

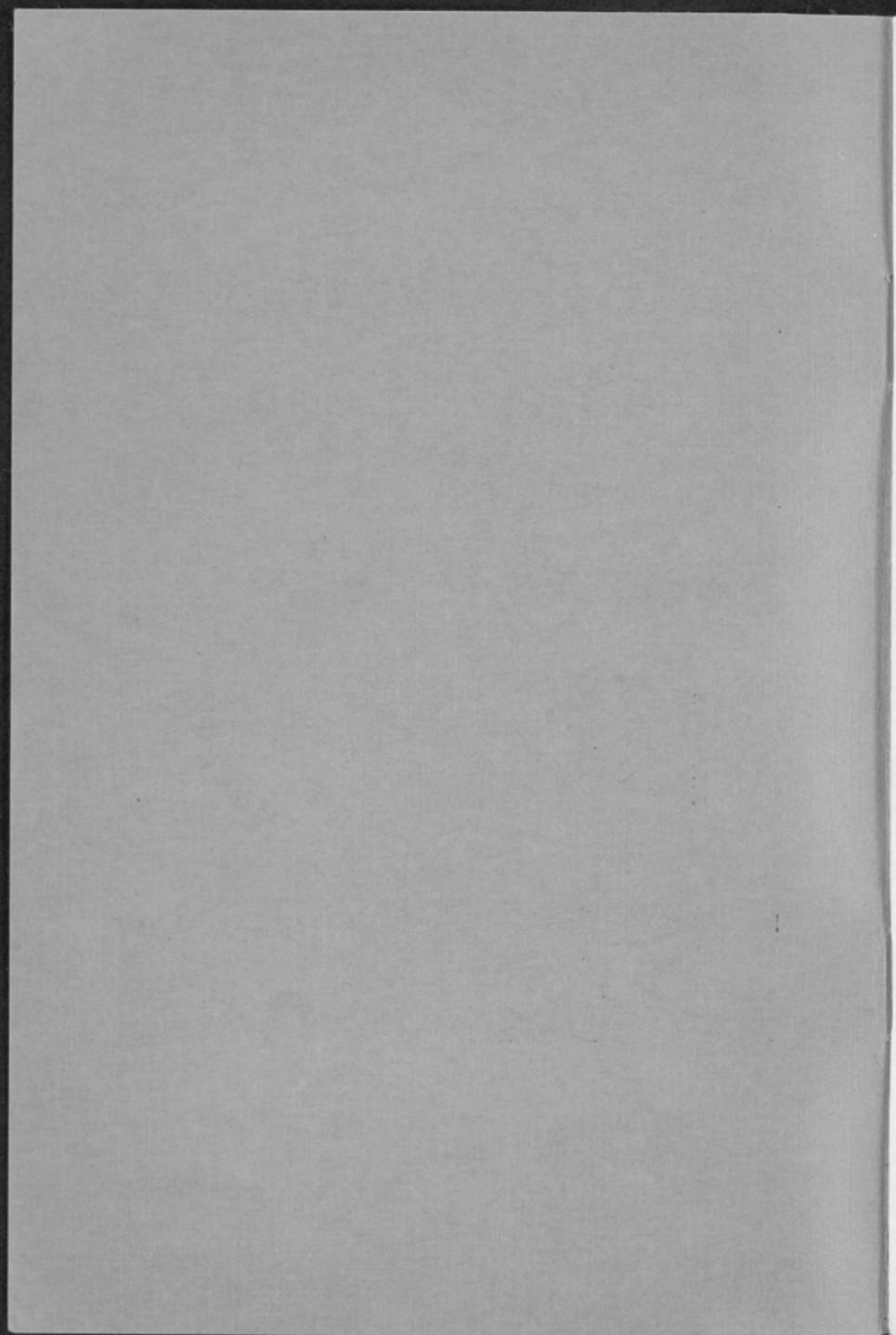
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BE YOU PERFECT

A Way of Perfection
for
The Laity

by Robert B. Eiten, S.J.



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Price Fifteen Cents

A GRAIL PUBLICATION

St. Meinrad

Indiana

IMPRIMI POTEST:

JOSEPH M. EGAN, S.J.

Provincial, Chicago Province

July 3, 1953

NIHIL OBSTAT:

FRANCIS J. REINE, S.T.D.

Censor Librorum

IMPRIMATUR:

✠ PAUL C. SCHULTE, D.D.

Archbishop of Indianapolis

September 8, 1953

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BE YOU PERFECT



1. The Call of All to Perfection

“**B**E YOU PERFECT as also your heavenly Father is perfect” (*St. Matt.* v, 42) are the words by which our Blessed Lord has called everyone to a life of Christian perfection. Pope Pius XI has expressly stated that these words of our Blessed Lord do not merely apply to a few select souls, but rather to *all* men. “The law of holiness,” he further states, “embraces all men and admits of no exception.” In his encyclical on *Marriage* he states that “all men, of every condition and in whatever honorable walk of life they may be, can and ought to imitate that perfect example of holiness placed before man by God, namely, Christ our Lord, and by God’s grace to arrive at the summit of perfection.” One of the main duties of a priest according to our present Holy Father, Pope Pius XII, is to help the faithful “to acquire perfection.”

For the encouragement, too, of the laity, countless laymen in all walks of life can be found who have reached a high degree of perfection. Such names as Matt Talbot the Dublin longshoreman, Frederick Ozanam the scholar, St. Mary Goretti the little girl, St. Benedict Labre the tramp, St. Thomas More the chancellor of England, St. Catherine of Siena the



advisor of some Popes, St. Joseph the carpenter, and finally the greatest of all saints, Mary the housewife, are just some few of many that could be mentioned who have reached Christian perfection.

Again, if there is anything in life in which one would want to achieve eminence, it certainly should be in spiritual perfection. Men of the various professions resent mediocrity and would feel very humiliated if they were called or only considered mediocre in their field. How much more should we not resent spiritual mediocrity and thus try to reach the summits of Christian perfection?

2. What is Christian Perfection

To achieve this great goal of Christian perfection we must know where we are going or we must know what it is. Various definitions all more or less reducible to the same thing, have been given. Thus for some, perfection consists in the imitation of Christ or in union with God or Christ. Others will say perfection consists in conformity to God's holy will or in charity, first and foremost in the love of God, and then in the love of one's neighbor.

Still many most likely will find these definitions hard to understand and thoroughly comprehend. For this and other reasons a more workable and concrete definition will be chosen here. A great modern authority in matters spiritual says that "perfection consists *negatively* in avoiding every fully deliberate sin, and as far as possible, semi-deliberate ones too, and

positively in accomplishing as far as possible all the good which is a matter of precept or counsel" (Zimmerman, *Aszetik*, pp. 17-18).

This definition surely is very clear and understandable. Still most likely it has at least some implications that many do not realize. The rest of this pamphlet will be devoted to explaining this definition and its implications.

Summarily, then, perfection consists in: 1) the avoidance of mortal sin, deliberate venial sin, and culpable imperfections, and 2) in doing all the good we possibly can, whether this good be a matter of some commandment (of God or the Church) or some matter which we are counseled or urged to do either by scripture, the official teaching of the Church, or by great authorities on the spiritual life.

