

# Discernment 180

## Preface

“Thy kingdom come; thy will be done” - Matthew 6:10

Every time we recite the Lord’s prayer, we ask that the Father’s will be done. Imagine the amount of times you have prayed for that intention! Keep that in mind as you read these words of our Lord:

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. Which one of you would hand his son a stone when he asks for a loaf of bread, or a snake when he asks for a fish? If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to those who ask him.”

Matthew 7:7-11

You have asked that the Lord’s will be done; you are seeking to know your vocation, and with this book, you are knocking. God is prepared to open a door for you, and this book will help you to know if it is the door leading to the priesthood.

In my roles as the associate pastor of a university parish and the vocation director of a diocese, I have been grateful to recommend the many excellent discernment materials that are already available to men discerning the priesthood. With this book, I will not offer any new principles or information missing from such guides as *To Save a Thousand Souls* by Fr. Brett Brannen or *Discernment Do’s and Don’ts* by Fr. George Elliott. What I am offering is a way to implement the tried and true principles of discernment described in those books and a framework to let the information they provide become actual seeds that take root in your heart and bear fruit in your life.

One of the recommendations that I have read in a popular discernment resource is to dedicate a six-month period of time to discerning your vocation. That recommendation is the inspiration for this book. *Discernment 180* is a step-by-step guide to consecrating six months of your life to discerning whether God is calling you to the priesthood. On each of the 180 days you will have a short reflection to bring to prayer. At various points in the six months, you will take specific actions, including going on a retreat and visiting a seminary. All throughout this time you will follow a rule of life that will help you to hear God’s voice and follow where He leads.

Of course, we cannot “force” God to act on our timeline or to answer our prayers in the way we expect - nor would it be good to do so. He is our providential Father who is laboring to love us, who wants our holiness even more than we do. He knows the time and place to give us each grace necessary to draw us more deeply in communion with Him, and He will wait accordingly. It was in the “fullness of time” that Jesus took flesh in

the womb of the Virgin - not a moment before or after (Galatians 4:4). The Lord also has a “fullness of time” for each grace He will give us, including the grace of knowing our vocation, and discernment means waiting accordingly.

But even in the waiting, God is at work. He is not content to merely inform you; He wants to transform you. It would be easy for God to send you a text message, but that would not lead to holiness. The time of waiting serves to stretch your heart so that when the hour comes to inform you, there will be so much more of you to inform. By waiting and longing, God purifies and strengthens you. He knows what He is about. He does not waste any time.

These 180 days are not a means to strong-arm God to fulfill our will; they are a means to dispose our hearts to receive His. Should the “fullness of time” for you to receive the grace of knowing your vocation be now, this book will help you to receive it. The prayer, pursuit of virtue, and rule of life that you will take up will help to remove the noise that often prevents us from hearing God’s voice. Hearing God’s voice through the guided reflections and deliberate actions that you will take will help you to listen specifically for whether His voice is leading you to the priesthood. Prayer and action - the tried and true principles of discernment - are as simple as that.

Thus, the principles of discernment are simple; however, the choice to discern is serious. It is not a small thing to consecrate six months of your life to God in this way. I know firsthand the risk and, at times, the agony of discerning a priestly vocation. As a fellow brother in Christ and on behalf of the Church, then, please receive my sincere thanks. Thank you for your faith and courage to give God this time. I am grateful for your willingness to follow where Christ leads you.

In addition to my gratitude, let me also share a bit of excitement and a personal encouragement from an older brother who has been where you are, preparing to take this step. The agony and risk were real, but the thrill of holiness has been more than worth it. I have found Jesus’ words to be completely trustworthy: “I have told you this so that my joy might be in you and your joy might be complete” (John 15:11). I can’t imagine settling for anything less.

Take heart, my brother. No matter what your vocation is, God has planned from all eternity to give you some grace, to bless you in some way during these days. The adventure of receiving that grace and blessing awaits you, and my prayers accompany you. May St. Joseph protect you, may our Blessed Mother intercede for you, and may God bless and reward you.

Peace in Christ,

Fr. Greg Gerhart

# Day 0

“A voice proclaims: In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD! Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God!” - Isaiah 40:3

Day 0 is the day of preparation. The more important something is to us, the more time we give in order to prepare for it. Think of tests at school, competition in sports, interviews for work, or dates with girls; think of the time you have spent preparing for these tasks or others like it. The more important something is to us, the more we are willing to prepare to do it well.

Your vocation is of paramount importance. It concerns the way that you will come to love God and your neighbor while you live on earth, and it is the means by which God calls you to be with Him forever in heaven. You taking up this book shows that you recognize the gravity of your vocation; now it is time to prepare to discern it well.

Day 0 lays out the framework for your 180 days. In the sections below, you will study the dynamics of vocational discernment, make plans to incorporate spiritual practices into a regular rule of life, and start scheduling specific actions that you will take. Day 0 may need to last several days, but preparing well for this period of intentional discernment will make every day that follows all the more fruitful.

## Vocational Discernment

“This is the will of God: your holiness.” - 1 Thessalonians 4:3

The vocation that you certainly have, the will of God for you that takes no special effort to discern, is your holiness. You are called to be a Saint! You are called to know the glory of holiness on earth and to enjoy perfect beatitude in communion with God forever in heaven. If God is calling you to be a priest, it is because that is the way He has made you to be holy, the means by which He wants you to attain Heaven. But, it is not necessary that you already be a priest (or religious or married) in order to be holy. Holiness is available to you already, *now*.

Let that give you encouragement and consolation. No matter what your vocation is, the goal is holiness, and that is already possible. This potential means that there is no wasted time with God. The sentiment, “If only I knew my vocation - then I could be holy!” is false and a distraction meant to discourage us from receiving the gift of holiness that is already offered to us in our current state of life.

Through daily prayer, frequent reception of the sacraments, growth in virtue, studying the faith, and serving others, holiness is already possible. By incorporating these spiritual practices into our lives, we grow in friendship with God, and the closer you are to a friend, the more you know what he wants. That is what I like to call the general path of discernment. It is the foundation, and there is no substitute for it.

To give an analogy, imagine an AM/FM radio playing music in a room. **General discernment** is like removing the noise from the room so that you can hear what is playing. **Specific discernment** is like dialing into the

station to find what is playing. Even if you are dialed into the right station, noise in the room of your heart will make it impossible to hear God's voice calling to you. However, once you have removed the noise of the world, the flesh, and the devil (cf. 1 John 2:16), God's voice will resound loud and clear. At that point, it remains for us to dial into the station of the priesthood and listen for God's call.

This book will help you to do both.

## **Rule of Life**

“Take heed, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things which your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life.” - Deuteronomy 4:9

A rule of life is a way of organizing your day and week with the end of holiness in mind. Much like an athlete orders his or her life (how they eat, sleep, train, play, etc.) in order to attain the goal of a championship, Christians can order their lives with the end of attaining heaven:

“Do you not know that the runners in the stadium all run in the race, but only one wins the prize? Run so as to win. Every athlete exercises discipline in every way. They do it to win a perishable crown, but we an imperishable one.”

1 Corinthians 9:24-25

Throughout the 180 days, you will follow a rule of life that will incorporate prayer, sacraments, virtue, service, and study into your daily rhythm, which will result in a life ordered to heaven. We will also choose specific practices of prayer, types of service, and books to study that will allow these foundational and general works of holiness to serve as specific discernment practices too.

Continuing with the athlete analogy, the appropriate amount of “training” would be something that stretches you but does not injure you. An athlete that does not practice enough will not perform well, but if he practices too much, he will get injured and unable to perform at all. Be honest and courageous as you write your rule of life. Do not settle for something that will not stretch you, and do not take on so much that you become discouraged and tempted to give up.

## **Prayer**

Prayer is crucial for discernment, and your rule of life should give generous time to it everyday. It is possible to distinguish two types of prayer: personal and communal.

**Personal Prayer** - Personal prayer goes by several names in our tradition: mental prayer, meditation, contemplation, and relational prayer, just to name a few. It is characterized by an authentic sharing of hearts; God shares His heart with you, and you share yours with Him. Personal prayer is the place where God speaks to you directly as well as the place for you to reflect upon other times that God has spoken to you in a more indirect way, such as experiences of service, conversations with others, and spiritual reading. There are many “methods” of personal prayer, and this book will introduce you to a few. The important thing now is to devote dedicated time to personal prayer everyday.

**Communal Prayer** - As Catholics, we engage in communal prayer through the Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours. A priest is obliged to pray the Liturgy of the Hours everyday, and he is strongly encouraged to offer Mass everyday. Although the Church warmly recommends Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours to everyone, it is especially important for someone considering the priesthood to make participation in these communal prayers a regular part of your life.

***Suggestions for your Rule of Life:***

- Personal Prayer:
  - o Holy Hour: Reflect upon the chapters provided in this book in silent prayer for 60 minutes everyday (or less if 60 minutes is too long; remember the athlete analogy).
    - Ideally, this would take place in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, but a well-ordered prayer space in your room will also work.
- Communal Prayer:
  - o Liturgy of the Hours: Pray Night Prayer everyday (add other hours, too, if possible).
  - o Mass: Attend Mass on Sunday and at least one other day of the week.

**Sacraments**

The sacraments are the privileged place of encountering Christ; they are the principle means by which He continues His ministry on earth. If we want to grow in holiness, there is no better place to go.

**Mass** - The Church describes the Mass as the “source and summit” of our lives as Christians. It is the source from which every grace flows, and it is the summit towards which we journey on earth. Indeed, it is a foretaste of heaven already on earth. In the Mass, Jesus feeds us with His Body and Blood, and He incorporates us into His perfect sacrifice to the Father. The priest is ordained primarily to offer Mass; everything else he does is ordered to that supreme end. Of course, being a faithful Catholic means attending Mass on Sunday and holy days of obligation, but because the priest is so intimately connected to the Mass, discerning the priesthood ought to include attending daily Mass when possible, too.

**Confession** - Holiness is friendship with God, and on this side of heaven, every friendship requires forgiveness. Scripture affirms that even the just man sins seven times a day (see Proverbs 24:16), so Confession should be a regular part of our lives. The sacrament of Confession restores us to grace if we have fallen into mortal sin, which is crucial for vocational discernment. After all, we come to know what our friend wants by growing in friendship with Him. Mortal sin breaks that friendship, but Confession restores it and strengthens us against temptation in the future. Even if we have not fallen into mortal sin, the Church recommends that we receive the sacrament of Confession regularly.

***Suggestions for your Rule of Life:***

- Mass:
  - o Attend Mass on Sunday and at least one other day of the week.
- Confession:
  - o Receive the Sacrament of Confession every two weeks or at least once a month.

## **Virtue**

The Catechism teaches that “A virtue is a habitual and firm disposition to do the good” (CCC 1803). The primary way that we receive the virtues necessary for the Christian life is through the sacraments. Baptism infuses faith, hope, and love into our hearts, and the rest of the sacraments strengthen or restore the virtues. In addition to reliance upon the grace of the sacraments, we can grow in natural virtues, which are also helpful for the Christian life, through repeated asceticism and good works.

**Chastity** - The virtue of chastity merits special attention. Chastity integrates our sexuality such that our bodies become instruments of love rather than occasions of lust; it is necessary in every vocation and is the fruit of self-mastery. The sins of lust are not the worst sins, but they are sufficient to break our friendship with Christ and become an obstacle to our discernment. Due to the proliferation and widespread acceptance of pornography, chastity presents a significant trial, but it is a battle that can be won through the purifying power of Christ and diligent cooperation with His grace. If you find yourself falling into solitary sins of lust, visit the *His Mercy Endures* website: [www.hismercyendures.org](http://www.hismercyendures.org). There, you will receive the tools necessary to grow in the virtue of chastity.

### ***Suggestions for your Rule of Life:***

- Asceticism:
  - o Digital fast:
    - The most important fasting will be from the internet and TV. Many of the spiritual practices that you will take up require time, and that time has to come from somewhere. Remove what wastes time, and find that you do have time to pray, serve, and read.
  - o Bodily fast:
    - Fasting from other sources of consolation provides opportunities to set our hearts on God alone. It also strengthens our will to resist temptation so that we might remain in Him. Consider fasting from meals, warm showers, meat, sweets, and/or alcohol either entirely or on a regular basis.
- Good works:
  - o See the section on service below.
- Chastity:
  - o Incorporate necessary practices from [www.hismercyendures.org](http://www.hismercyendures.org).

## **Service**

Every vocation consists in a particular expression of loving service. Jesus declares that He “did not come to be served but to serve” (Matthew 20:28), and at the Last Supper, He tells His disciples, “If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another’s feet” (John 13:14). Of the elements to include in your rule of life, which is necessary for general discernment, the element of service has significant potential for specifically discerning the priesthood. Incorporating the kind of service that a priest performs will aid you in discerning whether God is calling you to a priestly expression of love.

**Liturgical Service** - The distinguishing service that a priest provides is liturgical service; only a priest can offer Mass, hear Confessions, and prepare souls for death through the Anointing of the Sick. Committing to regular liturgical service in your life - especially altar serving at Mass - will bring you close to the specifically priestly expressions of love and provide helpful data for your discernment.

**Other Forms of Service** - Liturgical service is essential for our brothers and sisters in Christ, *and* the Church of today does not need priests who never leave the sacristy. Priests ought to be engaged in service outlined by the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, too. For example, consider *instructing the ignorant* (one of the spiritual works of mercy): if our brothers and sisters are to receive the sacraments worthily, they will need someone to prepare them well - to till their hearts into rich soil so that the seeds of grace from the sacraments bear fruit 30, 60, and 100 fold. Or, consider *feeding the hungry* (one of the corporal works of mercy): a true celebration of the Mass includes not only recognizing Christ in the Eucharist and feeding on His Body and Blood - it also includes being sent to recognize Christ in the poor and feeding them with our own loaves and fishes. The spiritual and corporal works of mercy are excellent forms of service that both draw us in deeper communion with Christ and can aid in the specific discernment of the priesthood.

**Suggestions for your Rule of Life:**

- Liturgical service:
  - o Become an altar server at your parish.
- Other forms of service:
  - o Choose a spiritual and/or corporal work of mercy to perform:
    - Spiritual: Consider teaching RCIA or CCD at your parish.
    - Corporal: Consider helping at a soup kitchen or taking Communion to the homebound.

**Study**

One helpful way to appreciate study as a means of growing in holiness is through the word, “recognize.” It literally means to think again: *re - cognize*. All of creation was in the mind of God even before He brought it into being; He was thinking it. No matter what we are studying, then, when we come to know something, we think what God has already thought; we *recognize* it. That means that all of our studies - but especially studying the faith - have the potential to draw us into deeper friendship with God. Close friends are not content to do things together; they want to share one mind and one heart - to know and love the same things, especially one another. By recognizing His creation and His revelation, we come to share one mind and heart with God, which is what holiness is.

**To Save a Thousand Souls** - This book by Fr. Brett Brannen is the comprehensive guide to discerning the priesthood. It explains what priests do, what qualities are necessary to become a priest, and how to discern whether you are called. It also provides a common point of reference to discuss your discernment with your spiritual director and vocation director. To finish the book within 180 days, it is necessary to read two pages per day. Do not move to other books until you have finished this one.

**Other Books to Consider** - There are many other books that are particularly helpful during a period of intentional discernment. Here are just a few:

- *Virginity*, Raniero Cantalamessa; a guide to celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom as it truly is: a gift to be received, not a burden to be imposed.
- *Discernment of Spirits*, Timothy Gallagher; a guide to understanding the different movements of spiritual life, how to recognize which are from God, which are from the enemy, and how to respond to each.
- *The Priest is Not His Own*, Fulton Sheen; a reflection on the priesthood of Jesus Christ, who offered the sacrifice not of a separate victim, but of Himself.

### ***Suggestions for your Rule of Life:***

- Spiritual reading:
  - o Engage in 15-30 minutes of spiritual reading every day.

