Fr. Aumann piety gives “filial worship to God precisely as our Father and to relate with all people as children of the same Father.” Fr. Hardon says that piety, “aids and supplements the virtue of justice by disposing us to show reverence for God as a most loving Father and for men as the sons of God.” This gift helps us not only to show reverence to God our Heavenly Father, but also to honor our parents and show respect to our neighbors who are our brothers and sisters.
- **Fortitude:** Fr. Aumann tells us that fortitude helps us “overcome difficulties or to endure pain and suffering with the strength and power infused by God.” Fr. Hardon says that fortitude “goes beyond fortitude as a virtue by carrying to a successful conclusion even the most difficult tasks in the service of God.” Fortitude helps us, “to undertake arduous tasks and to endure long and trying difficulties for the divine glory.” It helps us to carry on in the face of criticism and helps us to persevere in the practice of virtue in spite of oppressive odds. Moreover, it aids us in facing unexpected trials, such as sickness, persecution, and external failure.
- **Fear of the Lord:** Fear of the Lord according to Fr. Aumann causes us “to avoid sin and attachment to created things out of reverence and love of God.” According to Fr. Hardon it contains “the virtue of hope and impels a man to a profound respect for the majesty of God. Its correlative effects are protection from sin through dread of offending the Lord, and a strong confidence in the power of his help.”

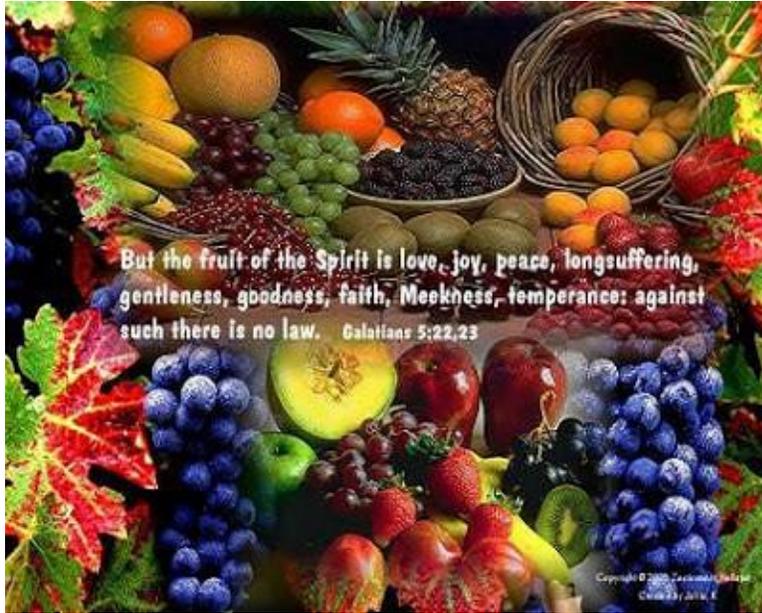
The gifts are needed in addition to the virtues: Why are the gifts needed in addition to the virtues? Fr. John Hardon says that because of our fallen human nature, our minds and wills, helped by God’s grace working through our virtues, are often not enough to overcome the problems or difficulties that we face in our lives, but necessitate additional help of the gifts. He says of this matter that, “it lies in the need for having a supernatural counterpart for the natural

instincts of mind and will. Even the infused virtues are not enough. They do not, by themselves, so perfect a man on the road to heaven that he has no further need of being moved by the yet higher promptings of the Holy Spirit. For whether we consider human reason and will in their natural powers alone, or as elevated by the theological virtues, they are still very fallible and require help: wisdom against folly, understanding against dullness, counsel against rashness, fortitude against fears, knowledge against ignorance, piety against hardness of heart, and fear of God against pride. The gifts of the Holy Spirit supply this help by giving us remedies against these defects and making us amenable to the promptings of his grace” (*The Catholic Catechism*, Part One: Doctrines of the Faith, VI. The Grace of God Gifts of the Holy Spirit). Therefore, both the gifts and the virtues are needed for salvation.

Difference between gifts and virtues: What are the difference between gifts and virtues? According to Fr. Aumann, there are several differences between the gifts and the virtues:

- The infused virtues operate under the control of the individual's reason illumined by faith and prompted by actual grace. On the other hand, only the Holy Spirit can actuate the gifts, to put them into operation.
- Since the infused virtues operate under the direction and control of reason illumined by faith, their operations are confined to the strictly human level. On the other hand, since the gifts have the Holy Spirit as their cause, they operate at the divine or supernatural level.
- The soul is fully active in the exercise of the infused virtues; the soul's acts are produced in a human manner and it is fully conscious that it works when and how it pleases. On the other hand, the exercise of the gifts is entirely different. The Holy Spirit is the unique cause of the gifts; the soul is receptive, though remains conscious and free. Thus we preserve freedom and merit under the operation of the gifts, but the soul merely agrees with the divine action, which belongs entirely to the Holy Spirit.

As with the Theological and Moral Virtues, the Gifts of the Holy Spirit are first infused into us at Baptism.



FRUITS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Fruits of the Holy Spirit are defined as “Virtuous acts which are performed under the influence of grace and which are accompanied by a certain spiritual joy . . . They are called Fruits of the Holy Spirit because they are the products of grace, which is given by the Holy Spirit” (*Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Bible*). Moreover, in the beginning, virtuous acts are frequently difficult and distasteful. But with the practice of virtue such acts become easier

and are accompanied by a pleasure or spiritual joy; then acts of virtue are called fruits.

How many fruits are there? St. Paul (Gal. 5:22) enumerates nine fruits: charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, modesty, and continency. In some Latin translations of this Epistle, three additional fruits have been added to the list, bringing the total to twelve. The *Baltimore Catechism*, following the *Challoner-Rheims New Testament*, lists twelve fruits. However, the enumeration of Paul was not meant to be complete, the number nine being symbolic. A fruit is in reality “any virtuous deed in which one delights.” As we become holy and make use of our seven gifts, we will see certain effects taking place in our lives. These effects are called the “Fruits of the Holy Spirit.” In line with what we have just said, the Church has identified twelve fruits, which are listed, in turn.

1. **Charity:** love for God and others.
2. **Joy:** happiness in living the Christian life.
3. **Peace:** inner calmness, even in difficulties.
4. **Patience:** kindly putting up with the faults of others.
5. **Kindness:** concern for the needs of others.
6. **Goodness:** setting a good example in all that we do.
7. **Continence:** the proper balance in our desire for pleasure.
8. **Mildness (Meekness):** being gentle towards others in words and deeds.
9. **Fidelity:** being loyal to God and the people we are committed to.
10. **Longsuffering:** an extraordinary patience in enduring suffering.
11. **Modesty:** having respect for ourselves and others in conversation, dress, etc.
12. **Chastity:** proper attitude toward others and control over our sexual desires.

Jesus told us that we would receive the fruits of the Holy Spirit only if we are united with him through prayer and the sacraments.

THE WORKS OF MERCY



Now that we have discussed what it means to live more holy and virtuous lives, let's go on to the means necessary to achieve holiness and union with God in this life and for eternity. To do so requires that we practice the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, also called good works. We demonstrate our love and devotion to God by practicing the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. Jesus summarizes the heart of the works of mercy in the following quotation taken from the Gospel of Matthew:

When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. Then the King will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.' Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry or

thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to thee?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.' And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life (Matthew 25:31-46).