3. Obstacles to Christian Perfection

In reaching any prized goal there are usually certain obstacles which we must overcome or otherwise such a goal is simply unattainable. The prized goal of Christian perfection is no exception to this rule.

The obstacles to Christian perfection are 1) mortal sin, 2) deliberative venial sin, and 3) positive imperfections. These have already been mentioned in our definition of perfection and they may be considered the *negative side* of perfection or a clearing away of the rubbish. Still their absence in our lives implies also a high degree of perfection in a positive way.

a. Mortal Sin

Mortal sin is the greatest evil in this world since it brings about the death of the most precious reality in this world—our divine life of sanctifying grace. When we are in the state of sanctifying grace we merit a reward or a higher degree of glory in heaven for every good action we do for supernatural motives. When, however, we are in the state of mortal sin we cannot merit anything; we are working for nothing since with the loss of sanctifying grace we no longer have at hand a supernatural principle capable of meriting or earning supernatural wages. Imagine any man working on a job and receiving no wages for this work!

The first thing then that we should do after committing a mortal sin is to make immediately an act of perfect contrition, for this latter restores us to the state of grace. In our next confession, however, we must mention that we committed such a sin. Since the Council of Trent requires that we go to confession after committing a mortal sin before receiving Holy Communion, this confession should be made soon for otherwise we will of necessity miss some Holy Communions.

These are just a few of many reasons—to pass over too the one of the danger of eternal punishment—that should deter us from committing any mortal sins.

We commit a mortal sin every time we violate the law of God in a grievous matter with full knowledge and consent. We need not delay here since all good

Catholics normally know what in the concrete is a mortal sin.

b. Deliberate Venial Sin

Next to mortal sin deliberate venial sin is the greatest evil in this world. Such tragedies as the sinking of the Titanic, the Johnstown flood, and airplane disasters, terrible though they be, are not as great an evil as one deliberate venial sin. Realizing then what a terrible thing a deliberate venial sin is, we ought to try to recoil instinctively from it and keep ourselves far away from its occasions.

When one rather readily and easily commits deliberate venial sins, he falls into the state previously mentioned of *spiritual mediocrity*.

A person in this state is really victimized by spiritual blindness and a certain torpor of will. He is seriously tampering with God's friendship for implicitly he is telling God: "Now I know that I can go thus far and still retain Your friendship and this is what I am going to do." Certainly we would not care much for such a friend and surely we would not class him among our select ones.

In this state of spiritual mediocrity a person does not give the glory to God that he should and for which he was created; he is disobedient and he is placing himself in danger of falling into serious sin.

Under deliberate venial sin fall such things as lying, "professional loafing on the job," small deceptions and calumnies, petty thefts, reading slightly off-color books, watching somewhat indecent movies

and television programs, getting somewhat intoxicated, and small liberties with the eye and tongue in the matter of sex, somewhat immodest attire, and being deliberately disobedient in matters of some importance.

c. Positive Imperfections

For our purposes here we can define a positive imperfection as a failure to do God's will in matters not binding under the pain of sin.

We know that intimate friends try to please each other even in the *least* matters. Similarly we should act with God if we really profess—as we should naturally—to be intimate friends of Him.

Continued carelessness in this matter of committing many positive imperfections brings about in our lives a certain spiritual tepidity or lukewarmness—something nearly bordering on or approaching spiritual mediocrity.

Some examples of positive imperfections are 1) deliberate resistance to grace or a failure to carry out a clear light from God, 2) failure to carry out the *wishes* of those over us in authority if such wishes are real and thus God's will, 3) neglect of our morning and night prayers, our prayers before and after meals, 4) little irreverences in prayer and at Mass, and 5) a failure to observe a rule if we belong to a Third Order, the Sodality, or a similar organization approved by the Church.

4. Some Remedies for Obstacles to Christian Perfection

In the previous section we have seen that mortal sin, deliberate venial sin, and positive imperfections are our great obstacles to perfection. Fortunately we have at hand very apt remedies for these. Since we are urged to practice these remedies by either the Church or authorities on the spiritual life, besides being remedies, they are also part and parcel of the positive side of perfection or the practice of the good of counsel. These chief remedies are frequent confession daily examination of conscience, and a spirit of detachment.

a. Frequent Confession

After advocating the practice of frequent confession in his encyclical on the *Mystical Body*, Pope Pius XII says that "by it genuine self-knowledge is increased, Christian humility grows, bad habits are corrected, spiritual neglect and tepidity are countered, the conscience is purified, the will strengthened, a salutary self-control is attained and grace is increased in virtue of the sacrament itself."

It is taken for granted here that the reader knows how to go to confession. All that will be mentioned, then, will be *little tips* which will help the penitent to get more out of his confessions and thus make this sacrament—as it should be—a great means of spiritual growth.

By *frequent* confession is normally meant the practice of going to confession once a week or at least

every two weeks. Some may argue that they haven't anything to tell the priest. They should be glad since this is the very thing that they are striving for—a life of relative sinlessness.

In their confession such persons can always mention and be sorry again for sins of their past life. In any case by receiving the sacrament they receive an increase in sanctifying grace which will help them on the way to perfection, as well as special actual graces to help them against their peculiar faults and weaknesses.

Here we must stress the positive side of confession—the graces both actual and sanctifying which the sacrament gives. We must never forget that by confession we not only have our present sins forgiven and our past ones submitted again for absolution, but especially that we receive the *grace of the sacrament* which means spiritual growth and the right to special protective graces against our present failings. How then can anyone fail to see the importance of frequent confession or fail to avail himself of the great spiritual graces it brings!

In confessing our venial sins it is not necessary to confess all of them; in fact it is better to concentrate on a few and really try to be very sorry for them. We ought to use any other special means at hand to help wipe these out of our lives. Some of these means would be a *special* daily checkup on these failures, care to avoid or at least properly to meet those situations in which these sins usually take place,

and prayer. If we do this for a period of time we will find different types of venial sins gradually and finally disappearing from our lives.

It is helpful both for the confessor and the penitent that the latter confess his sins *in their causes* as: "I spoke uncharitably of another *because I was jealous of her.*" Or: "I frequently have immodest thoughts and I consented to a few of them; their origin is due largely to an inordinate attachment to one of the opposite sex." This will help both the confessor and penitent to see the root causes of a certain sin and more easily to find a remedy for it.

In our confessions we must guard against such things as routine, lack of sufficient preparation, and a failure to stress real sorrow for our sins. It is very important that we try to grow in an abiding sorrow for our sins and especially to concentrate this sorrow upon certain *present* sins which are obstacles to our present spiritual progress.

b. Daily Examination of Conscience

More important than saying the usual night prayers is to make before retiring an examination of conscience. This is really a beautiful night prayer to which we need add nothing.

The importance of the daily examination of conscience in the eyes of the Church is brought out in her Canon Law in which she prescribes all priests and religious to make a daily examination of conscience. The rules of the lay Third Orders of Mt.

Carmel and St. Francis as well as that of the Sodality, all prescribe a daily examination of conscience. Spiritual writers insist upon the importance of self-knowledge as a great factor for spiritual progress. Surely one of the great means of acquiring this self-knowledge is a daily examination of conscience for by it we get a daily checkup of our faults and our growth in the various virtues.

