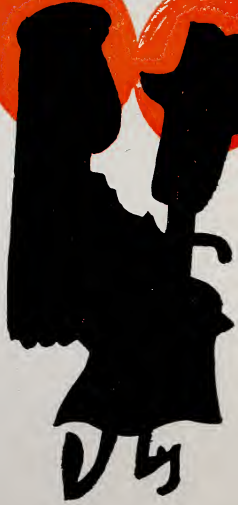
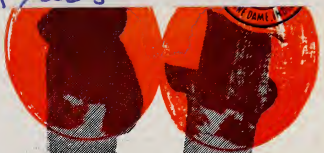


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SANCTITY MARRIED

For
The



by Donald J. Thorman



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by Donald J. Thorman



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✠ **Most Rev. Leo A. Pursley, D.D.**
Bishop of Fort Wayne

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Sanctity for the Married

"O.K., Father, you say marriage is a special vocation, that a man and his wife should become saints through their marriage? All right, I'm married. I've got five kids to prove it. My wife and I get along pretty well, but we're not ready for halos yet. So how do we use our marriage to become saints?"

This question, in one form or another, is coming at priests more often these days. Usually it will be phrased in a half-embarrassed, half-humorous way. Nevertheless, there are a great many Catholic couples who are seriously looking for the ways they can serve God better in their marriage. They almost hate to admit it, but they do want to know how they can use their marriage to become saints together.

Every marriage — like every person — is something distinct. It needs special advice, special treatment. This booklet cannot take the place of the direction which should come from a priest who knows the couple personally, but



it will offer some ideas about the basic means the husband and wife can use to become saints through their marriage.

We're aiming at heaven, at an everlasting happiness in the presence of God. During our life on earth, if we know what we're doing, we will build our own heaven. This means that *right now* we will try to know Christ better—we will try to live closer to Him—so we can be prepared for the face-to-face union with God we will enjoy in heaven.

If we are going to grow spiritually, we must work to develop particular virtues, and these virtues grow with those actions that nourish the love of God and the love of neighbor in our souls. We can grow in charity, for example, by being kind, understanding and generous to the new family that moved in next door. We can grow in humility and obedience by occasionally giving up our own wishes for the common good of the whole family.

But even a pagan will often do these things, simply because decency and self-respect demand actions of this kind. The couple who want to become saints must *supernaturalize* actions of this kind. They must raise these deeds above the natural plane by doing them to fulfill God's Will; they must root their spiritual lives in a frequent and worthy reception of the sacraments; they must use the changing of diapers, the checking of homework, the overtime hours at the office as means of growing in grace and the love of God.

At the same time, the husband and wife must work individually and must help each other to get rid of the faults and vices which hold them back from spiritual progress: the expressions of pride, of selfishness, the "cattiness" of the bridge session or of the *kaffeeklatch*, the husband's tendency to be indifferent to the needs and troubles of others.

Most of you already know the broad outline of what is necessary for spiritual growth. But now you are married; you have tied your life to that of another person in the closest union possible for human beings. What effect has this had

on your struggle to become a saint? How do marriage and family life change the ground rules of this effort for holiness?

For all of us—priest or layman, married or single—heaven is the goal. And Christ told us how to achieve that goal. Nevertheless, the particular circumstances of our lives, the kind of day-to-day routines we follow, do call for an application of Christ's teaching to the special problems and opportunities we face as individuals.

Therefore, we can talk about sanctity or spirituality for married couples because marriage and all that it involves can have a profound effect on our climb toward sanctity.

Start with Sex

Sex isn't the most important element in a marriage, but the sex-happy society in which we live almost forces us to think first of sex when we are considering any aspect of marriage—just as we are being forced to think of sex when we try to decide which toothpaste, soap or automobile to use.

It's true that the sex urge can raise some of the more obvious problems of married life, but it's also true that sex is a gift from God, that it is intended to help a husband and wife fit their married life to the plan God has in mind for it. A correct understanding of sex and the proper use of it can help a couple to become saints through their marriage.