The Corporal Works of Mercy: The *Catechism* states that the Corporal Works of Mercy are, “charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbor in bodily necessities” (No. 2447). The Corporal Works of Mercy are as follows:

- **To feed the hungry:** “For I was hungry and you gave me to eat” (Matthew 25:35). We must never turn away anyone who is hungry. Those in authority should prevent unemployment as best they can. Giving work is the best means for removing the necessity of feeding the unemployed. Saint Louis IX of France, a contemporary of St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Dominic, provided daily food to the poor, and often served them himself. Many charitable people today, especially the religious institutions, Catholic Charities and the like, feed the hungry. Lay people can help out best by giving work to all they can afford to help; work is better for the able-bodied than direct alms-giving.
- **To give drink to the thirsty:** “I was thirsty and you gave me to drink.” (Matthew 25:35). Our Lord says that a cup of cold water given in his name shall not go unrewarded (Mark 9:40). Giving medicine belongs to this work of mercy. Those who construct reservoirs, or who purify public drinking water, are giving drink to the thirsty, this is especially true in the poor third world countries.
- **To clothe the naked:** “I was . . . naked and you clothed me . . .” (Matthew 25:36). Many make a practice of giving clothes to the poor; other gifts belong to this kind of alms. The story of Saint Martin, giving half his cloak to a beggar, exemplifies this work of mercy.
- **To visit the imprisoned:** “I was in prison and you came to me.” (Matthew. 25:36). Those who visit the prisoners in jails and give them instruction and material help are doing a work of mercy. In the Middle Ages the Order of Ransom was founded for the ransom of Christians held captive by the Turks. It is said that more than a million Christians were thus ransomed, either with money, or by others taking their place. In the 19th century Cardinal Lavigerie established the Order of the White Fathers, aimed at freeing slaves in Africa. If it isn't practical to visit the imprisoned, one could write them or become a pen pal to a prisoner or one could provide books or magazines for them to read or study. Above all, one could pray for their conversion. Although St. Therese of Lisieux never visited a prison, she constantly prayed for the conversion of criminals.
- **To shelter the homeless:** “I was a stranger and you took me in..” (Matthew 25:35). Those who do this work of mercy are like the Good Samaritan. Those who provide clean and comfortable homes for the poor at low rates of rent practice this work of mercy. Saint Paul said: “Hospitality do not forget; for by this some, not being aware of it, have entertained angels” (Hebrews 13:2). In olden times travelers stopped for the night or for

food in the monasteries. In the Alps, the monks of Saint Bernard perform this work of mercy when they rescue, with the aid of their famous breed of dogs, travelers who have met with accidents. Providing alms to the Light House Mission or the Salvation Army who help shelter the homeless or providing gifts to Hurricane or Tsunami relief are call examples of helping to shelter the homeless. Those who contribute their time to building homes for Habitat for Mankind are helping to shelter the homeless.

- **To visit the sick:** “I was sick and you cared for me...” (Matthew 25:36). When we visit the sick, in order to give them temporal or spiritual relief, we do an act of mercy. To build, support, or aid a hospital or a patronage for the sick is a most meritorious act of charity. Doctors and nurses who perform their duties to please God and the benefit their neighbor will be rewarded in Heaven. Several religious orders have been founded for the express purpose of taking care of the sick, such as the orders founded by Saint John of God and Saint Vincent de Paul. Mother St. Francesca Cabrini helped found numerous hospitals in the Western Hemisphere for the needy. Rose Hawthorne, daughter of Nathaniel Hawthorne and a convert to Catholicism, started the Hawthorne Dominicans and built hospitals to care for cancer victims. The sisters have seven homes in the U.S. today that serve the needs of terminal cancer patients who cannot pay for their care. To this day the sisters do not charge their patients. Nor do they rely on government support; they accept neither Medicare nor Medicaid. Visiting the elderly and the sick in their homes and in nursing homes is another meritorious way to fulfill this work of mercy.
- **To bury the dead:** “Amen, I say to you, insofar as you did it for one of these least of my brothers, you did it for me.” (Matthew 25:40). To attend a funeral, visit a house of mourning, or aid the bereaved family, are works of merit. Other corporal works of mercy are: helping out during a fire or accident, rescuing one in danger of death, etc. Every word or act done in the name of or for the sake of Christ is a work of mercy, and will be rewarded.

The Spiritual Works of Mercy: The *Catechism* says that the Spiritual Works of Mercy are, “charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbor in spiritual necessities” (No. 2447). They are actions that help our neighbors achieve Heaven. There are seven Spiritual Works of Mercy, which are as follows:

- **To admonish the sinner:** “...there will be more joy in Heaven at the repentance of one sinner than at ninety-nine of the righteous who had no need of repentance.” (Luke 15:7). Whenever we think our words may have a good effect, we should not hesitate to admonish the erring prudently. Those in authority, such as parents and teachers, are bound to admonish those under them of their faults, even if in doing so they bring trouble upon themselves. Good example is another way of admonition. In admonishing sinners, we must do so with gentleness and charity. Otherwise we might only produce results the opposite of what we wish. It would be wrong, if with a little trouble we could save a sinner from sin, did we not speak to save him; it would, moreover, be a loss of great grace for ourselves. “He who causes a sinner to be brought back from his misguided way, will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins” (James 5:20).

- **To instruct the ignorant:** “Go into the whole world and proclaim the good news to all creation.” (Matthew 16:15). Missionaries, catechists, confessors. Christian writers and teachers—all who teach religion or other useful knowledge—are doing an important work of mercy, and will receive a reward. “They that instruct many unto justice shall shine as stars for all eternity” (cf. Daniel 12:3). Those who collect money for foreign missions do a work of mercy.
- **To counsel the doubtful:** “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you . . . Let not your hearts be troubled . . .” (John 14:27). We should be most zealous in helping those whom a word may save or aid. We should be happy if the word we say helps a doubtful one to become firm in his or her faith! As in admonishing sinners, advising the doubtful should be done prudently, and gently, to effect good results. It is seldom effective to rush into heated argument. One should pray for guidance before giving counsel.
- **To comfort the sorrowful:** “Come to me, all you grown weary and burdened, and I will refresh you.” (Matthew 11:28). We can comfort the afflicted by showing them sincere sympathy, by suggesting consolations, and by helping them in their need. To comfort the sorrowful is a work of mercy, similar to curing the sick, since grief is a mental and emotional ailment. To give comfort, we may speak of God's providence, of his love for every single one of his creatures, of the happiness he reserves for us in Heaven, when all earthly sorrows and troubles will be ended.
- **To bear wrongs patiently:** “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you.” (Luke 6:27-28). By being patient with injustice, we benefit both ourselves and our neighbors. Our patience might help them realize their wrongdoing. It is, however, wrong to permit others to falsely accuse us of a serious crime and not defend ourselves. But we should be patient, for love of God.
- **To forgive all injuries:** “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” (Matthew 6:12). We must not seek revenge. “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord” (Romans 12:19). We must forgive others, as we hope God will forgive us. Instead of seeking revenge, those who wish to imitate the saints go out of their way to do favors to those who injure them. Like Jesus Christ, they love all men.
- **To pray for the living and the dead:** “Father, I desire that they, too, may be with me where I am...” (John 17:24). In 2 Maccabees, Judas Maccabee ordered that sacrifices be offered in the Temple in Jerusalem for Jewish soldiers who had been killed while wearing pagan good-luck charms (12:38-46). We may not see the effects of our prayers, but God sees. Not one single prayer raised to God from a sincere heart is wasted. “More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of.” Prayers do good not only to those we pray for, but for those who do the praying.

This completes our discussion of the various elements that are needed for each of us to live holy and virtuous lives.

OUR ENEMIES: THE WORLD, THE FLESH, AND THE DEVIL

What does it mean that the World, the Flesh, and the Devil are our enemies and can militate against our spiritual lives and threaten our eternal salvation? You have probably heard someone say, “The Devil made me do it”! And it’s true that sometimes Satan is the source of our temptation, but not all temptations come from the Devil. Some of our temptations are due to concupiscence, for as St. James says, “The tug and lure of his own passion tempt every man” (James 1:14). The World, the Flesh, and the Devil all militate against our desire to achieve union with God in this life and the next in Heaven. They are all sources of temptation that can lead us away from God and to everlasting damnation in Hell.