### **Write Your Rule of Life**

With the suggestions provided above, write your own rule of life. Remember, the goal is to stretch yourself, but not injure yourself. It will not do you any good to commit to something that discourages you and leads you to quitting altogether. At the end of this chapter, you will find a template to help you. Feel free to add more or take away some of the bullets provided.

### **Take Action**

The rule of life is a spiritual discipline that orders your life to heaven, regardless of whether you are discerning your vocation or not. This pursuit of holiness is the foundation of discernment, and there is no shortcut around it or substitute for it. With the foundation established, a period of intentional, vocational discernment also requires other specific actions aside from the general pursuit of holiness. The specific discernment facilitated by *Discernment 180* incorporates a “dating fast,” spiritual direction, a visit to a seminary, and a discernment retreat to help you listen more attentively for whether God’s voice is leading you to the priesthood.

### **Dating Fast**

*Discernment 180* includes the commitment to celibacy for the duration of the six months. This “dating fast” serves two purposes:

#### *1. Listening to God*

The Catechism states that “The vocation to marriage is written in the very nature of man and woman as they came from the hand of the Creator” (CCC 1603). Since the vocation to marriage is inherent in our nature, as long as we remain human beings, we will continue to feel this call. Even priests continue to feel the call because - as it turns out - priests are human. If you feel desires for and attractions to marriage, that is a wonderful gift from God! However, the only firm conclusion you can derive from desires for and attractions to marriage is that you are human. It does not touch on whether God is calling you to be a priest.



Priesthood includes the promise of celibacy, which is renouncing marriage for the sake of the Kingdom (cf. Matthew 19:12). It does not mean lacking a desire for marriage. If one had no desire for marriage, there would be nothing to renounce. It might indicate a calling to counseling rather than a calling to the priesthood!

The desires for and attractions to marriage are generally going to register with louder volume on the surface level of minds and hearts than a desire for the priesthood. But, if you are called to the priesthood, the gift of celibacy and the desire to offer an undivided heart directly to the Lord reside deep within you. The dating fast serves to quiet the surface-level desires and enable you to listen more attentively to the depths of your heart.

This book will treat celibacy in greater detail; for now, it suffices to know that the dating fast serves to discern whether you have that gift.

## *2. Respecting women*

Dating is for the purpose of discerning whether to marry *this* woman - NOT whether to marry. To start dating someone indicates to that person that you believe God has not called you to the priesthood or religious life. Until you believe that with moral certainty, it would be dishonest and disrespectful to the woman to date her. Even saying up front, "I am discerning the priesthood," before dating her is to play with her heart. Be a man. Guard her heart; do not play with it. It is not masculine to keep her on the side in case it turns out you're not called to the priesthood.

## **Spiritual Direction**

As with any task that one attempts to complete, it is helpful to receive guidance from someone with experience and expertise in the matter. Discernment is no different. A spiritual director provides more than just an objective perspective on our spiritual experiences (as helpful as that is); he also brings wisdom and knowledge to bear on the content of our experiences, helping us to recognize what is from God, what is from the enemy, and how to respond.

Generally, spiritual direction takes place once a month. The first place to look for a spiritual director is your pastor. If he is unavailable, reach out to your vocation director, and he will help you to find someone.

## **Visit to a Seminary**

Visiting a seminary, speaking with the men in formation, and experiencing a normal "day in the life" of a seminarian is invaluable for discerning your vocation. It is easy to get the wrong idea of what it takes to be a seminarian and what life will be like in seminary, and those wrong ideas can be discouraging. It is worth it to remove any false obstacles that your imagination has made by simply experiencing it for yourself.

Whether you attend an official "Come and See" program or not, visiting the seminary will allow you to sit in on some classes, meet guys who were just in your shoes a few years ago, and speak to the faculty about priestly formation and life in the house. You will join the men for Mass, prayer, meals, recreation, and get a lived experience of what it would be like to be a seminarian.

In my time as Vocation Director, I have not seen a man who visited the seminary come away disappointed that he went. Most are surprised by the joy of the community and the normal - yes, normal! - character of most of the guys (we are all a little weird...), and all find the experience helpful for their discernment.

Reach out to your vocation director to see when the next time would be for you to visit a seminary, and schedule it in your calendar.

### **Discernment Retreat**

It is essential to give time to God in prayer everyday, but even in a good rhythm of habitual silent prayer, the legitimate occupations of our state in life (much less the illegitimate ones) often occupy our mind and heart. It is helpful to retreat from our day-to-day routine to dispose ourselves to listen more attentively to Our Lord, who often speaks in a still small voice (cf. 1 Kings 19:12). We see how much value the Church ascribes to a retreat in the fact that Canon Law legislates that priests take a retreat once a year. It is appropriate for those discerning the priesthood to do the same.

Reach out to your vocation director to see when the next discernment retreat is available. There may not be a retreat specifically for discernment that is available during these six months. Silent retreats would also be appropriate. If neither discernment nor silent retreats are available during this time, speak to your spiritual director to discuss your options to make a personal retreat on your own.

## **Plan Your 180 Days**

Now that we have discussed all the elements for your period of intentional discernment, it is time to plan out your 180 days. It is okay for this task to take several days. Do not fall into the temptation to start Day 1 until you have fulfilled this task well. While you are working on this plan, there are plenty of free prayer resources to guide your daily meditation (consider praying with Scripture by doing *lectio divina* with the Hallow app: [www.hallow.com](http://www.hallow.com)). It would also be appropriate to take this task of planning your 180 days to prayer. Speak to God about the appropriate commitment - not too much, but not too little. Be generous and humble.

At the end of each week throughout these six months, *Discernment 180* will help you review this Rule of Life to keep you on track, facilitate any adjustments you need to make, and allow you to prepare for the next week.

## **Rule of Life**

### **Prayer:**

- I will pray for \_\_\_\_ minutes every day.
  - o My prayer time will be from \_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_.
  - o I will wake up at \_\_\_\_\_. My bedtime will be \_\_\_\_\_. (*Allow for 7 hours of sleep*)
- I will pray Night Prayer every night.
  - o I will also pray these hours every day: \_\_\_\_\_.

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**Sacraments:**

- I will go to Mass \_\_\_\_ times a week.
  - o Aside from Sunday, I will go to Mass on \_\_\_\_\_.
- I will go to Confession \_\_\_\_ times a month.

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**Virtue:**

- I will engage in this digital fast: \_\_\_\_\_.
- I will engage in this bodily fast: \_\_\_\_\_.
- I will fulfill these (if any) practices from [hismercyendures.org](http://hismercyendures.org): \_\_\_\_\_.

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**Service:**

- I will be an altar server at this parish: \_\_\_\_\_.
- I will do this spiritual work of mercy: \_\_\_\_\_.
- I will do this corporal work of mercy: \_\_\_\_\_.

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**Study:**

- I will do spiritual reading for \_\_\_\_\_ minutes a day \_\_\_\_ times a week.

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**Specific Discernment Actions**

**Dating Fast:**

- I will relate to women in the way that a priest relates to women (or, in the way a married man relates to women who are not his wife) for 180 days.
  - o I will dismiss any romantic interests that arise for 180 days.
  - o I will avoid one-on-one settings with women for 180 days.

**Spiritual Direction:**

- I will go to spiritual direction once a month.
  - o My spiritual director is \_\_\_\_\_.

**Visit a Seminary:**

- I will visit \_\_\_\_\_ Seminary on this date: \_\_\_\_\_.
- o (Start *Discernment 180* even if you do not know when you will be able to visit a seminary.)

### **Discernment Retreat:**

- I will go on this retreat: \_\_\_\_\_.
- It takes place on this date: \_\_\_\_\_.
- (Start *Discernment 180* even if you do not know when you will be able to make a retreat.)

## **When Should I Call My Vocation Director?**

*Discernment 180* takes six months to complete, but it is not necessary to wait half a year before calling your vocation director.

First, reach out to him simply to let him know that you are beginning this period of intentional discernment. He would love to pray for you and offer whatever other assistance you need - especially if you need to find a spiritual director or opportunities for engaging in service or making a retreat.

Second, reach out to him if there are pronounced movements of desolation or consolation. St. Ignatius is the master of discernment in our tradition. He describes consolation and desolation thus<sup>1</sup>:

**Consolation:** “I call it consolation when some interior movement in the soul is caused, through which the soul comes to be inflamed with love of its Creator and Lord; and when it can in consequence love no created thing on the face of the earth in itself, but in the Creator of them all.

Likewise, when it sheds tears that move to love of its Lord, whether out of sorrow for one’s sins, or for the Passion of Christ our Lord, or because of other things directly connected with His service and praise.

Finally, I call consolation every increase of hope, faith and charity, and all interior joy which calls and attracts to heavenly things and to the salvation of one’s soul, quieting it and giving it peace in its Creator and Lord.”

**Desolation:** “I call desolation all the contrary of the [above], such as darkness of soul, disturbance in it, movement to things low and earthly, the unquiet of different agitations and temptations, moving to want of confidence, without hope, without love, when one finds oneself all lazy, tepid, sad, and as if separated from his Creator and Lord. Because, as consolation is contrary to desolation, in the same way the thoughts which come from consolation are contrary to the thoughts which come from desolation.”

Like the topic of celibacy, this book will also treat what to do in times of consolation and desolation in greater detail later, but for now, it suffices to know that both of these movements in the spiritual life are ordinary and meaningful. They are ordinary in the sense that everyone who seriously takes up a life of prayer and virtue should experience them; do not be surprised if you experience both several times throughout your 180 days. They are also meaningful in that each experience indicates a certain action to take. Desolation generally indicates the task of remaining faithful to one’s previous commitments and resolutions, not changing them. Consolation generally indicates the task of following where the consolation leads.

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<sup>1</sup> St. Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Elder Mullan, Boston, MA, P.J. Kenedy & Sons, 1914, Third & Fourth Rules.

Much of what you discuss with your spiritual director will be what movements you have experienced in the past month. If your experiences of consolation or desolation are so pronounced that you want to quit *Discernment 180* or that you want to apply to seminary, give your vocation director a call. The Bishop has assigned him with the task of helping men to discern their vocations, so let him fulfill the role that your Bishop has given him.

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## The Night Before Day 1

Now that you have planned your *Discernment 180*, ask the Lord to bless your endeavor: “Entrust your works to the LORD, and your plans will succeed” (Proverbs 16:3). Making a prayer vigil the evening before you begin this period of vocational discernment will allow you to start Day 1 in the right frame of mind and filled with grace.

I recommend this prayer vigil to take place on Saturday. It will allow you to go to Confession, go to the Vigil Mass, and begin Day 1 on Sunday, but you are free to begin whenever you think it best. The four elements to include in your prayer vigil are Confession, Mass, a holy hour, and a good bedtime. Here is a possible structure to follow for your holy hour:

### Holy Hour

- ***Pray Prayer to Know My Vocation:***

“Lord, my God and my loving Father, you have made me to know you, to love you, to serve you, and thereby to find and to fulfill my deepest longings. I know that you are in all things, and that every path can lead me to you.

But of them all, there is one especially by which you want me to come to you. Since I will do what you want of me, I pray you, send your Holy Spirit to me: into my mind, to show me what you want of me; into my heart, to give me the determination to do it, and to do it with all my love, with all my mind, and with all of my strength right to the end. Jesus, I trust in you. Amen.”

- ***Meditate on Romans 12:1-21***

“I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship. Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect. For by the grace given to me I tell everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than one ought to think, but to think soberly, each according to the measure of faith that God has apportioned. For as in one body we have many parts, and all the parts do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually parts of one another. Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us exercise them: if prophecy, in proportion to the faith; if ministry, in ministering; if one is a teacher, in teaching; if one exhorts, in exhortation; if one contributes, in generosity; if one is over others, with diligence; if one does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. Let love be sincere; hate what is evil, hold on to what is good; love one

another with mutual affection; anticipate one another in showing honor. Do not grow slack in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, endure in affliction, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the holy ones, exercise hospitality. Bless those who persecute [you], bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Have the same regard for one another; do not be haughty but associate with the lowly; do not be wise in your own estimation. Do not repay anyone evil for evil; be concerned for what is noble in the sight of all. If possible, on your part, live at peace with all. Beloved, do not look for revenge but leave room for the wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' Rather, 'if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head.' Do not be conquered by evil but conquer evil with good."

- ***Entrust your vocation to Mary:***

"Blessed Mother, I entrust myself and my vocation to your motherly care and intercession. You perfectly heard the word of God and obeyed. Pray for me, that I too might also hear God's word and follow where He leads. Should the Lord desire me to be a priest, ask your Son that I might receive the grace to hear His call and the strength of faith and hope to lay down my life in loving service for the Church. O Mother of the Word Incarnate, be my mother, too. May God be glorified to answer your prayers on my behalf. Amen."

- ***Pray the Memorare:*** "Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, or sought thine intercession was left unaided. Inspired by this confidence, I fly unto thee, O Virgin of virgins, my mother; to thee do I come, before thee I stand, sinful and sorrowful. O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions, but in thy mercy hear and answer me. Amen."

- ***Pray the Rosary:*** [Rosary-for-Vocations.pdf \(dsj.org\)](https://www.dsj.org/Prayer-Rosary-for-Vocations.pdf)

- ***Consecrate Discernment 180 to the Lord:***

"Heavenly Father, you are the source of all that is good. I offer myself to you. Send your Holy Spirit, I pray, to consecrate these 180 days of vocational discernment, and receive them as an expression of my gratitude for your mercy. Bless and anoint my efforts, Lord. May they be inspired by your grace, draw me into deeper communion with the Sacred Heart of Your Son, and bear great fruit for your Kingdom. Should it be your will, I ask that you reveal to me my vocation. If this is not the time, may I receive the graces I need to abandon myself to Your providence no matter where You may lead. Hear and answer my prayer, Lord. I make it in faith through Jesus Christ, Your Son and my Lord. Amen."

- ***Pray the Suscipe:*** "Take, O Lord, and receive my entire liberty, my memory, my understanding and my whole will. All that I am and all that I possess, Thou hast given me: I surrender it all to Thee to be disposed of according to Thy will. Give me only Thy love and Thy grace; with these I will be rich enough and will desire nothing more. Amen."
- ***Pray the Glory Be:*** "Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen."

## Go to Bed

A good morning starts with the discipline of going to bed on time. With all the graces you have received in your vigil, start Day 1 strong by going to bed at the time outlined in your rule of life.

## Conclusion and Encouragement

As you prepare for Day 1, recall these words of encouragement from Bishop Vásquez' foreword:

I have always taken great comfort in these words from the prophet Jeremiah: "I know well the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare, not for your woe; plans to give you a future full of hope" (Jeremiah 29:11). The faith and courage that you are showing by beginning this period of discernment shows that God has already been working to fulfill these plans for you. After all, He is the source of all good gifts. He came that you might have "life and have it to the full" (John 10:10), and the gifts of your faith and courage make it clear that He is at work to do so even now. Have great confidence and humble anticipation, my son: "he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion" (Philippians 1:6).

The Church eagerly awaits to witness in what way the Lord will bring His work in you to completion. The great cloud of angels and Saints accompany you with their prayers and protection. And the Lord looks down upon you with the pride of a loving Father. You have asked that His will be done, and He is laboring to bring it about. Godspeed, my brother!

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## Part I: *Introduction to the Devout Life* by St. Francis de Sales



### Days 1-24

The content for your meditation in Part I of *Discernment 180* consists of readings from the first part of the spiritual classic, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, by St. Francis de Sales<sup>2</sup>. St. Francis sets out in the first part to help the Christian attain a firm resolution to the devout life, which he does by explaining what the devout life is and leading the reader through several meditations. By including it at the beginning of *Discernment 180*, we are focusing on the **general discernment** of growing in holiness. With the good foundation of a devout life established, we will then move on to the **specific discernment** of the priesthood.