Sex takes its meaning from marriage. Its primary purpose, of course, is that cooperation by which the husband and wife join their powers to the creative Will of God to bring new persons into the world. Through the intimacy of married love, the partners should grow in a deep love and respect for each other. It's important for the husband and wife to realize that the sex act is not merely something that is permitted to them because they have accepted the obligations of marriage. It is one important way in which they cooperate with God's Will. It should be an expression of love for God and for the marriage

partner—the human expression of the most intimate union of souls. Human love expressed in the use of the sex powers should lead to a deep spiritual love between husband and wife, and, in this way, it should draw them both up to a deeper love of God.

One way in which the single person shows his love of God is by completely abstaining from the use of his sexual powers. The married couple show their love for Him by the proper use of sex. This is the most obvious way in marriage which influences our struggle for holiness.

The begetting of children, the warmth and love of the marriage partners for each other, are positive acts by which the husband and wife can gain spiritual merit. They are all acts of virtue which, with the right intention, can increase the amount of grace in their souls. And the simple fact is that the amount of grace in our souls at the moment of death is going to determine the degree of sanctity we will have for all eternity.

The union of two persons in the holy use of sex should reflect the union of love which will bind the conscientious married couple to their Savior in heaven.

Children and Sanctity

Anyone who has watched a young child spill his cup of milk for the fourth time during one meal should understand that children, in one way or another, are also going to have an effect on the parents' efforts to become holy.

The child is the product of his parents' love for each other. When they nourish, protect, cherish, their child, they are serving their own love, as well as this new soul whom God has given into their care.

The child, even as an infant, can help his parents make their lives and their marriage successful. He can help them to become saints, but first the parents must see the child as part

of God's plan for their marriage—rather than as a cute, sticky, lovable nuisance.

One couple I knew took their marriage, their vocation, their sanctity seriously from the time they became engaged. During the first months after their wedding, they worked out a neatly wrapped plan of the way in which they would build their home on religious practices. They had time set aside each day for at least a little spiritual reading; they went to Mass and received the sacraments together regularly; they made a married couples' retreat together.

Then came the first baby.

That was the end of the well-planned program. As the family grew, the mother complained: "The children take so much time that I even have a hard time getting to Sunday Mass. If I'm not washing diapers, I'm wiping noses or preparing meals. I barely get the children dressed and out for the morning when they're back in for lunch. When the dishes are washed, I have a little time to get the house straightened out. Then it's time to begin supper. There's no such thing as a time to pray or read any more."

Later on, when these children are in school, the mother will find herself caught up in a round of activities. The father who formerly spent time getting the small children to bed will have to help with homework or devote time to hobbies and games—unless he is going to become just "that man who pays the bills."

Practically, this means that the spiritual life of the couple is affected. The husband, when he was single, or before the children were born, might have stopped by the parish church for a visit on his way home from work. He might have been able to attend weekday Mass frequently. The wife could get to a later Mass after her husband was off to work; she could find time for visits to the church, spiritual reading, acts of charity for the neighbors.

But the arrival of the children often puts an end to some

of these practices, it curtails others. Interrupted sleep frequently makes it difficult to get up in time for that early Mass. The stack of bills, which grows in proportion to the number of pairs of shoes that must be bought can discourage a husband from having breakfast downtown after Mass and Communion.

On the surface, these problems seem to discourage a vital spiritual life for the mother and father. This, of course, is not true. These difficulties simply mean that the married couple must adapt their spiritual growth to the circumstances of their life together. They must use different tools, different practices, to become saints.

Straight thinking on this matter is absolutely necessary if the husband and wife are to make any spiritual progress. Occasionally you run into a young married man or woman who, possibly without realizing it, resents the children God has given to them. This type of person can miss the ridiculous contradiction in his attitude as he regrets the roadblocks his growing family puts in the way of his spiritual growth. "I'm willing to make the sacrifice," he tells himself, "but it is one of the biggest sacrifices. Things were going so smoothly. I could have made so much progress . . . if I could have continued to concentrate on spiritual values."