Why God allows us to be tempted by our spiritual enemies: There are several reasons God permits us to be tempted by our spiritual enemies. For one, it provides us with opportunities to achieve greater merit. In this regard, St. Paul says: “You can trust God not to let you be tried beyond your strength, and with any trial he will give you a way out of it and the strength to bear it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Fr. Jordan Aumann, one of the world’s most prominent spiritual theologians and directors, gives us other reasons why God allows us to be tempted. He tells us that there are many advantages to overcoming temptations with the help and grace of God. He says that, “Victory over temptation humiliates Satan, makes the glory of God shine forth, purifies our soul, fills us with humility, repentance, and confidence in the divine assistance. It reminds us to be always vigilant and alert, to mistrust ourselves, to expect all things from God, to mortify our personal tastes. It arouses us to prayer, helps us grow in experience, and makes us circumspect and cautious in the struggle against our enemy. With good reason does St. James say: ‘Happy the man who holds out to the end through trial! Once he has been proved, he will receive the crown of life the Lord has promised to those who love him’ (James 1:12).”

However, to enjoy these advantages of overcoming temptation, we must know what is required to conquer them, with God’s help, of course. To help us do this we shall examine, in turn, each of the sources of temptation: the world, the flesh, and the devil.



The devil is seen presenting the seven deadly sins to St. Augustine of Hippo. According to his classical definition, sin is "a word, deed, or desire in opposition to the eternal law of God." He is noted for saying sin is doing something contrary to God’s will. He offers of much wise advice on how to defeat our enemies: the world, the flesh, and the devil.

The World

First let's deal with our enemy the World. What does it mean to say that the world can be an enemy to our spiritual lives and to our salvation? We want to preface our remarks by saying that God's creation is good and not necessarily an obstacle to our sanctification and salvation. The first chapter of the book of Genesis tells us that we are required to believe that the universe and everything in it was created by God; "that it was created in time and not from eternity; that all things were created by God alone; and that all things created were good." (*Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Bible*). As a consequence, the world is not necessarily an obstacle to our sanctification and salvation. As Fr. Aumann says, our sanctification and salvation depend on "how we react to the things of the world and the manner in which we use them." He goes on to say, "Many Christians who lived in the world and were very much a part of the world became great saints. The world becomes an enemy of the Christian only when we become so attached to the things of the world that we fail to advance in the love and service of God. In such cases, the world becomes a source of almost irresistible temptation and a formidable enemy of the spiritual life." St. Teresa of Avila repeatedly warns us that we must become detached to the things of this world if we are to achieve holiness and union with God.

When and how the worldly spirit become an obstacle to our sanctification and salvation: The things of this world become an enemy to our spiritual lives only when we become excessively attached to them, when we live only for the pleasures and satisfactions that we can get out of created things. According to Fr. Aumann, the worldly spirit is manifested in four ways:

1. The worldly spirit stresses the importance of pleasure, comfort, riches, fame, violence, and power. It advises its followers to enjoy life while they can, to make the most of what the world has to offer, to find security and the maximum bodily comfort.
2. The worldly spirit is found in the ridicule and persecution of those who strive to live honestly and decently. People who live by their senses claim that they are free of all moral restrictions and live as they please, and they make a mockery of any authority or law that would guide people along the path of self-control and obedience. Not wanting to observe the law themselves, they cultivate a special disdain for those who honestly strive to lead good lives.
3. The worldly spirit is found in the pleasures and diversions of those who observe no control in regard to their lower appetites. Excesses in sex and in the use of drugs, alcoholic beverages, and food are accepted as being in good taste socially. The theater, magazines, and other media of entertainment know no restriction except the strong arm of the law or the startled indignation of the public. According to Fr. Aumann, the abnormal becomes normal in the lives of these persons.
4. The worldly spirit is found in the scandal and bad example that confront the earnest Christian at every turn. It is not a question merely of persons who give scandal by their evil lives, but what is even worse, scandal is sometimes given by those who, because of

their Christian belief or state in life, should be examples of virtue. With good reason could St. John complain, “the whole world is under the evil one” (1 John 5:19). (Aumann, *Spiritual Theology*)

How to be in the world but not of it: There is an old saying that goes, “Be in the world but not of it.” How can this be so? Fr. Aumann says that the most effective remedy against the influence of the world and worldly persons is to flee; however, “since the majority of Christians must live in the world and still pursue Christian perfection, it is necessary that they strive to acquire the mind and spirit of Christ, who also lived in the world but was opposed to its spirit.” Father’s advice to live in the world and to not let it overwhelm us is as follows:

- **Avoid occasions of sin:** In this regard, Fr. Aumann says that “‘He who loves danger will perish in it.’ Whether it be a question of worldly possessions, mundane pleasures, or creature attachments, Christians must keep themselves from temptation.” The occasions that are sinful for one may not be so for another, and for that reason it is difficult to make any universal laws in this matter. Father’s says that the best rule in this matter is to ask ourselves, “What would Jesus do?” Moreover, remember St. Paul’s admonition that not all things that are lawful are prudent.
- **Enliven one’s faith:** Fr. Aumann says that “faith is an intellectual assent to certain dogmas and mysteries; when it is perfected it gives us an attitude of mind or a way of judging things in a divine manner. It enables us to see things through the eyes of God, so to speak. A strong faith will enable the Christian to see God in all things and to walk through great dangers unharmed because he is able to rise above those things that are temptations for others. A strong faith will enable the Christian to withstand the taunts and ridicule of worldly persons” (*Spiritual Theology*).
- **Meditate on the vanity of the World:** This was the advice of St. Teresa of Avila. Regarding this, Fr. Aumann states that “The world passes quickly, and life passes even more quickly. There is nothing stable and permanent in the world’s judgment and friendships; there is nothing completely satisfying in its delights. Those who are applauded today are criticized tomorrow; the evil prosper, for they have their reward in this world. But Christians, who realize that they have not here a lasting city but are travelers to the eternal fatherland, know that only God is changeless and only his justice and truth will remain forever. For that reason, only those who do the will of God ‘abide forever’” (1 John 2:17) (*Spiritual Theology*).
- **Ignore What the World Thinks:** In this regard, Fr. Aumann advises us not “To be concerned about ‘what they will say’”, for this is “an attitude unworthy of a Christian. Jesus said explicitly that he would deny before his heavenly Father anyone who denies him before men” (Matthew 10:33). It is therefore necessary for the Christian to take a firm stand in this matter and to follow the injunction of Christ to the letter: “He who is not with me is against me” (Matthew 12:30). And St. Paul warns that he is not a disciple of Christ who would be concerned about pleasing men (Galatians 1:10).

Just one final word of Fr. Aumann's in this regard; he warns us that "One who desires to reach sanctity must be absolutely indifferent to what the world may think or say. One's only concern must be to do the will of God, no matter what the cost. And it is best to make this decision from the very first, so that all may know at the outset where one stands. We have been warned by Christ that the world will hate and persecute us (John 15:18-20), but if the world sees that we stand firm in our decision to follow Christ and his laws, it will ultimately leave us in peace and consider the battle lost. The best way to conquer the world is not to yield a single pace, but to take an unswerving stand in renouncing its false maxims and its vanities" (*Spiritual Theology*). I have always told my students that whenever the world praises us, we had better examine our lives very carefully, because we are probably doing something drastically wrong.

The Flesh

Now let's go into our next topic, the Flesh. What do we mean by this, and how can it militate against our salvation? Fr. Aumann tells us that although the world and the devil are our main enemies, the flesh is our most formidable enemy. By the flesh we mean the disordered operation of our senses due to original sin. Fr. Aumann tells us that the flesh wages war against us in two ways: by its insatiable desire for pleasure, which can threaten our eternal salvation; and by its instinctive fear of suffering, which is an obstacle to sanctification. Because of these detrimental effects, we need to know how to combat these dangerous tendencies.

Since God gave us a desire for pleasure, what is wrong with it? Although bodily pleasures associated with sensual appetites can threaten our eternal salvation, they are not evil in themselves. God gave us appetites, which are pleasurable to satisfy, to conserve the individual and the human race. The appetite to consume beverages and food is essential to our survival as individuals and the appetite to procreate is essential for the survival of the human species. If these activities were not pleasurable, no one would willingly eat or drink or procreate. However, because of original sin, the appetite for pleasure often wars against the demands of reason and causes us to sin.

