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**PROGRAM FOR
A PRACTICAL
CATHOLIC LIFE**

D. F. Miller



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**PROGRAM FOR A
PRACTICAL CATHOLIC LIFE**

by

Donald F. Miller, C.S.S.R.

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**LIGUORIAN PAMPHLETS
REDEMPTORIST FATHERS**

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Philosophy of Life

We hear a great deal nowadays about "philosophies of life." Translated into simple language, a philosophy of life is simply a unified collection of reasons or principles on which one tries to base the conduct of his life. Many have wrong principles or reasons in their philosophy of life. A genuine Catholic might describe his philosophy of life as follows:

1. I was created, like all other things that are, for the honor and glory of God. That is, God wished to reproduce some of His own perfections in me, that my existence might be like an everlasting evidence of His power, intelligence, and freedom, and therefore an honor to Him just as any work of art is honor and glory to the artist.

2. I was so created that I must seek happiness in the unlimited degree in which God made it possible for me. Unless I can attain this happiness, God will never be honored fully by my existence because I shall always be something less than He intended me to be—a poor evidence of His power, and a miserable image of His intelligence and love.

3. I can attain that happiness only by fidelity to the laws that He has made to govern my conduct in this world. It will not do for me to say that I must have happiness, and that therefore any means of attaining it must be lawful. God alone understands me fully, and God alone knows what will lead me to unlimited joy. He has made that known in the laws He imposed upon me.

4. In attaining happiness and thus giving honor to God as a perfect man, I shall at times have to undergo sacrifice and pain. Rejecting temptations, giving up dangerous friends, denying my flesh, submitting my will—these things cost sacrifice and pain. I do not mind, because God Who

commanded them knew what He was doing, and never acts cruelly or unwisely.

5. I am the only creature on earth to whom God gave the privilege of freely honoring Him by freely choosing the happiness He has intended for me. All other things He has forced to do His will, to represent His perfections, to attain the end He set for them. By this I know the meaning of the phrase that I am made to His own image and likeness, and just as He has freely made me, so I can freely fulfill or destroy His plan.

At least once a month every Catholic should make a meditation on these simple elements in the philosophy by which he should live. These truths make us feel the nobility of our nature, the folly of sin, the greatness of our destiny, the value of all our thoughts and words and deeds in the sight of Him who looks on us as the images of His own infinite being!

On the Good Intention

It is often said that religion should effect a transformation in the lives of men. This means, of course, that religion provides the motives through which sinful actions are avoided and good actions, like prayer and deeds of charity, etc., are performed. But it means more than that. Religion provides the means whereby all indifferent actions are transformed into expressions of love of God and means of merit for the soul. This is done by the use of the good intention—neglected by so many people:

1. God wants not only the direct service and homage of His children, as it is given in attending Mass and saying prayers, and receiving the Sacraments; He wants everything they do to be directed to Him. St. Paul makes this clear, when he says: Whether you eat or drink or whatever else you do, do all to the glory of God.

2. It is impossible for a person to be thinking constantly of God, and consciously directing to Him "all, whatsoever he does." God does not expect that. But He does ask that at intervals frequent enough to carry over from one to the other, a conscious intention be made by which every thought, word and deed is given to God.

3. There are certain opportune times for making such an intention. The most obviously so is the morning, when one awakens. At meal times is another such occasion. Before beginning one's daily work is another. Before entering a period of recreation is another. In a time of suffering or pain is another.

4. The expressions by which indifferent actions are transformed into prayers should be very simple, "All for Thee, O Lord," "O God, I give you all my thoughts, words, and deeds as expressions of my love," "May this day, or this action, or this recreation, be to the glory of my God."

The reward of habitually using the good intention is beyond conception. It covers the whole of one's life with the vesture of prayer; it obtains the special Providence and protection of God. It makes the avoidance of sin easy because it keeps the soul mindful that there are so many positive actions that can be pleasing to God. It takes away the feeling of futility that so many people experience because they have time for so few prayers. It makes holiness out of the ordinary stuff of the ordinary man's life—and God Himself asks for no more.

On Daily Mass

It is always a striking thing to see the out-of-proportion difference between the crowds who attend Mass on Sunday in Catholic churches and the paltry few who attend the same supreme religious service on week-days. We point to the former as a sign of the vigor of Catholicism in the land; we might refer to the emptiness of churches at Mass on week-days as significant of the fact that there are thousands of Catholics to whom the following truths seem meaningless:

1. Week-day Mass is a golden opportunity for beginning each day in a perfect manner; by offering up the Body and Blood of Christ for one's own past sins and for the sins of the world; by joining with millions of Christians of every age and nation in the most beautiful prayers that the tongue can utter; by being reminded that the essence of true religion is the cross, borne first by Christ and to be borne in turn by every one of His faithful followers.

2. Week-day Mass is not the difficult, laborious practice that the absence of many would seem to indicate. It requires one-half hour or less of one's time; for all but a few it can always be attended before the beginning of their daily toil; it does not tax one's mind or strength, unless, of course, one is leading an inordinate night-life that renders him unfit not only for Mass but for other daily duties as well. It seems so strange that actual believers in God and in Christ should begrudge a half hour out of each day's twenty-four to the sublime purpose of rendering appropriate gratitude, praise, petition and atonement to God.

3. Week-day Mass will bring about the sanctification of individuals and the salvation of the world, if the world is to be saved from its present decadence. The sanctification of an individual must begin with Calvary, and Calvary is represented in daily Mass. The salvation of the world de-

pend on Calvary, and not until the world returns to it in the form of the Mass will it be safe from wars, depressions, and man-made catastrophies.

Many people are wondering these days what they can do to save society and themselves from the terrors that are impending. One thing *you* can do, whether you be learned or ignorant, powerful or weak, great or small; go to Mass every morning and you will do more than can be accomplished by all the speeches and all the propaganda in the world.

How To Protect Faith

A great danger for those who have been Catholics from infancy is that they will forget the truth that, though God freely gave them the gift of faith, its preservation is dependent in large part on their own actions once they have grown to maturity. There are three things that may be called indispensable to the preservation of faith in a Catholic; if any one of them is neglected, faith may easily be lost.

1. The first means of preserving faith is that of prayer. All graces, in our adult lives, come to us through prayer. The greatest of all graces is the power to believe all that God has revealed. God may have given that power freely in baptism but He will not continue to uphold it in a person who does not pray. Experience confirms this abundantly; those who give up the practice of frequent prayer invariably find their faith weakening until at last it may be said to be lost.

2. The second means necessary to the preservation of faith is fidelity to what it commands. Deliberate, habitual, mortal sins frequently end in a loss of faith. It is not hard to understand why. Sin is a direct insult to Almighty God, on whose good pleasure faith depends. God is all-merciful, of course, and for one sin or even several sins does not

usually permit a person's faith to die. But when He is offended again and again, when a person's life is built around a habit of mortal sin, God frequently withdraws all His graces from that person, and the sad result is a loss of faith.

3. The third important means of preserving faith is the use of the mind to understand its reasonable foundations and its essential teachings. Faith is built upon reason, and the more a person studies its motives, its bases, its logical connections, its applications to life, the stronger will faith become. No matter what a person's education may be, he is bound to use his mind in some way, e.g., by listening to sermons, by reading, by asking questions, etc. Many people lose their faith simply through culpable ignorance; they give it up as something unreasonable because they have been too slothful or busy with other things to learn how unanswerably reasonable it is.

Hence, if anyone finds his faith becoming more or less shaky, it will be well for him to examine whether he is neglecting one of these means. Any one of them—even apart from the others—can gradually lead a Catholic into the sorry ranks of the hundreds of "fallen aways." And that means the loss of the highest gift God can ever give to man.

On Listening to Sermons

During Lent most Catholics have special opportunities for listening to sermons. Lenten lectures are given in most churches; they are held at convenient evening hours for all; they are usually on special topics not ordinarily dealt with thoroughly during the rest of the year. Every Catholic should use these opportunities for the following reasons:

1. Understanding is necessary for the right kind of faith. St. Paul commands all: Have a reason for the faith that is in you. To have a reason for faith means to understand the logical foundations of the true faith, to comprehend how

perfectly all its doctrines form one unified whole, to know how these truths must be reflected in the actions of daily life. Some Catholics go through life with wrong notions of some of the teachings of their faith; with ignorance of many of its necessary doctrines; with rebellion against some of its laws because they are grossly uninformed of the necessity of observing them. Listening to sermons is one of the best means of removing error and ignorance. If "faith comes by hearing," as Holy Scripture says, then it is also true that faith is improved and increased "by hearing."

2. Another reason for attending sermons, especially during Lent, is that special graces are attached to the practice. These graces come through the words of the priest, who is officially commissioned by Christ through His Church to preach and instruct, and through the humble submission of the hearer to the word of God. These graces are received no matter what the ability or eloquence of the preacher may be. Some Catholics will listen to a sermon only if the preacher has a wide reputation, or if he is especially gifted in the art of public speaking. Others look only for the type of preacher who is entertaining. Where there is a possible choice, of course, they are free to attend those sermons that they think will do them the most good. But even when a speaker is not particularly gifted or not up to the average, Catholics should attend sermons for the graces and instruction that are always received.

An excellent Lenten resolution for this year would therefore be that of determining to attend as many extra sermons as possible. If twice a week evening services are conducted with special sermons, it would be incalculably worth while to make regular attendance at all of them the rule for Lent.

On Spiritual Reading

An indispensable means of promoting one's spiritual welfare is spiritual reading. Founders of religious orders lay down strict rules for daily spiritual reading for all their subjects; every director of souls has emphasized its importance in the daily life of those who wish to be holy; self-knowledge and common sense confirm authorities in this matter.