Each chapter is very short and will serve as the content for your meditation. In the context of prayer, read the text slowly and attentively. Be aware of the thoughts, feelings, and desires that arise as you read. Speak to God about them, and open yourself to His voice speaking to you in silence. When the chapter is itself a meditation, simply

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<sup>2</sup> St. Francis de Sales, Christian Classics Ethereal Library: *Introduction to the Devout Life*, 1619.

follow his directions. Do not get caught up in worrying about praying “right.” The more important thing right now is consistency.

If you feel unable to begin without some guidance on meditation, you can turn to Day 8 to find St. Francis’ instructions. Yet again, the more important thing right now is consistency. Prayer is learned primarily through practice. Do not let the method get in the way of the most important thing - doing it!

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## Day 1

### *What True Devotion Is*<sup>3</sup>

“You aim at a devout life, dear child, because as a Christian you know that such devotion is most acceptable to God's Divine Majesty. But seeing that the small errors people are wont to commit in the beginning of any undertaking are apt to wax greater as they advance, and to become irreparable at last, it is most important that you should thoroughly understand wherein lies the grace of true devotion;--and that because while there undoubtedly is such a true devotion, there are also many spurious and idle semblances thereof; and unless you know which is real, you may mistake, and waste your energy in pursuing an empty, profitless shadow. Arelus was wont to paint all his pictures with the features and expression of the women he loved, and even so we all color devotion according to our own likings and dispositions. One man sets great value on fasting, and believes himself to be leading a very devout life, so long as he fasts rigorously, although the while his heart is full of bitterness;--and while he will not moisten his lips with wine, perhaps not even with water, in his great abstinence, he does not scruple to steep them in his neighbor's blood, through slander and detraction. Another man reckons himself as devout because he repeats many prayers daily, although at the same time he does not refrain from all manner of angry, irritating, conceited or insulting speeches among his family and neighbors. This man freely opens his purse in almsgiving, but closes his heart to all gentle and forgiving feelings towards those who are opposed to him; while that one is ready enough to forgive his enemies, but will never pay his rightful debts save under pressure. Meanwhile all these people are conventionally called religious, but nevertheless they are in no true sense really devout. When Saul's servants sought to take David, Michal induced them to suppose that the lifeless figure lying in his bed, and covered with his garments, was the man they sought; and in like manner many people dress up an exterior with the visible acts expressive of earnest devotion, and the world supposes them to be really devout and spiritual-minded, while all the time they are mere lay figures, mere phantasms of devotion.”

“But, in fact, all true and living devotion presupposes the love of God;--and indeed it is neither more nor less than a very real love of God, though not always of the same kind; for that Love one while shining on the soul we call grace, which makes us acceptable to His Divine Majesty;--when it strengthens us to do well, it is called Charity;--but when it attains its fullest perfection, in which it not only leads us to do well, but to act carefully, diligently, and promptly, then it is called Devotion. The ostrich never flies,--the hen rises with difficulty, and achieves but a brief and rare flight, but the eagle, the dove, and the swallow, are continually on the wing, and soar high;--even so sinners do not rise towards God, for all their movements are earthly and earthbound.

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<sup>3</sup> St. Francis, *Devout Life*, “Part I: Chapter i,” 2-5.



Well-meaning people, who have not as yet attained a true devotion, attempt a manner of flight by means of their good actions, but rarely, slowly and heavily; while really devout men rise up to God frequently, and with a swift and soaring wing. In short, devotion is simply a spiritual activity and liveliness by means of which Divine Love works in us, and causes us to work briskly and lovingly; and just as charity leads us to a general practice of all God's Commandments, so devotion leads us to practise them readily and diligently. And therefore we cannot call him who neglects to observe all God's Commandments either good or devout, because in order to be good, a man must be filled with love, and to be devout, he must further be very ready and apt to perform the deeds of love. And forasmuch as devotion consists in a high degree of real love, it not only makes us ready, active, and diligent in following all God's Commands, but it also excites us to be ready and loving in performing as many good works as possible, even such as are not enjoined upon us, but are only matters of counsel or inspiration. Even as a man just recovering from illness, walks only so far as he is obliged to go, with a slow and weary step, so the converted sinner journeys along as far as God commands him but slowly and wearily, until he attains a true spirit of devotion, and then, like a sound man, he not only gets along, but he runs and leaps in the way of God's Commands, and hastens gladly along the paths of heavenly counsels and inspirations. The difference between love and devotion is just that which exists between fire and flame;--love being a spiritual fire which becomes devotion when it is fanned into a flame;--and what devotion adds to the fire of love is that flame which makes it eager, energetic and diligent, not merely in obeying God's Commandments, but in fulfilling His Divine Counsels and inspirations.”

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## Day 2

### *The Nature and Excellence of Devotion*<sup>4</sup>

“Those who sought to discourage the Israelites from going up to the Promised Land, told them that it was ‘a land which eateth up the inhabitants thereof’ [Numbers 13:32]; that is, that the climate was so unhealthy that the inhabitants could not live long, and that the people thereof were ‘men of a great stature,’ who looked upon the new-comers as mere locusts to be devoured. It is just so, my child, that the world runs down true devotion, painting devout people with gloomy, melancholy aspect, and affirming that religion makes them dismal and unpleasant. But even as Joshua and Caleb protested that not only was the Promised Land a fair and pleasant country, but that the Israelites would take an easy and peaceful possession thereof, so the Holy Spirit tells us through His Saints, and our Lord has told us with His Own Lips, that a devout life is very sweet, very happy and very loveable.”

“The world, looking on, sees that devout persons fast, watch and pray, endure injury patiently, minister to the sick and poor, restrain their temper, check and subdue their passions, deny themselves in all sensual indulgence, and do many other things which in themselves are hard and difficult. But the world sees nothing of that inward, heartfelt devotion which makes all these actions pleasant and easy. Watch a bee hovering over the mountain thyme;--the juices it gathers are bitter, but the bee turns them all to honey,--and so tells the worldling, that though the devout soul finds bitter herbs along its path of devotion, they are all turned to

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<sup>4</sup> St. Francis, *Devout Life*, I.ii, 6-8.

sweetness and pleasantness as it treads;--and the martyrs have counted fire, sword, and rack but as perfumed flowers by reason of their devotion. And if devotion can sweeten such cruel torments, and even death itself, how much more will it give a charm to ordinary good deeds? We sweeten unripe fruit with sugar, and it is useful in correcting the crudity even of that which is good. So devotion is the real spiritual sweetness which takes away all bitterness from mortifications; and prevents consolations from disagreeing with the soul: it cures the poor of sadness, and the rich of presumption; it keeps the oppressed from feeling desolate, and the prosperous from insolence; it averts sadness from the lonely, and dissipation from social life; it is as warmth in winter and refreshing dew in summer; it knows how to abound and how to suffer want; how to profit alike by honor and contempt; it accepts gladness and sadness with an even mind, and fills men's hearts with a wondrous sweetness.”

“Ponder Jacob's ladder:--it is a true picture of the devout life; the two poles which support the steps are types of prayer which seeks the love of God, and the Sacraments which confer that love; while the steps themselves are simply the degrees of love by which we go on from virtue to virtue, either descending by good deeds on behalf of our neighbor or ascending by contemplation to a loving union with God. Consider, too, who they are who trod this ladder; men with angels' hearts, or angels with human forms. They are not youthful, but they seem to be so by reason of their vigor and spiritual activity. They have wings wherewith to fly, and attain to God in holy prayer, but they have likewise feet wherewith to tread in human paths by a holy gracious intercourse with men; their faces are bright and beautiful, inasmuch as they accept all things gently and sweetly; their heads and limbs are uncovered, because their thoughts, affections and actions have no motive or object save that of pleasing God; the rest of their bodies is covered with a light shining garment, because while they use the world and the things of this life, they use all such purely and honestly, and no further than is needful for their condition --such are the truly devout. Believe me, dear child, devotion is the sweetest of sweets, the queen of virtues, the perfection of love. If love is the milk of life, devotion is the cream thereof; if it is a fruitful plant, devotion is the blossom; if it is a precious stone, devotion is its brightness; if it is a precious balm, devotion is its perfume, even that sweet odor which delights men and causes the angels to rejoice.”

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## Day 3

### ***Devotion is Suitable to Every Vocation and Profession***<sup>5</sup>

“When God created the world He commanded each tree to bear fruit after its kind [Genesis 1:12]; and even so He bids Christians,--the living trees of His Church,--to bring forth fruits of devotion, each one according to his kind and vocation. A different exercise of devotion is required of each--the noble, the artisan, the servant, the prince, the maiden and the wife; and furthermore such practice must be modified according to the strength, the calling, and the duties of each individual. I ask you, my child, would it be fitting that a Bishop should seek to lead the solitary life of a Carthusian? And if the father of a family were as regardless in making provision for the future as a Capucin, if the artisan spent the day in church like a Religious, if the Religious

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<sup>5</sup> St. Francis, *Devout Life*, I.iii, 9-11.

involved himself in all manner of business on his neighbor's behalf as a Bishop is called upon to do, would not such a devotion be ridiculous, ill-regulated, and intolerable? Nevertheless such a mistake is often made, and the world, which cannot or will not discriminate between real devotion and the indiscretion of those who fancy themselves devout, grumbles and finds fault with devotion, which is really nowise concerned in these errors. No indeed, my child, the devotion which is true hinders nothing, but on the contrary it perfects everything; and that which runs counter to the rightful vocation of any one is, you may be sure, a spurious devotion. Aristotle says that the bee sucks honey from flowers without damaging them, leaving them as whole and fresh as it found them;--but true devotion does better still, for it not only hinders no manner of vocation or duty, but, contrariwise, it adorns and beautifies all. Throw precious stones into honey, and each will grow more brilliant according to its several color:--and in like manner everybody fulfills his special calling better when subject to the influence of devotion:--family duties are lighter, married love truer, service to our King more faithful, every kind of occupation more acceptable and better performed where that is the guide.”

“It is an error, nay more, a very heresy, to seek to banish the devout life from the soldier's guardroom, the mechanic's workshop, the prince's court, or the domestic hearth. Of course a purely contemplative devotion, such as is specially proper to the religious and monastic life, cannot be practiced in these outer vocations, but there are various other kinds of devotion well-suited to lead those whose calling is secular, along the paths of perfection. The Old Testament furnishes us examples in Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, David, Job, Tobias, Sarah, Rebecca and Judith; and in the New Testament we read of St. Joseph, Lydia and Crispus, who led a perfectly devout life in their trades:--we have Saint Anne, Martha, Saint Monica, Aquila and Priscilla, as examples of household devotion, Cornelius, Saint Sebastian, and Saint Maurice among soldiers;--Constantine, Saint Helena, Saint Louis, the Blessed Amadaeus<sup>6</sup>, and Saint Edward on the throne. And we even find instances of some who fell away in solitude,-- usually so helpful to perfection,--some who had led a higher life in the world, which seems so antagonistic to it. Saint Gregory dwells on how Lot, who had kept himself pure in the city, fell in his mountain solitude. Be sure that wheresoever our lot is cast we may and must aim at the perfect life.”

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## Day 4

### *The Need of a Guide for Those Who Would Enter Upon and Advance in the Devout Life*<sup>7</sup>

“When Tobias was bidden to go to Rages, he was willing to obey his father, but he objected that he knew not the way;--to which Tobit answered, ‘Seek thee a man which may go with thee.’ [Tobit 5:3] and even so, [son], I say to you, If you would really tread the paths of the devout life, seek some holy man to guide and conduct you. This is the precept of precepts, says the devout Avila,--seek as you will you can never so surely discover God's Will as through the channel of humble obedience so universally taught and practiced by all the Saints of olden time. When the blessed Teresa read of the great penances performed by Catherine of Cordova, she

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<sup>6</sup> It is probable that S. Francis here means to indicate Amadeo IX., Duke of Savoy, who died 1472.

<sup>7</sup> St. Francis, *Devout Life*, I. iv, 12-15.

desired exceedingly to imitate them, contrary to the mind of her Confessor, who forbade her to do the like, and she was tempted to disobey him therein. Then God spoke to Teresa, saying, 'My child, thou art on a good and safe road:-- true, thou seest all this penance, but verily I esteem thy obedience as a yet greater virtue:' --and thenceforth Saint Teresa so greatly loved the virtue of obedience, that in addition to that due to her superiors, she took a vow of special obedience to a pious ecclesiastic, pledging herself to follow his direction and guidance, which proved an inexpressible help to her. And even so before and after her many pious souls have subjected their will to God's ministers in order the better to submit themselves to Him, a practice much commended by Saint Catherine of Sienna in her Dialogues. The devout Princess Saint Elisabeth gave an unlimited obedience to the venerable Conrad; and one of the parting counsels given by Saint Louis to his son ere he died was, 'Confess thyself often,--choose a single-minded, worthy confessor, who is able wisely to teach thee how to do that which is needful for thee.'<sup>8</sup> 'A faithful friend,' we are told in Holy Scripture, 'is a strong defense, and he that hath found such an one hath found a treasure' [Sirach 6:14]; and again: 'A faithful friend is the medicine of life; and they that fear the Lord shall find him' [Sirach 6:16]. These sacred words have chiefly reference, as you see, to the immortal life, with a view to which we specially need a faithful friend, who will guide us by his counsel and advice, thereby guarding us against the deceits and snares of the Evil One:--he will be as a storehouse of wisdom to us in our sorrows, trials and falls; he will be as a healing balm to stay and soothe our heart in the time of spiritual sickness,--he will shield us from evil, and confirm that which is good in us, and when we fall through infirmity, he will avert the deadly nature of the evil, and raise us up again."

"But who can find such a friend? The Wise Man answers:-- 'He that feareth the Lord' [Sirach 6:17]: that is to say, the truly humble soul which earnestly desires to advance in the spiritual life. So, [son], inasmuch as it concerns you so closely to set forth on this devout journey under good guidance, do you pray most earnestly to God to supply you with a guide after His Own Heart, and never doubt but that He will grant you one who is wise and faithful, even should He send you an angel from Heaven, as He sent to Tobias."

"In truth, your spiritual guide should always be as a heaven-sent angel to you;--by which I mean that when you have found him, you are not to look upon him, or trust in him or his wisdom as an ordinary man; but you must look to God, Who will help you and speak to you through this man, putting into his heart and mouth that which is needful to you; so that you ought to hearken as though he were an angel come down from Heaven to lead you thither. Deal with him in all sincerity and faithfulness, and with open heart; manifesting alike your good and your evil, without pretense or dissimulation. Thus your good will be examined and confirmed, and your evil corrected and remedied; --you will be soothed and strengthened in trouble, moderated and regulated in prosperity. Give your guide a hearty confidence mingled with sacred reverence, so that reverence in no way shall hinder your confidence, and confidence nowise lessen your reverence: trust him with the respect of a daughter for her father; respect him with the confidence of a son in his mother. In a word, such a friendship should be strong and sweet; altogether holy, sacred, divine and spiritual. And with such an aim, choose one among a thousand, Avila says;--and I say among ten thousand, for there are fewer than one would think capable of this office. He must needs be full of love, of wisdom and of discretion; for if either of these three be wanting there is danger. But once more I say, ask such help of God, and when you

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<sup>8</sup> "Confesse-toi souvent, eslis un confesseur idoine, qui soit prudhomme, et qui te puisse seurement enseigner a faire les choses qui te seront necessaires."

have found it, bless His Holy Name; be steadfast, seek no more, but go on simply, humbly and trustfully, for you are safe to make a prosperous journey.”

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## Day 5

### *The First Step Must Be Purifying the Soul*<sup>9</sup>

“The flowers appear on the earth’ [Song of Songs 2:12], says the Heavenly Bridegroom, and the time for pruning and cutting is come. And what, my child, are our hearts' flowers save our good desires? Now, so soon as these begin to appear, we need the pruning-hook to cut off all dead and superfluous works from our conscience. When the daughter of a strange land was about to espouse an Israelite, the law commanded her to put off the garment of her captivity, to pare her nails, and to shave her head [Deuteronomy 21:12]; even so the soul which aims at the dignity of becoming the spouse of Christ, must put off the old man, and put on the new man, forsaking sin: moreover, it must pare and shave away every impediment which can hinder the Love of God. The very first step towards spiritual health is to be purged from our sinful humors. Saint Paul received perfect purification instantaneously, and the like grace was conferred on Saint Magdalene, Saint Catherine of Genoa, Saint Pelagia, and some others, but this kind of purgation is as miraculous and extraordinary in grace as the resurrection of the dead in nature, nor dare we venture to aspire to it. The ordinary purification, whether of body or soul, is only accomplished by slow degrees, step by step, gradually and painfully.”