Fr. Aumann points out that a problem occurs when we attempt to discriminate the difference between honest pleasure from disordered and forbidden pleasure, and how to keep ourselves within the boundaries of the former. The enjoyment of lawful pleasures often becomes occasions or stimulation to disordered and unlawful pleasures. To help us make the morally correct distinction and practice between lawful and unlawful pleasures, the Church has always advocated that we practice mortification by depriving ourselves of many lawful pleasures. This is one of the main reasons we fast and abstain.

He also tells us that our appetites associated with nutrition and generation create the largest problems for us. The former is needed to maintain the survival of the individual and the latter the survival of the human species. Satisfying the appetite for food and drink and the need to procreate the human species is our principal struggle. The problem occurs when we try to satisfy these appetites without regard for the maintenance of the individual and the species. If reason does not

intervene to keep these instinctive appetites within morally acceptable limits, they can easily lead to the destruction of the individual and the species. He says that, “It is incredible how much harm an unmortified appetite can cause in us, not only as regards perfection, which is absolutely impossible without mortification, but even as regards our eternal salvation. Sensual people not only are not united with God, but they also lose the taste for divine things, as St. Paul teaches (1 Corinthians 2:14)” (*Spiritual Theology*).

Some advice on learning to control our desire for pleasure: Fr. Aumann lists several remedies, both natural and supernatural, that are helpful in controlling sensuality, but as he points out the most effective remedies proceed from faith and are strictly supernatural.

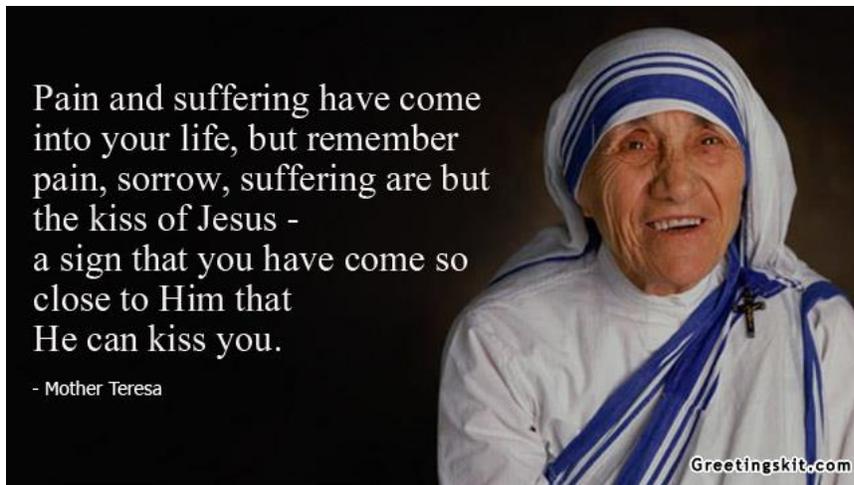
- **Custody of the Senses:** This involves avoiding the near occasions of sin. Control of the senses, especially the senses of sight, is the most important to maintain in order to overcome the desire for unlawful and sinful pleasures. Fr. Aumann says that sincere resolutions and unswerving determination are not enough, that sin is simply too glamorous and fascinating for us to overcome if we place ourselves in occasions of sin. To do so is to tempt God. He states that in such unguarded circumstances, “The senses are aroused, the imagination is excited, passion is strongly stirred, self-control is lost, and the fatal fall takes place” (*Spiritual Theology*).
- **Self-denial:** Never go to the limit in regard to satisfactions that are permitted. Father warns us that this requires self-denial and sometimes even denying ourselves lawful pleasures, especially if we are inclined to sensate satisfactions. To make his point he quotes Clement of Alexandria who said that those who do everything that is permitted will very readily do that which is not permitted.
- **Beneficial Occupation:** Perhaps you have heard the old saying that, “Idle hands are the hands of the Devil.” We might add an idle mind as well. In this regard Fr. Aumann says that “The seed of sensuality finds fertile ground in a soul that is unoccupied and slothful. Sloth is the mother of all vices, as we read in Scripture, but in a special way it is fertile ground for sins of the flesh.” He advises that those of us who wish to preserve ourselves from the demands of concupiscence must endeavor to keep ourselves occupied in some useful and beneficial exercise, especially intellectual activities that keep the mind profitably occupied (*Spiritual Theology*).
- **Sense of Christian Dignity:** We are rational creatures created in the image and likeness of God. It is undignified to our humanity to allow ourselves to be carried away by the sensuality that we share in common with animals. More important yet, Baptism has raised us above the natural order to the supernatural level. Through sanctifying grace we have become adopted children of God the Father and brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ his only begotten son. Moreover, grace has made us temples of the Holy Spirit in which dwell the Father and the Son. As long as we remain in God's grace our sonship or daughterhood makes us heirs to Heaven, for as St. Paul says, “and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be

glorified with him” (Romans 8:17). Moreover, in regard to disordered sensuality he said, “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? . . . Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” (1 Corinthians 6:15, 19-20).

- **Remembrance of the Passion of Christ:** Father Aumann says that “Motives inspired by love and gratitude are much nobler than those that originate in fear. Jesus was nailed to the Cross because of our sins. Basic gratitude toward the Redeemer ought to help keep us from sin. The consideration of the suffering Savior ought to make us ashamed of seeking our bodily delight.” St. Paul made this perfectly clear when he said, “And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Galatians 5:24).
- **Humble and Persevering Prayer:** The Bible is full of statements declaring that it is impossible to conquer concupiscence without God's grace (See Wisdom 8:21; Sirach 23:6). Prayer is recommended as one of the chief channels of his grace.
- **Devotion to Mary:** The Church has long recommended devotion to the Immaculate Virgin Mary as help against temptations of the flesh. In this regard, Fr. Aumann reminds us that “she is the Mediatrix of all graces and the refuge of sinners.” Moreover, “A tender devotion to our Blessed Mother can be a constant reminder to live a life of virtue, and it can be a basis for hope in her maternal protection.”
- **Reception of the Sacraments:** Since the Sacraments are the principal channels of God's grace, it is not without saying that a frequent reception of the Sacraments is the most effective way to do battle with temptations of the flesh. According to Fr. Aumann, “This is a certain and efficacious remedy against all types of sin, but especially against the attacks of concupiscence.” For example Confession not only eliminates past sins, but also protects us from committing future sins. Father tells us that, “The soul that is habituated to sins of the flesh should approach this fountain of purification and should regulate the frequency of confession according to the strength it needs in order not to fall again.” He says that, “It is necessary to anticipate possible falls and to approach the sacrament of penance when we note that we are weakening and are losing strength. In this way we can regain strength and thereby avoid the fall that threatened us.” Moreover, Father recommends frequent communion to help combat temptations of the flesh. Regarding this he says, “Holy Communion has a supreme efficacy against the concupiscence of the flesh. Our Lord diffuses over us the graces of fortitude and resistance against the power of the passions. His most pure flesh is placed in contact with our sinful flesh to spiritualize it.” This is especially true for young people, because, “Experience in the direction of souls shows clearly that there is nothing so powerful and efficacious for keeping a young person in temperance and chastity as daily or frequent Communion” (*Spiritual Theology*).
- **Consideration of Sin's Punishment.** All of the remedies suggested above to help us

overcome sensuality are of a positive nature. If they are not a powerful enough deterrent to curbing sins of the flesh, perhaps a consideration of the pain of Hell will motivate the habitual sinner to repentance and avoidance of the near occasions of sin. And as Fr. Aumann points out, even if a person repents of sin and obtains forgiveness, he still owes the debt of temporal punishment; he or she will have to pay for the offense against God or the damage inflicted on his neighbor by his sin either in this life with penance or in the next life with suffering in purgatory. In either case, as Father warns, “the suffering that will have to be endured far exceeds the pleasure that the individual enjoyed in sinning. From this point of view alone it is a very poor exchange” (Spiritual Theology).