It is highly recommended that along with this daily examination of conscience and really a part of it, we make a particular examination of our progress in combatting our predominant fault, or some other fault, or that we check our progress in the practice of some virtue and fundamental spiritual principle about which we are as it were pivoting our entire spiritual life.

A method of making this night examen of conscience might be the following:

1) Recall that you are in God's presence Who is within you and everywhere about you.

2) Offer this examen for the purest love of God, the salvation of souls, the poor souls in purgatory, etc.

With these preliminaries finished the body of the examen is begun. Here might be one method of making it:

1) Thank God for the benefits both general and particular of the day, given to you and others.

2) Ask for the light to know your faults of the day and virtues you practiced.

3) Check then your faults of the day by going through the hours of the day from morning until this examen or by taking the main events of the day and checking them.

4) Naturally following this examen will be an act of sorrow for these sins of the days and those of your entire life. Being the most important part of the examination of conscience, this should be done slowly and very deliberately. An excellent way is to take the act of contrition and slowly meditate on it.

5) Offer some pointed resolutions as remedies for your faults of the day.

As just said, the particular examen can be made part of number three of the body of the general examen. However upon rising, around midday, and upon retiring one should recall briefly the subject matter of this particular examen to impress it upon our minds. This is nothing but an application of the psychological law of concentration. Spiritual writers also tell us that we should mark in a book the number of times we have failed or practiced such a virtue daily and then compare our progress day by day, week by week, etc.

If we are faithful in practicing this particular examen we will gradually observe either the disappearance of certain faults or growth in this or that virtue.

c. A Spirit of Detachment

As a matter of universal experience it will be found that the source and root causes of our sins are certain

inordinate attachments to objects be these latter persons, places, or things. Once these inordinate attachments are broken, our sins disappear for nothing can make a detached heart sin.

Let us exemplify this. Some persons by being inordinately attached to drink, expose themselves to sin; others by being too attached to persons with low sex ideals may find themselves implicated frequently in serious sin. For others such places as night clubs, taverns, and off-color shows may be sources of inordinate attachments and thus occasions of sin. Still others may be too attached to their own opinion (pride), to lust for wealth or power, to sloth, and so forth.

In most cases or at least in many of them, the thing to which we are inordinately attached, is innocent. The thing that is wrong is within us—the *inordinate attachment*. And while the object may be innocent in itself, sometimes we must give it up to get rid of the inordinate attachment.

Obviously these inordinate attachments can be sources of either mortal sin, venial sin, or positive imperfections. Thus an inordinate attachment to drink may expose one to frequent serious sin while another may find himself inordinately slothful and thus negligent in the matter of saying his night prayers which is at most a slight imperfection. Others too self-opinionated and selfish, may consequently be uncharitable to their neighbor which is usually only a venial sin.

In practice then we must force ourselves to put out of our lives objects that stand *as obstacles between us and God*, things that are sources of sin and imperfections in our lives, things that prevent us from cooperating with God's grace, things that tend to lower our spiritual ideals, things that would make us satisfied with *spiritual mediocrity*.

Certainly this spirit of detachment or unworldliness is found inculcated and counselled in page after page of the New Testament. "Love not the world," says St. John, "nor the things which are in the world. If any man loves the world, the charity of the Father is not in him for all that is in the world is the concupiscence of the flesh and the concupiscence of the eyes and the pride of life" (*I John 2, 15-16*). When St. John speaks of the *world*, he means the world of sin, the world towards which some are inordinately attached, the world of modern-day secularism which to all purposes lives and acts as if there were no God.

This spirit of detachment then is surely a *good of counsel* and sometimes a *good of precept*. The fruits of a genuine spirit of detachment are very evident for once a soul is detached then its flight to God is fast and sure. It is freed from entanglements and obstacles. It has a new spiritual vision and strength. Supernatural values have a new meaning to it. It is now free from the servitude and enslavement of creatures and thus it enjoys the freedom of the true children of God.

5. The Positive Side of Christian Perfection

We have just finished discussing the *negative* side of Christian perfection or the obstacles to Christian perfection. In pointing out and explaining remedies for these obstacles, of necessity we touched on the positive side of perfection since in themselves, frequent confession, daily examination of conscience, and a spirit of detachment are *positive good acts*.

Let us not forget, too, that a life which is freed from all mortal sin and relatively free, too, from deliberate venial sin, necessarily implies a rich spiritual life—something belonging of course to the *positive side* of spiritual perfection.

The positive side of our definition of Christian perfection consists in doing as far as possible all the good which is prescribed by the commandments, or which is counselled by scripture, the Church, or great authorities on the spiritual life.

Here then we will give and explain a number of good works which are either matter of precept or counsel. Let us not fall into the error of some who think erroneously that they get greater merit for things they freely do of themselves. Rather let them realize that they get greater merit for doing things that are either commanded or counselled by the Church since besides the merit of the good in itself done, they receive also the merit of obedience. This is based upon the principle that the more virtues we practice in doing a deed, the greater the merit we receive for the performance of it.

6. Sanctification of our Daily Actions

"Whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever also you do, do all to the glory of God" (I *Cor.* 10, 11) and "all whatsoever else you do in word or in work, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (*Col.* 3, 17) are forceful statements of St. Paul whereby we are counselled to offer each and every action of our day for the glory of God and in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is really nothing else than the sanctification of all our daily actions which is one of the great secrets of the saints and thus of sanctity. Once we learn this secret, our life becomes a continual prayer for as St. Thomas says, man prays as long as his life tends to God.

Of course we cannot sanctify anything that is sinful or opposed to God's will. It is all-important then both to know and do God's will during the course of our daily activities. The commandments and the duties of our state of life will be two very helpful means to know His will. Then since properly constituted ecclesiastical and civil powers both have their authority from God, Church laws and just civil laws are expressions of the will of God. Similarly the legitimate directives of such duly authorized powers. We should then look upon traffic, food, and tax laws as an expression of God's will.

Most of us earn our livelihood by being engaged in some business, profession, or job. If we have engaged in this work with an honest motive, and pursue

it according to the dictates of reason and the laws of justice and charity, then we can feel that we are doing the will of God in this work. We can also feel when we take a reasonable amount of innocent recreation and a yearly vacation of a moderate kind and length, that we are doing the will of God. But we must be on our guard against wasting or killing time; nobody is excused from that. Many because they have wealth seem to think that they can use their time as they please. What a fallacy! Are they sure they are doing God's will!

Supposing however that we are doing God's will in our activities, let us now see how we can further sanctify them.

We sanctify our actions by what is called *an act of purity of intention*. This latter is an act of the will whereby we offer or direct an action for a supernatural reason(s) such as for the purest love of God, the salvation of souls, the poor souls in purgatory, some special grace we need, etc., taken either singly or even better, all together.

It is a part of wisdom then to make an act of purity of intention at the beginning of the day for all the actions of the day. This we do admirably if we recite upon rising *the morning offering* of the Apostleship of Prayer for by it we offer through the Immaculate Heart of Mary all our prayers, works, joys, and sufferings of the day for different supernatural motives. It is an excellent practice to renew this act of purity of intention frequently during

the day, especially before any major task. We can do this in a few words of our own as "O Blessed Trinity, I offer this action up for the purest love of You and for the salvation of souls." It is preferable to use a wide variety of expressions rather than the same formula each time to prevent this from becoming a mere matter of routine.