1. Spiritual reading is that kind of reading which instructs the mind so that it may know more and more about God, and inflames the will so that it may desire to do His will. Therefore it may be the reading of the Bible, or of the lives of saints, or of treatises on the virtues, or on the vices, or on human nature in its relation to God.

2. The necessity of spiritual reading springs from the truth that God wants every man to use his own mental faculties for learning those things that are necessary and useful for salvation. It is a fact that nothing so stimulates the mind to think out the meaning of life and man's purpose therein as frequent spiritual reading. The reading of the Gospels forces us to think of God's intimate relationship to our souls; the reading of lives of the saints helps us to understand how the principles of Christ are to be applied; the reading of studies of human nature and virtue and vice inevitably assists us to plan our spiritual careers.

3. Such reading is especially necessary when we are surrounded by powerful worldly interests and distractions as all are today. It was never more true than today that "with desolation is the land made desolate because there is no man who thinketh in his heart." Going to shows, listening to radio programs, taking part in idle conversations, reading newspapers and magazines and novels, do not require much "thinking," and reveal very little of importance to us. Spir-

itual reading offsets the din that a pagan world creates in our ears.

4. Like everything else that is useful and necessary for salvation, spiritual reading must be made a habit and given a definite place in one's daily routine. "I'm too busy," is no excuse, because it is usually based on unimportant affairs. "I'm too lazy" is not an excuse because it is just as easy to say "I won't be lazy." "I'm too ignorant" is just a subterfuge, because there are books for every degree of intelligence and education, and they are the means whereby ignorance is destroyed.

The Right Attitude toward Prayer

It can be said with truth that the most important thing in every human being's life is prayer. Yet for many people, distracted by the many activities going on about them, busy with the material tasks of every day living, prayer is the first thing that is put off, forgotten, sometimes entirely neglected for long periods of time. It would not be so if they would make personal convictions out of the three following truths about prayer:

1. *Prayer is a privilege.* It is universally thought to be a privilege to talk to famous men and women, such as leaders of industry, stage and screen stars, heads of nations, geniuses in any field, even though nothing is gained from such contacts other than a brief gratification of vanity. But prayer means talking with God, the King of Kings, the Creator of all things, the wisest and most loving of all fathers, and it means talking with Him with the certain knowledge that He listens and can and will do something for the one praying. No privilege of human contact can faintly compare with the privilege of talking thus with God.

2. *Prayer is a necessity.* Nothing worthwhile in life can be done without prayer, "Without Me," said Christ, "you

can do nothing," but He also said that through the medium of prayer in His name a person would be able to accomplish anything. On the one hand, strength against evil, the power to do good, the elevation of one's nature and the beatific vision in heaven, are gifts that only God can give; on the other hand He has promised to give them in response to prayer. All men want to be good and want to be happy; neither goal can be attained without prayer.

3. *Prayer is infallible.* There is no such thing as a wasted prayer, if it is rightly said. "Ask," said Christ, "and you shall receive." For the intelligent and humble Christian, this does not mean that the exact thing asked for must always be given in the exact measure asked for; it does mean that God answers every prayer, using His divine wisdom and infinite love to measure out the right kind of answer.

These are the reasons why it is the most foolish thing in the world to make prayer secondary or unimportant in life, or to neglect it in favor of action, recreation, sleep etc. Morning and night prayers, prayers before and after meals, prayer in time of temptation or of spiritual or material need, should be considered the most important actions of every day.

How To Be a Saint

The Catholic Church has a long process of investigation that she uses in examining the lives of those whose names, after their death, are proposed to her for beatification. The first part of the process concerns itself with the question of whether the person practiced heroic virtue in life. All Christians can be reminded of what to strive for, and what to make resolutions about, by considering the norms applied to proposed candidates for the honors of sainthood. These are the norms:

1. *Did the person perform virtuous actions that were above the ordinary, not common to the majority of men?*

Such actions would be accepting martyrdom for the faith or for some virtue; practicing even small virtues at great expense of comfort, convenience, gain; adopting forms of penance for sinners that average Christians would not consider, etc.

2. *Did the person perform such virtuous actions with great promptitude and ease?* The question here is whether the higher nature, through the grace of God, had so controlled and dominated the lower nature, that the latter was not permitted to raise a fuss, or to complain, or to interfere, when there was a question of practicing virtue even under difficulty.

3. *Did the person perform such virtuous actions with a certain supernatural joy?* This is the answer to the wrong notion of some people that saints are sad and morose. They cannot be saints unless they are cheerful and joyous in their service of God even in the midst of trial.

4. *Did the person perform such actions with promptitude and joy, not once, but habitually?* One heroic act of virtue does not make a saint, unless it be the final heroic act of accepting martyrdom cheerfully. Outside of that, heroic virtue consists of continuous devotion to duty resulting from acquired habits of doing God's will under any and all circumstances.

Human nature by itself cannot fulfill these requirements of sanctity. But the grace of God makes them possible to all who begin by awakening strong desires of sanctity in their hearts, who make use of the many means of grace God has provided, and who are determined to love God more than anything in the world.

The Most Important Devotion

Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is the most important of all the devotions that can be practiced by Christians. It will be noticed that in every apparition of Our Lord or His Blessed Mother that has occurred since Christ left the earth, some fundamental truth that He revealed in his lifetime is merely stressed in dramatic fashion once more. Devotion to the Sacred Heart, as revealed to St. Margaret Mary, merely stresses man's duty of loving God, and the already known but oft-forgotten manner in which this love must be given.

1. The appeal of the Sacred Heart is a repetition of Our Lord's words as recorded in the Gospel: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul, with all thy mind and all thy will. This is the first and the greatest commandment." It is a re-emphasizing of the words of St. Paul: "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as tinkling cymbals and as sounding brass. If I have all faith . . . if I give all my goods to the poor . . . if I deliver my body to be burned . . . and have not charity (the love of God), it shall profit me nothing."

2. The appeal of the Sacred Heart is a reminder that the love of man for God must be inspired and must grow out of thoughts of the love of God for man as manifested in the passion and death of Christ. That is why He showed His heart encircled with thorns and pierced with a lance—that these might be reminders of all the sufferings of His passion. No one can seriously believe that the Son of God suffered and died for him, and bore the agony, the scourging, the crowning with thorns, the heavy cross, for him, without being moved to love God. No one can meditate on any feature of the passion of the Son of God without growing in love for God.

3. The appeal of the Sacred Heart includes a reminder of the truth long before made known by Him, that the love of man for God must be manifested in the frequent and worthy reception of Holy Communion. He had said: "He that eateth me shall live by me forever." That statement offers a test of the love of any man for God, because love is fictitious unless it wills to stay with the one beloved forever. In the apparition of His Sacred Heart, He stresses the frequent reception of Holy Communion, not only as a manifestation of love but as a means of atonement for those who refuse to love God.

Thus a man's principal duties in life are fulfilled in devotion to the Sacred Heart. By that he truly loves God; he grows in love through being reminded of Christ's suffering for him; and he expresses his love through frequent reception of Holy Communion. "Do this," Christ can say, "and thou shalt live."

Why We Need Mary

The only sufficient answer to the question of why devotion to the mother of Christ is so universal and essential a part of Catholic Christianity is that, according to the plan of God, we need her in some way for the task of working out our salvation. The sense of need for Mary must be the basis on which practices of devotion to her are built up in the life of the individual Christian. It can be intensified by these considerations:

1. We need Mary because God gave her to us in the intimate relationship of mother to child, and God does nothing that is foolish or unnecessary or in vain. No Catholic believes that God needed Mary or that He was bound to be dependent on her in any way. But the fact that God chose to come into the world through her, and to permit her to help Him in working for our redemption and salvation, is

proof that God foresaw our need of her, and intended that we rely on her help as He chose to do so freely Himself.

2. We need Mary, according to God's chosen plan, because we are made up of body and soul, and we therefore need not only a knowledge of virtue and God's commandments that can be confined to the soul, but also an image and example of virtue that will appeal even to the senses of our bodies. Mary was created and made our mother to provide us with the living picture of one human being like us, who through God's grace did perfectly all the things God asks us to do. God knew that a virtuous human being, especially one with the title of mother over us, would be far more effective in inducing us to practice virtue than a mere definition of virtue.

3. We need Mary, according to God's plan, because one of the lingering effects of original sin, and an inevitable effect of actual sin, in us is a tendency to discouragement and even despair. As God created the instinctive love of every mother to be a source of encouragement and confidence to her children, so He created Mary and made her our spiritual mother to counteract every tendency toward discouragement that might arise in us. We instinctively feel that if Mary will offer our prayers to her Son, or if Mary will pray to Him for us, we shall have nothing to fear. God created that instinct in us as He created Mary to achieve its purpose.

Objections to devotion to Mary are often built on the mistaken notion that such devotion is contrary to the truth that God is all-powerful and perfectly independent of the help of any creature. That truth remains intact, and devotion to Mary flourishes, when it is remembered that God gave her to men, not because He needed her, but because they would need her as they would need many other things that He freely gave them.

How To Make a Meditation

Meditation is thoughtful prayer. Anyone can meditate, old or young, educated or illiterate, sick or well.

Any place will do for a meditation. Best, a church or chapel, before the Blessed Sacrament. But also in one's room, or before a hearth-fire, or even in the kitchen.

It is all in knowing what to do, and a little practice. Here are the simple steps in the process:

1. Try to recognize the presence and companionship of God. Ask Him, then, to help and inspire you during these moments of prayer.

2. Read a paragraph or a page from a good spiritual book—one that appeals to you. The Gospels, the Imitation of Christ, any Life of Our Lord, any work on the Christian virtues, etc.