Ridiculous!

Talk about "the grass being greener in the other pasture!" This is the same kind of self-delusion that makes a young religious in the novitiate believe that in six weeks he can get rid of all his vices, in another six weeks he can gain all the virtues . . . and then he'll be ready for canonization.

Actually, this husband or wife has the foolish notion that sanctity becomes more difficult for him because he is following God's Will for him. That's what a vocation is—whether it's a vocation to the priesthood or to marriage—the special kind of life in which God wants you to become a saint. Holiness doesn't come easily for anyone. If it seems to, it would be a

pretty good bet that it's not really holiness that you're talking about.

Caring for the 24-hour-a-day demands of small children is the way most parents are expected to practice the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. Slaving at a desk, a stove or an assembly line can be just as meritorious for the parent as the missionary's long hours devoted to the care of out-cast lepers. Children should not be obstacles to grace, any more than Jesus was an obstacle to the sanctity of Mary and Joseph; they should be the occasions for grace. If they are not, it is not the fault of the children; it's the fault of the parents who are feeling sorry for themselves and longing for a life to which God didn't call them.

Christ told us that whatsoever we do for the least of His brethren, we do for Him. Among these "least of His brethren" are our own children. When we feed and clothe the infant, we are serving Christ. When we instruct and discipline the growing child, we are serving Christ. When we advise the teen-ager and gradually make that painful recognition of his self-reliance, we are still serving Christ.

The parent who sees Christ in



his children and serves them unselfishly is opening the door of his soul to a divine grace and love. He is bringing his own will into conformity with the Will of God. This is becoming a saint.

Every state of life has its own particular virtues and opportunities for holiness, and the married state is no exception. Charity—love of God and neighbor—is essential for all, but the mother and father have special opportunities to develop this love in the sympathy, understanding and sacrifice which is demanded of them as part of the daily routine.

Sacrifice is the only language in which love can express itself, and sacrifice is at the core of marital and family life. Parents must learn to sacrifice their privacy, their time and their own wishes—constantly—for the common good of their family. In this sense, marriage is “a school of perfection.”

Children, simply by being themselves, offer their parents a continuing opportunity for growth in the virtues. Charity, because children sop up love like dry sponges; love is the ground in which the personality of a child can grow. Obedience, because the child’s ever-present demand for attention *right now* is a constant call for the parents to obey the obligations they accepted when they chose their vocation. Humility, because the parents are steadily called upon to subject their wishes, their ambitions, to the good of the family. And what better occasion for humility can you find than the understanding acceptance of the “taken for granted” attitude with which most children regard their parents and the sacrifices their parents make for them.

Also, the work of forming a child’s character is a constant reminder to the mother and father that they must re-examine their own characters. The father who hears his son begin to use some of the off-color expressions which he himself uses, or the mother who hears her teen-age daughter echoing the cutting gossip which she herself passed on to a neighbor over morning coffee will usually experience a severe jolt. This kind

of lesson will have more effect than half a dozen sermons on scandal.

Thus, the parents are under a constant pressure to put into their own lives the virtues they are trying to develop in their children.

The whole pattern of married life lends itself to a realistic, down-to-earth formula for growth in sanctity. The parents who live up to their obligations, for the right motive (to show their love of God) have the battle half-won.

Sanctity and the World

The concrete circumstances of spiritual growth are different for the married person and for the priest or religious. Sanctity for the husband or wife grows out of the home and family. For the priest or religious, it must grow in different surroundings (though the roots and the flower are the same).

There is another difference. The priest and religious have renounced the "world." Though they devote their lives to the sanctification of this world, they must not be *of it*. The married person is part of the world, and this fact, too, will make his approach to sanctity distinctive.