Another important factor in stepping up or furthering the spiritual worth of our actions is to do them *with great care and perfection*. Since we are offering them up for God, we ought to be ashamed to present them to Him done *slipshod* or *slovenly*. The secret of the Little Flower was not that she did extraordinary things for to very few of us is this latter given, but that she did the ordinary things *extraordinarily well*. This too we must make our secret. We must try then to do everything with great care, fervor of spirit, and not half-heartedly and carelessly. Along with the proper physical effort, we must put our mind and our heart into what we do.

As St. Paul clearly indicates in the above texts, we can sanctify even such things as eating and drinking. This is not at all strange since they are necessary for continuance in life. We must make it a practice then of sanctifying *everything* coming up in the day, e.g., recreation, sleeping, and even *futile* actions which in spite of good intentions happen frequently enough.

With our daily actions sanctified we cease to be an hour-a-week Catholic but one whose every mo-

ment is spiritually vitalized and lifted up on the supernatural plane.

With the best of intentions it is still somewhat difficult at times to remember to renew one's purity of intention. We can be helped here by frequently making during the day the sign of the cross with the idea in the back of our mind that we are doing everything *in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost*, or for the purest love of Them.

Here then is one of the great secrets of growing fast in a spiritual way; here briefly is something which will spiritually revolutionize our lives for good—the greater glory of God, the salvation of souls, the poor souls in purgatory, etc.

7. Daily Mass and Holy Communion

In modern times the figure who stands out before all others in urging the faithful to receive Holy Communion frequently is that of Pope Blessed Pius X. Along with frequent communion as a necessary concomitant came frequent and daily attendance at Mass. It is not an uncommon sight to see in a church a rather large number of people at Mass every day.

In his encyclical on the *Sacred Liturgy* Pope Pius XII says that "the mystery of the Most Holy Eucharist . . . is the *culmination and the center as it were* of the Christian religion" (italics mine). It is his desire too that the faithful participate daily in this august mystery and receive Holy Communion daily.

Here at Mass we are as it were at the very heart

of our religion. We offer again the Sacrifice of Calvary, for we have in the Mass the same chief Offerer and Victim, Christ our Lord. On Calvary we were present only in our sins but here fortunately, due to our Blessed Lord's goodness, we have a *positive* role. The faithful at Mass "not only offer this sacrifice by the hands of the priests, but also to a certain extent, *in union with him.*" At the Mass our divine Redeemer "offers not only Himself as Head of the Church to the heavenly Father, but in Himself His mystical members at well." Thus the faithful, members of Christ, at the Mass are in some secondary way both *offerers* and *offered* (victims) in Christ, the Head. We are then in some sense *in Him* co-offerers and co-offered (co-victims) with Him.

On Calvary heights the price for our redemption was paid by our Blessed Lord meriting for us these infinite redemptive graces while at Mass we have the application of some of these graces to mankind.

And just as the apostles received our Blessed Lord at the Last Supper, so too at Mass we can again receive Him—the very Source of grace.

What a privilege then it is to attend Mass and receive Holy Communion daily! Surely not a burden but one of the greatest gifts to us in this life!

Since at Mass we are in some way co-offerers and co-victims in Christ, our Head, we ought during Mass, especially at the Consecration, to offer ourselves, our hardships, our crosses, and our all along with our Blessed Lord's offering. Outside of the Mass we

ought to live and carry out the spirit of this offering—to accept the hard things of life without complaint, manfully, in a sacrificial spirit, and even if possible, cheerfully.

While no doubt the best way to attend Mass is to follow the priest by using a Missal, still some find this difficult and undevotional. To them other ways will suggest themselves as meditating on the Last Supper and Calvary, or on the four ends of the Mass; reciting the rosary, reading Mass prayers as found in certain prayer books, and so forth.

After receiving Holy Communion we ought to spend, if at all possible, about fifteen minutes in quiet thanksgiving for so great a Gift received. Here again each one's devotion will dictate what is best in the way of thanksgiving. Variety is helpful and it is a good practice to use with each succeeding Communion a different method of thanksgiving. We ought then to have at hand at least four or five different kinds of thanksgiving.

One way is to meditate upon the words suggested by the letters of the word *father*: faith, adoration, trust, humility, enjoyment, and resolutions; or the words suggested by the letters of the word *ardor*: adoration, return-thanks, devotedness, oblation or offering of self, and resolutions. Another excellent way is to meditate upon the fact that Holy Communion is the Food of our soul. This divine Food also repairs, nourishes, refreshes, delights, and satiates. It is also very helpful to read slowly and meditatively

the beautiful prayers for thanksgiving after Holy Communion or some of the beautiful hymns on the Blessed Sacrament. Another fine way to make a fitting thanksgiving is to spend this period in spirit with our Lord on Calvary or at the Last Supper.

We can make a suitable thanksgiving by meditating upon the four ends of the Holy Eucharist: 1) adoration, 2) thanksgiving, 3) reparation, and 4) petition. At other times a fitting thanksgiving is provided by meditating upon the words: *Who? To whom? Why? How? From Whom? etc.*

Meditative reading upon the promise of the Holy Eucharist (John 6, 55-58), our Lord's discourse at the Last Supper (John chs. 14-17), and the fourth book of the *Imitation of Christ* will also be found an excellent way of thanksgiving after Holy Communion.

8. Prayer

There is scarcely anything to which we are more exhorted by Holy Scripture than prayer. "Let nothing hinder thee from praying always" (*Ecclus.* 18, 22). "Be watchful in prayers" (*I Pet.* 4, 7). Our Blessed Lord says that we "must always pray" (*Luke* 18, 1). Since in these texts as elsewhere in Holy Scripture we are told to *pray always*, prayer is certainly a good which anyone who is striving after perfection must take serious account of in his life.

Prayer is a lifting of the mind and heart to God; in any conversation we direct our mind and our will

(heart) to the person to whom we are talking. Prayer then can be also defined as a conversation with God.

Prayer is either *public* or *private*; the Mass, novenas, Holy Hour services, and other prayers offered in Church are examples of public prayer. In a strict sense *public* prayer is one which is offered in the name of *society* while *private* prayer is offered in the name of the *individual*. All liturgical prayer is an example of public prayer in the strict sense. Thus a priest is deputed by the Church to offer up the Divine Office in its name.

Prayer can also be *vocal* or *mental*. In vocal prayer whether we say it aloud or silently we always use the same *fixed* expressions; we never take liberties with the wording of the prayer involved. In mental prayer on the other hand we talk to God in our own words and the expression which these words take is only determined on the spur of the moment. Then too at times mental prayer is practically wordless for it may at times be just one long affectionate gaze or one long act of love without any words.

The importance of vocal prayer is obvious; we need not delay on it since it is something which we have learned about since childhood. Later we will suggest a few directives for it.

It is quite a different matter with mental prayer. All no doubt have heard about it, many wonder about it, and would use it if they knew how.

For anyone striving after perfection mental prayer is of extreme importance; in fact so much so that

without mental prayer it is normally impossible for most people to reach perfection. By prescribing mental prayer as a matter of daily duty upon all its priests and religious, the Church shows how important it considers mental prayer. The lay Third Orders of St. Francis, St. Dominic, and Mt. Carmel along with the Sodality prescribe mental prayer in their rules. If we add also what the great authorities on the spiritual life have said on mental prayer, then it is certainly evident that it is something which is *counselled*.