“The angels on Jacob's ladder had wings, yet nevertheless they did not fly, but went in due order up and down the steps of the ladder. The soul which rises from out of sin to a devout life has been compared to the dawn, which does not banish darkness suddenly, but by degrees. That cure which is gradually effected is always the surest; and spiritual maladies, like those of the body, are wont to come on horseback and express, while they depart slowly and on foot. So that we must needs be brave and patient, my child, in this undertaking. It is a woeful thing to see souls beginning to chafe and grow disheartened because they find themselves still subject to imperfection after having made some attempt at leading a devout life, and well-nigh yielding to the temptation to give up in despair and fall back; but, on the other hand, there is an extreme danger surrounding those souls who, through the opposite temptation, are disposed to imagine themselves purified from all imperfection at the very outset of their purgation; who count themselves as full-grown almost before they are born, and seek to fly before they have wings. Be sure, [son], that these are in great danger of a relapse through having left their physician too soon. ‘It is but lost labor to rise up early and late take rest,’ unless the Lord prosper all we do.”

“The work of the soul's purification neither may nor can end save with life itself;--do not then let us be disheartened by our imperfections,--our very perfection lies in diligently contending against them, and it is impossible so to contend without seeing them, or to overcome without meeting them face to face. Our victory does not consist in being insensible to them, but in not consenting to them. Now to be afflicted by our imperfections is certainly not to consent thereto, and for the furtherance of humility it is needful that we

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<sup>9</sup> St. Francis, *Devout Life*, I.v, 16-18.

sometimes find ourselves worsted in this spiritual battle, wherein, however, we shall never be conquered until we lose either life or courage. Moreover, imperfections and venial sins cannot destroy our spiritual life, which is only to be lost through mortal sin; consequently we have only need to watch well that they do not imperil our courage. David continually asks the Lord to strengthen his heart against cowardice and discouragement; and it is our privilege in this war that we are certain to vanquish so long as we are willing to fight.”

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## Day 6

### *The First Purification, Namely, From Mortal Sin*<sup>10</sup>

“The first purification to be made is from sin;--the means whereby to make it, the sacrament of penance. **Seek the best confessor within your reach, use one of the many little books written in order to help the examination of conscience**<sup>11</sup>. Read some such books carefully, examining point by point wherein you have sinned, from the first use of your reason to the present time. And if you mistrust your memory, write down the result of your examination. Having thus sought out the evil spots in your conscience, strive to detest them, and to reject them with the greatest abhorrence and contrition of which your heart is capable;--bearing in mind these four things:--that by sin you have lost God's Grace, rejected your share in Paradise, accepted the pains of Hell, and renounced God's Eternal Love. You see, my child, that I am now speaking of a general confession of your whole life, which, while I grant it is not always necessary, I yet believe will be found most helpful in the beginning of your pursuit after holiness, and therefore I earnestly advise you to make it. Not unfrequently the ordinary confessions of persons leading an everyday life are full of great faults, and that because they make little or no preparation, and have not the needful contrition. Owing to this deficiency such people go to confession with a tacit intention of returning to their old sins, inasmuch as they will not avoid the occasions of sin, or take the necessary measures for amendment of life, and in all such cases a general confession is required to steady and fix the soul. But, furthermore, a general confession forces us to a clearer self knowledge, kindles a wholesome shame for our past life, and rouses gratitude for God's Mercy, Which has so long waited patiently for us;--it comforts the heart, refreshes the spirit, excites good resolutions, affords opportunity to our spiritual Father for giving the most suitable advice, and opens our hearts so as to make future confessions more effectual. Therefore I cannot enter into the subject of a general change of life and entire turning to God, by means of a devout life, without urging upon you to begin with a general confession.”

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<sup>10</sup> St. Francis, *Devout Life*, I.vi, 19-20.

<sup>11</sup> St. Francis suggests Grenada, Bruno, Arias, Augez, authors little known now, though we have the substance of their teaching in numerous valuable helps for those who are preparing for confession: such as “Pardon through the Precious Blood,” “Helps for Confirmation and First Communion” (Masters), “Manual for Confession,” “Repentance,” (Rev. T. T. Carter), “Hints to Penitents” (Palmer), Brett’s “Guide to Faith and Piety,” Crake’s “Bread of Life” (Mowbray), “Paradise of the Christian Soul,” etc.

## Day 7

### *The Second Purification, From All Sinful Affections*<sup>12</sup>

“All the children of Israel went forth from the land of Egypt, but not all went forth heartily, and so, when wandering in the desert, some of them sighed after the leeks and onions,--the fleshpots of Egypt. Even so there are penitents who forsake sin, yet without forsaking their sinful affections; that is to say, they intend to sin no more, but it goes sorely against them to abstain from the pleasures of sin;--they formally renounce and forsake sinful acts, but they turn back many a fond lingering look to what they have left, like Lot's wife as she fled from Sodom. They are like a sick man who abstains from eating melon when the doctor says it would kill him, but who all the while longs for it, talks about it, bargains when he may have it, would at least like just to sniff the perfume, and thinks those who are free to eat of it very fortunate. And so these weak cowardly penitents abstain awhile from sin, but reluctantly;-- they would fain be able to sin without incurring damnation;--they talk with a lingering taste of their sinful deeds, and envy those who are yet indulging in the like. Thus a man who has meditated some revenge gives it up in confession, but soon after he is to be found talking about the quarrel, averring that but for the fear of God he would do this or that; complaining that it is hard to keep the Divine rule of forgiveness; would to God it were lawful to avenge one's self! Who can fail to see that even if this poor man is not actually committing sin, he is altogether bound with the affections thereof, and although he may have come out of Egypt, he yet hungers after it, and longs for the leeks and onions he was wont to feed upon there! It is the same with the woman who, though she has given up her life of sin, yet takes delight in being sought after and admired. Alas! of a truth, all such are in great peril.”

“Be sure, my child, that if you seek to lead a devout life, you must not merely forsake sin; but you must further cleanse your heart from all affections pertaining to sin; for, to say nothing of the danger of a relapse, these wretched affections will perpetually enfeeble your mind, and clog it, so that you will be unable to be diligent, ready and frequent in good works, wherein nevertheless lies the very essence of all true devotion. Souls which, in spite of having forsaken sin, yet retain such likings and longings, remind us of those persons who, without being actually ill, are pale and sickly, languid in all they do, eating without appetite, sleeping without refreshment, laughing without mirth, dragging themselves about rather than walking briskly. Such souls as I have described lose all the grace of their good deeds, which are probably few and feeble, through their spiritual languor.”

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## Week 2

Each week of *Discernment 180* will include a facilitated review of the past week, an overview of what to expect in the week to come, and a reminder of what you have set out to do. As you progress through this period of intentional discernment, you will be able to use and review these sections to prepare for your meetings with your spiritual director.

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<sup>12</sup> St. Francis, *Devout Life*, I.vii, 21-22.

## Preview of Next Week

### Prayer:

The material for your meditations during Week 2 will consist of continued readings from the first part of the spiritual classic, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, by St. Francis de Sales.

- On Day 8, St. Francis introduces meditations as the means to purify one's soul, and he states that he will give instructions on how to meditate later in his work. Those instructions are included this week after the meditation on Day 8 as an *excursus*. Schedule time apart from your dedicated prayer time to read this *excursus*.

### Study:

In order to finish *To Save A Thousand Souls* within the 180 days, you will need to read two pages per day; by the end of Week 2, you should have made it to page 28, but do not limit yourself to that if you can and want to read more.

## Review of Past Week

### Prayer:

- *I fulfilled my commitment to daily, personal prayer \_\_\_/7 days this week.*
- *I fulfilled my commitment to the Liturgy of the Hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.*
- *I slept for at least seven hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.*
- *These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:*

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- *Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:*

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### Sacraments:

- *I fulfilled my commitment to daily Mass this week. Yes / No*
- *I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to regular Confession. Yes / No*
- *These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:*

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- *Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:*

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**Virtue:**

- I was faithful to my bodily fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I was faithful to my digital fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I was faithful to my dating fast. Yes / No
- I was faithful to the necessary practices from [www.hismercyendures.org](http://www.hismercyendures.org). Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Service:**

- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to altar serving. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to spiritual works of mercy. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to corporal works of mercy. Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Study:**

- I fulfilled my commitment to spiritual reading this week: Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my response, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Planning Ahead**

- What day(s) will I go to daily Mass this week? S M T W Th F S
- What day will I go to Confession this week? S M T W Th F S or [ ] not this week
- When will I make extra time to read the excursus on meditation this week? \_\_\_\_\_

- *Am I scheduled for altar service this week? Spiritual works of mercy? Corporal works of mercy?* Yes / No
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- *Have I scheduled my next spiritual direction?* Yes / No
  - *Have I scheduled my seminary visit?* Yes / No
  - *Have I scheduled my discernment retreat?* Yes / No
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## Day 8

### ***How to Effect This Second Purification***<sup>13</sup>

“The first inducement to attain this second purification is a keen and lively apprehension of the great evils resulting from sin, by means of which we acquire a deep, hearty contrition. For just as contrition, (so far as it is real,) however slight, when joined to the virtue of the Sacraments, purges away sin; so, when it becomes strong and urgent, it purges away all the affections which cling around habits of sin. A moderate, slight hatred makes men dislike its object and avoid his society; but when a violent, mortal hatred exists, they not only abhor and shun the person who excites it, but they loathe him, they cannot endure the approach of his relations or connexions, nor even his likeness or anything that concerns him. Just so when a penitent only hates sin through a weakly although real contrition, he will resolve to avoid overt acts of sin; but when his contrition is strong and hearty, he will not merely abhor sin, but every affection, every link and tendency to sin. Therefore, my child, it behooves us to kindle our contrition and repentance as much as we possibly can, so that it may reach even to the very smallest appearance of sin. Thus it was that the Magdalen, when converted, so entirely lost all taste for her past sin and its pleasures, that she never again cast back one thought upon them; and David declared that he hated not only sin itself, but every path and way which led thereto. This is which is that ‘renewing of the soul’ which the same Prophet compares to the eagle's strength [Psalm 103:5].”

“Now, in order to attain this fear and this contrition, you must use the following meditations carefully; for if you practise them steadfastly, they (by God's Grace) will root out both sin and its affections from your heart. It is to that end that I have prepared them: do you use them one after another, in the order in which they come, only taking one each day, and using that as early as possible, for the morning is the best time for all spiritual exercises;--and then you will ponder and ruminate it through the day. If you have not as yet been taught how to meditate, you will find instructions to that purpose in the Second Part.<sup>14</sup>”

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<sup>13</sup> St. Francis, *Devout Life*, I.viii, 23-24.

<sup>14</sup> See the *excursus* below.

## ***Excursus: Instructions for Meditation from the Second Part A short Method of Meditation. And first, the Presence of God, the First Point of Preparation***<sup>15</sup>

“It may be, my [son], that you do not know how to practise mental prayer, for unfortunately it is a thing much neglected now-adays. I will therefore give you a short and easy method for using it, until such time as you may read sundry books written on the subject, and above all till practice teaches you how to use it more perfectly. And first of all, the Preparation, which consists of two points: first, placing yourself in the Presence of God; and second, asking His Aid. And in order to place yourself in the Presence of God, I will suggest four chief considerations which you can use at first.”

“First, a lively earnest realisation that His Presence is universal; that is to say, that He is everywhere, and in all, and that there is no place, nothing in the world, devoid of His Most Holy Presence, so that, even as birds on the wing meet the air continually, we, let us go where we will, meet with that Presence always and everywhere. It is a truth which all are ready to grant, but all are not equally alive to its importance. A blind man when in the presence of his prince will preserve a reverential demeanour if told that the king is there, although unable to see him; but practically, what men do not see they easily forget, and so readily lapse into carelessness and irreverence. Just so, my child, we do not see our God, and although faith warns us that He is present, not beholding Him with our mortal eyes, we are too apt to forget Him, and act as though He were afar: for, while knowing perfectly that He is everywhere, if we do not think about it, it is much as though we knew it not. And therefore, before beginning to pray, it is needful always to rouse the soul to a steadfast remembrance and thought of the Presence of God. This is what David meant when he exclaimed, ‘If I climb up to Heaven, Thou art there, and if I go down to hell, Thou art there also!’ [Psalm 139:8]. And in like manner Jacob, who, beholding the ladder which went up to Heaven, cried out, ‘Surely the Lord is in this place and I knew it not’ [Genesis 28:16], meaning thereby that he had not thought of it; for assuredly he could not fail to know that God was everywhere and in all things. Therefore, when you make ready to pray, you must say with your whole heart, ‘God is indeed here.’”

“The second way of placing yourself in this Sacred Presence is to call to mind that God is not only present in the place where you are, but that He is very specially present in your heart and mind, which He kindles and inspires with His Holy Presence, abiding there as Heart of your heart, Spirit of your spirit. Just as the soul animates the whole body, and every member thereof, but abides especially in the heart, so God, while present everywhere, yet makes His special abode with our spirit. Therefore David calls Him ‘the Strength of my heart’ [Psalm 73:26]; and S. Paul said that in Him ‘we live and move and have our being’ [Acts 17:28]. Dwell upon this thought until you have kindled a great reverence within your heart for God Who is so closely present to you.”

“The third way is to dwell upon the thought of our Lord, Who in His Ascended Humanity looks down upon all men, but most particularly on all Christians, because they are His children; above all, on those who pray, over whose doings He keeps watch. Nor is this any mere imagination, it is very truth, and although we see Him not, He is looking down upon us. It was given to S. Stephen in the hour of martyrdom thus to behold Him, and

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<sup>15</sup> St. Francis, *Devout Life*, II.ii, 69-71.

we may well say with the Bride of the Canticles, ‘He looketh forth at the windows, shewing Himself through the lattice’ [Song of Songs. 2:9]. The fourth way is simply to exercise your ordinary imagination, picturing the Saviour to yourself in His Sacred Humanity as if He were beside you just as we are wont to think of our friends, and fancy that we see or hear them at our side. But when the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar is there, then this Presence is no longer imaginary, but most real; and the sacred species are but as a veil from behind which the Present Saviour beholds and considers us, although we cannot see Him as He is.”

“Make use of one or other of these methods for placing yourself in the Presence of God before you begin to pray;—do not try to use them all at once, but take one at a time, and that briefly and simply.”

### ***Invocation, the Second Point of Preparation***<sup>16</sup>

“Invocation is made as follows: your soul, having realised God’s Presence, will prostrate itself with the utmost reverence, acknowledging its unworthiness to abide before His Sovereign Majesty; and yet knowing that He of His Goodness would have you come to Him, you must ask of Him grace to serve and worship Him in this your meditation. You may use some such brief and earnest words as those of David: ‘Cast me not away from Thy Presence, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me’ [Psalm 51:11] ‘Shew me Thy Ways, O Lord, and teach me Thy paths’ [Psalm 25:4]. ‘Give me understanding, and I shall keep Thy Law: yea, I shall keep it with my whole heart’ [Psalm 119:34]. ‘I am Thy servant, O grant me understanding’ [Psalm 119:125]. Dwell too upon the thought of your guardian Angel, and of the Saints connected with the special mystery you are considering, as the Blessed Virgin, S. John, the Magdalene, the good thief, etc., if you are meditating in the Passion, so that you may share in their devout feelings and intention,—and in the same way with other subjects.”