3. Close the book and think out the meaning of what you have read. Concentrate on some particular truth it reveals. Think of it as if God were telling it to you, enlarging on it, illustrating it, revealing it in His human life.

4. Apply the truth to your own life. Is it something new to you? Something you knew before, but seldom thought about? Something you thought about, but seldom applied? Something you could practice today or tomorrow?

5. Speak to God of your need in this matter. Ask Him to help you. Tell Him you love Him and want to know His Will, to remember it, to fulfill it. Tell Him especially you will try to put into practice the truth or virtue or lesson that has come to you from your meditation.

6. Put your intention into the form of a simple resolution. Repeat it several times prayerfully, as an act of love for

God. Ask the Mother of God, your patron saint, and your Guardian Angel to help you.

Such is the simple process of making a meditation. It may be made in any length of time—five minutes, fifteen minutes, half an hour. If you are distracted at any point unconsciously, that does not spoil your meditation.

On Sins of Speech

There are many different sins committed in speech. Some are against the 6th and 8th commandments of God, and some are involved in sins of anger against the 5th commandment. However, confused ideas are most common in regard to sins against the 2nd commandment. The words "cursing," "swearing," "blaspheming," "profanity," are used wrongly so often that clear statements of what each one means may be helpful.

1. Swearing means calling upon God to witness to the truth of what one is stating or promising. In serious matters, such as court trials, swearing is legitimate and meritorious, as when the witness swears he will tell the truth. To swear "by God" or holy things in trivial matters of conversation is a venial sin of disrespect to God.

2. Perjury is false swearing; calling upon God to attest the truth of what we know is a lie or a false promise. Perjury, whether in a judicial court or in private affairs, is a mortal sin.

3. Blasphemy is any derogatory or contumelious statement of imprecation about God or holy things. To say deliberately and consciously that God is unjust or cruel or a tyrant; that He is unworthy of love or service; to scoff at saints or the Sacraments or the Mass—these are forms of blasphemy. It is always a mortal sin.

4. Cursing, in its most common form, means expressing a desire for the damnation of a fellow human being. If this desire is real and intended, to curse a human being whether through the words, "May God condemn you to hell or damn you" or in any other form is a mortal sin; it is a serious offense against charity, and a form of blasphemy as attributing to God a desire for a soul's damnation. Cursing inanimate or irrational things is always a venial sin of irreverence to God.

5. Profanity, irreverence in speech, etc., means the light and irreverent use of God's name or of the name of Jesus, or of the names of saints and holy things, in anger or in ordinary conversation. It means using the holy names as one might use slang. It is always a venial sin.

The habit of swearing or cursing or of using profanity is usually a sign that religion means very little to the one who has allowed himself to acquire such habits. Even though the majority of the offenses committed in conversation are venial sins, still those who misuse the holy names will meet with a sad awakening when they stand face to face with the all-holy God whose love they have professed, but whose Name they have so frequently derided.

On Temptation

Ignorance of the meaning of temptation is often the cause of sorrow and discouragement, and not infrequently leads to deliberate sins that could otherwise easily be avoided. When a person understands the what and why of temptation, he is fortified for the battles of life, and not unduly disturbed by even severe attacks of temptation. Hence this instruction.

1. A temptation is not a sin. It is an invitation to sin. It may be a bad thought just arisen in the mind, or an evil desire just awakening in the soul, or an inclination to some-

thing wrong first felt in the senses, or a tendency to satisfy curiosity attacking the eyes or the ears at the chance sight or sound of something evil. As such it is not a sin. It is then an invitation to think deliberately, to desire willingly, to enjoy fully, to see and hear all despite sin. Only he who accepts the invitation involved in these things after he is conscious of their sinfulness, changes a temptation into a sin.

2. Temptations are the lot of all men because they are the battleground on which God and heaven are won. "The Kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away," said our Lord. In other words, we have to earn heaven, and the chance to earn it comes through temptation. And whether the temptations are against chastity or charity or humility or justice or obedience or any other virtue, they are all equal opportunities for gaining merit and climbing nearer to heaven.

3. To gain merit from temptation, the observance of two simple rules is sufficient. As soon as a temptation is recognized, one should 1) make an act of the will rejecting the evil offered, which is best done by a positive act of love of God or any little prayer. Utterance of the holy names of Jesus and Mary is sure proof that a temptation has been rejected by the will; 2) place the external faculties under control; i.e., insist that they take no part in answering the invitation to sin. If these two conditions are fulfilled, temptations no matter how violent or prolonged never become sins.

4. Three consoling truths are worth remembering about temptation: 1) No temptation that is not deliberately sought is a sin. 2) No temptation is ever allowed to attack a person that is beyond his strength to overcome. 3) Every temptation is a means of gaining merit and favor from God that could not otherwise have been gained.

Whoever understands these truths and is ready to apply them, has "prepared his soul for temptation." They are all contained in the word of our Lord to one of His saints, who complained to Him saying: "Where wert Thou when I was so sorely tried by evil?" He answered: "During all that time I was in the midst of your heart."

On Human Respect

Human respect is a vice that flourishes most luxuriously in a democratic country like ours. Where all men are considered in theory, equal, it is natural that the principles and practices that are current and popular exert a powerful influence over the individual who does not want to be different from his fellows. To succumb to that influence is to lose one's individuality and very probably one's soul. It is necessary, therefore, to recognize its meaning and appeal.

1. Human respect means that excessive regard for the opinion of men that leads one to act contrary to the principles of faith or Christian morality. It is slavish subservience to man-made standards of conduct; it is a cowardly fear of being criticized by men for something that in itself is good and pleasing to God.

2. Human respect may influence one in a negative way; i.e., may lead to sins of omission and to the neglect of practices that one knows are necessary or good. The man who misses Mass because he is in the company of non-Catholics and does not want them to remark about his religious loyalty is a slave of human respect. The man who doesn't admit his faith when it is being criticized or condemned, or who doesn't pray or attend Catholic devotions because doing so would make him different from the crowd, has a soul enslaved by human respect.

3. Human respect often influences men in positive ways. There are those who take part in unclean conversations and smutty story telling only because this is a means of keeping in well with a certain crowd. A large percentage of those who practice contraception to limit their families are influenced solely by human respect; they have a craven fear of what others think and say.

4. The surest remedy for human respect is a realistic meditation on the last judgment. There each man and woman will be judged not by the standards of the age in which they lived, but by the immutable principles of the law of God. There the craven and the coward, the slave and the weakling, who has knowingly rejected God and served men, will cry out for the mountains to cover him; and the company of all his ilk will not make less bitter his shame.

There is no one who is free from the danger of human respect today. The society of equals in an irreligious land tends to create and foster its own principles and standards of conduct and morality; it tends to ostracize those who refuse to conform. The individual Catholic must be willing to be ostracized; willing to be criticized; willing to be different in his loyalty to the divine truth that has been revealed.

On Ideals

Much has been written on ideals. Some of it is theoretical, verbose, impractical. Ideals should play a practical part in a person's progress toward good—towards perfection. They should be the goal toward which resolutions are directed. For all this their meaning needs to be simplified.

1. An ideal is one's concept of what is the highest, best, noblest degree of any quality proper to and desirable for man. It must, of course, have truth; it must be the concept of "something truly proper and desirable for men." A high

degree of skill and cunning at thievery might be made an ideal by a man—but it would be a false ideal—as representing something not proper to nor desirable for man, as he has been created by God.

2. From this it is clear that ideals require knowledge. Without study and knowledge of what is good for one, all sorts of false ideals will be formed and pursued. He who has never learned by self-examination nor been taught the meaning and necessity and high value of chastity will not be able to form an ideal of that virtue; he may even be led to form the false ideal of unlimited self-indulgence in sensuality.

3. After true ideals have been formed and clarified, they must be remembered. It is hard to remember an ideal in the abstract; it is difficult to be moved simply by the definition of the highest degree of a certain quality. Therefore, ideals should be associated with images; with persons; with models and examples. The saints are the embodiments of ideals; St. Paul, for example, puts flesh and blood on the ideals of courage and zeal; St. John the Evangelist on that of love of God; St. Mary Magdalen on that of true repentance, etc.

4. Christ became man, for one of many reasons, to make ideals live and appeal in the flesh and blood of His human personality. The commandments and counsels are ideals in the abstract; Christ is their living image. "Love of enemies" is a Christian ideal; Christ forgiving His enemies on the cross is a personified and therefore powerful ideal. The Mother of Christ is the embodiment of many ideals.

When true ideals have been formed, associated with images and persons and examples, and remembered, it is only left to strive and keep on striving to make them exist not only in one's thought but in one's character and soul. No dis-

couragement, nor lapses, nor failures should be allowed to put an end to "striving." Resolving is a form of striving; resolve on the ideals you need.

On Examination of Conscience

Lent, as everyone knows, and as the Church reiterates in her daily prayers, is the time for the removal of sin and affection for sin from the soul. To accomplish this, a daily examination of conscience is almost indispensable. Every religious community makes a daily examination of conscience as a part of the ordinary routine; lay people, however, often think of the practice as only connected with the actual preparation for confession. Many will be glad to learn how it can and should be a part of one's daily spiritual life. The rules are as follows:

1. Choose a definite time for the examination. Perhaps during a regularly made visit to a church each day. Perhaps shortly before the evening meal in the home. Or, if at no other time, at least before retiring.

2. Begin the examination always with a prayer. A prayer of thanks for graces received and a prayer of petition for help in the work of self-searching at hand.

3. Decide on a virtue that is needed, and make it the subject of the examination for a week or even a month at a time. This will not make for any lop-sided effect in seeking to perfect self, because the attainment of any one virtue will always carry along gradual development in all the others. Begin, of course, with the outstanding need of the soul.