When we realize too that the practice of mental prayer is to our spiritual life what a thorough clinical checkup is to our physical life, then its importance from the standpoint of the personal lives stands out.

In mental prayer too the *personal* element is stressed more in that it is the heart of one person talking to the heart of another (here our Blessed Lord, our Lady, our guardian angel, etc.). We can here prayerfully *in our own words* discuss with one or another of our heavenly friends our *personal* spiritual and temporal problems and thus mental prayer might be more appropriately called *personalized* prayer. Certainly the *personal* element is much more felt in mental prayer than in vocal prayer where we are trying to make our own someone else's words. Since the *personal side* is much more stressed in mental prayer, such mental states as those of joy, love, hope, happiness, pleasure and those too of sorrow, loneliness, spiritual depression or abandonment, will be more felt.

a. Strict Meditation

As other things, so mental prayer, too, has its beginnings and its growth. The beginnings of mental prayer are usually called by the name "strict meditation." What however is said about strict meditation can in certain respects be applied to more advanced degrees of mental prayer.

Since our soul has only the two powers of the intellect and the will, naturally in meditation as in all mental prayer these powers will come into play. The memory is really only a part of our intellect but for good reasons the intellect is sometimes considered as made up of the *memory* and *reason*. For convenience we will do this here.

In strict meditation with our *memory* we place before our *mind* or *reason* some truth or mystery of faith. With our reason we look at it from various angles, we make comparisons, analyses, analogies, and then try to arrive at some pointed conclusions for our own lives.

Meanwhile with our *will* we pray for light, inspiration, and strength; we make affections of sorrow, love, thanksgiving, joy, etc., and finally we make pointed resolutions in line with the pointed conclusions of our mind.

We usually end our meditation with a heart-to-heart talk with our Lord.

While this explanation might seem to be very vague and difficult, still in the concrete a meditation is a very simple thing. True it is practically impossible

to write out a meditation; for the sake of illustration, however, it will be done here since it will clear up some of the obscure points of the above explanation of it.

Let us make a little meditation on St. Paul's words: "bearing with one another" (*Col. 3, 13*).

In the very beginning of our mental prayer it is a very highly commendable thing to put ourselves in the Presence of God and make an act of purity of intention. And now for a practical meditation.

I. *Beginning of Meditation:*

a) *Act of the Presence of God:* "O Blessed Trinity, I firmly believe that I am in Your Presence and that You dwell within me. I adore You.

b) *Act of Purity of Intention:* "Grant, O Blessed Trinity, that this mental prayer may be offered as an act of the purest love of You, for the salvation of souls, the poor souls in purgatory, and my own personal intentions.

II. *Body of the Meditation:*

"Through your inspired writer, St. Paul, I am told by You to help carry the burdens of my fellowmen. Dear God, when I look around and see all the sorrow, sickness, ravages of war, and oppression, I begin to realize what a vast apostolate of charity and mercy awaits me.

"I realize that in the past, dear Lord, I have largely been taken up with my own selfish interests with the result that I have scarcely devoted any time to helping others in their burdens, their sorrows, their sicknesses, and so forth. Pardon and forgive me, my God, for this gross negligence. Pardon my shortsightedness and selfishness.

"In the future, then, I will make it a point to join soon the St. Vincent de Paul Society or some similar charitable organization, that I may in a definite way have an outlet for works of charity and mercy. I will try also to be more dutiful in visiting the sick in hospitals and consoling those who are weighed down with sorrow."

In this little laboratory demonstration of a meditation you will notice that the memory, reason, and will were used interchangeably. God's part in this meditation by His inspirations and graces, could not be recorded here. No doubt in our meditations He is constantly at hand furnishing our souls with good thoughts, inspirations, and motivation while we are making our mental prayer.

b. Some Other Ways of Meditating

Where it is possible it is usually helpful to avail ourselves of variety; this is very true in mental prayer. Many souls find it very helpful to use *different* ways in their mental prayer. Some of these are

meditative reading, vocal prayer meditated, and imaginative contemplation.

In meditative reading we take a passage of a book as the New Testament, the Imitation of Christ, or some other spiritual book, and reflect upon it phrase by phrase, clause by clause, or sentence by sentence. We reflect and meditate upon each phrase, etc., until we have derived all the fruit from it. Then we pass on to the next and do the same. Sometimes a few lines will keep us occupied for a considerable period of time. The Imitation of Christ is a wonderful book for meditative reading. It might be mentioned here that meditative reading is both an easy and a wonderful way of being initiated into mental prayer.

The method used in *vocal prayer meditated* is exactly the same as that used in meditative reading except that the matter used consists in various prayers as the Our Father, Hail Mary, etc.

To clarify both *meditative reading* and *vocal prayer meditated*, a laboratory example will be given of them. An example of *vocal prayer meditated* on the *Hail Mary* will be given here.

I. *Beginning of the Meditation:*

- a) *Act of the Presence of God:* "O my God, I firmly believe that I am in Your Presence; I adore You, O Three Divine Persons, Who dwell within my very soul.
- b) *Act of Purity of Intention:* "Grant that this mental prayer may be offered up as an act of the purest love of You; may it be offered

for the salvation of souls, the poor souls in purgatory, and for my own personal spiritual needs.

II. *Body of the Meditation:*

Hail: "What a joy it is for me, dear blessed Mother, to greet you and to be with you! You are one of the world's greatest persons and thus it is a great privilege to speak to you and discuss my problems with you. . . .

Full of grace: "Yes, Mary, you are full of grace and hence full of God. I too must grow in grace since it is more precious than any material object. Your great worth and dignity are because of this fullness of grace. Help me to evaluate myself merely in terms of sanctifying grace and growth therein. Let all other possessions mean much less to me and let me never barter with them in a way to lose grace. . . .

The Lord is with thee. "How truly at the moment of the Incarnation the Lord is truly with You in Your womb. How conscious you were of this Divine Presence. Help me to realize more and more that I am a temple of the blessed Trinity. How frequently I should turn inward to this living cathedral of my soul and there adore these Divine Persons, consult Them, praise Them, thank Them, and be sorry for my failings against Them. . . .
Etc. . . .

In imaginative contemplation we take some mystery of our Lord's life as the nativity and we try to see it as it actually occurred. We try to see it as a motion-picture producer would if he were to make a motion picture of it. In that case we would see the persons, hear their words, and witness their actions. It is not merely a gaze, but an affectionate gaze—one beginning from love and ending in ever greater love. And as we contemplate these various mysteries, we are constantly witnessing the practice of various virtues. These latter we will feel an attraction for and thus we will be stimulated to try to put them into our lives.

Let us now for the sake of charity make a simple contemplation on the Presentation in the Temple, pausing momentarily at the dots . . .

"O blessed Trinity, I realize that I am in Your Presence; I adore You within the depths of my soul and I realize that You are everywhere.

"Grant that this mental prayer may be offered as an act of the purest love of You; if it be Your will may our blessed Lady take it and offer it for whatever purpose she sees fit.