I remember a cartoon in which two men are soaking in a pool of intensely hot water in Hell, and the one said to the other, “John’s wife was not worth this.”



The role of suffering in our fight against the Flesh: What role does suffering play in our fight against the Flesh? The other way that the flesh wages war against us is instinctive fear of suffering, which, according to Fr. Aumann is an obstacle to our sanctification. We run from pain because we love pleasure so much. St.

Teresa of Avila tells us that those who are to reach the heights of sanctity must learn to dominate their fear of suffering. St John of the Cross gives special emphasis to the love of suffering to pay for the damage caused by one's sins and to achieve union with God. An outstanding example of one embracing suffering was St. Teresa of Lisieux who when she spit up blood for the first time from consumption (Tuberculosis) rejoiced because she could now begin to suffer for her salvation and the salvation of others. Now this does not mean that we should like suffering; this would make one a masochist. But to embrace whatever suffering comes our way in life and unite it to Christ's suffering gives our suffering redemptive value. St. Teresa of Avila has said to achieve perfection one must first become detached from the things of the world. Fr. Aumann tells us that there is nothing that more readily detaches us from created things than the pains of suffering. This is true because the suffering person is more likely to raise his or her eyes to heaven and long for his or her heavenly home.

In this worldly vale of tears, suffering and sorrow are going to come our way whether or not we want them or not. So isn't it better to embrace it and not waste it on bitterness and despair? Certainly! Since the fall of man our human lot has been one of suffering, sorrow, death, and destruction. Therefore, we might as well resign ourselves to dealing with these evils in life. The way we deal with them will determine not only our degree of happiness in this life, but in the next

life as well. There is no other way to Heaven, for as Jesus said, “If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself, and take up his cross and follow me” (Matthew 16:24). According to Fr. Aumann, “There is no other way; it is necessary to embrace suffering, to take up one's cross, and to follow Christ to the height of Calvary; not to see there how they crucified him, but to be crucified at his side. There is no sanctification without crucifixion with Christ.” He said that those who weep and mourn are blessed because they shall be comforted (Matthew 5:5).

Also, redemptive suffering helps to restore the imbalance caused by sin. Fr. Aumann explains that actual sin upsets the balance of divine justice that was first upset by Adam and Eve's original sin and reestablished by Christ's redemption. This is true because, “actual or personal sin places the weight of pleasure on the scale of justice, for every sin carries with it some pleasure or satisfaction. It is therefore necessary that the equilibrium of divine justice be reestablished by the weight of sorrow placed on the other scale” (*Spiritual Theology*). The offense against God and the damage caused by our sins must be paid for by some form of suffering, either in this life or the next.

Practical advice on how to cope with suffering: Fr. Aumann gives us several ways that we can cope with suffering, which are as follows:

- **Acceptance of Duties:** Never omit any of our duties because of the suffering or difficulty it causes. In this regard, Fr. Aumann says that if one neglects a serious obligation without any reason other than the inconvenience or slight difficulty involved in performing it, he or she commits a serious sin. Moreover, even if the obligation is light, it is necessary for one to perform his or her duties in spite of a natural dislike for them.
- **Resignation to Crosses:** The crosses that God sends us directly or allows to happen to us have a great value for sanctification if we accept them with love and resignation. God uses crosses as instruments for our sanctification.
- **Voluntary Mortification:** The person who takes the initiative to voluntarily practice Christian mortification in its various forms advances in the love of suffering in spite of the repugnance he or she feels.
- **Preferring Suffering to Pleasure:** Fr. Aumann tells us that “The great saints reached heights of sanctity whereby they felt an “instinctive horror for anything that would satisfy their tastes and comfort. When everything went badly with them and the whole world persecuted and calumniated them, they rejoiced and gave thanks to God. If others applauded or praised them, they trembled as if God had permitted those things as punishment for their sins. They hardly took any account of themselves at all or of the heroism that such an attitude presupposes. They were so familiar with suffering that it seemed to them the most natural thing in the world to endure pain” (*Spiritual Theology*). As I never tire saying to my students, and I have said several times in this essay, when the world praises us, it is time to closely examine our lives, because we are probably doing something wrong.
- **Offering Oneself as Victim:** The highest state of love of suffering is the example of

victim souls. As I said earlier, St. Teresa of Lisieux rejoiced the first time she spit up blood, for now she could begin to suffer for the benefit of others. Victim souls offer up their suffering not only for their own sins, but for the conversion of sinners, the poor souls in Purgatory, the benefit of the Church, vocations to the priesthood and religious life, expiation for the sins of the world, the needs of the poorest of the poor, or other lofty purposes. Fr. Aumann warns though that it “would be a terrible presumption for a beginner or an imperfectly purified soul to place itself in this state.” He says that “The soul that would give itself in this way for the salvation of others must itself be intimately united with God and must have traveled a long way toward its own perfection in charity. It must be a soul well schooled in suffering and even have a thirst for suffering” (*Spiritual Theology*). God selects victim souls for this work. Therefore, we should not attempt to offer ourselves as victim souls until we have reached a very high state of sanctification and then only with the consent of our confessor or spiritual director. In addition to St Teresa, some of history's great victim souls are St. Catherine of Siena, St. Gemma Galgani, St. Teresa of Avila, Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity, St Teresa of Lisieux, and St. Padre Pio. Nonetheless, this should not keep us from praying for people in need and to applying sacrifices to their causes until we reach the level of a victim soul.

Redemptive suffering: Several times we have referred to redemptive suffering in this essay. Evil causes much suffering, sorrow, death, and destruction in the world. As we have heard one holy priest say many times over the years in his sermons, “suffering can make us either bitter or better.” We can either be resentful and spiteful, even hateful, because of our infirmities or we can benefit from them by offering them up to God. It is especially beneficial and commendable to offer our suffering to the Blessed Mother at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, who will unite it to her own suffering and that of her son Jesus who, in turn, will offer them to God the Father. Of redemptive suffering Fr. Aumann says:

God accepts the suffering offered to him by a soul in grace for the salvation of another soul or for sinners in general. It is impossible to measure the redemptive power of suffering offered to divine justice with a living faith and an ardent love through the wounds of Christ. When everything else fails, there is still recourse to suffering to obtain the salvation of a sinful soul (*Spiritual Theology*).

How can one do to make his or her suffering redemptive? We can offer our suffering in reparation for our sins and the sins of others; for the poor souls in Purgatory—the Church Suffering—that Jesus will take them to Heaven; for the conversion of sinners, that Jesus will lead them to Heaven; for the poor of the world, especially the poorest of the poor, that somehow their needs will be satisfied; for the sick and the sorrowing in the world, that God will heal and console them; for the poor homeless, abandoned, abused, and orphan children of the world, that they will find loving homes to care for them; for the reverence of all human life from conception to natural death; and for the abandoned, abused, and lonely of the world. To this list could be added prayers and sacrifices for many others in need. Our sacrifices on behalf of the needs of others will earn great merit for us and help fulfill the requirements to perform spiritual works of mercy for the love of our neighbor.

Jesus makes suffering redemptive: Jesus is the one who by his suffering and death on the cross made suffering redemptive. He gave infinite worth to suffering. He is the Suffering Servant who came into the world to suffer and die for mankind. He came into the world to sanctify suffering (Especially see Isaiah 52 and 53). His sacrifice made suffering redemptive. We too can make our suffering redemptive when we unite our suffering to his. We Christians have the duty to take up our crosses daily and follow in the footsteps of Jesus; there is simply no other way to get to Heaven. This means that we must embrace our suffering and unite it to his suffering. Why God permits the innocent to suffer is still a mystery; but Christians should consider it a privilege to be able to suffer for Jesus. He was the most innocent person who ever lived, yet he suffered more than any person who has ever lived. His suffering and death was the greatest injustice ever committed. Mary, Our Lady of Sorrows, did not deserve to suffer either, but next to her son, Jesus, she suffered more than any other human being in the history of the world.