### ***The Third Point of Preparation, representing the Mystery to be meditated to Your Imagination***<sup>17</sup>

“Following upon these two ordinary points, there ere is a third, which is not necessary to all meditation, called by some the local representation, and by others the interior picture. It is simply kindling a vivid picture of the mystery to be meditated within your imagination, even as though you were actually beholding it. For instance, if you wish to meditate upon our Lord on His Cross, you will place yourself in imagination on Mount Calvary, as though you saw and heard all that occurred there during the Passion; or you can imagine to yourself all that the Evangelists describe as taking place where you are. In the same way, when you meditate upon death, bring the circumstances that will attend your own vividly to mind, and so of hell, or any subjects which involve visible, tangible circumstances. When it is a question of such mysteries as God’s Greatness, His Attributes, the end of our creation, or other invisible things, you cannot make this use of your imagination. At most you may employ certain comparisons and similitudes, but these are not always opportune, and I would have you follow a very simple method, and not weary your mind with striving after new inventions. Still, often this use of the imagination tends to concentrate the mind on the mystery we wish to meditate, and to prevent our thoughts from wandering hither and thither, just as when you shut a bird

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<sup>16</sup> St. Francis, *Devout Life*, II.iii, 73.

<sup>17</sup> St. Francis, *Devout Life*, II.iv, 74.

within a cage, or fasten a hawk by its lures. Some people will tell you that it is better to confine yourself to mere abstract thought, and a simple mental and spiritual consideration of these mysteries, but this is too difficult for beginners; and until God calls you up higher, I would advise you, my [son], to abide contentedly in the lowly valley I have pointed out.”

### ***Considerations, the Second Part of Meditation***<sup>18</sup>

“After this exercise of the imagination, we come to that of the understanding: for meditations, properly so called, are certain considerations by which we raise the affections to God and heavenly things. Now meditation differs therein from study and ordinary methods of thought which have not the Love of God or growth in holiness for their object, but some other end, such as the acquisition of learning or power of argument. So, when you have, as I said, limited the efforts of your mind within due bounds,—whether by the imagination, if the subject be material, or by propositions, if it be a spiritual subject,—you will begin to form reflections or considerations after the pattern of the meditations I have already sketched for you. And if your mind finds sufficient matter, light and fruit wherein to rest in any one consideration, dwell upon it, even as the bee, which hovers over one flower so long as it affords honey. But if you do not find wherewith to feed your mind, after a certain reasonable effort, then go on to another consideration,—only be quiet and simple, and do not be eager or hurried.”

### ***The Third Part of Meditation, Affections and Resolutions***<sup>19</sup>

“Meditation excites good desires in the will, or sensitive part of the soul,—such as love of God and of our neighbour, a craving for the glory of Paradise, zeal for the salvation of others, imitation of our Lord’s Example, compassion, thanksgiving, fear of God’s wrath and of judgment, hatred of sin, trust in God’s Goodness and Mercy, shame for our past life; and in all such affections you should pour out your soul as much as possible. If you want help in this, turn to some simple book of devotions, the Imitation of Christ, the Spiritual Combat, or whatever you find most helpful to your individual wants.”

“But, my [son], you must not stop short in general affections, without turning them into special resolutions for your own correction and amendment. For instance, meditating on Our Dear Lord’s First Word from the Cross, you will no doubt be roused to the desire of imitating Him in forgiving and loving your enemies. But that is not enough, unless you bring it to some practical resolution, such as, “I will not be angered any more by the annoying things said of me by such or such a neighbour, nor by the slights offered me by such an one; but rather I will do such and such things in order to soften and conciliate them.” In this way, my [son], you will soon correct your faults, whereas mere general resolutions would take but a slow and uncertain effect.”

### ***The Conclusion and Spiritual Bouquet***<sup>20</sup>

“The meditation should be concluded by three acts, made with the utmost humility. First, an act of thanksgiving;—thanking God for the affections and resolutions with which He has inspired you, and for the

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<sup>18</sup> St. Francis, *Devout Life*, II.v, 75.

<sup>19</sup> St. Francis, *Devout Life*, II.vi, 76.

<sup>20</sup> St. Francis, *Devout Life*, II.vii, 78.

Mercy and Goodness He has made known to you in the mystery you have been meditating. Secondly, an act of oblation, by which you offer your affections and resolutions to God, in union with His Own Goodness and Mercy, and the Death and Merits of His Son. The third act is one of petition, in which you ask God to give you a share in the Merits of His Dear Son, and a blessing on your affections and resolutions, to the end that you may be able to put them in practice. You will further pray for the Church, and all her Ministers, your relations, friends, and all others, using the Our Father as the most comprehensive and necessary of prayers.” “Besides all this, I bade you gather a little bouquet of devotion, and what I mean is this. When walking in a beautiful garden most people are wont to gather a few flowers as they go, which they keep, and enjoy their scent during the day. So, when the mind explores some mystery in meditation, it is well to pick out one or more points that have specially arrested the attention, and are most likely to be helpful to you through the day, and this should be done at once before quitting the subject of your meditation.”

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## Day 9

### *First Meditation - On Creation*<sup>21</sup>

#### **Preparation**

1. Place yourself in the Presence of God.
2. Ask Him to inspire your heart.

#### **Considerations**

1. Consider that but a few years since you were not born into the world, and your soul was as yet non-existent. Where wert thou then, O my soul? the world was already old, and yet of thee there was no sign.
2. God brought you out of this nothingness, in order to make you what you are, not because He had any need of you, but solely out of His Goodness.
3. Consider the being which God has given you; for it is the foremost being of this visible world, adapted to live eternally, and to be perfectly united to God's Divine Majesty.

#### **Affections and Resolutions**

1. Humble yourself utterly before God, saying with the Psalmist, O Lord, I am nothing in respect of Thee--what am I, that Thou shouldst remember me? O my soul, thou wert yet lost in that abyss of nothingness, if God had not called thee forth, and what of thee in such a case?
2. Give God thanks. O Great and Good Creator, what do I not owe Thee, Who didst take me from out that nothingness, by Thy Mercy to make me what I am? How can I ever do enough worthily to praise Thy Holy Name, and render due thanks to Thy Goodness?

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<sup>21</sup> St. Francis, *Devout Life*, I.ix, 25-27.

3. Confess your own shame. But alas, O my Creator, so far from uniting myself to Thee by a loving service, I have rebelled against Thee through my unruly affections, departing from Thee, and giving myself up to sin, and ignoring Thy Goodness, as though Thou hadst not created me.

4. Prostrate thyself before God. O my soul, know that the Lord He is thy God, it is He that hath made thee, and not thou thyself. O God, I am the work of Thy Hands; henceforth I will not seek to rest in myself, who am nought. Wherein hast thou to glory, who art but dust and ashes? How canst thou, a very nothing, exalt thyself? In order to my own humiliation, I will do such and such a thing,--I will endure such contempt:--I will alter my ways and henceforth follow my Creator, and realize that I am honored by His calling me to the being He has given; I will employ it solely to obey His Will, by means of the teaching He has given me, of which I will inquire more through my spiritual Father.

## **Conclusion**

1. Thank God. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and praise His Holy Name with all thy being, because His Goodness called me forth from nothingness, and His Mercy created me.

2. Offer. O my God, I offer Thee with all my heart the being Thou hast given me, I dedicate and consecrate it to Thee.

3. Pray. O God, strengthen me in these affections and resolutions. Dear Lord, I commend me, and all those I love, to Thy never failing Mercy. OUR FATHER, etc.

At the end of your meditation linger a while, and gather, so to say, a little spiritual bouquet from the thoughts you have dwelt upon, the sweet perfume whereof may refresh you through the day.

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## **Day 10**

### ***Second Meditation - On the End for Which We Were Created*<sup>22</sup>**

#### **Preparation**

1. Place yourself before God.
2. Ask Him to inspire your heart.

#### **Considerations**

1. God did not bring you into the world because He had any need of you, useless as you are; but solely that He might show forth His Goodness in you, giving you His Grace and Glory. And to this end He gave you understanding that you might know Him, memory that you might think of Him, a will that you might love Him, imagination that you might realize His mercies, sight that you might behold the marvels of His works, speech that you might praise Him, and so on with all your other faculties.

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<sup>22</sup> St. Francis, *Devout Life*, I.x, 28-29.

2. Being created and placed in the world for this intent, all contrary actions should be shunned and rejected, as also you should avoid as idle and superfluous whatever does not promote it.

2. Consider how unhappy they are who do not think of all this,--who live as though they were created only to build and plant, to heap up riches and amuse themselves with trifles.

## **Affections and Resolutions**

1. Humble yourself in that hitherto you have so little thought upon all this. Alas, my God, of what was I thinking when I did not think of Thee? What did I remember when I forgot Thee? What did I love when I loved Thee not? Alas, when I ought to have been feeding on the truth, I was but filling myself with vanity, and serving the world, which was made to serve me.

2. Abhor your past life. I renounce ye, O vain thoughts and useless cogitations, frivolous and hateful memories: I renounce all worthless friendships, all unprofitable efforts, and miserably ungrateful self-indulgence, all pitiful compliances.

3. Turn to God. Thou, my God and Saviour shalt henceforth be the sole object of my thoughts; no more will I give my mind to ideas which are displeasing to Thee. All the days of my life I will dwell upon the greatness of Thy Goodness, so lovingly poured out upon me. Thou shalt be henceforth the delight of my heart, the resting-place of all my affections. From this time forth I will forsake and abhor the vain pleasures and amusements, the empty pursuits which have absorbed my time;--the unprofitable ties which have bound my heart I will loosen henceforth, and to that end I will use such and such remedies.

## **Conclusion**

1. Thank God, Who has made you for so gracious an end. Thou hast made me, O Lord, for Thyself, that I may eternally enjoy the immensity of Thy Glory; when shall I be worthy thereof, when shall I know how to bless Thee as I ought?

2. Offer. O Dearest Lord, I offer Thee all my affections and resolutions, with my whole heart and soul.

3. Pray. I entreat Thee, O God, that Thou wouldest accept my desires and longings, and give Thy Blessing to my soul, to enable me to fulfill them, through the Merits of Thy Dear Son's Precious Blood shed upon the Cross for me. OUR FATHER, etc.

Gather your little spiritual bouquet.

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# Day 11

## *Third Meditation - On the Gifts of God*<sup>23</sup>

### Preparation

1. Place yourself in the Presence of God.
2. Ask Him to inspire your heart.

### Considerations

1. Consider the material gifts God has given you--your body, and the means for its preservation; your health, and all that maintains it; your friends and many helps. Consider too how many persons more deserving than you are without these gifts; some suffering in health or limb, others exposed to injury, contempt and trouble, or sunk in poverty, while God has willed you to be better off.
2. Consider the mental gifts He has given you. Why are you not stupid, idiotic, insane like many you wot of? Again, God has favored you with a decent and suitable education, while many have grown up in utter ignorance.
3. Further, consider His spiritual gifts. You are a child of His Church, God has taught you to know Himself from your youth. How often has He given you His Sacraments? What inspirations and interior light, what reproofs, He has given to lead you aright; how often He has forgiven you, how often delivered you from occasions of falling; what opportunities He has granted for your soul's progress! Dwell somewhat on the detail, see how Loving and Gracious God has been to you.

### Affections and Resolutions

1. Marvel at God's Goodness. How good He has been to me, how abundant in mercy and plenteous in loving-kindness! O my soul, be thou ever telling of the great things the Lord has done for thee!
2. Marvel at your own ingratitude. What am I, Lord, that Thou rememberest me? How unworthy am I! I have trodden Thy Mercies under root, I have abused Thy Grace, turning it against Thy very Self; I have set the depth of my ingratitude against the deep of Thy Grace and Favor.
3. Kindle your gratitude. O my soul, be no more so faithless and disloyal to thy mighty Benefactor! How should not my whole soul serve the Lord, Who has done such great things in me and for me?
4. Go on, my child, to refrain from this or that material indulgence; let your body be wholly the servant of God, Who has done so much for it: set your soul to seek Him by this or that devout practice suitable thereto. Make diligent use of the means provided by the Church to help you to love God and save your soul. Resolve to be constant in prayer and seeking the Sacraments, in hearing God's Word, and in obeying His inspirations and counsels.

### Conclusion

1. Thank God for the clearer knowledge He has given you of His benefits and your own duty.

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<sup>23</sup> St. Francis, *Devout Life*, I.xi, 31-32.

2. Offer your heart and all its resolutions to Him.

3. Ask Him to strengthen you to fulfill them faithfully by the Merits of the Death of His Son. OUR FATHER, etc.

Gather the little spiritual bouquet.

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## Day 12

### *Fourth Meditation - On Sin*<sup>24</sup>

#### Preparation

1. Place yourself in the Presence of God.

2. Ask Him to inspire your heart.

#### Considerations

1. Consider how long it is since you first began to commit sin, and how since that first beginning sin has multiplied in your heart; how every day has added to the number of your sins against God, against yourself and against your neighbor, by deed, word, thought and desire.

2. Consider your evil tendencies, and how far you have followed them. These two points will show you that your sins are more in number than the hairs of your head, or the sand on the seashore.

3. Apart from sin, consider your ingratitude towards God, which is in itself a sin enfolding all the others, and adding to their enormity: consider the gifts which God has given you, and which you have turned against the Giver; especially the inspirations you have neglected, and the promptings to good which you have frustrated. Review the many Sacraments you have received, and see where are their fruits. Where are the precious jewels wherewith your Heavenly Bridegroom decked you? With what preparation have you received them? Reflect upon the ingratitude with which, while God sought to save you, you have fled from Him and rushed upon destruction.

#### Affections and Resolutions

1. Humble yourself in your wretchedness. O my God, how dare I come before Thine Eyes? I am but a corrupt being, a very sink of ingratitude and wickedness. Can it be that I have been so disloyal, that not one sense, not one faculty but has been sullied and stained;--not one day has passed but I have sinned before Thee? Was this a fitting return for all my Creator's gifts, for my Redeemer's Blood?

2. Ask pardon;--throw yourself at the Lord's Feet as the prodigal son, as the Magdalene, as the woman convicted of adultery. Have mercy, Lord, on me a sinner! O Living Fountain of Mercy, have pity on me, unworthy as I am.

3. Resolve to do better. Lord, with the help of Thy Grace I will never again give myself up to sin. I have loved it too well;--henceforth I would abhor it and cleave to Thee. Father of Mercy, I would live and die to Thee.

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<sup>24</sup> St. Francis, *Devout Life*, I.xii, 33-35.

4. In order to put away past sin, accuse yourself bravely of it, let there not be one sinful act which you do not bring to light.

5. Resolve to make every effort to tear up the roots of sin from your heart, especially this and that individual sin which troubles you most.

6. In order to do this, resolve steadfastly to follow the advice given you, and never think that you have done enough to atone for your past sin.

## **Conclusion**

1. Thank God for having waited till now for you, and for rousing these good intentions in your heart.

2. Offer Him all your heart to carry them to good effect.

3. Pray that He would strengthen you.

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## **Day 13**

### ***Fifth Meditation - On Death***<sup>25</sup>

#### **Preparation**

1. Place yourself in the Presence of God.

2. Ask His Grace.

3. Suppose yourself to be on your deathbed, in the last extremity, without the smallest hope of recovery.

#### **Considerations**

1. Consider the uncertainty as to the day of your death. One day your soul will quit this body--will it be in summer or winter? In town or country? By day or by night? Will it be suddenly or with warning? Will it be owing to sickness or an accident? Will you have time to make your last confession or not? Will your confessor or spiritual father be at hand or will he not? Alas, of all these things we know absolutely nothing: all that we do know is that die we shall, and for the most part sooner than we expect.

2. Consider that then the world is at end as far as you are concerned, there will be no more of it for you, it will be altogether overthrown for you, since all pleasures, vanities, worldly joys, empty delights will be as a mere fantastic vision to you. Woe is me, for what mere trifles and unrealities I have ventured to offend my God? Then you will see that what we preferred to Him was nought. But, on the other hand, all devotion and good works will then seem so precious and so sweet:--Why did I not tread that pleasant path? Then what you thought to be little sins will look like huge mountains, and your devotion will seem but a very little thing.