"It is about mid-morning as I walk into the Temple of Jerusalem. . . . About me everywhere are people. . . . I stroll leisurely about trying to see various things in the Temple. . . . Oh, here before me is a beautiful mother and her little Child, both radiant with beauty and virtue. . . . They are accompanied by a man. . . . Oh, it is the Holy Fam-

ily, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. . . . I see the Infant Jesus is going through the rite of presentation and His mother is similarly going through the rite of purification. . . . As Mary here offers her Child, she seems to offer herself so completely and the Child although only an Infant seems to be conscious of what is going on and thus is offering Himself to God. . . . As I witness this touching scene I again realize my entire dependence upon God and thus I offer myself entirely to Him. . . . He is my very all and to Him my all must be given. . . .

c. Growth in Prayer

It will be noticed that in meditation only the two faculties of the intellect (with its memory and reason) and the will are used. One can easily see that the intellect might be used more than the will or the will more than the intellect. In the beginning of mental prayer usually the intellect is used more and thus strict meditation is usually defined as the mental prayer in which the *reasoning* element predominates.

As we more and more practice mental prayer our intellect sees more readily and more time is spent during our prayer in affections and petitions of the will. This is a sign that we are growing in mental prayer; we are making progress in it since the *will* element is more precious in mental prayer than the *reasoning* element. When we reach the state where affections and the *will* element predominate in our mental prayer, then we have reached the second degree of ordinary mental prayer or *affective* prayer.

After some years spent in mental prayer it may be noticed that the reasoning element practically occupies no time at all and that our affections instead of being varied and many as those of sorrow for sin, joy, thanksgiving, love and so forth, are now becoming much less varied and reducing themselves more or less to that of love and that this latter is really more or less a prolonged affection. This is a sign that we are either in or near the lower frontier of the prayer of simplicity or active contemplation. Between the lower and upper frontier of the prayer of simplicity is much room for growth in prayer. Beyond the upper frontier of this simplified prayer is mystic prayer which will not be discussed here since it is more opportune to read about this latter when we are well versed in the practice of ordinary mental prayer. Much of such reading would otherwise be totally meaningless to us.

d. External Adjuncts to Mental Prayer

Such things as the proper length of a mental prayer, posture for it, preparation for it, and the time of the day for it, are surely also things we need to know about mental prayer.

It would seem that at least two or three minutes must be given to mental prayer if we are to get any real fruit out of it. The members of the Sodality of our Lady are supposed by rule (rule 34) to spend at least fifteen minutes daily in mental prayer. This would seem to be a good norm for anyone who is

striving after perfection. Members of the Third Order of Mt. Carmel are expected by rule to spend one-half hour daily in mental prayer. This may be rather difficult but for one who is aiming at *high perfection* this length of time is really necessary.

Any reverent posture as kneeling, sitting, standing, and walking may be assumed during mental prayer. In any case our posture should be such that we would not be ashamed of it if somebody who knew we were making our mental prayer came into our presence.

If our mental prayer is to succeed, we must prepare for it. This preparation will consist in gathering some material on which to meditate either sometime previous or immediately before our mental prayer. Abundant material can be found in the New Testament, the Imitation of Christ, spiritual reading books, and meditation books many of the latter being especially written with an eye for the needs of the laity.

We should devote a period of the day to mental prayer when we are physically and mentally alert; for some this will be the early morning, for others some time in the afternoon, for still others the quiet of evening will be best.

We should not be surprised if occasionally or even somewhat frequently we have a period of days when we find mental prayer difficult for these periods can come through no fault of our own. True, two common reasons are carelessness in our spiritual life and in our preparation for mental prayer.

e. The Secret of Praying Always

Our Blessed Lord has told us that we "must always pray" (*Luke* 18, 1), and St. Paul similarly says that we should "pray without ceasing" (*I Thess.* 5, 17). This brings up the problem of *continuous* prayer to which we are here counselled by our Blessed Lord and St. Paul.

As we have seen, prayer is a union of our mind and will with God; the union of the will is the more important of these two. This psychological union of the will with God can either be *actual* or *habitual*; when we are here and now engaged in prayer, we certainly have an actual union of not only wills, but even our minds with God. The union of our will with God is habitual when it is united with Him *by intention* although due to various activities our will may be *explicitly* diverted to other things. By an act of purity of intention we direct our will and our other faculties through it to God. Hence when our duties are offered to God by an act of purity of intention they are also a prayer, for as St. Thomas says, man prays as long as his life tends to God or is directed to God.

Since it is no difficult task to make an act of purity of intention as we do by the morning offering and as we well might even more profitably do several other times during the day in our own words, the problem of continual or uninterrupted prayer is not a difficult one.

We can further step up our union with God through the frequent use of ejaculatory prayer or

aspirations. While we might well aim at saying a large number of them daily, still they should be said slowly, devoutly, and without any trace of mental strain. If a fewer will unite us more with God than a larger number of them, then let us say a fewer number since ultimately the objective we have in mind is a more perfect union with God.

Archbishop Goodier states further that *when we do what God wants us to do, when we are what God wants us to be, and when we imitate Christ in some particular action*, we are praying. Briefly, then, in his eyes both active and passive conformity or union with God's will, and imitation of Christ in a particular instance are examples of prayer. In any case here we either allow ourselves to be spiritually chiseled or sculptured by the Divine Sculptor as He wants it to be done or we ourselves do it; while this sculpturing is going on there is between us and God at least *an implicit psychological union* or a prayer. Faithful cooperation with grace is also another example of prayer for here there is an attending, listening, and active carrying out of the inspirations of the Holy Spirit which certainly implies an active union with Him or a prayer.

The problem then of continual prayer is certainly far from being an insuperable one, but given a little attention and effort on our part, it can be made part and parcel of ourselves and certainly an invaluable help for reaching Christian perfection.

f. Vocal Prayer

Some few remarks should be made here on vocal prayer over and above those made previously. We should say our vocal prayers slowly and devoutly for otherwise they become more or less parrotlike repetitions of words. This is especially true of the rosary which most Catholics make a practice of saying daily.

When we say the rosary we are supposed simultaneously to meditate upon the mystery concerned while reciting the *Our Father* and the *Hail Marys*. Here is involved the difficult psychological problem of doing two mental tasks at the same time. This however becomes relatively easy if while we say the *Hail Marys*, we focus our minds upon the persons in the mystery and direct these prayers to them. In a word, we direct the *Hail Marys* to the sacred persons as found in the setting of the mystery concerned.

g. Liturgical Prayer

"The sacred liturgy," says our Holy Father, Pope Pius XII, in his encyclical on the *Sacred Liturgy*, "is . . . the public worship which our Redeemer as Head of the Church renders to the Father, as well as the worship which the community of the faithful renders to its Founder, and through Him to the heavenly Father. It is, in short, the worship rendered by the Mystical Body of Christ in the entirety of its Head and members."

Liturgical prayer is then the prayer of the Mystical Body of Christ. It is a continuation of Christ's official

prayer upon this earth. Surely such prayer must be very precious in the eyes of God.

The members of the Third Orders of St. Francis, St. Dominic, and Mt. Carmel as well as those of the Sodality are obliged by rule to say daily either an Office of our Lady or the rosary.

Besides these members, others of the laity will be found today who recite at least part of some Office some time during the week. This is a very laudatory practice. Thus on Sunday when there is more leisure, it is very commendable to recite the Little Office of our Lady or some other office. On other days maybe an hour or two of one of these offices could be recited. Perhaps on certain days we might even omit our rosary and say one of these offices in its stead.