4. Make the actual examination according to these successive points:

a. My outward conduct in regard to this virtue. For example if the virtue needed be love of neighbor, search out faults in word, action or omission.

b. My inward tendencies against the same. For example, against charity, feelings of envy, or unchecked inward anger, or rash judgment, etc.

c. My particular needs with regard to the positive manner of practicing this virtue. It is helpful here to try to represent the virtue as illustrated in the character and actions of Christ, and to try to prepare to act as he did when parallel circumstances arise.

5. Close always with *a*) an act of sorrow; *b*) a strong but simple resolution; *c*) a prayer to Our Lord and His Blessed Mother and some favorite saint for help to carry it out.

Such an examination of conscience need not take long, and would show definite results in a short time. Self-discipline and earnest concentration will be needed at first; but gradually the practice will weave itself sweetly and naturally into the pattern of daily life.

Queries about Confession

There are certain questions concerning the sacrament of confession that are asked repeatedly both by Catholics trained in their faith from childhood and by converts who have recently been introduced into its consoling practices. Some of the most common of these questions are answered here:

1. Must I not go to confession before each reception of Holy Communion? It is amazing how many Catholics there are who ask this question under the impression that the answer has to be in the affirmative. The right answer is

No. Any Catholic may receive Holy Communion any day on which he is not conscious of having committed a mortal sin since his last good confession.

2. If I have committed a deliberate venial sin since my last Communion, must I not go to confession before receiving Communion again? No. It is good to go to confession to have venial sins forgiven before Communion, but it is neither necessary nor commanded. And no one should stay away from Communion for the sole reason that he is conscious of venial sins and has no opportunity of confession. A good interior act of sorrow for such sins is sufficient to make one worthy of Communion.

3. If several days or a week or two have elapsed since my last Communion, must I not then go to confession before receiving again? Time has nothing to do with this matter. You are bound to go to confession before Communion only if you are conscious of a deliberate mortal sin.

4. How often should one go to confession who receives Communion daily, or weekly or frequently? It is good to go to confession at least every three to four weeks, at best every week, if one receives Communion often. But failure to do so, or lack of opportunity to do so, need not keep one from Communion, so long as one remains in the state of grace.

5. Why should I go to confession often if I seldom have even deliberate venial sins to tell? Because confession is a sacrament that, besides forgiving sins, also gives strength against future sins, even if one has only a sin of one's past life to tell.

It is a grave mistake for Catholics to speak or act contrary to any of the above answers to questions about confession.

Too often Communion is neglected for a false or foolish reason. Both confession and Communion have a part to play in every Catholic life. What that part is should be clearly known.

On Venial Sin

As Lent progresses and the soul finds it has learned more and more of the lesson of God's love for mankind, there should gradually revive a hatred not only of serious sin, but light faults as well! To promote this desirable effect, venial sin may be made the subject of salutary meditation. These points in particular should be pondered:

1. Venial sins are the stepping stones to mortal. No sinner, it is reasonable to assume, ever started his career of rebellion by a serious offence against God. The way was gradually prepared for the final tragic act of enmity by smaller faults gradually increasing in boldness and in number. Judas is an example of this—beginning as he did with interior envy and a series of petty thefts—ending in the very betrayal of his Lord.

2. Venial sin has a great deal to do with the Passion and Death of Our Blessed Lord. Venial sins are the slights and hurts dealt out by those who call themselves friends. Sometimes these things hurt almost more than the scourgings and taunts of declared enemies; and there can be no doubt whatsoever that Our Lord felt them keenly throughout His sufferings.

3. Venial sins are the destroyers of character and nobility of soul. Pagans often present to the world a more amiable character simply because they avoid for natural reasons those petty faults and sins that, despite both natural and supernatural reasons, are not avoided by Christians. Gossiping, lying, breaking out in anger, using profanity—these

venial sins mar the character of Christians and frequently give more scandal and disedification than certain more serious sins which the pagan world has not learned to recognize.

4. Venial sin will demand atonement—and the cleansing fires of Purgatory will teach the soul—if it does not learn by merit and effort here—its real meaning in the sight of God. “To the last farthing” will our account be rendered and when the conscious little faults mount into the hundreds and thousands—that last farthing will be long in being paid!

Lent should not pass away without a serious attack upon our light faults. The love of the Redeemer will inspire it, and His help will assist it to a successful conclusion. Start by singling out the fault most frequently committed; allow no day to pass without at least a few moments' self-examination on the matter; and designate some small penance to be assumed for every conscious violation. This will bring results.

On Communion for the Sick

One of the unkindest omissions on the part of the family and relatives of seriously sick Catholics is not to arrange for them an opportunity to receive the Sacraments. When one is either seriously ill or bed-ridden for a long period of time, the priest should be informed and requested to visit the sick person and administer the Sacraments if possible. When the priest comes to the house with the Blessed Sacrament, these rules should be followed:

1. Before the priest arrives, the following things should be prepared beside the sick person's bed; a small table covered with a white cloth. On the table a crucifix, two (or at least one) blessed candles, a small glass half filled with water, and a teaspoon. If Extreme Unction is to be admin-

istered, a small wad of cotton should be added. The table should be free of other articles.

2. When the priest arrives, he should be met at the door by a member of the family holding one of the lighted blessed candles, who should kneel as the priest enters and then lead the way to the sick room in silence. There the candle should be placed on the table beside the bed. If the sick person's confession is to be heard, all present should leave the room, waiting outside until the priest opens the door to readmit them before Communion is given. Those present should then kneel about the bed.

3. If the priest has to leave immediately after Holy Communion is given, one of the family should read from a prayerbook a few prayers of thanksgiving to the sick person. It is not right to begin conversation on ordinary topics immediately after Holy Communion has been received, because the Body and Blood of the Saviour are still present for some minutes.

It is not unusual for Catholics either to neglect to call the priest when serious illness comes to some member of the family, or to find themselves without the things necessary for the Communion call. Every Catholic home should be provided with the simple items enumerated above and should know how and when to use them.

Motives for Charity

It is impossible to practice charity in all that it implies unless one has accepted the motives for charity provided by the religion of Jesus Christ. All charity otherwise motivated will be found to fail in some particular or to degenerate into selfishness, when a real test of it is given. The motives Christ gave, on the contrary, are sufficient to overcome every form of that selfishness which is forever taking issue with incentives to charity. These motives are:

1. The motive of the love of God. Every human being is bound to love God with all his heart and soul and mind and will. Loving God means loving the things God loves, and God loves every human being He created with an infinite love. He became man for all men, lived, worked, taught, suffered and died for them. He loves even sinners until by dying unrepentant they are lost to Him forever. Anyone, therefore, who possesses in his heart the love of God, has to love his fellowmen with a real and active love. That is why St. John said: If any man say that he loves God and hates his neighbor, that man is a liar.

2. The motive of the brotherhood of man. God made all men brothers in a social and spiritual sense, dependent on one another for peace on earth and the salvation of their souls. One who realizes this relationship of others to him and their dependence on him, both for happiness in this world and in the next, cannot let selfishness stop the flow of his charity because he knows that to do so is to disrupt his own peace and to spoil his own chances of salvation. Thus the second motive of charity makes a man understand that working for himself means working for all.

3. The motive of incorporation in the mystic body of Christ. The true Christian is a member of Christ's body, and remains a living member only so long as the principles and example of Christ continue to live in him. The outstanding principle and example of Christ's life was that of charity; the external mark of all the members of His body must always be a like charity in thought and word and deed. That is why Christ said: By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, that you have love, one for another.

Some people, with no belief in Christ, try to practice charity because they love peace. Others attempt it because they want to be loved and honored. But every natural and

purely human motive for charity places limits as to how far charity should go. Only that charity which is based on the love of God and the everlasting brotherhood of man and in imitation of Christ is unlimited enough to effect peace on earth and happiness in heaven.

On Forgiveness

One of the essential marks of a Christian is willingness to forgive. It is not one of the easiest marks to acquire, nor is its task the easiest to fulfill. There are two extremes to be avoided: The one is that of those nominal Christians who say that it is natural to resent injuries and unnatural to forgive them. The other extreme is that of worried and scrupulous persons who cannot distinguish involuntary feelings of resentment and remembrance of wrong from sheer unwillingness to forgive. Perhaps the following principles will help to clear up the matter:

1. All enemies must be forgiven, whether the wrong they have done us is real or imaginary, great or small, malicious or unintended.

2. This forgiveness means two things: 1) an internal act of the will, condoning the injury, rejecting the temptation to wish harm to the offender, wishing him well, i.e., wishing the salvation of his soul and all things needful for it; 2) an external act, by which we show readiness to be reconciled if the occasion offers, or by which we treat the person with ordinary signs of human recognition and decency.

3. We are not necessarily unforgiving if we cannot forget the wrong done us, if bitter thoughts and feelings continue to rise up in us even though we try to reject them, if we cannot be as friendly with the person as we were before. So long as we pray for the offender, and try to treat him decently, we are not guilty of wilful sin.

4. The command to forgive does not demand that, if we have been defrauded of material goods, we forego using means to gain back what has been unjustly taken. We may forgive a person in our hearts, and yet take him to court, when no other means would be fruitful, and thus make him restore.

5. Signs of unforgiveness are: refusing to speak to a person—refusing publicly to shake hands when it is the conventional thing to do—wilfully rejoicing when evil befalls him, etc.

No one will deny that to forgive a real enemy is difficult for fallen human nature. Yet no one can say that Christ has not clearly demanded that His followers do so: in fact, He has made our own forgiveness in His sight dependent on our forgiveness of those who have wronged us!