The Blessed Mother, Our Lady of Sorrows: Because of Mary's suffering, she has been given the title Our Lady of Sorrows. Mary was the most perfect person that ever lived, yet she is known as our Lady of Sorrows, because she suffered so much. She became the perfect model for us when she united her suffering to her son's at the foot of the Cross.

Of Mary's suffering Fr. Aumann says, "The supreme excellence of Christian suffering is that suffering souls are configured with Christ in his sufferings and in his death (Phil. 3:10). And at the side of Jesus, the Redeemer, stands Mary, the co-Redemptrix of the human race. Souls enamored of Mary feel a particular inclination to accompany her and to imitate her in her ineffable sorrow. Before the Queen of Martyrs they feel ashamed that they have ever thought of their own comfort and pleasure. They know that, if they wish to be like Mary, they must embrace the Cross."

Why God permits evil: In regard to the latter, God never permits evil except to bring good from it. The *Catechism* says that "In time we can discover that God in his almighty providence can bring a good from the consequences of an evil, even a moral evil, caused by his creatures: 'It was not you', said Joseph to his brothers, 'who sent me here, but God . . . You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive.'" The *Catechism* goes on to say that "From the greatest moral evil ever committed—the rejection and murder of God's only Son, caused by the sins of all men—God, by his grace that 'abounded all the more', [Cf. Rom 5:20.] brought the greatest of goods: the glorification of Christ and our redemption. But for all that, evil never becomes a good" (No. 312). Elsewhere the *Catechism* states:

But why did God not prevent the first man from sinning? St. Leo the Great responds, 'Christ's inexpressible grace gave us blessings better than those the demon's envy had taken away.' And St. Thomas Aquinas wrote, "There is nothing to prevent human nature's being raised up to something greater, even after sin; God permits evil in order to draw forth some greater good. Thus St. Paul says, 'Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more'; and the Exsultet sings, 'O happy fault. . . which gained for us so great a Redeemer!'" (No. 412).

The *Catechism* is here referring to the sin of Adam and Eve, but the quote is quite applicable to actual sin as well.

In this regard, one of my students perceptibly said several years ago that, “perhaps God allowed Adam and Eve to sin because it gave him a chance to redeem us in order to show his infinite love for us.” This is the ultimate example of God causing good to result from evil; the greatest good of all time—the redemption of mankind—resulting from the worst evil of all time—the fall of mankind. God let Adam and Eve sin so that he could one day show the human race how much he loved them by sending his only begotten Son into the world to suffer and die for their salvation (See John 3:16). One of classrooms at John Paul II Catholic High School used to display over a chalkboard the saying, “The worst thing that ever happened, the suffering and death of Jesus, is best thing that ever happened, for us.” Another slogan said, “Good Friday was bad for Jesus, but good for us.”

Even after discussing all of these reasons God permits evil, the existence of evil in the world is largely a mystery. In this regard, the *Catechism* tells us, “The fact that God permits physical and even moral evil is a mystery that God illuminates by his Son Jesus Christ who died and rose to vanquish evil. Faith gives us the certainty that God would not permit an evil if he did not cause a good to come from that very evil, by ways that we shall fully know only in eternal life” (No. 324).

Elsewhere the *Catechism* states, “We firmly believe that God is master of the world and of its history. But the ways of his providence are often unknown to us. Only at the end, when our partial knowledge ceases, when we see God ‘face to face’, will we fully know the ways by which—even through the dramas of evil and sin—God has guided his creation to that definitive sabbath rest for which he created heaven and earth” (No. 314).

The Devil

Now that we have finished discussing the second enemy to our spiritual lives and eternal salvation, the Flesh, let’s go on to discuss the influence of the Devil. In what ways is the Devil a threat to our salvation? Although most temptations come from the world and the flesh, many temptations do proceed from the devil, however. St. Peter says of the Devil, “Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour” (1 Peter 5:8).

Fr. Aumann tells us that the best way to avoid or defeat temptations from the Devil is not to enter into dialog with him in the first place. Sins are pleasurable to contemplate and to perform and the longer one continues to dialog with him the more glamorous the thoughts or behavior become. We should stay away from near or proximate occasions of sin and when doubts assault our faith, we should put them out of our minds at once. The same holds true when our senses are bombarded by allurements to sin; we should put them out of reach of our senses or out of our minds. If we do not do this at once, we will gradually weaken and are in danger of giving consent of the will. The longer one ponders the enjoyment of the sinful thoughts or behavior, the more desirable and fascinating they become. When this happens, we are in grave danger of mortal sin if the matter is a serious one.

We must remember that mortal sin is the spiritual death of the soul. Mortal sin loses everything

for us: one would lose sanctifying grace, the life of God within him or her. As a bitter consequence one would no longer be a temple of the Holy Spirit, or a child of God the Father, or a brother or sister to his son Jesus, or an heir to Heaven. One would have lost all of the merits that he or she had earned throughout his or her entire lifetime. If one should die before repenting his or her infidelity, he or she would be in danger of eternal damnation in Hell. The Devil, who tricked this person into committing the sin, would be sneeringly and gleefully laughing all the while.

How to overcome temptations from the Devil: Fr. Aumann provides us with excellent advice on what to do before, during, and after temptation from the Devil in a list which follows:.

- **Vigilance even before temptations arise:** The Devil never tires of trying to seduce us. He appears to leave us alone at times to return and assault us when we least expect it. To be ready for the inevitable attack, Father's advice is that during periods of calm remain convinced that he will resume the battle, perhaps with even greater intensity than before. Consequently, we must remain on our guard at all times or we will be taken by surprise. He tells us that we do this by avoiding the near occasions of sin, by trying to anticipate unexpected assaults, by practicing self-control, by frequently examining our consciences, by frequently renewing our firm resolution never to sin again, and by avoiding sloth or spiritual laziness (*Spiritual Theology*).
- **Prayer:** Fr. Aumann tells us that vigilance alone is not enough. He says, "To remain in the state of grace and to be victorious against all temptations require an efficacious grace from God, obtainable only through prayer . . . Christ taught us to ask the Father: 'Lead us not into temptation.' It is also reasonable that we should invoke the Blessed Mother, who crushed the serpent's head with her virginal heel; and our guardian angel, who has as one of his principal duties to defend us against the assaults of the devil" (*Spiritual Theology*).
- **Actively resist temptation:** According to Fr. Aumann, it is not enough merely to remain passive when one is being tempted; he says that positive resistance is required. In this regard he says, "This resistance can be either direct or indirect. Direct resistance is that which faces up to the temptation itself and conquers it by doing the precise opposite from that which is suggested. For example, to begin to speak well of a person when we are tempted to criticize him, to give a generous alms when our selfishness would prompt us to refuse, to prolong our prayer when the devil suggests that we shorten it or abandon it altogether." Regarding indirect resistance, he states that it "does not attack the temptation but withdraws from it by distracting the mind to some other object that is completely distinct. This is the type of resistance to be used in temptations against the faith or against purity, because in these cases a direct attack would very likely increase the intensity of the temptation itself. The best practice in these cases is a rapid but calm practice of a mental exercise that will absorb our internal faculties, especially the memory and imagination, and withdraw them from the object of the temptation. It is also helpful to have some hobby or pastime or activity that is interesting enough to absorb one's attention for the moment" (*Spiritual Theology*).