People in the apostolic movements are always talking about the difference between the temporal and spiritual order. What they mean is something like this: the priest or religious is interested in things like housing, education, civil rights legislation *primarily* because these things involve problems and opportunities for the salvation and sanctification of souls.

The layman is certainly interested in these issues for the same reason. But as a layman, who is as much a part of this world as anyone else, he is also interested because the political, social and economic institutions involved have a natural goodness of their own. Ultimately, like all things, they must be viewed as rungs on the ladder to God, but they can also be seen as having an intermediate goal of their own—simply to

make it possible for man to live a good, dignified human life in society. This latter view is what we mean by the *temporal common good*.

Looking at the temporal common good, the Catholic, the Protestant, the Jew, the Moslem can have the same attitude toward labor legislation or segregation—for the same reasons. It's not likely that this would be true if they were considering the problems from the viewpoint of the spiritual order, because their ideas of the ultimate goal would not be the same.

The world is not something evil. The religious withdraws from it, because he wants to get away from its distractions in order to concentrate more completely on the things of God. But the world, as God created it is good, and it is important for the husband and wife to realize that they can grow in sanctity by accepting their responsibility in the various social organizations to which they belong.

If labor for the salvation of souls is a spiritual work, so, too, is labor for the sanctification of human institutions a spiritual work.

With the right intention, the husband and wife who give themselves to the service of groups such as the P.T.A., a labor union, a professional association, a woman's civic organization are performing virtuous, spiritual acts.

Of course, this obligation and opportunity applies to the single person, too. But the married person, simply by being married, has committed himself to a life in the world, and he will be neglecting his obligations if he shuts himself up within the prefab walls of his duplex and acts as though nothing existed outside his home.

Any over-all plan for spiritual growth for lay people must give proper attention to the place of the world and the temporal order in God's plan for mankind.

Plan of Action

We need more than knowledge if we are going to become Christlike. It's true that, basically, the saint is the person who loves God completely. But this love isn't something passive. When we love a person, we express that love by doing things for the beloved. Love isn't something we obtain and then keep, like a television set. It's more like the ability to play the piano. A person hasn't mastered the piano simply because he can sit down and thump out the "Blue Danube." As a matter of fact a person never really "masters" the piano. As long as he lives he can go on improving. He never stands still. If he doesn't practice, he begins to lose his ability; if he does practice regularly, he's almost certain to improve.

Sanctity is something like this. We will never actually *achieve* sanctity in this life, because one of its essential elements is the constant effort to love God more, to develop the virtues more completely, to root out more thoroughly all attachments to sin and imperfection. This calls for a plan.

Though a rigid program is not necessary, any plan for sanctity must include these elements: the Liturgy, Mental Prayer, the Apostolate.

The liturgy should come first in our thinking. The Popes, as well as many spiritual writers, use terms like "first," "primary," "indispensable," when speaking of the liturgy as a source of sanctity.

Many Catholics are frightened off when the word "liturgy" is dropped into a discussion. It sounds abstract, mysterious. It suggests the need for a good deal of special, technical knowledge. Actually, though, the liturgy simply refers to the Mass and the sacraments, the Divine Office and the sacramentals. Every practicing Catholic participates in the liturgy, in one way or another, when he assists at Mass, when he receives the sacraments, when he uses the "official" prayers of the church. And for the Catholic, there is no spiritual growth unless he

does make use of these means. They are the primary means by which the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in our souls. They are the chief sources of the grace which will make us saints.

First, of course, is the Mass in which we come into direct contact with Christ. To the Mass we bring ourselves, our joys, hopes and sufferings. But we cannot stop there. We must also bring our family, our work, and the environment in which we live. We must join all these elements of our life to the sacrifice being offered by the priest at the altar.