On Scandal

The word "scandal" is a rather widely abused term. Some use it only in connection with uncharitable conversation, as when they speak of spreading scandal about others. Others use the term as synonymous with any notorious evil deed, which is called a scandal. It is true that the sin of scandal usually accompanies backbiting and uncharitable conversation; and is usually inherent in a notorious crime; yet it has a very definite meaning.

1. Scandal is any word or action which causes spiritual harm to another; e.g., which causes another to sin, or makes it easier for him to sin; which causes another to be less virtuous; which lessens his respect for religion or for the things and persons of religion.

2. It is at its worst, when a person deliberately sets out to cause another to sin, whether from deliberate malice and

evil, or from passion and desire for pleasure, or because the other's help is needed for the commission of a sin.

3. It is still the sin of scandal, however, if, though one does not wish or intend the sin of another or the lessening of virtue, he yet foresees that his action or words will have such an effect. Thus, if one spreads or passes on evil literature or pictures, he may not intend the sin of another, but he is guilty of serious scandal nevertheless, because he can foresee very probable sin.

4. It is still scandal, if one tries to induce another to do evil, but fails; or if he acts or speaks in such a way that evil could easily follow, even though as a matter of fact, in a given instance, it does not.

5. It is not scandal, if an action which is in itself good, is misinterpreted by another and made the cause of evil, or used as an argument against religion.

The sin of scandal has its own particular malice. It is the most serious sin against charity, because it does harm to immortal souls. It was for this reason that the gentle Savior condemned it in such terrible words: "He that shall scandalise one of these little ones that believe in Me, it were better for him that a mill-stone be hanged about his neck, and that he should be drowned in the depth of the sea."

On Loving Oneself

The obligation every human being has of loving himself is not often spoken of for two reasons. First, it is not only a law but also a powerful instinct, which does not require frequent injunctions. Second, far from neglecting the duty of love of self, most people are in danger of loving themselves immoderately or in an evil way, so that they must be

reminded of the importance of loving God and their neighbor more often than of loving themselves. However, there is great value in pondering the meaning and extent of love of self.

1. The love of self means the supreme desire of fulfilling the glorious destiny that has been set for every man by God. It means placing first on the list of all one's hopes and ambitions the salvation of the soul, and only secondary to that the attainment of whatever good things may be enjoyed on earth. The love of self is manifest in a fear of hell, a desire of heaven, a hatred of sin above all evils, and in the determination to avoid all unnecessary occasions of sin. The heart of the duty of self-love is therefore the desire to preserve one's soul for the happiness of heaven.

2. The love of self need not be called a selfish love if it be remembered that desiring one's salvation is desiring the same thing for self that God desires for every rational soul He has created. It is through obedience to God that a man saves his soul, and at the same time honors and glorifies God. Selfishness would mean desiring for self something that is contrary to the will and the plan of God. That is why sin is a very selfish thing. It wants and takes something that is contrary both to God's will and one's own ultimate good.

3. The love of self may also manifest itself in the desire of good things on earth, so long as these are not contrary to one's ultimate destiny. The love of self is the love of life, though not at the price of a denial of faith in God and the loss of the soul; the love of material goods, though not to the extent that one will neglect God or do evil to attain them; the love of pleasure, but never of pleasure that is forbidden by God.

The command, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" means that, as a man must place his own salvation above

every other interest and good in life, so too must he be willing to help his neighbor save his soul, sometimes at the expense of many of the lesser goods in life that he wants for himself.

On Poverty of Spirit

Christmas emphasizes in dramatic fashion the poverty of spirit which Christ insisted that all His followers, rich and poor, must practice. Some of the elements that constitute poverty of spirit are the following, as they can be learned from the example of Christ:

1. Poverty of spirit means willingness to do with less in the way of material comforts than one has to. It means being able to have the best material things, but freely choosing to get along with less than the best. How clear was the example of Christ in this regard. He could have had the most magnificent surroundings for His birth. He chose a stable. A rich man is poor in spirit who, for the love of Christ, deliberately chooses to spend less on his home, his car, his servants and his trips than he can afford.

2. Poverty of spirit means utilizing what is saved by not living as expensively as one might, to help others who are unable to live as decently as human beings should. This is the only way to avoid the pitfall of becoming a money-miser. Misers are willing to live in cellars and stables, not to be able to help others, but to increase their store of money. To practice poverty of spirit, one must not only do with less than one has to, but must be willing to give away most of what is thereby saved. Christ not only gave up things by being born in a stable; He thereby earned heaven for His people.

3. Poverty of spirit means being content and cheerful when circumstances deprive one of some of the material comforts that others have and that are usually loved. It is

not being poor that is pleasing to Christ; it is being content in poverty. It is not possessing wealth that in itself makes one displeasing to Christ; it is not being able to do without the things that money could buy. Christ was both the rich Godhead and a poor family's child in the stable. The important point is that He was content with His stable.

St. Paul gave a classic definition of poverty of spirit when he said that Christians "must use this world as if using it not, because the fashion of this world passes away." Whether a man be rich or poor, capable of having the best or the least of material things, he must show that he is not dependent for happiness on such things.

On the Essence of Purity

The essence of the virtue of purity rests on three simple principles that are easily grasped by the human mind. While knowledge does not make one pure, it is a necessary foundation of purity, and above all, an indispensable means of avoiding wrong attitudes and mistaken notions about purity.

1. *First principle*: The powers of sex with which God has endowed men and women are in themselves good and holy, and are intended by the Creator to be used for the sublime purpose of procreation, in a state wherein children conceived and born can also be reared and trained for their work in this world and their happiness in heaven. The only such state is that of indissoluble marriage. For those who use the powers of sex rightly in marriage, without interference with their primary purpose, God prepared a high degree of pleasure, which would act as both an incentive and a reward for the use of sex in the right relationship to its important purpose.

2. *Second principle*: Any deliberate indulgence in the pleasure that God has destined solely for married persons, taken alone or with others, outside of marriage, before

marriage, or in marriage but contrary to the purpose of the functions of sex, is against the natural and divine law and a serious breach of purity. This includes direct seeking of the forbidden pleasure, or indirectly accepting it by placing actions that almost inevitably lead to it.

3. *Third principle*: The strength of the instinct that God implanted in human beings toward the pleasure and the fruits of marriage, indicates the strength of the measures that must be taken by those who truly wish to remain pure outside of marriage. They must avoid strong incentives to forbidden pleasure such as would arise from bad thoughts, obscene reading, salacious shows, evil conversation, and immodest or exciting conduct and contact with others. And just as God provided special sacramental graces for those who marry and so have a right to the proper use of sex, so He provides powerful supernatural means to purity for those who remain unmarried: frequent or daily Communion, frequent Confession, and the habit of prayer.

One who understands these principles must, of course, apply them to possess and preserve the virtue of purity. One who does apply them need not fear temptations, which will inevitably arise. Temptations are the lower nature suggesting indulgence in sinful pleasure; the intelligent and spiritual nature can always resist the suggestions and so avoid sin.

On Unclean Speech

One of the most frequent dangers met with today is that of unclean conversation. In a society that harbors so many non-religious and pagan individuals, it is to be expected that there will be an exaggerated interest in the things of sex. Pagans always drift deeper and deeper into sensuality. The true Christian and genuine Catholic must know what unclean speech is, how important it is to take no part in it, and what to do when it is thrust upon him.

1. Unclean speech is any form of conversation that deals with the sacred things of sex in a light, flippant, prurient or even unnecessary way. There is a difference between sinful unclean speech, and vulgar or unrefined speech. The latter deals with subjects that are crude, i.e., not brought up in any decent company, but which are not concerned with sex as such. Vulgar speech need not be sinful, except that it usually fails against charity and good manners. But unclean conversation is marked by its concentration on sex.

2. A Christian worthy of the name realizes that flippant, jesting and unnecessary sex talk is both a revelation of coddled sex thoughts in the speaker, and an offer of unrestrained bad thoughts to others. He knows that it is his duty to defend purity, to set an example of purity, to resist the spread of impurity in the world. Therefore he makes it an unbreakable rule that he will never relate a sexy story, he will never join in discussion of sex-actions and sex-sins, he will never promote the dangerous thoughts that may already be lodged in the minds of others.

3. Because it is all but impossible, if one mingles in the world at all, to escape ever hearing any bad conversation, the true Christian has a program all worked out as to what he should do when he cannot evade evil talk. If in a given case he has either authority or influence over the one who indulges in evil talk, he uses it to reprimand the person and to try to put a stop to the practice. If he has neither authority nor influence, as is often the case with persons working in the midst of others in an office or factory, he learns to show no interest in the evil talk, and to act as if he did not even hear the words that were said. Even when someone tells an unclean story directly to him, he has a way of showing by his reaction that he has no interest in that sort of thing.

If more persons would adhere to these rules in respect to indecent conversation, there would soon be far less of it in the world. Too many, forgetting the principles for which they stand, allow human respect to influence them to a point where they show great amusement over evil talk, or even take an active part in it themselves.

On Obedience

The virtue of obedience enters of necessity into every man's life. Its necessity arises from the fact that God decreed, in the very manner of creating human beings, that men should be ruled by men when and where men have an evident title to represent the authority of God. There are two principles pertaining to obedience, one for those things in which obedience to others is due, the other for those in which authority is exercised over others.