- **Discuss temptations with confessor or spiritual director:** Fr. Aumann says that it is helpful to discuss temptations with one's confessor or spiritual director, especially if they are temptations that occur repeatedly or continue to persist.
- **Thank God for help overcoming temptation:** When one successfully overcomes temptation, he or she should give thanks for God's help and ask for his continued assistance when tempted again.
- **Take care to avoid scrupulosity:** Scrupulosity is a morbid preoccupation with sin. A person suffering from scrupulosity finds it difficult, even impossible to believe in God's infinite love, mercy, and forgiveness. The scrupulous person remains doubtful as to whether or not he has given consent to temptation or that he has been forgiven with the priest's absolution. Fr. Aumann advises persons inclined to scrupulosity “not to examine their consciences minutely and with scrupulosity, for this may provoke the temptation anew and even increase the danger of falling. Sometimes it is better to let a certain period of time pass until the soul becomes more tranquil, and then examine one's conscience carefully as to whether or not sin has been committed. In any event, it is well to make an act of contrition and to make known to the confessor at the proper time the temptation that has been encountered, admitting one's guilt as it appears in the sight of God” (*Spiritual Theology*).

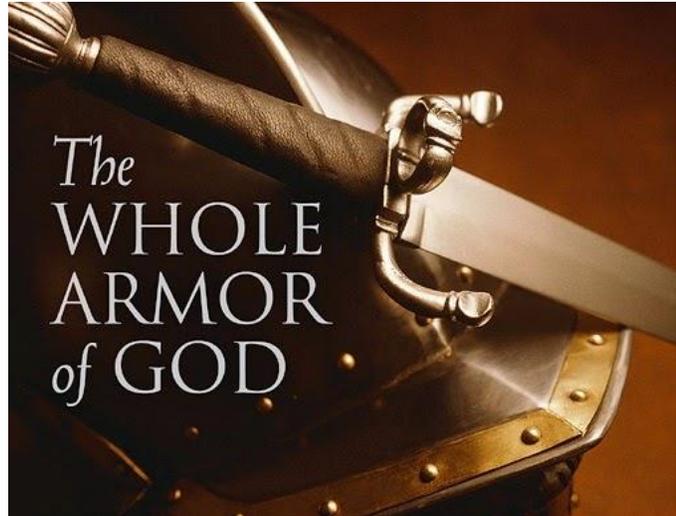
What to do if temptations don't end easily: No matter what one does to overcome the Devil's temptations, sometimes they do not go away immediately. When this happens, what should we do? Fr. Aumann warns that the Devil may attack again with even greater tenacity. When this happens one should not become discouraged. He says:

[T]he “insistence of the devil is one of the best proofs that the soul has not succumbed to the temptation. The soul should resist the attacks as often as necessary but always with great serenity and interior peace, being careful to avoid any kind of anxiety or disturbance. Every assault repulsed is a source of new merit before God and greater strength for the soul. Far from becoming weakened, the soul gains new energies. Seeing that he has lost, the devil will finally leave the soul in peace, especially when he sees that he has not been able to disturb the interior peace of the soul, which sometimes is the only reason he caused the temptation in the first place” (*Spiritual Theology*).

Even if one falls again into serious sin, Fr. Aumann encourages us not to be disheartened. He advises us to, “remember the infinite mercy of God and the lesson of the prodigal son, and then cast itself [one's soul] in all humility and repentance into the arms of the heavenly Father, asking him for forgiveness and promising with his help never to sin again. If the fall has been serious, the soul should not be content with a simple act of contrition, but should approach the sacrament of reconciliation and use this sad experience of sin to redouble its [one's soul] vigilance and to intensify its fervor in order not to sin again” (*Spiritual Theology*).

Advice from St. Paul: St Paul gave us some good advice on resisting the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the Devil. He says:

[B]e strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the equipment of the gospel of peace; besides all these, taking the shield of faith, with which you can quench all the flaming darts of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that utterance may be given me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak” (Ephesians, 6:10-20).



St. Paul is here encouraging us here to arm ourselves with virtues with which to do battle with the world, the flesh, and the Devil.

HOW TO PURIFY THE SENSES AND FACULTIES OF THE SOUL

Now that we have finished with discussing how to deal with threats to our spiritual lives and eternal salvation produced by the world, the flesh, and the Devil, let's go on to look at some practical advice on how to purify our senses and faculties of the soul. In order to do this, first we must look at what we mean by the senses and the faculties of the soul. By the senses we mean the ability of humans to hear, smell, taste, touch, and see. By the faculties we mean the operations of the soul including our ability to think (intellect), make decisions (free will), to remember things (memory), and imagine things (imagination). Now to put the faculties in their proper context, let's recall that God created man in his image and likeness. In image God created them with immortal souls and endowed them with faculties of intellect and free will. In addition to these faculties of the soul, man possesses imagination and memory. In likeness he created them in Original Holiness and Original Justice.

Tragically, our first parents lost Original Holiness and Justice for themselves and their children by committing the first sin—the Original Sin. In the fallen state, all of humankind inherited a diminished intellect, a weakened will, a limited memory, and an imagination that can run wild. Moreover, they inherited the desire to sin, called concupiscence, and to experience the wages of sin, which are suffering, sorrow, and death. They were no longer children of God or shared in the inner life of the Holy Trinity. They and all of their children were no longer the Father's heirs. To complete the story, Jesus Christ restored the dignity of man by becoming a man himself and suffering and dying for our sins. He made it possible for man once again to become holy and friends with God; to once again be children of God the Father. We are made friends with God once again at Baptism.

How to purify the senses and faculties of the soul

Fr. Aumann gives us some wise advice on how to purify the senses and faculties of our souls in order to overcome temptation and achieve holiness. Our intellect gives us the ability to think, to reason, to know, to understand. Father Aumann tells us that “The active purification of the intellect normally requires first of all the removal of obstacles to the virtuous use of this faculty. This means that the individual must at the outset reject all vain, useless, and sinful thoughts” (*Spiritual Theology*). Since the imagination is practically uncontrollable and will frequently present to the intellect images that are detrimental to our spiritual health, we must learn to reject or ignore them.

Furthermore, it is necessary that we overcome our ignorance by, “studying the truths of faith and seeking to probe their deeper meaning and their application to Christian living” (*Spiritual Theology*). Faith is a personal commitment and surrender to God as well as an intellectual assent to the truths he has revealed. It is a supernatural virtue infused into our souls by God. Faith means to believe in God and his promises. Believing has been defined as, “an act of the intellect assenting to the divine truth by command of the will moved by God through grace” (*Catechism*, Nos. 150, 154, 155).

How can we protect ourselves from assaults on our faith: In regard to faith, Fr. Aumann advises that we should “avoid the vice of intellectual curiosity that engages in the study of sacred truths as a purely scholastic pursuit instead of seeing them as truths by which one lives” (*Spiritual Theology*). Moreover, he says that, “it is necessary to avoid excessive attachment to one's own ideas and opinions, especially in matters of faith. The two attitudes that are especially important here are obedience to the Magisterium of the Church and the cultivation of a mentality that is open and receptive to new developments and applications of revealed truths or theological conclusions” (*Spiritual Theology*).

How to purify the intellect: To purify the intellect, Fr. Aumann recommends that we must let the soul “be led by the light of faith, which is the proximate and proportionate means for the union of the intellect with God in this life” (*Spiritual Theology*). He goes on to say that because the first movement toward God is through faith, the first thing we must do to achieve a closer union with him is to purify our faith and enliven it with charity. The greater the faith of the soul, the more closely is it united with God. In order for the intellect to be prepared for this divine union, it must be purified of all that pertains to the senses and be detached and freed from all that can be clearly comprehended by the intellect

How to purify of the will: The will is the faculty of our souls that helps us choose to do or not to do God's will, to decide to obey or not to obey his commandments. Sometimes it is called the rational appetite. Father Aumann tells us that the “proper object of the will is the good proposed to it by the intellect, but in the appreciation or evaluation of the good, error may creep in. The intellect can judge as a true good something that is only an apparent good, and the will, which is a blind faculty and always follows the apprehension of the intellect, will be impelled toward that object that is taken as if it were a true good.” What he is saying is in order to make good choices, we must strive to inform our intellects with good information and to purify our memories and imaginations. Moreover, “the proper act of the will is love, or the effective union of the will with a known good” (*Spiritual Theology*).