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<sup>25</sup> St. Francis, *Devout Life*, I.xiii, 36-38.

3. Consider the universal farewell which your soul will take of this world. It will say farewell to riches, pleasures, and idle companions; to amusements and pastimes, to friends and neighbors, to husband, wife and child, in short to all creation. And lastly it will say farewell to its own body, which it will leave pale and cold, to become repulsive in decay.

4. Consider how the survivors will hasten to put that body away, and hide it beneath the earth--and then the world will scarce give you another thought, or remember you, any more than you have done to those already gone. "God rest his soul!" men will say, and that is all. O death, how pitiless, how hard thou art!

5. Consider that when it quits the body the soul must go at once to the right hand or the left. To which will your soul go? What side will it take? none other, be sure, than that to which it had voluntarily drawn while yet in this world.

### **Affections and Resolutions**

1. Pray to God, and throw yourself into His Arms. O Lord, be Thou my stay in that day of anguish! May that hour be blessed and favorable to me, if all the rest of my life be full of sadness and trial.

2. Despise the world. Forasmuch as I know not the hour in which I must quit the world, I will not grow fond of it. O dear friends, beloved ones of my heart, be content that I cleave to you only with a holy friendship which may last forever; why should I cling to you with a tie which must needs be broken?

I will prepare for the hour of death and take every precaution for its peaceful arrival; I will thoroughly examine into the state of my conscience, and put in order whatever is wanting.

### **Conclusion**

Thank God for inspiring you with these resolutions: offer them to His Majesty: entreat Him anew to grant you a happy death by the Merits of His Dear Son's Death. Ask the prayers of the Blessed Virgin and the Saints. OUR FATHER, etc.

Gather a bouquet of myrrh.

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## **Day 14**

### ***Sixth Meditation - On Judgment***<sup>26</sup>

#### **Preparation**

1. Place yourself in the Presence of God.
2. Entreat Him to inspire you.

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<sup>26</sup> St. Francis, *Devout Life*, I.xiv, 39-41.

## Considerations

1. When the time comes which God has appointed for the end of this world, and after many terrible signs and warnings, which will overwhelm men with fear,--the whole earth will be destroyed, and nothing then left.
2. Afterwards, all men, save those already risen, shall rise from the dead, and at the voice of the Archangel appear in the valley of Jehoshaphat. But alas, with what diverse aspects! for some will be glorious and shining, others horrible and ghastly.
3. Consider the majesty with which the Sovereign Judge will appear surrounded by all His Saints and Angels; His Cross, the Sign of Grace to the good and of terror to the evil, shining brighter than the sun.
4. This Sovereign Judge will with His awful word, instantly fulfilled, separate the evil and the good, setting the one on His Right Hand, the other on His Left--an eternal separation, for they will never meet again.
5. This separation made, the books of conscience will be opened, and all men will behold the malice of the wicked, and how they have condemned God; as also the penitence of the good, and the results of the grace they received. Nothing will be hid. O my God, what confusion to the one, what rejoicing to the other! Consider the final sentence of the wicked. "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." Dwell upon these awful words. "Go," He says--for ever discarding these wretched sinners, banishing them forever from His Presence. He calls them "cursed:" O my soul, what a curse: a curse involving all other maledictions, all possible evil, an irrevocable curse, including all time and eternity; condemning them to everlasting fire. Think what that eternity of suffering implies.
6. Then consider the sentence of the good. "Come," the Judge says--O blessed loving word with which God draws us to Himself and receives us in His Bosom. "Blessed of My Father"--O blessing above all blessings! "inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world." O my God, and that Kingdom will know no end!

## Affections and Resolutions

1. Tremble, my soul, at the thought. O God, who will be my stay in that hour when the pillars of the earth are shaken?
2. Abhor your sins, which alone can cause you to be lost when that fearful day comes. Surely I will judge myself now, that I be not judged;--I will examine my conscience, accuse, condemn, punish myself, that the Judge may not condemn me then. I will confess my faults, and follow the counsels given me.

## Conclusion

Thank God for having given you means of safety in that terrible Day, and time for repentance.

Offer Him your heart, and ask for grace to use it well. OUR FATHER, etc.

Gather your bouquet.

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# Week 3

## Preview of Next Week

### Prayer:

The material for your meditations during Week 3 will consist of continued readings from the first part of the spiritual classic, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, by St. Francis de Sales.

- On Day 19, St. Francis concludes the meditations by recommending a *general Confession*, which is like a normal Confession, but instead of confessing only the sins that have occurred since the last Confession, the penitent confesses, as far as he can, *all* past sins.
  - Two of the benefits that one receives from a general Confession include a deeper appreciation of God's mercy in light of our many sins and an occasion to renounce all sin and follow Christ with greater fervor.
  - Making a general Confession is not a common practice today, but you may ask your spiritual director if he would be willing to let you do so. It may take the place of your normally scheduled spiritual direction. **Do not** seek to make a general Confession in the standard time that the parish offers Confessions.
  - If your spiritual director is not able to hear your general Confession, you may do the following:
    - Examine your life and make a list of the sins you remember.
    - Confess your sins to God in prayer.
    - Go to Confession; confess the sins that have occurred since your last Confession and then conclude, "as well as all the sins of my past life," having in mind the sins you just confessed in prayer.
  - You may move on to Day 20 and the rest of the book even while you are waiting to be able to make your general Confession.
- On Day 20, St. Francis provides a template of a formal resolution to serve God for you to write and sign, which includes a renewal of one's baptismal promises.
  - While the content of your formal resolution should not change, you may change some of the language in order for you to make it your own.
  - It is desirable that you write this formal resolution by hand on a separate piece of paper so that you can sign it and keep it separate from this book.

### Study:

In order to finish *To Save A Thousand Souls* within the 180 days, you will need to read two pages per day; by the end of Week 3, you should have made it to page 42, but do not limit yourself to that if you can and want to read more.

## Review of Past Week

### Prayer:

- I fulfilled my commitment to daily, personal prayer \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I fulfilled my commitment to the Liturgy of the Hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I slept for at least seven hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Sacraments:**

- I fulfilled my commitment to daily Mass this week. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to regular Confession. Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Virtue:**

- I was faithful to my bodily fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I was faithful to my digital fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I was faithful to my dating fast. Yes / No
- I was faithful to the necessary practices from [www.hismercyendures.org](http://www.hismercyendures.org). Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Service:**

- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to altar serving. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to spiritual works of mercy. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to corporal works of mercy. Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Study:**

- I fulfilled my commitment to spiritual reading this week: Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my response, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Planning Ahead**

- What day(s) will I go to daily Mass this week? S M T W Th F S
- What day will I go to Confession this week? S M T W Th F S or [ ] not this week
- Am I scheduled for altar service this week? Spiritual works of mercy? Corporal works of mercy? Yes / No

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- Have I scheduled time to prepare for my general Confession? Yes / No
  - Have I scheduled time to write out my formal resolution to serve God? Yes / No
  - Have I scheduled my next spiritual direction? Yes / No
  - Have I scheduled my seminary visit? Yes / No
  - Have I scheduled my discernment retreat? Yes / No

**Day 15**

**Seventh Meditation - On Hell<sup>27</sup>**

**Preparation**

1. Place yourself in God's Presence.
2. Humble yourself, and ask His Aid.
3. Picture to yourself a dark city, reeking with the flames of sulfur and brimstone, inhabited by citizens who cannot get forth.

<sup>27</sup> St. Francis, *Devout Life*, I.xv, 42.



## Considerations

1. Even so the lost are plunged in their infernal abyss;--suffering indescribable torture in every sense and every member; and that because having used their members and senses for sin, it is just that through them they should suffer now. Those eyes which delighted in impure vicious sights, now behold devils; the ears which took pleasure in unholy words, now are deafened with yells of despair;--and so on with the other senses.
2. Beyond all these sufferings, there is one greater still, the privation and pain of loss of God's Glory, which is forever denied to their vision. If Absalom cared not to be released from exile, if he might not see his father's face [2 Samuel 14:32], how much sorer will it be to be deprived forever of the blessed vision of God?
3. Consider how insupportable the pains of Hell will be by reason of their eternal duration. If the irritating bite of an insect, or the restlessness of fever, makes an ordinary night seem so long and tedious, how terrible will the endless night of eternity be, where nought will be found save despair, blasphemy and fury!

## Affections and Resolutions

1. Read the Prophet's descriptions of the terrors of the Lord<sup>28</sup>, and ask your soul whether it can face them--whether you can bear to lose your God forever?
2. Confess that you have repeatedly deserved to do so. Resolve henceforth to act differently, and to rescue yourself from this abyss. Resolve on distinct definite acts by which you may avoid sin, and thereby eternal death.

Give thanks, offer yourself, pray.

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## Day 16

### *Eighth Meditation - On Paradise*<sup>29</sup>

#### Preparation

1. Place yourself in the Presence of God.
2. Invoke His Aid.

#### Considerations

1. Represent to yourself a lovely calm night, when the heavens are bright with innumerable stars: add to the beauty of such a night the utmost beauty of a glorious summer's day,-- the sun's brightness not hindering the clear shining of moon or stars, and then be sure that it all falls immeasurably short of the glory of Paradise. O bright and blessed country, O sweet and precious place!

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<sup>28</sup> Isaiah 33:14; "In Zion sinners are in dread, trembling grips the impious: 'Who of us can live with consuming fire? Who of us can live with everlasting flames?'"

<sup>29</sup> St. Francis, *Devout Life*, I.xvi, 44-45.

2. Consider the beauty and perfection of the countless inhabitants of that blessed country;-- the millions and millions of angels, Cherubim and Seraphim; the glorious company of Apostles, martyrs, confessors, virgins, and saints. O blessed company, any one single member of which surpasses all the glory of this world, what will it be to behold them all, to sing with them the sweet Song of the Lamb? They rejoice with a perpetual joy, they share a bliss unspeakable, and unchangeable delights.

3. Consider how they enjoy the Presence of God, Who fills them with the richness of His Vision, which is a perfect ocean of delight; the joy of being forever united to their Head. They are like happy birds, hovering and singing forever within the atmosphere of divinity, which fills them with inconceivable pleasures. There each one vies without jealousy in singing the praises of the Creator. "Blessed art Thou for ever, O Dear and Precious Lord and Redeemer, Who dost so freely give us of Thine Own Glory," they cry; and He in His turn pours out His ceaseless Blessing on His Saints. "Blessed are ye,--Mine own forever, who have served Me faithfully, and with a good courage."

### **Affections and Resolutions**

1. Admire and rejoice in the Heavenly Country; the glorious and blessed New Jerusalem.

2. Reprove the coldness of your own heart for having hitherto so little sought after that glorious abode. Why have I so long lingered indifferent to the eternal happiness set before me? Woe is me that, for the sake of poor savourless earthly things, I have so often forgotten those heavenly delights. How could I neglect such real treasures for mere vain and contemptible earthly matters?

3. Aspire earnestly after that blessed abode. Forasmuch, O Dear Lord, as Thou hast been pleased to turn my feet into Thy ways, never will I again look back. Go forth, my soul, towards thy promised rest, journey unweariedly to that hoped-for land; wherefore shouldst thou tarry in Egypt?

4. Resolve to give up such and such things, which hinder you on the way, and to do such others as will help you thitherwards.

Give thanks, offer, pray.

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## **Day 17**

### ***Ninth Meditation - On the Choice Open to You Between Heaven and Hell***<sup>30</sup>

#### **Preparation**

1. Place yourself in the Presence of God.

2. Humble yourself before Him, and ask His inspiration.

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<sup>30</sup> St. Francis, *Devout Life*, I.xvii, 46-48.

## Considerations

1. Imagine yourself alone with your good angel in an open plain, as was Tobit on his way to Rages<sup>31</sup>. Suppose the Angel to set before you Paradise, full of delights and joys; and on the other hand Hell, with all its torments. Contemplate both, kneeling in imagination before your guardian Angel. Consider that you are most truly standing between Hell and Paradise, and that both the one and the other are open to receive you, according to your own choice.
2. Consider that the choice you make in this life will last forever in the next.
3. Consider too, that while both are open to receive you according to your choice, yet God, Who is prepared to give the one by reason of His Justice, the other by reason of His Mercy, all the while desires unspeakably that you should select Paradise; and your good Angel is urging you with all his might to do so, offering you countless graces on God's part, countless helps to attain to it.
4. Consider that Jesus Christ, enthroned in Heaven, looks down upon you in loving invitation: "O beloved one, come unto Me, and joy forever in the eternal blessedness of My Love!" Behold His mother yearning over you with maternal tenderness--"Courage, my child, do not despise the Goodness of my Son, or my earnest prayers for thy salvation." Behold the Saints, who have left you their example, the millions of holy souls who long after you, desiring earnestly that you may one day be for ever joined to them in their song of praise, urging upon you that the road to Heaven is not so hard to find as the world would have you think. "Press on boldly, dear friend,"--they cry. "Whoso will ponder well the path by which we came hither, will discover that we attained to these present delights by sweeter joys than any this world can give."

## The Choice

1. O Hell, I abhor thee now and forever; I abhor thy griefs and torments, thine endless misery, the unceasing blasphemies and maledictions which thou pourest out upon my God;--and turning to thee, O blessed Paradise, eternal glory, unfading happiness, I choose thee for ever as my abode, thy glorious mansions, thy precious and abiding tabernacles. O my God, I bless Thy Mercy which gives me the power to choose--O Jesus, Saviour, I accept Thine Eternal Love, and praise Thee for the promise Thou hast given me of a place prepared for me in that blessed New Jerusalem, where I shall love and bless Thee for ever.
  2. Dwell lovingly upon the example set before you by the Blessed Virgin and the Saints, and strive to follow where they point you. Give yourself up to your guardian Angel, that he may be your guide, and gird up your courage anew to make this choice.
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## Day 18

### *Tenth Meditation - On How the Soul Chooses the Devout Life*<sup>32</sup>

#### Preparation

1. Place yourself in the Presence of God.
2. Humble yourself before Him, and ask His Aid.

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<sup>31</sup> Refer to Tobit 6.

<sup>32</sup> St. Francis, *Devout Life*, I.xviii, 49-51.

## Considerations

1. Once more imagine yourself in an open plain, alone with your guardian Angel, and represent to yourself on the left hand the Devil sitting on a high and mighty throne, surrounded by a vast troop of worldly men, who bow bareheaded before him, doing homage to him by the various sins they commit. Study the countenances of the miserable courtiers of that most abominable king:--some raging with fury, envy and passion, some murderous in their hatred;--others pale and haggard in their craving after wealth, or madly pursuing every vain and profitless pleasure;--others sunk and lost in vile, impure affections. See how all alike are hateful, restless, wild: see how they despise one another, and only pretend to an unreal self-seeking love. Such is the miserable reign of the abhorred Tyrant.

2. On the other hand, behold Jesus Christ Crucified, calling these unhappy wretches to come to Him, and interceding for them with all the Love of His Precious Heart. Behold the company of devout souls and their guardian Angels, contemplate the beauty of this religious Kingdom. What lovelier than the troop of virgin souls, men and women, pure as lilies:-- widows in their holy desolation and humility; husbands and wives living in all tender love and mutual cherishing. See how such pious souls know how to combine their exterior and interior duties;--to love the earthly spouse without diminishing their devotion to the Heavenly Bridegroom. Look around--one and all you will see them with loving, holy, gentle countenances listening to the Voice of their Lord, all seeking to enthrone Him more and more within their hearts.

They rejoice, but it is with a peaceful, loving, sober joy; they love, but their love is altogether holy and pure. Such among these devout ones as have sorrows to bear, are not disheartened thereby, and do not grieve overmuch, for their Savior's Eye is upon them to comfort them, and they all seek Him only.

3. Surely you have altogether renounced Satan with his weary miserable troop, by the good resolutions you have made;--but nevertheless you have not yet wholly attained to the King Jesus, or altogether joined His blessed company of devout ones:--you have hovered betwixt the two.