1. Obedience to lawfully constituted authority is obedience to God. Lawfully constituted authorities are: *a*) Parents, to whom God gives His own authority to govern when He sends them children who need their physical, moral, religious and intellectual guidance and help for many years. *b*) Religious superiors, Pope, bishops, pastors, etc., to whom the Son of God directly gave authority to govern in His name. *c*) Civil rulers, whose authority comes from God once they have been duly elected, chosen or confirmed by the people, because God so made men to live in groups that He obviously intended His authority to be vested in the rulers without whom group-life would be impossible. *d*) Even more limited superiors, such as teachers, physicians, superintendents in business relations,—even these share God's authority in that which pertains to the field in which leadership is necessary for the fulfillment of purposes necessary to man. Obedience to all such superiors, in all that pertains to the scope of their authority, excluding of course

anything that might be sinful, may be looked upon as obedience to God and will be rewarded as such.

2. Those who hold authority are bound to exercise it in subjection to God's plans, in conformity to God's evident purpose in delegating His authority. For example, God gives His authority to parents that they may prepare their children for successful, God-fearing lives on earth and the ultimate happiness of heaven; any exercise of authority that would distort that plan of God would be abuse and misuse. Civil rulers have authority over their citizens only in those things necessary for their temporal welfare and which the citizens cannot privately procure; to go beyond that, to try to command their consciences or to interfere with personal or family rights would be misuse and abuse. So all authority has a scope based on its purpose; it is the authority of God only so long as it remains within that purpose and scope.

When obedience to lawful superiors is denied, and when superiors themselves misuse and abuse the authority they have been given, disorder, strife, increasing chaos prevail in the world. In the recognition of the source of all true authority, and remembrance of that both in commanding and obeying, consists peace for the family, the state and the world.

On the "Passions"

The word "passions" is associated with any number of strange and contorted ideas in the minds of many people. To some it immediately suggests something evil, something to be constantly suppressed. To others it suggests only pleasure and self-gratification, as if indulgence of passion were man's only means of joy. Neither of these two ideas conforms to the truth about the passions of man, as may be seen from the following:

1. The passions of man are simply the inclinations of an appetite of the body that always desires what is pleasing and detests what is displeasing. Indulgence or gratification of a particular passion therefore depends for its goodness or badness on whether the object towards which the passion inclines one is good or bad. Sometimes an object, highly pleasing to the bodily appetite, is at the same time dangerous or harmful or destructive to either the body or the soul. To permit passion to pursue such an object would be to act immorally. At other times an object highly pleasing to the bodily appetite is perceived to be wholesome or necessary and not harmful in any way; to pursue and enjoy such an object would be to act in a morally good way. Thus every incentive to indulge passion must be judged as either good or bad according to the goodness or badness of the object.

2. A simple example makes this clear. In the presence of food a hungry man experiences the passion of desire. If the food desired be not destructive to his health, or forbidden by some higher law (like the positive law of fast or abstinence) he may indulge his desire and in so doing is performing a good action. If the food desired is harmful or poisonous to him, or forbidden for some other reason, then to indulge his desire would be to perform a bad action.

3. Hence the important thing in regard to passions is to cultivate the habit of passing a reasonable judgment on the object desired (or hated) before letting the passions have their way. The difference between a strong character and a weak character is simply this: the strong character subjects his passions to reason and faith; the weak character lets his passions rule him as if they could not possibly desire anything not good. Ultimately, the latter destroys himself.

Thus it would be wrong to say either that all indulgence in passion is good or that all such indulgence is bad. The objects attractive or repulsive to passion must be judged

by higher standards than the body alone possesses; it is on the basis of those judgments that a particular indulgence is seen to be good or bad.

Fidelity in Marriage

On entering the state of marriage, every man and woman made a promise of fidelity until death. This fidelity in practice means three things, each of which should be considered carefully by engaged couples before marriage, and adhered to loyally by husbands and wives after marriage.

1. *Fidelity in marriage means admitting into the mind no thought of divorce and marriage to someone else.* Divorce and remarriage Christ called simply "adultery." "If any man put away his wife and marry another, he is guilty of adultery." A hundred thousand examples of this do not make it anything less than adultery. Separation between validly married Christians is sometimes permitted her children by the Catholic Church for very grave reasons, but never with a permission to marry again while one has a lawful spouse still living.

2. *Fidelity in marriage means the absolute avoidance of regular company-keeping with a third person.* Husbands are guilty of infidelity who have a girl friend on the side with whom they have regular dates. Wives are guilty of the same if they accept regular dates or visits with a male friend alone. This principle holds even for divorced Christians. Divorce, for any reason, does not lift their responsibility for fidelity to their lawful partners till death, and this makes regular company-keeping, as if they were free to marry, seriously unlawful.

3. *Fidelity in marriage means a deep hatred and a constant defense against partial or complete sins of adultery.* Adulterous actions of husbands or wives are gravely evil under four heads. They are sins against fidelity to a solemn

oath; against the justice they owe their partners and families; against charity in the form of scandal, because they involve cooperation with another's sin; against chastity in a most detestable form. Adultery is so hated by God that He usually punishes it in this world as well as by everlasting torment in the next.

Pagans make light of infidelity, and renegade Christians very often have lost their faith by reason of this sin. But Christ still demands and expects that all true Christians will cherish fidelity in marriage as the indispensable price of redemption through Him.

On Patriotism

Too often it is forgotten or not even known that patriotism is a virtue, and that as a virtue it is a habit of the will and not merely an exercise of the emotions. Like all virtues, it stands in the middle between two extremes; hence, to learn what it is not, is a good way to establish a foundation for what it is.

1. Patriotism is not a love of country that transcends all principles of morality, that excludes from one's love the human beings of any other country, that manifests itself in a blind support of every institution in one's country and scorns everything connected with a foreign country. Patriotism is not an inexplicable feeling. Patriotism is not a blind infatuation. Patriotism is a combination of justice, gratitude and love for one's country inspired by the good things that a country gives to its citizens.

2. Patriotism is not, on the other hand, an empty word, or something to be scorned by educated and sophisticated men and women. Patriotism is not a virtue for the ignorant and unenlightened only. Patriotism is not a cloak to be worn as a covering for selfishness and greed, as when men make love of their country the basis for demanding the right

to exploit their neighbors. Patriotism is not separable from other virtues. It is a part of justice; it is nothing without brotherly love; it is subject to and bound up with the love of God; it is inconceivable without self-sacrifice and self-denial.

3. Patriotism is therefore an intelligent, strong, active love of the country of one's birth or adoption. It is intelligent, because all true love must be intelligent, i.e., based on the good perceived in the object loved. Patriotism is a strong love, because the ardor of love must be measured by the benefits received from the one loved. Patriotism is an active love, because no true love can be internal alone, but must be manifested in service, in gifts, in loyalty and sacrifice.

It is therefore only a sham patriotism in a man if he loves what is bad as well as what is good in his country. He must, if he loves his country, try to change what is bad into good. It is mock patriotism if a man loves his own country, not merely more ardently than other countries, as he should, but to the exclusion of all other countries. It is no patriotism if a man professes to love his country, but will do nothing and suffer nothing to help or protect it.

On the Education of Children

The opening of school always calls for the reaffirmation of the principles binding on Catholic parents and guardians in regard to the kind of education they are to provide for their children. This is a matter that is dealt with clearly and adequately in the general laws of the Catholic Church and a loyal Catholic will not think of either setting up his own principles of education nor of breaking the laws the Church has made. There are three principles that must be kept in view:

1. Only the bishop, or his representative (usually the pastor), may grant permission to parents to send their

children to a non-Catholic school. Parents may not take this upon themselves if there be any possibility of providing a Catholic education for their children. Furthermore, if Catholics send their children to a school where non-Catholic religious doctrine is taught, they are said by law to be "suspected of heresy," i.e., it is considered probable that they are no longer truly Catholic in their beliefs.

2. To obtain permission from a bishop to send children to a non-Catholic school, parents and guardians must have a serious reason. If they were to use lying or deceit to obtain permission, they would be just as guilty as if they had no permission at all. Thus to plead financial inability to undertake the extra expense that a Catholic education might involve when they can well afford it, would be to invalidate the permission. That is why most bishops demand that the reasons for sending a child to a non-Catholic school must be fully submitted to the pastor and judged by him before the permission can be granted.

3. Even after a valid permission to send children to a non-Catholic school has been granted, the law of the Church commands that special precautions be taken and special means used to prevent a loss or diminution of faith on the part of the children. This means that all parents who have children in non-Catholic schools must see to it that the latter attend instruction classes and must themselves try to instill the principles and knowledge of the faith into their children.

For these reasons parents may never be said to escape any obligations by educating their children in non-Catholic schools. Rather they assume thereby greater and harder responsibilities. What a Catholic school might have done in a religious way, they must now do themselves. If they fail in that, both they and the children will suffer.

On Devotion to the Holy Spirit

There are three persons in God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The worship of God the Father takes the form of perfect submission to His authority and perfect acceptance of His Providence ruling all things wisely and well. The worship of God the Son concentrates especially on His redemptive sacrifice on the cross, and the love and mercy of God as manifested thereby. While these forms of worship of God seem natural and instinctive to the Christian, the worship of God the Holy Ghost is less widely understood and practiced. It should take pre-eminently the following three forms.

1. *A strong sense of hatred and opposition to the devil*, who is called the Prince of Darkness, the Father of lies, the Spirit of Evil. It is Satan's constant endeavor to nullify the inspirations of the Holy Spirit and to induce souls to give up the treasure of divine grace. The more one hates and fears the devil, therefore, the more he will seek guidance and strength from the Holy Spirit. The recognition of the suggestions of the devil who is constantly urging men to give in to pride, human respect, lust, greed, etc., leads to reliance on the Holy Spirit, whose inspirations are strong incentives to virtue at any price.