In reciting one of these offices we ought to carry out the Church's direction of saying it "worthily, with attention, and devotion," for being an act of worship of God, it should be done with care and fervor of spirit.

9. The Practice of Devotions.

In our endeavor to reach Christian perfection it is obvious that we should avail ourselves of all the helps possible. One of these great helps is the direct or intercessory power of those in heaven. There is unfortunately a good deal of misunderstanding of what *devotion to a saint* really means. Some very erroneously think it consists in such things as saying *certain* prayers daily in honor of that saint or in attending

novena services in honor of the saint. True these can be manifestations of devotion.

We get an idea of the true meaning of devotion if in place of the word *devotion* we use *devotedness*. Devotion to a saint means "*devotedness to that saint*" or "*being devoted to that saint.*"

From our experiences in life we know what a devoted mother and a devoted daughter are. A mother devoted to her family, works from morning to night for them, frequently thinks lovingly of each of them, and is vitally concerned about the welfare of each. A devoted daughter may put aside an attractive career for the sake of her parents if necessary.

Devotion then is devotedness—a personal and absorbing attachment towards another. Devotion to a saint obviously is a personal and absorbing attachment towards that saint. It is therefore far more than saying a few prayers in honor of that saint; it is a personal attachment for him, a love of his way of life, a great confidence in him, and a spontaneous recourse to him.

To what heavenly citizens should we be devoted? Obviously we cannot be devoted to all of them due to our limitations. We must therefore be selective. Our choice will be based upon such factors as the heavenly one's nearness to us, the degree of the saint's intercessory power, and our own personal attractions.

Obviously what we have said here about devotion to a saint, applies also and even more to the Blessed Trinity, the Sacred Heart, and our blessed Mother.

Our devotions will be directed either to these or some of the saints or both.

On the basis of nearness to us and power to help us, we certainly should be very devoted to the Three Divine Persons Who besides being the Source of all graces, deign to dwell within our souls as in a temple when we are in the state of grace.

All we need do is to turn inward to the cathedral of our souls to get in touch with this Source of all power and grace. What a compelling reason in this indwelling of Three Persons we have for leading a life of recollection and for frequently using ejaculatory prayer!

Similarly on the same basis we should be very devoted to our Blessed Lord, especially to Him in the Blessed Sacrament under the aspect of His Heart. Our whole being should as it were gravitate towards Him in this wondrous sacramental Presence and a real effort on our part should be made to visit Him frequently and at stated times.

Mary, His Mother, naturally has tremendous intercessory power with Him. She is called the Mediatrix of all graces. If we are spiritually wise, we will be very devoted to her, and with childlike simplicity turn to her as our mother in all our difficulties and problems. We will ask her to take charge of us and all the problems—both our own and those of others. It is difficult to see how we can completely bypass her spouse, St. Joseph, the patron of the universal Church. Surely he has great intercessory powers in heaven.

As for devotions to other saints, such determining factors as personal attractions for them and nearness to us, will be our guide. Most people will be devoted to their patron saint. Many will be attracted to a certain saint because of his way of life or his nationality. In any case, let us spare no effort to achieve such a deep devotion for the latter pays rich dividends.

10. Spiritual Reading

The value of spiritual reading does not consist so much in the amount of time we devote to it or in the fact that such time is well spent, but rather in its *great force* for changing and revolutionizing our entire life for good; in a word, in its *great formative* value. In the light of this we can more clearly understand the adage: "Tell me what you read and I will tell you what kind of a person you are." In writing to Timothy St. Paul bids him not to neglect reading.

Down the centuries men have been completely changed through the reading of good books. We are all more or less *hero-worshippers*. We need inspiration in our lives and one excellent way of getting it is by good reading. In the cases of St. Augustine of Hippo and St. Ignatius of Loyola spiritual reading along with powerful graces were the great initial means of spiritually revolutionizing their lives. That some time therefore should be spent daily in spiritual reading is so evident that we need not labor the point here. Spiritual reading is evidently then a matter of *counsel*.

As any other reading, spiritual reading affects both our *mind* and our *will*. It lifts up our mind, gives it new ideas and slants. Old ideas are refreshed or newly put (*non nova sed nove*). It is a great means of broadening our vision and knowledge. It helps us look at things through the minds of others; it gives us their appreciation of spiritual values.

Spiritual reading affects our *will* by giving the latter more enthusiasm, courage, and strength. As a result of spiritual reading, the will experiences not infrequently a new urge to be great and to undertake great things. Our will frequently enough becomes spiritually stagnant and inert. Spiritual reading is often just what is needs to be lifted out of its own inertia and put on the road of ambition, inspiration and zeal.

In reading spiritual books two questions immediately present themselves: 1. *what* should we read; and 2. *how* should we read?

In the matter of books, we ought to aim to read only the best since there is not enough time for reading even the best. Our first aim should be to read the great modern authors since besides giving what the older authors give, they will give us the latest results of modern scholarship. This is especially true of the lives of Christ. A list of such authors will include such names as Prat, Lagrange, Goodier, Boylan, Plus, Marmion, Tanqueray, Lehodey and Leen. In an appendix of Boylan's *This Tremendous Lover*, a fine

selective bibliography of great modern authors on various spiritual topics is given.

After we have finished reading most of the great modern authors, we can turn to the great spiritual writers of the last few centuries. Such names as St. Francis de Sales, St. Alphonsus Liguori, St. Paul of the Cross, St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross will be included here. We will also find selections from such earlier authors as St. Augustine, St. Bernard, St. Bonaventure and St. Thomas Aquinas very helpful. After this field of spiritual reading has been covered, we will have rather definite ideas on what we need and like.

Good solid spiritual books as the *Imitation of Christ* should be read *slowly, thoughtfully, and prayerfully*. Other lighter books as biographies may be read more rapidly. We might even scan or skip certain parts of them. It is sometimes very helpful to re-read—even several times—certain passages which have particularly struck us.

Finally let us never forget that the greatest of all books is the Bible, especially the New Testament. Let us make this our constant companion, be able to quote freely from it, and enjoy reading passages of it again and again.

11. The Lay Apostolate

Among the various definitions of perfection is that of St. Thomas who says equivalently that "perfection consists essentially in the love of God and

the love of our neighbor." Note especially that "the love of our neighbor" is a part of this definition. Now certainly one of the finest ways of loving our neighbor is in a spiritual and apostolic way.

It is clear, then, that one who is striving for perfection should lead an apostolic life. Furthermore, we are told by St. Augustine that "he who does not have zeal does not have love." Thus we can see that zeal is in a certain sense a measure of our love and perfection.

Recently our Holy Father, Pope Pius XII, gave further emphasis to the importance of an apostolic life when he wrote in his encyclical on the *Mystical Body* that, "we desire that all who claim the Church as their mother, should seriously consider that not only the sacred ministers but the other members as well of the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ *have the obligation of working hard and constantly for the upbuilding and increase of this Body*" (italics mine).

From this potent remark of our Holy Father, it is clear that we all have the duty to be concerned about the spiritual welfare of our neighbor and that the lay apostolate should be a matter of concern to anyone seriously intent upon perfection.