How to achieve union with the divine will: To achieve union with God requires that we subject our wills to his divine will. St. Augustine defined sin as a condition whereby one intentionally does not conform his will to God's. In order to conform our wills to God's we must strive to lead virtuous lives with the help of his grace. In order to achieve total submission of our wills to God's will. In this regard, Fr. Aumann tells us that we “must first detach ourselves from excessive love of created things and from the self-centered love that runs counter to the demands of charity.” Father says that, “It is a fact that the soul is filled with God in the measure and to the degree that it empties itself of creatures” (*Spiritual Theology*).

To conclude our discussion of the purification of the will, we will once again quote Father Aumann's wise advice: “The soul that aspires to perfect union with God must strive energetically against its own self-love, which subtly penetrates even holy things. It must examine the true motive for its actions, continually rectify its intentions, and not place as its goal or the goal of all its activities and efforts anything other than the glory of God and the perfect fulfillment of his divine will. It must keep constantly in mind the decisive words of Christ himself, who makes

perfect self abnegation (denial) the indispensable condition for following him: “Whoever wishes to be my follower must deny his very self, take up his cross each day, and follow in my steps” (Luke 9:23).

How to Purify the imagination: The imagination is our ability to form mental images. Every idea that we have corresponds to an image impressed upon the imagination. Without images, the intellect cannot know anything. Fr. Aumann says that because of its great importance and influence on our thinking and behavior, the imagination needs a profound purification. When used for good, it can be of great benefit to our sanctification; but he warns, “there is nothing that can cause greater difficulty on the way to sanctification than an imagination that has broken away from the control of reason enlightened by faith” (*Spiritual Theology*).

Father tells us that there are two principal obstacles caused by an uncontrolled imagination: dissipation and temptation. Dissipation of the imagination impedes recollection and an interior life and a life of prayer is impossible without recollection. Before we can pray effectively, we must learn to free ourselves from attractions or distractions from without and turmoil from within. In the parlance of a generation ago, one must become “calm, cool, and collected.” This calming of the self is called composure or recollection. Recollection means collecting the scattered self and returning to the center of one’s being. The person who is distracted by what is going on around him or herself or is daydreaming is not aware of what is happening simply cannot carry on a conversation with God.

How to avoid difficulties with our imagination: Fr. Aumann warns that “Freed of any restraint, the [imagination] paints in vivid colors the pleasure sin provides for the concupiscible appetite, or exaggerates the difficulty the irascible appetite will encounter on the road to virtue, thus leading to discouragement” (*Spiritual Theology*). However, he states that we can avoid difficulties with our imagination if we use the following means:

- **Custody of the senses:** The imagination is fed by images provided by our senses: hearing, feeling, tasting, smelling, and seeing, especially the latter. Fr. Aumann says that “It is necessary that we control the senses, because they provide the images the imagination retains, reproduces, and reassembles that arouse our passions and encourage the consent of our will” (*Spiritual Theology*). I have often told my students to be very careful what they read, look at or listen to, because the objects of perception will be stored in their memories for the rest of their lives. Not only can the initial perception be occasions of sin, but also once stored in memory one never knows when the stored impressions will find their way into the intellect and produce bad thoughts either when they are awake or in dreams when they are asleep.
- **Prudent selection of reading matter:** This requires that we not only avoid reading evil matter, but also matter that fills our minds with useless images. Light reading for relaxation is all right on occasion, but we should not make it a practice to fill our minds with useless images. On the other hand, good spiritual reading can contribute a great deal to the proper use of the imagination. We should develop the practice of reading holy and

profitable material so that the imagination will be positively directed to holy things.

- **Pay attention to the duty of the moment:** Developing the habit of paying attention to the duty of the moment helps us to concentrate our intellectual powers and to discipline the imagination by preventing it from being distracted to other objects, especially sinful objects. Moreover, an old saying goes something like “Idle hands are the hands of the devil.” I might add that an idle mind is in the hands of the Devil as well. Since idleness is one of the primary sources of dissipation or distraction, always paying attention to what we are doing can help us remain profitably engaged.
- **Ignoring distractions:** Although it is difficult in this society where our senses are constantly being bombarded with stimuli, we can make every effort to ignore them. This is easier than trying to combat them directly. Fr. Aumann tells us that “It is possible to keep one's mind and heart fixed on God even in the midst of involuntary distractions” (Spiritual Theology).

Purification of the memory: The memory is defined as “the power or process of reproducing or recalling what has been learned.” It is a storehouse of information that has entered our soul via the senses or is processed by the intellect by reasoning. If it were not for memory our minds would be empty. The memory is the filing cabinet of our souls.

Since the memory stores both good and bad knowledge, it must be purified. Throughout our lives we acquire knowledge that is of no use or even harmful for the sanctification of our souls. A lot of this information destroys the peace and tranquility of our souls. These are necessary in order for us to lead lives of prayer and recollection.

How to purify the memory: Fr. Aumann has several suggestions that will help us to purify our memories which follow:

- **Forget past sins:** The first step in learning to control the memory is to forget our own past sins and those of others. According to Fr. Aumann, dwelling on them can cause us new temptations and dispose us to sin again.
- **Stop thinking of past injuries:** Even if we have forgiven others for past injuries, the remembrance of their offenses will disturb our peace of mind and continue to present the offending party in an unfavorable manner. We can best forget offenses against ourselves by realizing that our offenses against God are much greater and to remember his promise that he will forgive us our trespasses only if we forgive others their trespasses against us. We will never reach sanctity or union with God by holding grudges.
- **Remember benefits from God:** This is an excellent way to direct your memory to God. Remembering the many benefits we have received from God, such as the times he has pardoned us, protected us from danger, and exercised loving care over us, is an excellent way to arouse our gratitude toward him and to increase our desire of cooperate more

faithfully with his graces. Father Aumann says that if to this we add “the recollection of our disobedience and rebellion, of our ingratitude and resistance to grace, our soul will be filled with humility and confusion and will experience the need of redoubling its vigilance and its efforts to be better in the future” (*Spiritual Theology*).

- **Consider motives for Christian Hope:** Father says that this is one of the most effective ways to direct our memory to God and for detaching and purifying it of contact with earthly things. The memory is the foundation of Christian hope, which is the virtue of remembering eternal happiness with God in Heaven. Hope helps us to despise and detach ourselves from the things of this life and to raise our hearts and minds to God.

CONCLUSION



The *Catechism* says of the universal call to holiness, “All Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity. All are called to holiness: ‘Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect’” Mt 5:48; No. 2013). Few become perfect and achieve union with God in this life. Most of us hopefully will accomplish this only after we have died and been cleansed in Purgatory, for no unclean thing can enter the Kingdom of Heaven (Revelation 21:27). The *Catechism* continues, “The way of perfection passes by way of the Cross. There is no holiness without renunciation and spiritual battle. (2 Tim 4) . Spiritual progress entails the *ascesis* and mortification that gradually lead to living in the peace and joy of the Beatitudes (No. ” 2015)

We are all called to holiness, to be like Jesus. To be like him we must be perfect as is our heavenly Father. Our main goal in life should be to achieve and maintain union with God. To achieve union with God requires holiness. Jesus is our model for holiness, because he is holy; therefore, being holy means being like Jesus. The closer we become like Jesus, the more like God we become, the closer to the image of God created in our souls.

Jesus is like him because he is the Father's son by nature. We become like the Father by becoming his adopted children by grace, by God dwelling in our souls. One must establish and maintain God's friendship in this life if he or she hopes to enjoy his friendship for eternity. Jesus calls us all to holiness, to sainthood. By doing so we become his brothers and sisters and adopted sons and daughters of his Father; we become members of the Trinitarian Family by adoption and by grace. Being the Father's sons or daughters makes us heirs to Heaven. Jesus called his heavenly Father “Abba”, an intimate reference to the Father, some have even claimed the term is the Jewish equivalent for “Daddy”. As members of God's family we too can truly do as Jesus did, and as he encouraged us to do, call our Heavenly Father “Abba”, “Daddy”.