4. The Blessed Virgin, Saint Joseph, Saint Louis, Saint Monica, and hundreds of thousands more who were once like you, living in the world, call upon you and encourage you.

5. The Crucified King Himself calls you by your own name: "Come, O my beloved, come, and let Me crown thee!"

## The Choice

1. O world, O vile company, never will I enlist beneath thy banner; for ever I have forsaken thy flatteries and deceptions. O proud king, monarch of evil, infernal spirit, I renounce thee and all thy hollow pomp, I detest thee and all thy works.

2. And turning to Thee, O Sweet Jesus, King of blessedness and of eternal glory, I cleave to Thee with all the powers of my soul, I adore Thee with all my heart, I choose Thee now and ever for my King, and with inviolable fidelity I would offer my irrevocable service, and submit myself to Thy holy laws and ordinances.

3. O Blessed Virgin Mother of God, you shall be my example, I will follow you with all reverence and respect.

O my good Angel, bring me to this heavenly company, leave me not until I have reached them, with whom I will sing for ever, in testimony of my choice, "Glory be to Jesus, my Lord!"

## Day 19

### *How to Make a General Confession*<sup>33</sup>

“Such meditations as these, my child, will help you, and having made them, go on bravely in the spirit of humility to make your general confession;--but I entreat you, be not troubled by any sort of fearfulness. The scorpion who stings us is venomous, but when his oil has been distilled, it is the best remedy for his bite;--even so sin is shameful when we commit it, but when reduced to repentance and confession, it becomes salutary and honorable. Contrition and confession are in themselves so lovely and sweet-savored, that they efface the ugliness and disperse the ill savor of sin. Simon the leper called Magdalene a sinner [Mark 14 and Luke 7:39], but our Lord turned the discourse to the perfume of her ointment and the greatness of her love. If we are really humble, my child, our sins will be infinitely displeasing to us, because they offend God;--but it will be welcome and sweet to accuse ourselves thereof because in so doing we honor God; and there is always somewhat soothing in fully telling the physician all details of our pain.”

“When you come to your spiritual father, imagine yourself to be on Mount Calvary, at the Feet of the Crucified Savior, Whose Precious Blood is dropping freely to cleanse you from all your sin. Though it is not his actual Blood, yet it is the merit of that outpoured Blood which is sprinkled over His penitents as they kneel in Confession. Be sure then that you open your heart fully, and put away your sins by confessing them, for in proportion as they are put out, so will the Precious Merits of the Passion of Christ come in and fill you with blessings.”

“Tell everything simply and with straightforwardness, and thoroughly satisfy your conscience in doing so. Then listen to the admonitions and counsels of God's Minister, saying in your heart, ‘Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth.’ It is truly God to Whom you hearken, forasmuch as He has said to His representatives, ‘Whoso heareth you, heareth Me’ [Luke 10:16]. Then take the following protest, as a summary of your contrition, having carefully studied and meditated upon it beforehand: read it through with as earnest an intention as you can make.”

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## Day 20

### *A Hearty Protest Made with the Object of Confirming the Soul's Resolution to Serve God, as a Conclusion to Its Acts of Penitence*<sup>34</sup>

“I, the undersigned,--in the Presence of God and of all the company of Heaven, having considered the Infinite Mercy of His Heavenly Goodness towards me, a most miserable, unworthy creature, whom He has created, preserved, sustained, delivered from so many dangers, and filled with so many blessings: having above all considered the incomprehensible mercy and loving-kindness with which this most Good God has borne with

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<sup>33</sup> St. Francis, *Devout Life*, I.xix, 52-53.

<sup>34</sup> St. Francis, *Devout Life*, I.xx, 54-56.

me in my sinfulness, leading me so tenderly to repentance, and waiting so patiently for me till this-- (present) year of my life, notwithstanding all my ingratitude, disloyalty and faithlessness, by which I have delayed turning to Him, and despising His Grace, have offended Him anew: and further, remembering that in my Baptism I was solemnly and happily dedicated to God as His child, and that in defiance of the profession then made in my name, I have so often miserably profaned my gifts, turning them against God's Divine Majesty:--I, now coming to myself prostrate in heart and soul before the Throne of His Justice, acknowledge and confess that I am duly accused and convicted of treason against His Majesty, and guilty of the Death and Passion of Jesus Christ, by reason of the sins I have committed, for which He died, bearing the reproach of the Cross; so that I deserve nothing else save eternal damnation.”

“But turning to the Throne of Infinite Mercy of this Eternal God, detesting the sins of my past life with all my heart and all my strength, I humbly desire and ask grace, pardon, and mercy, with entire absolution from my sin, in virtue of the Death and Passion of that same Lord and Redeemer, on Whom I lean as the only ground of my hope. I renew the sacred promise of faithfulness to God made in my name at my Baptism; renouncing the devil, the world, and the flesh, abhorring their accursed suggestions, vanities and lusts, now and for all eternity. And turning to a Loving and Pitiful God, I desire, intend, and deliberately resolve to serve and love Him now and eternally, devoting my mind and all its faculties, my soul and all its powers, my heart and all its affections, my body and all its senses, to His Will. I resolve never to misuse any part of my being by opposing His Divine Will and Sovereign Majesty, to which I wholly immolate myself in intention, vowing ever to be His loyal, obedient and faithful servant without any change or recall. But if unhappily, through the promptings of the enemy, or human infirmity, I should in anywise fail in this my resolution and dedication, I do most earnestly resolve by the grace of the Holy Spirit to rise up again so soon as I shall perceive my fall, and turn anew, without any delay, to seek His Divine Mercy. This is my firm will and intention,--my inviolable, irrevocable resolution, which I make and confirm without any reserve, in the Holy Presence of God, in the sight of the Church triumphant, and before the Church militant, which is my mother, who accepts this my declaration, in the person of him who, as her representative, hears me make it. Be pleased, O Eternal, All-Powerful, and All-Loving God,-- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, to confirm me in this my resolution, and accept my hearty and willing offering. And inasmuch as Thou hast been pleased to inspire me with the will to make it, give me also the needful strength and grace to keep it. O God, Thou art my God, the God of my heart, my soul, and spirit, and as such I acknowledge and adore Thee, now and for all eternity. Glory be to Jesus. Amen.”

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## Day 21

### *Conclusion of This First Purification*<sup>35</sup>

“Having made this resolution, wait attentively, and open the ears of your heart, that you may in spirit hear the absolution which the Lord of your soul, sitting on the throne of His Mercy, will speak in Heaven before the Saints and Angels when His Priest absolves you here below in His Name. Be sure that all that company of blessed ones rejoice in your joy, and sing a song of untold gladness, embracing you and accepting you as

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<sup>35</sup> St. Francis, *Devout Life*, I.xxi, 57.

cleansed and sanctified. Of a truth, my child, this is a marvelous deed, and a most blessed bargain for you, inasmuch as giving yourself to His Divine Majesty, you gain Him, and save yourself for eternal life. No more remains to do, save to take the pen and heartily sign your protest, and then hasten to the Altar, where God on His side will sign and seal your absolution, and His promise of Paradise, giving Himself to you in His Sacrament, as a sacred seal placed upon your renewed heart. And thus, dear child, your soul will be cleansed from sin, and from all its affections. But forasmuch as these affections are easily rekindled, thanks to our infirmity and concupiscence (which may be mortified, but which can never be altogether extinguished while we live), I will give you certain counsels by the practice of which you may henceforth avoid mortal sin, and the affections pertaining thereto. And as these counsels will also help you to attain a yet more perfect purification, before giving them, I would say somewhat concerning that absolute perfection to which I seek to lead you.”

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## Week 4

### Preview of Next Week

#### **Prayer:**

The material for your meditations during Week 4 will consist of three more readings that will conclude the first part of the spiritual classic, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, by St. Francis de Sales. On Day 25, you will move to Part II of *Discernment 180: Praying with Scripture* - which will focus on growth in friendship with Jesus and provide exposure to other ways to pray.

#### **Study:**

In order to finish *To Save A Thousand Souls* within the 180 days, you will need to read two pages per day; by the end of Week 4, you should have made it to page 56, but do not limit yourself to that if you can and want to read more.

### Review of Past Week

#### **Prayer:**

- I fulfilled my commitment to daily, personal prayer \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I fulfilled my commitment to the Liturgy of the Hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I slept for at least seven hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Sacraments:**

- I fulfilled my commitment to daily Mass this week. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to regular Confession. Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Virtue:**

- I was faithful to my bodily fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I was faithful to my digital fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I was faithful to my dating fast. Yes / No
- I was faithful to the necessary practices from [www.hismercyendures.org](http://www.hismercyendures.org). Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Service:**

- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to altar serving. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to spiritual works of mercy. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to corporal works of mercy. Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Study:**

- I fulfilled my commitment to spiritual reading this week: Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my response, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Planning Ahead**

- What day(s) will I go to daily Mass this week? S M T W Th F S
- What day will I go to Confession this week? S M T W Th F S or [ ] not this week
- Am I scheduled for altar service this week? Spiritual works of mercy? Corporal works of mercy? Yes / No

- 
- Have I scheduled my next spiritual direction? Yes / No
  - Have I scheduled my seminary visit? Yes / No
  - Have I scheduled my discernment retreat? Yes / No

**Day 22**

***The Necessity of Purging Away All Tendency to Venial Sins***<sup>36</sup>

“As daylight waxes, we, gazing into a mirror, see more plainly the soils and stains upon our face; and even so as the interior light of the Holy Spirit enlightens our conscience, we see more distinctly the sins, inclinations and imperfections which hinder our progress towards real devotion. And the selfsame light which shows us these blots and stains, kindles in us the desire to be cleansed and purged therefrom.”

“You will find then, my child, that besides the mortal sins and their affections from which your soul has already been purged, you are beset by sundry inclinations and tendencies to venial sin; mind, I do not say you will find venial sins, but the inclination and tendency to them. Now, one is quite different from the other. We can never be altogether free from venial sin,--at least not until after a very long persistence in this purity; but we can be without any affection for venial sin. It is altogether one thing to have said something unimportant not strictly true, out of carelessness or liveliness, and quite a different matter to take pleasure in lying, and in the habitual practice thereof. But I tell you that you must purify your soul from all inclination to venial sin;--that is to say, you must not voluntarily retain any deliberate intention of permitting yourself to commit any venial sin whatever. It would be most unworthy consciously to admit anything so displeasing to God, as the will to offend Him in anywise. Venial sin, however small, is displeasing to God, although it be not so

<sup>36</sup> St. Francis, *Devout Life*, I.xxii, 58-60.

displeasing as the greater sins which involve eternal condemnation; and if venial sin is displeasing to Him, any clinging which we tolerate to mortal sin is nothing less than a resolution to offend His Divine Majesty. Is it really possible that a rightly disposed soul can not only offend God, but take pleasure therein?"

"These inclinations, my child, are in direct opposition to devotion, as inclinations to mortal sin are to love:--they weaken the mental power, hinder Divine consolations, and open the door to temptations;--and although they may not destroy the soul, at least they bring on very serious disease. 'Dead flies cause the ointment to send forth a stinking savour,' says the Wise Man [Ecclesiastes 10:1]. He means that the flies which settle upon and taste of the ointment only damage it temporarily, leaving the mass intact, but if they fall into it, and die there, they spoil and corrupt it. Even so venial sins which pass over a devout soul without being harbored, do not permanently injure it, but if such sins are fostered and cherished, they destroy the sweet savour of that soul--that is to say, its devotion. The spider cannot kill bees, but it can spoil their honey, and so encumber their combs with its webs in course of time, as to hinder the bees materially. Just so, though venial sins may not lose the soul, they will spoil its devotion, and so cumber its faculties with bad habits and evil inclinations, as to deprive it of all that cheerful readiness which is the very essence of true devotion; that is to say, if they are harbored in the conscience by delight taken therein. A trifling inaccuracy, a little hastiness in word or action, some small excess in mirth, in dress, in gaiety, may not be very important, if these are forthwith heeded and swept out as spiritual cobwebs;--but if they are permitted to linger in the heart, or, worse still, if we take pleasure in them and indulge them, our honey will soon be spoilt, and the hive of our conscience will be cumbered and damaged. But I ask again, how can a generous heart take delight in anything it knows to be displeasing to its God, or wish to do what offends Him?"

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## Day 23

### *It is Needful to Put Away All Inclination for Useless and Dangerous Things*<sup>37</sup>

"Sports, balls, plays, festivities, pomps, are not in themselves evil, but rather indifferent matters, capable of being used for good or ill; but nevertheless they are dangerous, and it is still more dangerous to take great delight in them. Therefore, my child, I say that although it is lawful to amuse yourself, to dance, dress, feast, and see seemly plays,--at the same time, if you are much addicted to these things, they will hinder your devotion, and become extremely hurtful and dangerous to you. The harm lies, not in doing them, but in the degree to which you care for them. It is a pity to sow the seed of vain and foolish tastes in the soil of your heart, taking up the place of better things, and hindering the soul from cultivating good dispositions. It was thus that the Nazarites of old abstained not merely from all intoxicating liquors, but from grapes fresh or dried, and from vinegar, not because these were intoxicating, but because they might excite the desire for fermented liquors. Just so, while I do not forbid the use of these dangerous pleasures, I say that you cannot take an excessive delight in them without their telling upon your devotion. When the stag has waxed fat he hides himself amid the thicket, conscious that his fleetness is impaired should he be in need to fly: and so the human heart which is cumbered with useless, superfluous, dangerous clings becomes incapacitated for that earnest following after God which is the true life of devotion. No one blames children for running after

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<sup>37</sup> St. Francis, *Devout Life*, I.xxiii, 61-62.

butterflies, because they are children, but is it not ridiculous and pitiful to see full-grown men eager about such worthless trifles as the worldly amusements before named, which are likely to throw them off their balance and disturb their spiritual life? Therefore, dear child, I would have you cleanse your heart from all such tastes, remembering that while the acts themselves are not necessarily incompatible with a devout life, all delight in them must be harmful.”

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## Day 24

### *All Evil Inclinations Must Be Purged Away*<sup>38</sup>

“Furthermore, my child, we have certain natural inclinations, which are not strictly speaking either mortal or venial sins, but rather imperfections; and the acts in which they take shape, failings and deficiencies. Thus Saint Jerome says that Saint Paula had so strong a tendency to excessive sorrow, that when she lost her husband and children she nearly died of grief: that was not a sin, but an imperfection, since it did not depend upon her wish and will. Some people are naturally easy, some oppositions; some are indisposed to accept other men's opinions, some naturally disposed to be cross, some to be affectionate—in short, there is hardly any one in whom some such imperfections do not exist. Now, although they be natural and instinctive in each person, they may be remedied and corrected, or even eradicated, by cultivating the reverse disposition. And this, my child, must be done. Gardeners have found how to make the bitter almond tree bear sweet fruit, by grafting the juice of the latter upon it, why should we not purge out our perverse dispositions and infuse such as are good? There is no disposition so good but it may be made bad by dint of vicious habits, and neither is there any natural disposition so perverse but that it may be conquered and overcome by God's Grace primarily, and then by our earnest diligent endeavor.

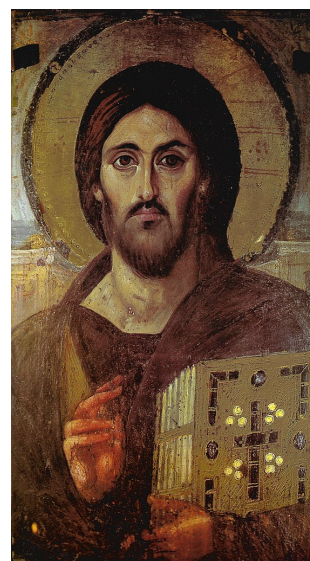
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## Part II: *Praying with Sacred Scripture*

### Days 25-54

Part I of *Discernment 180* has given your discernment journey the solid foundation of a devout life. With St. Francis de Sales' guidance, you have resolved to give your life to Christ in a definitive way. As you move to Part II, recall that our Lord is never outdone in generosity; persevere, then, with humble anticipation of receiving much more than you have given!