And, if we are truly working to increase the love of God and the love of neighbor in our souls—if we are showing this love in our actions—we obtain from the Mass great blessings for our life here on earth. More importantly, our souls are deluged with sanctifying grace; our whole lives are lifted higher into the supernatural plane.

It's true that the Mass, like all sacraments, confers its grace on all who make use of it, as long as they're not in the state of sin. But it's also true that the person who has the proper attitude toward the Mass, who assists devoutly, and who makes a real effort to carry the Mass into his home, his office, his club, will receive much more grace than the indifferent person who goes to Mass only because he is obliged to.

The Mass should be the center of our lives. Not that all other things are unimportant. We can't neglect our other duties and obligations to concentrate exclusively on this sacrifice. It's better to think of the Mass as being the high point of our day, or of our week. Our work, leisure, association with others should be a preparation for our next Mass; they should also be the application of the sacrifices we offered up in our last Mass.

Personally, Christ is the Fruit of the Mass for each of us. In this sense the climax of the Sacrifice is the Communion. But on the social level, the fruit of the Mass is shown in the way we take Christ back into our family, our offices and our neighborhoods. Only through us can Christ become a living

part of our society and culture. The Mass is a great social act, aimed not only at the sanctification of the individuals, but at the sanctification of society as well.

In this way, Christ lives in the world through us. We are Christ's hands and feet. We're His representatives in the factory, the office, the kitchen. Instead of being visibly present Himself, He chooses to depend on us, to let us carry Him into every part of the world.

He has given you a job when even His chosen ones—His Bishops and priests—cannot perform. They cannot get into your factory or office or kitchen and daily make Christ live there. That is your job. Only you can do it.

To the Mass we bring everything; but from the Mass we also take Everything. Our life does not stop with the Holy Sacrifice; it begins there. Around the Mass our life becomes a continuous cycle: Preparation, the climax of the Communion, and the daily carrying of Christ into our homes, our work and our community.

For the husband and wife, this means that they are constantly preparing for Mass, and applying the graces of the Mass, as they go through the frequently monotonous routine of fulfilling their duties to each other and to their children.

One final word about the Mass—and this applies to prayer in general. You sometimes hear a person complain: "I don't *feel* that I'm getting anything out of it. My mind is distracted by worries about the budget and about the visitors who are coming next week. I'm there at Mass, and I try to assist devoutly, but I feel that I'm just fulfilling the obligation."

First, whenever we *try* to pray, we are praying. God knows how hard it is for us to keep our minds from flitting around to other interests. All He wants is a sincere effort. And, at times, this dry effort will bring more grace than the prayers we say when we feel that we're all wrapped up in a little pink cloud of devotion.

Secondly, *feeling* isn't important when we're talking about

prayer. Our “feelings” might be influenced by the sauerbraten and sour cream pie we had the night before. Prayer has to do with the will and the intellect—not the feelings.

And thirdly—though this comparison may sound irreverent—a taste for the supernatural life is like a taste for a rare, delicate, smelly cheese. Or, more appropriately, like a taste for classical music. Most people don’t start out by liking either. They have to work at cultivating their taste. In the same way, the more we pray, the more effort we put into our prayers, the more attractive and important the supernatural life will become for us.

The Other Sacraments

Like the Mass, the other sacraments and sacramentals are given to us by Christ and His Church so that we can use them to become saints. Aside from the Mass, the sacrament of Penance is the one we make use of most frequently.

We can talk about “making use” of Confession because this sacrament helps us to keep a check on our spiritual progress; it helps us to work steadily to root out our vices and habits of sin. But the forgiveness of our sins isn’t the only way in which Penance helps us along the road to sanctity. Even if we didn’t commit a deliberate venial sin for six months, regular confession every week, or at least every month, should be a part of our spiritual growth.

Two positive helps are involved in Confession.