2. *A great appreciation and gratitude for the gift of sanctifying grace*, and the help of actual grace which is given to all who desire and ask for it. The Holy Ghost is called the Sanctifier, the one through whom grace comes to the soul. Thus Christ said "a man must be born again of water and the Holy Ghost" to enter heaven, and St. Paul tells Christians that their members are the temple of the Holy Ghost, who is in them. Thus the Holy Spirit sanctifies the Christian through grace, and grace makes him a child of God and heir of heaven. This is the greatest privilege ever bestowed on human beings, that through grace they

may become participators in God's nature, and the thought of it leads inevitably to devotion to the Holy Spirit.

3. *The practice of seeking help and guidance from the Holy Spirit*, who can enlighten the mind so that it will know the good and follow it. With sanctifying grace, the Holy Ghost brings seven gifts to the soul, and four of them are concerned with the knowledge that is necessary for virtue and salvation. Those four are wisdom, understanding, knowledge and counsel. Since so many of the gifts received from the Holy Ghost are concerned with enlightening the mind, it is natural to look to the Holy Spirit for guidance in times of doubt, perplexity and ignorance. Thus when examining the conscience, when striving to understand difficult doctrines, when perplexed as to how to act in given circumstances, one should always seek the help of the Holy Spirit by special prayers.

These practices of devotion to the Holy Spirit will not fail to render faith more childlike, the will more determined in the pursuit of virtue, and the whole being more loyal to God. As God the Father is the supreme authority, providence and preserver, as God the Son is the merciful Redeemer, so the Holy Ghost is the Sanctifier, enlightener and comforter of human hearts.

On Making a Retreat

During the summer months the laity will be given numerous opportunities for making retreats. A large number, a number that grows every year, will make use of the opportunities, but others—many others there are, who are "inhibited" or "complexed" about the whole idea. Let them consider the following reasons for making a retreat:

1. Since your days at school when you studied the catechism, you have had little chance of studying or even viewing the chief tenets of your faith as a whole, as a unit,

as a morally, intellectually, even emotionally satisfying pattern for your life. You have heard sermons, but they dealt with isolated topics. You have attended missions, but they had to stress the negative aspects of religion to bring back sinners. You have read, probably, Catholic books and magazines, etc., but they were not pointed directly at your needs. A retreat puts your faith before you as a whole.

2. Your daily life brings you into an atmosphere that does anything but foster the growth of religious faith and practice, as you know. Rather it tends to blot out of your mind the memory of God, and to loosen your grip on the ironclad principles of conduct which God has made known. A retreat offsets the dangerous influences of your daily world; jolts you into realization and remembrance; spurs you to enthusiasm for the highest and noblest things.

3. You have a duty in today's world more than that of saving your own soul, which latter is a task difficult enough in itself to provide ample reason for making a retreat. But over and above that—or rather as part of it—you have a duty of Catholic leadership—of leading other Catholics by your example and through the use of opportunities in word and deed; of leading your blind, groping, stumbling, unhappy fellow-citizens to the rock of stability and the haven of peace by every means in your power. Have you ever thought of that? It takes a retreat to make you intelligent and eager in this regard.

These are cogent reasons for every thinking layman. Let him only thrust from his mind all fear and apprehension, all those vague prejudices against retreats that have no foundation,—and he will find making a retreat the most joyous and inspiring and salutary experience of the year.

What Christmas Teaches

The purpose of Advent is to give all of us time to think out the virtues especially taught by Christ through the circumstances of His birth, so that we may celebrate Christmas by bringing to Him the virtues He brings to us in the stable. It is hard to think at all about the events of Christmas without becoming impressed with powerful incentives to three great virtues:

1. The first is the virtue of *humility*. Humility fundamentally means the remembrance of our utter dependence on God and of the deserts of our sins, and therefore inspires the putting aside of all spurious claims to honor, attention, consideration and praise. Was there ever an example of humility like that of Christ in the stable? He had a right, as God, to honor and praise, but in becoming one of us, He had to give up that right and appear as helpless as we must remember we are in the eyes of God. Therefore, the stable, bleak and cold, the animals, mute and unthinking companions, the lack of all pomp and convenience—all cry out to us: Remember, thou too must be content with little, unconcerned about honor, humbly submissive to all that God wills!

2. The second is the virtue of *detachment*. Detachment means a happy-go-lucky freedom from worry about the material circumstances of our lives. It means really believing that if we have God in our hearts, it does not really matter whether we have fine raiment or patched garments, expensive food or left-overs and remnants, money in the bank or barely enough to live on. Was ever detachment more perfect than Christ's? He could have chosen the best, but He chose the worst of all possible material things, to prove that we too should not be anxious about what we possess and what we are lacking in our lives.

3. The third is the virtue of *charity* expressing itself in *zeal*. Zeal means a constant and burning desire to make others happy and to save their souls. At the crib we learn that true charity and zeal begin with stripping oneself of all that might be held dear. He Who came to save all, came with nothing He could call His own; those who have true zeal begin by emptying all self-love out of their souls. Too many would make others happy and save their souls, if only they could do so and yet lose nothing of their own. Saving others means losing oneself with Christ in love for others.

Bring these three virtues to Christ this Christmas. Bring Him humility by learning to say: Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make my heart like unto thine! Bring Him detachment by repeating over and over; O Lord, I shall be content with little so long as I have Thy love! Bring Him zeal by saying over and over: Nothing for myself, O Lord; all for Thee and for souls!

Background for Resolutions

Many New Year resolutions have little force because they lack sufficient motivation to win fidelity and perseverance. The foundation necessary to make resolutions effective is the spirit of penance. If there be no real spirit of penance over the past there will hardly be fidelity to resolutions made for the future. The spirit of penance means these four things:

1. It means the *remembrance* of one's past sinfulness. Not a detailed, picturesque remembrance of the kind of sins committed, which might cause revived temptations, but the remembrance of the fact that one has been a sinner, a rebel against God, a person who might have been condemned by God forever. This is indispensable for the spirit of penance. Many saints became saints through the constant remembrance of the offense that they had given to God.

2. It means *sadness* over the remembrance of one's sinfulness. This sadness arises from the realization that every sin ever committed added something to the sufferings of Christ in His Passion and death. It is not a sadness of despair, because the sins should long before have been forgiven; but a sadness of sympathy that lingers in the heart when one realizes that he has cruelly mistreated another.

3. It means *hatred of sin*, hatred so great that one is willing to suffer any misfortune or hardship rather than offend again. The spirit of penance is empty and unreal unless it include this kind of hatred of sin. To say: "I am sorry for sin" without saying "I shall die rather than sin again" is to make use of words without meaning.

4. It means the will *to atone* for one's own past sins, and for the sins of others at the same time. Every Catholic knows that even after sins are forgiven by God, the necessity of atonement often remains. This amount of atonement that can be made is immeasurable, because even if all atonement for one's own sins could be made, there are always the sins of others for which a friend of Christ is eager to make atonement. It is a part of the spirit of penance never to be satisfied with the amount of atonement that is being offered for sin, in the form of resignation in sorrow, voluntary mortification, etc.

Anyone who possesses the spirit of penance for past sins as here described, will have sufficient motivation for almost any prudent resolution. So long as that spirit remains, there will be constancy and perseverance in fidelity.

Support for Resolutions

It is foolish to make resolutions, whether to break with certain evil habits or to do good that one had not been doing before, without at the same time preparing to use means that will keep one mindful of the resolution and alert to strong motives for keeping it. Some of the most important means to these ends, tested by universal experience, are the following:

1. *Regular, daily if possible, spiritual reading.* Without continuing and growing desires to do better and to be better spiritually than one has been before, the best of resolutions will not go unbroken very long. One of the surest ways of stimulating the strong desire to keep a certain resolution is daily spiritual reading. The life of Christ, well-written lives of the saints, inspiring treatises on the four last things, the virtues, the sacraments, etc., feed the mind with thoughts that create strong desires for goodness of life, and specifically for the good to be attained by a resolution one has made.

2. *Daily prayer at a specific time and in a specific place,* for the strength to be faithful to the resolution that has been made. One of the convictions most necessary for overcoming evil in one's life is that which Alcoholics Anonymous try to impress on new members: "I am helpless by myself to do the thing I want to do. I must humbly recognize my dependence on a higher power for the help that I need." This holds for any worthwhile resolution. There is only one way of putting it into practice and that is by daily prayer to God for help. This should be at a specific time and place so that it will be regular, and will be a definite reminder and renewal of one's resolve at the same time.

3. A daily examination of conscience, not only on the resolution that has been made, but on the strength of one's motives for keeping it. The importance of this may be seen

from the fact that no religious order has ever been founded without provision for a daily examination of conscience. Such an examination includes a renewed act of sorrow for past sins, a check-up on the present, and a repetition of one's resolution with a prayer for the help to keep it for another day.

Anyone who is serious about making a resolution should seriously plan to use these means of supporting and maintaining it unbroken. Without such means the best resolution would be what the philosophers call "an inefficacious act of the will."

On Serving Mass

Altar boys have a privilege second only to that of the priest in the celebration of Holy Mass. They are so necessary to the proper fulfillment of the great sacrifice that the law of the Church forbids a priest to say Mass without a server, except in unusual circumstances. The privilege of serving Mass is so great that every youth who shares it should train himself to perform his duties in the best possible manner. These rules especially should be observed:

1. The server should know the Mass prayers as near perfectly as possible. When he answers the priest's prayers, he is speaking not for himself alone but for all the people. Therefore he should not mumble the words, or glide over them so rapidly that they have no meaning, or be contented with learning only the general sound of the words. He should know each single word, pronounce it clearly, and now and then read to himself the English of the Mass prayers so that he will have some understanding of what he is saying.