Recent Popes have emphasized the *importance* of Catholic Action which is, of course, nothing but a *participation* of the laity in the works of the hierarchy; it is nothing but the lay apostolate properly channeled by the Holy Father and the bishops.

In the light of Catholic Action we again see the

importance of the laity being vitally concerned about apostolic works.

What is the scope of this lay apostolate? We might well divide the lay apostolate into that which is practiced in *private* and that which is practiced by a *group* under a *church organization*.

In the matter of private apostolate, we will find that there will be a tremendous field open to one; it will include such activities as the teaching of catechism, almsgiving, visiting the sick and poor, disseminating Catholic reading material, working in hospitals and, in general, doing spiritual and corporal works of mercy. In the pursuit of this *private apostolate* let us not forget that perhaps our *greatest* work will be done by our good example. If we are a shining example of what the exemplary Catholic should be, we undoubtedly will inspire many to lead a good life and win many graces for other souls.

The second outlet for a layman in apostolic works is the *group apostolate*. The group apostolate is an apostolate which is carried on under the direction or guidance of some organization approved by the Church. Some of these organizations, by way of example, will be one or another of the various Third Orders, the Sodality, the Legion of Mary, or the St. Vincent de Paul Society. Each one of these organizations has various apostolic projects which are somewhat similar, at least in name, to the ones we mentioned under the private apostolate.

Let us not be deluded however in being taken up

with various outside parish projects to the neglect of important projects within the parish itself.

Here, briefly, we have explained and lay apostolate, the motives for undertaking it and its scope. It should be obvious to all that it is a very important factor in the achieving of Christian perfection.

12. Sanctification of Our Association With Others

Much of our life is spent in family, friendly, and business associations. It ought to be clear to us that all these associations should be made the means of getting nearer to God and of growing in perfection. We are all intended to be God's children and Christ's brothers and so these various associations should be along brotherly lines.

Such is clearly the mind of our Blessed Lord if we are to judge from His description of the Last Judgment in which He so emphasizes the important role of practicing charity and which He sums up in the following: "Amen I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these My least brethren, you did it to Me. . . . Amen I say to you, as long as you did not to one of these least, neither did you do it to Me" (*Matt.* 25, 40, 45).

Our *family* associations should be marked by mutual love, respect, cooperation, and self-sacrifice towards the immediate members of our family.

We ought to have a *real home spirit* and homelike atmosphere there. We should love our home and make it such that we naturally love to be there. Too

many nowadays make their homes more or less hotels or mere sleeping quarters. Neatness, an attractive outlay of furniture and fixtures, a nice lawn and flowers, and a garden should be part and parcel of every home.

Still in our home life there must be nothing that stands as an obstacle between us and God. Sometimes we find parents too attached to their children or brothers and sisters to one another with the result that compromises are made in the matter of following clearly indicated vocations or professions.

In our associations *with our friends* we ought to cultivate genuine, deep and lasting friendships since these latter are sources of great solace and strength. Respect and reverence for one another, however, should always prevail and there should be present no softness or other signs of sensuousness. True friendly associations are further marked by such things as cooperation, generosity and self-sacrifice.

Our *professional and business associations* with others is another kind of association that takes up much of our lives. In these associations let us be models in observing the laws of justice and charity. Professional men as doctors and lawyers should show charity towards the poor. Employers should provide for their employees good working conditions and a just wage; in turn, the employee should do an honest day's work and studiously avoid the commonly practiced "professional loafing on the job." This

latter is unjust and is really nothing but a refined form of stealing.

Courtesy, politeness, cooperation, honesty, thoughtfulness, and generosity should be always present in our business dealings. We ought to cultivate an innate sense of the *golden rule*.

If we are *in political life*, we should seek the good of those represented, be scrupulously honest about the use of their funds, avoid bribery and political bickering, and try on all occasions to be persons of principle regardless of the cost.

A few words should be said here about the wealthy. They must realize that they are not the absolute owners of their holdings but only the *custodians* thereof. With a true spirit of magnanimity let them try to use their wealth well by building and subsidizing such institutions as hospitals, schools, orphanages, old age homes, mission churches and other such noble causes.

13. The Annual Retreat And A Rule Of Life

Periodic checkups are found to be both necessary and important in such matters as our health and business. How much more necessary and important these checkups are in the spiritual life since greater things are at stake!

We make such a checkup when we make a retreat.

During a retreat as Pope Pius XI has remarked in his encyclical on retreats *Mens Nostrae*, one is given an opportunity of examining "whence he comes; and

whither he is going." Retreats besides "compel the mind of a man to examine more diligently and intently into all the things that he has thought, or said, or done; they assist the human faculties in a marvelous manner; so that the mind becomes accustomed, in this remarkable spiritual arena, to weigh things maturely and with even balance, the will acquires strength and firmness, the passions are restrained by the rule of counsel; the activities of human life, being in unison with the thought of the mind, are effectively conformed to the fixed standard of reason; and, lastly, the soul attains its native nobility and altitude" (*Amer. Ed.* p. 4).

From the whole tenor of this encyclical on retreats, one can readily see that Pope Pius XI wants as many as possible to make a retreat and especially a *closed* one, that is, in a retreat house.

What is a retreat? Is it a few days spent in attending Mass, saying the rosary, stations, and a multitude of other prayers each day thereof? True, at a retreat there will be daily Mass, the rosary, stations, and some other prayers. These however are not the essence of a retreat but aids to give it a suitable setting.

A retreat is a period of days spent in meditation and prayer upon the purpose of life, whether we have been achieving this purpose, what changes we must make in our life to achieve this purpose, and in general, what does God here and now want us to do.

Once we know these things about our life, we ought to state them succinctly in what is called "Our Rule of Life." This rule of life should be *definite*, *clear*, and *sufficiently* detailed to cover all the big matters of our life. Its purpose is similar to that of the rules of a religious order, or the rules of a Third Order or the rules of the Sodality. We don't want to let our life be exposed to whim or chance. Here for sake of illustration an imaginary rule of life will be set up.

MY RULE OF LIFE

1. Morning Offering *daily*; offering of all my prayers, works, joys and suffering; frequent renewal of my act of purity of intention daily.

2. Daily Mass and Holy Communion if at all possible; daily rosary or some office of our Lady; weekly confession.

3. Daily meditation for at least fifteen minutes. Some daily spiritual reading.

4. An endeavor to do: a) the Will of God in everything; and b) to do everything with great care, perfection and purity of motive.

5. An endeavor to see, seek, and love Christ in my fellowman; to see, seek, love God in all things and all things in God.

6. My lay apostolate will consist in such activities as giving out Catholic reading material, teaching catechism, visiting the sick, helping the pastors as occa-

sion arises, and being active in the apostolic activities of the Parish Sodality (or of my Third Order).

7. Frequent turning to the Blessed Trinity within me by use of ejaculatory prayer.

8. An endeavor to be very devoted to our Lady; to look upon her as my Mother and to consecrate myself completely to her.

9. Always to be courteous and cheerful—radiating as far as I can everywhere love for God and divine things.

10. Finally, loving abandonment to God's loving Providence in all things, in both good and adverse, as contradictions, affronts, humiliations, sickness, etc. I will practice one little mortification at every meal and I will offer up all the hardships and discomforts of my life as my part in our Lord's Passion for the conversion, sanctification and final perseverance of souls.