The special grace of the sacrament is channeled directly at those sins and imperfections we mention in our confession—like water out of a firehose. For example, the mother who confesses that she was guilty of the sin of anger when she found pistachio ice cream stains on the new drapes in the living room, not only has the sin forgiven, she also receives a very special, a very powerful grace to avoid sins of anger in the future. (This, incidentally, is a good reason for mentioning sins of our past life in our confessions.) Though we may not be guilty of

committing them since our last confession, still we receive the special grace to overcome temptations to commit sins of this kind in the future.

Also, there is, of course, the tremendous increase of sanctifying grace that floods our souls whenever we receive any sacrament. We recognize this grace when we think of Holy Communion; we frequently forget it in thinking about the sacrament of Penance.

It's obvious, then, that the married couple should be particularly careful to mention the sins and offenses against their state in life so that they can receive the grace to live up to their obligations more perfectly.

Another point in any program aimed at sanctity is a daily examination of conscience. This doesn't have to take much time; it can be done in a couple of minutes. Nor should it be the kind of morbid scraping of conscience aimed at an exact tabulation of every offense committed during the day. An overly conscientious individual, in addition to being an object of pity, is also a pain in the neck for his confessor, his family and his friends.

No, this examination of conscience is a quick glance back over the day. It's a reminder of what we are trying to do with our lives, and a quick check to see if we moved forward or backward during the past twenty-four hours. When we see the results, we should know what resolutions to take for the next day.

Also, we should make use of the sacramentals in our program for sanctity through our marriage. The sacramentals are not the most important means of obtaining grace—these are the sacraments—but if we use the sacramentals properly, they will bring additional grace to our souls and enrich our family life with the symbolism of the liturgy. For example, many parents have the custom of sprinkling holy water on their children each night after they go to bed. Since the sacramentals represent the prayer of the universal Church, this act

amounts to the Church's asking God's blessing on the children each night. Keeping blessed palms in the home, the use of blessed candles at home shrines or altars, the use of statues, crucifixes, the rosary, the request for a blessing whenever a priest visits the home—all of these practices are expressions of faith, sources of grace, and a means of making religion something real and vital to your children.

For the same purposes, the parents should work, in a natural way, to establish family customs which give a spiritual tone to their homes. The saying of the family rosary is the most common practice. Some families observe the anniversary of the baptismal days, as well as the birthdays. Another beautiful practice is to have at least one member of the family at Mass each day, praying for the spiritual and temporal needs of the whole family.

Each home will develop its own religious customs, if the husband and wife make a serious effort to develop an atmosphere of reverence in themselves and in their children. In doing so, they are bringing God's blessing down on their home, they are fulfilling the obligation of their vocation, and they are making progress on their way to sanctity.

Mental Prayer

The term "mental prayer" suggests for many something like hypnotism, telepathy, yoga, or the Buddhist sitting cross-legged, lost in a trance, for hours. It's nothing of the kind, but it is one of the most basic requirements for any spiritual growth.

St. Alphonsus, one of the great teachers of the Church, once wrote: "It is morally impossible for him who neglects meditation to live without sins." And St. Teresa, a mystic who didn't believe in pulling punches, said: "He who neglects mental prayer needs not a devil to carry him to hell, but he brings him there with his own hands."

Because this subject is so important, I would like to recommend an excellent book on mental prayer, which was written for the layman of today. It's *Conversation with Christ*, written by Carmelite Father Peter-Thomas Rohrbach, and put out by Fides Publishers. Father Rohrbach speaks of mental prayer as being a conversation with Christ, a dialogue with a Friend who loves us.

He quotes St. Teresa as saying that "mental prayer is nothing else than an intimate friendship, a frequent heart-to-heart conversation with Him by Whom we know ourselves to be loved."

Bringing definitions down to practice, Father John Thomas, the Jesuit sociologist who specializes in family problems, says that for married persons at least five minutes a day devoted to talking with Christ is an essential for spiritual growth.