2. The server should be a model of devotion and piety in his manner around the altar. He should not look around, nor talk to other servers, nor argue with them about things

to be done. He should walk reverently about the altar, and not run or hurry. He should kneel erect and straight, genuflect slowly, and keep his hands folded whenever they are not occupied. His object should be to inspire devotion in the people who attend Mass, and not to distract them by irreverent actions.

3. The server should cultivate a great love of the Mass, and try to understand it better every day. He can do this by learning to follow the priest's prayers, not only when he has to answer them, but at all times during the Mass. Many lay people nowadays use English missals at Mass and know just what is going on at any moment; every server should be eager to do this, and should save his money until he can buy a complete English missal and then have someone explain it to him.

Mass-servers who keep these rules will be adding immensely to the beauty of Holy Mass, will be gaining graces that will last throughout their entire lives, and will be a real source of inspiration to all who see them at the altar.

On Spiritualizing Christmas

In the midst of the sheer worldliness with which many people approach the season of Christmas it is very important that true Christians concentrate on the predominantly spiritual aspects of the great feast. This means three things that are of the essence of a proper celebration of Christmas:

1. *Self-examination and correction.* The whole point of Christmas is that it is a reminder of the coming of God into the midst of men to find them eager and worthy to receive Him fittingly. Of course God in turn will do tremendous things for those who do receive Him fittingly. Receiving Him thus means sweeping out all the ugly results of

attachment to sin. It means making a good confession with a powerful determination that it won't be necessary to seek forgiveness for the same sins again.

2. *Turning more completely to God.* Religion is properly defined as "man's communication with God, based on God's communication with man." There must be some proportion between the two communications. Christmas reveals how perfect and complete was God's communication with man—unto "emptying Himself, taking the form of a servant," being born without any of the trappings of His Godhead. On the basis of that communication, there can be no limit to the degree of communication with God that man should seek, through his mind to know Him, through his will to love Him, through all his faculties to serve Him by perfect obedience.

3. *Spiritualizing gift giving to neighbors.* The spirit behind every gift planned and given to another at Christmas should be that of supernatural charity. When making up a list of gifts to be given, one should concentrate more on those who need the help and uplift of a present, than on those who don't; more on the kind of gift that will be helpful and fruitful than on those that are merely tokens and symbols; and more on the motive of love of God expressing itself in love for others than on mere custom or tradition.

These three things should enter and occupy every true Christian's thoughts during the season of Advent. They will make Christmas a time of great spiritual rejuvenation and of true spiritual joy.

The Way of the Cross

It has been truly said that it is impossible for a person to have a true and effective sorrow for sin without meditation on the sufferings the Saviour endured to atone for sin. One of the most popular and perfect means of practicing such meditation is by making the Way of the Cross.

1. The way of the Cross is an imaginative pilgrimage to the holy places where Our Lord suffered and died for sin. Centuries ago all Christians dreamed of being able some day to make such an actual pilgrimage. Because this was impossible for many, representations of the way of the cross were erected in their homelands to permit them to make the journey in spirit.

2. The Way of the Cross may be made in one of three ways: 1) By walking from station to station, wherever the fourteen stations have been officially erected, and pausing before each one to meditate on the sufferings of the Saviour. No special vocal prayers need be said when making the Way of the Cross in this way, either before, during or after the journey. 2) By remaining in one's place in church, with a congregation of people, while a priest walks from station to station and reads aloud a meditation on each. 3) By holding in the hand a crucifix which has been blessed for this purpose, and reciting 20 *Our Fathers*, *Hail Marys*, and *Glory Be to the Fathers*, while meditating on the Passion of Our Lord. This last method may be used only when one cannot make the Way of the Cross in one of the above ways in a church or chapel. Those who are too ill to recite 20 *Our Fathers*, etc., may gain the indulgences by merely kissing a crucifix blessed for the Way of the Cross and saying a short prayer or ejaculation in honor of the Passion of Our Lord.

3. The Way of the Cross is said to be the most richly indulgenced devotion in the world. Among others, a plenary

indulgence is gained each time it is made, and a second plenary indulgence is gained at the same time if the person has received Holy Communion on the same day.

It is impossible to think seriously of what the Saviour suffered for sin without being moved to deep sorrow for one's own offenses. It is recommended, to those who wish to practice the virtue of penance well, that they make the Way of the Cross every day.

On the Right Attitude to Death

The penitential season of Lent is filled with reminders of the salutary value of thoughts about death. The climax of the season is the death of the Redeemer, and the steps that led to that death, its purpose and achievement, should be an incentive to thoughts about his own death on the part of every Christian. All thoughts on that subject should be centered around these principles:

1. Death is a penalty that the whole human race must share, the pain of which arises chiefly from the fact that human beings are endowed with a powerful aspiration and a God-given capacity for immortality. Nature revolts at the thought of death, and there is nothing evil about the feeling of revulsion that it inspires. The first means of keeping that revulsion within bounds is to accept death as a penalty rather than to fight it mentally as an injustice. Penalties involve pain; recognizing death as a due penalty for the sins of the human family means to accept the cringing of nature when it comes to mind.

2. Even the instinctive cringing of nature over the thought of death can be modified and lessened by the thought of what a good death means and the determined will to experience such a death. A good death means the beginning of a close union with God, the source of all human delight. Saints reached a point of desire in respect to that which

made them long and sigh for death, as witness St. Paul: "I desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ". The ordinary Christian can at least come to think of death without horror or fear, because it brings the thought of happiness with God. Those on the contrary who are not living in such a way as to be able to expect to be united with God at death experience a double horror; the natural revulsion of nature, and the terrible fear of God's punishment. Many try to escape the latter by denying God and the hereafter, but it is usually clear that it is their sins, not their intellects, speaking in such denials.

3. The death of Christ is the third source of peace for good Christians at the thought of death. He died as the sinner would have to die, had there been no Redeemer to bear the major part of his burden for him. Each separate pain of the suffering and dying Christ took something away from the pains of the death of those who love Him. That is why death seems so easy for those who can lovingly hold a crucifix in their hands when they come to die.

Happy is the man who has reached the point where he has a greater fear of dying in sin than the fear that nature experiences at the thought of dissolution. Such fear makes good men, good Christians, great saints.

On Christian Burial

One of the great privileges to which every Catholic looks forward fondly is that of Christian burial, when God takes his soul from his body. Believing, as he does, in the resurrection of the body and the reunion of his body and soul forever, he desires with the Church that his body be given the reverence and care that are due to that which has been a temple of the Holy Ghost, and that through the reverence paid to his body, his soul will be remembered in prayers. The Church has made wise laws for the fulfillment of these instinctive desires.

1. It is commanded that the bodies of Catholics be buried, not cremated. The practice of cremation began in history as a public denial of the truth of the resurrection of the body; today it continues at least as a negative sign of unbelief. If a so-called Catholic were to direct that his body be cremated, his Catholic relatives would be forbidden under pain of serious sin to carry out the direction; and he would be denied any part of the Catholic burial ceremonies.

2. Christian burial includes bringing the body to the church, where it is to be placed before the sanctuary while the appropriate honors are paid to it and the sacrifice of the Mass and the beautiful liturgical prayers are offered for the repose of the soul. From this great privilege are excluded apostates and heretics, Catholics pronounced excommunicated, Catholics who have joined forbidden societies, deliberate suicides, those who died in a duel, public and notorious sinners, such as Catholics living in invalid marriages, and as noted above, those who directed that their bodies be cremated.

3. Christian burial means having the body placed in a grave located in a Catholic cemetery, either consecrated or blessed, with the appropriate rites of the Church. Catholics may not be buried in non-Catholic or non-sectarian cemeteries, except for a most urgent reason and with the express permission of the bishop. Catholic priests are forbidden to provide any of the rites of Christian burial for those who have arranged to be buried in non-Catholic or non-sectarian cemeteries. The only exceptions are made in behalf of converts under very special circumstances, but converts should consult authorities about the matter of their burial long before their death.

All these laws have but one purpose, which is easy for true Catholics to understand: to manifest the faith they

possess concerning the end of life, the meaning of death, the resurrection of the body and the reality of heaven. No Catholic who has tried to practice his faith in life, will want to appear as anything but a Catholic in death.

The Blessings of Purgatory

Purgatory is a place of great suffering which can be relieved by the prayers and sacrifices of the living. But at the same time it is a place where there are compensating blessings. The thought of these blessings need not lessen one's zeal for helping the poor souls; it will, nevertheless, inspire the determination on the part of the living to escape hell, and to avoid even venial sins that so easily lead to mortal sin and the loss of one's soul.

1. The greatest blessing of the poor souls is the knowledge that their souls are saved, even though they have to wait and suffer before they can enter heaven. With the greatest gratitude they look back on their lives and realize how eternally important were the decisions by which they resisted mortal sin, or made a sincere confession or prepared well for death. It is true that they suffer keenly from the fact that they now know the infinite goodness of God and have to wait to be united with Him; but the fact that they know they will be united to Him is a great relief and even joy.

2. It is common teaching and Catholic belief that the suffering souls are permitted by God to know that their friends on earth are remembering and helping them. This enables them to experience the continuing joys of human friendship and love. At the same time it inspires them to use whatever power of petition they possess to pray for their relatives and friends on earth, to beg of God special graces that will help them to bear their trials and to save their souls.

3. The souls in purgatory acquire many new friends while they are awaiting their purification and readiness for heaven. It is most probable that they come to know other souls who met the same trials on earth as themselves; that they cultivate new friendships that will be enjoyed for all eternity in heaven.

No sensible person will be inspired by the thought of these blessings to aim only at avoiding hell while worrying little about small faults and sins. No sensible person is unaware that unconcern about venial sin is one of the sure ways of slipping into serious sin. There will be enough to atone for in purgatory, even if one battles vigorously against every fully deliberate venial sin.

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