Success or failure in this practice depends on regularity. Start with a promise of just five minutes conversation with God each day, but hold to your promise! Don't even consider missing this conversation at the appointed time—any more than you would think of starting the day without brushing your teeth. The love of husband and wife for each other cannot grow if the man of the house spends all of his hours at home in his do-it-yourself shop in the basement, if the wife devotes her share of their hours together to the passionate pursuit of a television schedule. No more can our love of God grow without frequent, regular conversation with Him.

The ideal, of course, would be to assist at daily Mass and use the time before or after Mass for this conversation with Our Saviour. But if this is impossible, the wife might speak to God early in the morning when she is alone in the kitchen preparing breakfast for the family; the husband might do it while riding to work, or even while shaving. For most people the best time is early in the day; the afternoon and evening have a way of unraveling that makes it difficult to maintain any regular practice in these hours.

Keep your conversation simple; don't get wound up trying to talk like a prayer book. (Not even the people who write prayer books talk to God this way in their meditations.) God isn't impressed by flowery language.

You might start with an event from the life of Christ, reading a short passage from the New Testament. The story of Cana, for example, naturally suggests Christ's concern for the needs of married couples, the influence of His Mother in prompting Him to work His first miracle for the newlyweds, His mission of salvation which began with this first act of His public life.

Then talk to Christ. Thank Him for all that is good in your life; tell Him how you need His help to live up to your vocation in marriage; tell Him of your sorrow for the many times you've offended against your marriage and against the Christian life.

Try to end the conversation with a specific promise—an offering—just for this day. "Today I'll keep a civil tongue in my head when Joe forgets to hang up his coat and jacket." "Tonight I'll find some way of complimenting Mary on the evening meal—even if it is the second time this week for goulash." "Today I'll listen sympathetically to the fellow at the next desk—or to the neighbor—when they tell me what a hard life they are having."

This practice of mental prayer suggests two more important spiritual helps: spiritual reading and a spiritual director.

The spiritual director is a priest you go to regularly for help and advice in growing toward sanctity. He might be your confessor, but this isn't just a question of overcoming temptations and habits of sin. If you seek help along this line during your confession, it should be after you have received your penance and absolution. Before the priest closes the slide, just say, "Father, could I talk to you for a few minutes about my life." Unless it's the Saturday before Easter, he will be delighted to offer this kind of help. Tell him you don't want

to be satisfied with just avoiding serious sin; talk about your home and marriage; your prayer, your reading. He will help with questions. The goal is to give him enough information about yourself so he can tailor his advice to you as an individual.

It is a wonderful opportunity when husband and wife can find one spiritual director to whom they can go individually and together. Knowing both of them and their marriage, the priest is better able to offer the most profitable advice.

Spiritual reading feeds our prayer. When our reading is limited to baseball scores, weather predictions and the Hollywood gossip columns, our thoughts will remain on this level. Prayer is conversation with Christ; spiritual reading provides us with the thoughts that will be the subject matter of the conversation. Ten or 15 minutes a day will be enough—as long as we hold to it.

A word of warning, though, about “religious” reading, that is, reading aimed at priests, nuns and Brothers. Much of this writing assumes that the reader is trying to become a saint through the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.

But you’re not a Trappist or a Poor Clare—or even a Jesuit. Certainly the principles of sanctity are the same for you and for the monk, but the application is different. If you get up in the middle of the night, it’s not to chant the Office, it’s to feed the baby. However there might be just as much merit for you in walking the baby as there is for the Trappist who is shivering in the chapel at Gethsemani.

For example, *The Imitation of Christ*, is a spiritual classic. Properly understood and applied, it can be rich spiritual food for anyone. However, it simply isn’t aimed at the spiritual formation of lay people. At least as a start you should select books which are best fitted for your life.

Here you can get help from your spiritual director or from the book reviews published in the Catholic press. You might even take the drastic step of finding where the nearest Catholic

bookstore is located. The people who operate it will be able to offer help in recommending spiritual reading.

The Apostolate

The third prong of the threefold program is some form of apostolic work.

None of us can separate love of God from love of neighbor, and this love of neighbor should express itself in concern for his spiritual and temporal welfare. Often this concern will take some specific form.

For married couples, there are apostolic family groups: Cana and pre-Cana groups, Mr. and Mrs. Clubs, Cana Family Action and the Christian Family Movement. These aren't merely social groups aimed at giving the husband and wife an opportunity to get out of the house while feeling pious about it. Nor, heaven help us, should they be the occasion for prying into the lives of our neighbors!

Basically these groups work on two principles: First, we *are*, our brother's keeper. We have to think of our neighbor as something more than a convenient source of borrowed lawn tools. We can't be indifferent to the fact that Christ lives in him as truly as He dwells in the tabernacle; we must think in terms of his own vocation to be a saint.

Secondly, these groups recognize that institutions can make growth toward sanctity easier or more difficult, and institutions are influenced primarily by group action.

Take one example, the Christian Family Movement. Part of the biweekly meetings (usually a group of five or six couples) is given to a discussion of sections of the Gospel and the liturgy. By probing the texts together, these husbands and wives try to extract the meaning and apply it to their own lives.

The "social inquiry" part of the meeting takes a look at the problems which face the couples in their family life, in the neighborhood, in the community. There are many problems

which should concern them as Christians. Out of this discussion, the group decides on some small action which they will take before the next meeting. On the surface the actions might seem small and insignificant, but they make the family or its environment a little more of a Christian community. Progress is usually a matter of small steps.

These couples, by their efforts, by their preoccupation with Christian values, are opening their souls to the grace which will carry them along the road to sanctity. They are also making their all-important contribution to a Christian society, an effort which recent Popes have stressed as being essential.

Some individuals, some couples, will not be able to work in the organized apostolate. It may be a matter of personality or a question of circumstances. But they are not excused, for these reasons, from an obligation to look toward the apostolate. They can make a special effort to carry their weight by the apostolates of prayer and good example. They cannot be satisfied with living as though nothing existed outside their own home. Every person needs some form of social commitment, some kind of dedication. Christ was not talking to the apostles alone when he told them to carry His message into the whole world!

Heaven Can't Wait

For the husband and wife, sanctity is a tightly-woven fabric of personal, family and social elements. All the traditional means of spiritual growth must be used, and these must be applied and adapted to the special circumstances of family life in today's society.

The married couple must seek sanctity as individuals, as husband and wife, and as parents. Individually and as a family unit, they must use every opportunity open to them to grow in grace and to share in the Divine life.

They have already begun their eternal life, and—in spite of the opinion of a Tin Pan Alley tune—Heaven can't wait!

CATHOLIC FAMILY GROUPS

For additional material write to any of the groups listed below:

1. Family Life Bureau, NCWC,
1312 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington 5, D.C.
Director: Rev. John Knott.
(This is the Church's official national family life bureau.)
2. Christian Family Movement, Suite 2233,
111 West Monroe Street, Chicago 3, Illinois.
3. Cana Conference of Chicago, 720 North Rush Street,
Chicago 11, Illinois.
4. Cana Family Action, 94 Ridge St., Orange, New Jersey.
5. Catholic Marriage Club, 28 Deerfield Place,
Beacon, New York.
6. Family Communion Crusade, Barre, Massachusetts.
7. Family Federation of Catholic Action,
2200 Grand Avenue, St. Paul, Minnesota.
8. Holy Family Guilds Association, P.O. Box 5181,
Beacon Hill Station, San Antonio, Texas.
9. Holy Family Retreat Association, 24 W. Marshall St.,
Phoenix, Arizona.
10. Marriage and Family Apostolate, Box 4311,
Hamden, Connecticut.

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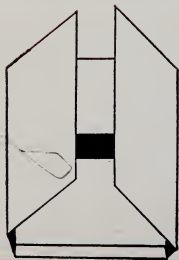
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