Part II of *Discernment 180* consists of thirty passages from Sacred Scripture, and it serves two purposes: growth in friendship with Christ and exposure to other ways of prayer.



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<sup>38</sup> St. Francis, *Devout Life*, I.xxiv, 63.

While the content for meditation may not mention the priesthood explicitly, praying with these passages, reading *To Save a Thousand Souls*, and serving others in various ways may cause thoughts, feelings, and desires about the priesthood to arise. That is okay; in fact, it is good. Discerning the priesthood is why you started this period of vocational discernment in the first place. Speak to God honestly about what comes up in your mind and heart and listen for Him patiently to respond. Other themes in prayer may also draw your attention over the next 30 days; that is also good. Discernment is not about solving a problem - it is about knowing and loving our Lord and friend, Jesus Christ. The more we know His voice, the more we trust His goodness, and the more we love His will, the more we will be able to follow where He leads. That is what Part II is about.

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## Day 25

*The Annunciation:* Luke 1:26-38

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## Day 26

*The Visitation:* Luke 1:39-56

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## Day 27

*The Nativity:* Luke 2:1-20

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## Day 28

*The Baptism of Our Lord:* Mark 1:1-11

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## Week 5

### Preview of Next Week

#### *Prayer:*

The material for your meditations during Week 5 will consist of more Scripture passages from the Gospels.

- On Day 30, there will be an *excursus* on a type of prayer popularly known as the ARRR Prayer. Schedule time apart from your dedicated prayer time to read this *excursus*.
- As you meditate on these Scripture passages, you may find that some speak to you powerfully, while others do not speak to you at all. That is to be expected; keep these things in mind when you experience them:

- Stay with the dry passages for the entire time you have dedicated for prayer that day; do not bounce around to try to find something “better.” The Lord is inviting you to fidelity and perseverance in the dry times.
- If you pray with a passage that speaks to you so powerfully that the time of prayer ended before you were finished, pray with that passage again the following day.
  - The goal is not to get through 30 passages in 30 days - it is to grow in friendship with Jesus Christ. Do not leave Him behind by moving to a new passage if He is still speaking to you in the old one. St. Ignatius calls this exercise a “repetition”: “I will remain quietly meditating upon the point in which I have found what I desire without any eagerness to go on till I have been satisfied.” ~ St. Ignatius, Exercise #76

**Study:**

In order to finish *To Save A Thousand Souls* within the 180 days, you will need to read two pages per day; by the end of Week 5, you should have made it to page 70, but do not limit yourself to that if you can and want to read more.

**Review of Past Week**

**Prayer:**

- *I fulfilled my commitment to daily, personal prayer \_\_\_/7 days this week.*
- *I fulfilled my commitment to the Liturgy of the Hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.*
- *I slept for at least seven hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.*
- *These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:*

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- *Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:*

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**Sacraments:**

- *I fulfilled my commitment to daily Mass this week. Yes / No*
- *I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to regular Confession. Yes / No*
- *These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:*

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- *Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:*

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**Virtue:**

- I was faithful to my bodily fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I was faithful to my digital fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I was faithful to my dating fast. Yes / No
- I was faithful to the necessary practices from [www.hismercyendures.org](http://www.hismercyendures.org). Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Service:**

- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to altar serving. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to spiritual works of mercy. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to corporal works of mercy. Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Study:**

- I fulfilled my commitment to spiritual reading this week: Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my response, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Planning Ahead**

- What day(s) will I go to daily Mass this week? S M T W Th F S
- What day will I go to Confession this week? S M T W Th F S or [ ] not this week

- Am I scheduled for altar service this week? Spiritual works of mercy? Corporal works of mercy? Yes / No

- 
- When will I make extra time to read the excursus on ARRR prayer this week? \_\_\_\_\_
  - Have I scheduled my next spiritual direction? Yes / No
  - Have I scheduled my seminary visit? Yes / No
  - Have I scheduled my discernment retreat? Yes / No
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## Day 29

*Jesus, the Good Shepherd:* John 10:1-18

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## Day 30

*The Washing of the Feet:* John 13:1-15

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## Excursus: ARRR Prayer

St. Teresa of Avila said, “For mental prayer in my opinion is nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with Him who we know loves us.” The A-R-R-R Prayer is a simple method of coming to the Lord as you are. It can be used almost any time of the day and in just about any circumstance. It can also be used within any other method of prayer, such as the method described by St. Francis de Sales, *Lectio Divina*, or Ignatian Contemplation, as a way of conversing with the Lord. “A-R-R-R” stands for different movements within the prayer: Acknowledge, Relate, Receive, Respond. Below, along with these steps, are illustrations of how these movements work, from the example of Mary at the Annunciation (Lk 1:26-38).

### *Acknowledge*

- Openly and honestly, without prejudice, acknowledge how you are before God. What are you experiencing? What is moving in your heart?
- Marian Example: At the Annunciation Mary was “troubled” and pondered what the words of the Angel meant.

### *Relate*

- Bring yourself as you are into relationship with God by relating your experience to Him. Speak to Him from your heart.
- Marian Example: At the Annunciation Mary asked, “How can this be?”

*Receive*

- Listen to what God is doing with the movements of your heart. Receive His presence and the constancy of His love.
- Marian Example: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you.”

*Respond*

- What we receive impels us to respond in gratitude and with renewed heart.
  - Marian Example: Mary’s fiat, “May it be done unto me...”
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**Day 31**

*The Vine and the Branches: John 15:1-13*

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**Day 32**

*Jesus’ High Priestly Prayer: John 17:20-26*

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**Day 33**

*The Temptation of Jesus: Matthew 4:1-11*

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**Day 34**

*Daughter of Jairus; Woman with a Hemorrhage: Mark 6:21-43*

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**Day 35**

*The Healing of the Paralytic: Mark 2:1-12*

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# Week 6

## Preview of Next Week

### Prayer:

The material for your meditations during Week 6 will consist of more Scripture passages from the Gospels.

- On Day 37, there will be an *excursus* on *lectio divina*. Schedule time apart from your dedicated prayer time to read this *excursus*.
- Remember the call to fidelity in dry passages and the invitation to repetition in the passages that speak to you powerfully.

### Study:

In order to finish *To Save A Thousand Souls* within the 180 days, you will need to read two pages per day; by the end of Week 6, you should have made it to page 84, but do not limit yourself to that if you can and want to read more.

## Review of Past Week

### Prayer:

- I fulfilled my commitment to daily, personal prayer \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I fulfilled my commitment to the Liturgy of the Hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I slept for at least seven hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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### Sacraments:

- I fulfilled my commitment to daily Mass this week. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to regular Confession. Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Virtue:**

- I was faithful to my bodily fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I was faithful to my digital fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I was faithful to my dating fast. Yes / No
- I was faithful to the necessary practices from [www.hismercyendures.org](http://www.hismercyendures.org). Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Service:**

- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to altar serving. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to spiritual works of mercy. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to corporal works of mercy. Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Study:**

- I fulfilled my commitment to spiritual reading this week: Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my response, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Planning Ahead**

- What day(s) will I go to daily Mass this week? S M T W Th F S
- What day will I go to Confession this week? S M T W Th F S or [ ] not this week

- Am I scheduled for altar service this week? Spiritual works of mercy? Corporal works of mercy? Yes / No
- 
- When will I make extra time to read the excursus on lectio divina this week? \_\_\_\_\_
  - Have I scheduled my next spiritual direction? Yes / No
  - Have I scheduled my seminary visit? Yes / No
  - Have I scheduled my discernment retreat? Yes / No
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## Day 36

The Woman at the Well: John 4:1-26

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## Day 37

The Prodigal Son: Luke 15:11-32

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## Excursus: Lectio Divina

*Lectio Divina*, or “divine reading,” is an ancient way of praying with Scripture. We move from the words on the page into intimacy with Jesus, the Living Word who speaks to us today. *Lectio divina* has four steps:

### *Lectio*: Reading

- *Lectio divina* begins with a prayerful reading of Scripture. This prayerful reading differs greatly from the fast and cursory reading of novels, magazines, or online material. It is different from the information-gathering task of reading textbooks or instruction manuals. There is a reverential and prayerful listening that accompanies the reading. With a spirit of silence and hopeful anticipation, I listen for the words that speak to me personally and intimately. In *lectio* I read slowly and attentively, honing in on the word or phrase that attracts me, draws me; the words with which God is inviting me to rest.

### *Meditatio*: Meditation

- Once we have found a word or a passage in the Scriptures that speaks to us in a personal way, we must take it in and “ruminate” on it. The image of the ruminant animal quietly chewing its cud was used in antiquity as a symbol of the Christian pondering the Word of God. Christians have always seen a scriptural invitation to *lectio divina* in the example of the Virgin Mary “pondering in her heart” what she saw and heard of Christ (Luke 2:19). For us today these images are a reminder that we must take in the word – that is memorize it – and while gently repeating it to ourselves, allow it to interact with our thoughts, our hopes, our memories, our desires. This is the second step or stage in *lectio divina* –

*meditatio*. Through *meditatio* we allow God's Word to become His word for us, a word that touches us and affects us at our deepest levels.

*Oratio*: Prayer

- The third step in *lectio divina* is *oratio*: prayer. Prayer here is understood both as dialogue with God—that is, as loving conversation with the One who has invited us into His embrace—and as offering to God our very selves, including our thoughts, feelings, desires, fears and weaknesses. We allow our real selves to be touched and changed by the word of God.

*Contemplatio*: Contemplation

- Finally, we simply rest in the presence of the One who has used His word as a means of inviting us to accept His transforming embrace. No one who has ever been in love needs to be reminded that there are moments in loving relationships when words are unnecessary. It is the same in our relationship with God. Wordless, quiet rest in the presence of the One Who loves us has a name in the Christian tradition – *contemplatio*, contemplation. Once again we practice silence, letting go of our words; simply enjoying the experience of being in the presence of God. Contemplation, strictly speaking, is a gift of God, so we cannot produce it ourselves, but we can dispose ourselves to receive it as a gift—for as long as God wishes to give it to us.

The more you practice *lectio*, the easier it gets, and the easier you will begin to move through these steps, disposing yourself more and more to the gift of contemplation.

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## Day 38

*The Call of Simon*: Luke 5:1-11

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## Day 39

*The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant*: Matthew 18:21-35

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## Day 40

*Fulfilled in your Hearing*: Luke 4:14-22

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## Day 41

*Jesus Walking on the Water: Matthew 14:22-33*

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## Day 42

*The Lilies of the Field: Matthew 5:25-32*

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## Week 7

### Preview of Next Week

#### **Prayer:**

The material for your meditations during Week 7 will consist of more Scripture passages from the Gospels.

- On Day 44, there will be an *excursus* on Ignatian contemplation. Schedule time apart from your dedicated prayer time to read this *excursus*.
- Remember the call to fidelity in dry passages and the invitation to repetition in the passages that speak to you powerfully.

#### **Study:**

In order to finish *To Save A Thousand Souls* within the 180 days, you will need to read two pages per day; by the end of Week 7, you should have made it to page 98, but do not limit yourself to that if you can and want to read more.

### Review of Past Week

#### **Prayer:**

- *I fulfilled my commitment to daily, personal prayer \_\_\_/7 days this week.*
- *I fulfilled my commitment to the Liturgy of the Hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.*
- *I slept for at least seven hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.*
- *These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:*

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- *Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:*

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**Sacraments:**

- I fulfilled my commitment to daily Mass this week. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to regular Confession. Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Virtue:**

- I was faithful to my bodily fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I was faithful to my digital fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I was faithful to my dating fast. Yes / No
- I was faithful to the necessary practices from [www.hismercyendures.org](http://www.hismercyendures.org). Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Service:**

- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to altar serving. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to spiritual works of mercy. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to corporal works of mercy. Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Study:**

- I fulfilled my commitment to spiritual reading this week: Yes / No
  
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:  
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- Based on my response, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:  
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**Planning Ahead**

- What day(s) will I go to daily Mass this week? S M T W Th F S
- What day will I go to Confession this week? S M T W Th F S or [ ] not this week
- Am I scheduled for altar service this week? Spiritual works of mercy? Corporal works of mercy? Yes / No  
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- When will I make extra time to read the excursus on Ignatian contemplation this week? -----
- Have I scheduled my next spiritual direction? Yes / No
- Have I scheduled my seminary visit? Yes / No
- Have I scheduled my discernment retreat? Yes / No

**Day 43**

*The Beatitudes: Matthew 5:1-12*

**Day 44**

*The Our Father: Luke 11:1-13*

**Excursus: Ignatian Contemplation**

Attributed to St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) and articulated in his "Spiritual Exercises," the Ignatian method of praying with Scripture invites us to enter actively into the mystery presented in a Scriptural text by using our imagination. Generally, Ignatian prayer works best with narrative material in which actual characters live an experience of faith, e.g. in the Gospel stories. Ignatius commended the imaginative use of the five senses in such meditation. You apply your senses of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and feeling to draw you into the scene of the story and then carry it forth just as you were there. You can imagine you are

in the place of one of the characters or a random observer being drawn into the action. Most of all, the aim is to draw near and encounter God and to enter the mystery being prayed.

**Steps in Ignatian Contemplation:**

- Remote Preparations:
    - Know your time and place for prayer.
    - Know what Scripture passage you'll be using ahead of time.
  - Immediate Preparations:
    - Consider how God looks at you lovingly as you begin to pray, or make another kind of Act of Presence.
    - Briefly ask for God's assistance.
    - Ask for the grace you desire.
  - Read the passage once or twice, slowly and prayerfully:
    - "Compose the place" in your mind--that is, imagine the setting and visualize the characters involved. Put yourself in the story, either as a bystander or as one of the characters.
  - Pray imaginatively with the story:
    - Allow the event to unfold through your imagination. Apply your senses: watch, listen, taste, smell, and feel what is happening around you. Allow yourself to creatively interact with the other persons in the event, especially Jesus, Mary, or whoever the central character may be.
    - Allow yourself to be drawn to the point of greatest interaction and being with God. Pause and remain where you feel consolation, i.e. thoughts, feelings, and desires that lead you towards God and an increase of faith, hope, and love.
    - Whenever during your prayer you experience that God is giving himself to you, loving you, touching you, or filling you, then simply stay there quietly and receive. Also, slow down and be attentive to areas of desolation, i.e. thoughts, feelings, and desires leading away from God. Bring these desolations conversationally to God humbly and relate them honestly with trust. Take a moment to receive his love for you even in your weakness.
  - Colloquy:
    - Conclude your time of prayer by responding spontaneously in a conversation with God the Father, with Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and/or Mary. You may choose to converse with just one, or two, or all of them. It may be helpful to conclude each conversation with learned prayers such as the Our Father, *Anima Christi*, Glory Be, and the Hail Mary.
  - Review of Prayer:
    - After your formal prayer time, take some additional time to review your prayer. What did you notice in your mind, feelings, sentiments, emotions, desires, etc.? Write these down, and try to discover what they are saying to you.
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## Day 45

*The Rich Young Man: Matthew 19:16-30*

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## Day 46

*I Am the Bread from Heaven: John 6:32-59*

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## Day 47

*The Transfiguration: Luke 9:28-36*

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## Day 48

*Jesus is Anointed by a Sinful Woman: Luke 7:36-50*

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## Day 49

*The Agony in the Garden: Matthew 26:36-56*

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## Week 8

### Preview of Next Week

#### **Prayer:**

This week concludes Part II of *Discernment 180* with the final Scripture passages from the Gospels.

- Remember the call to fidelity in dry passages and the invitation to repetition in the passages that speak to you powerfully.

#### **Study:**

In order to finish *To Save A Thousand Souls* within the 180 days, you will need to read two pages per day; by the end of Week 8, you should have made it to page 112, but do not limit yourself to that if you can and want to read more.

## Review of Past Week

### Prayer:

- I fulfilled my commitment to daily, personal prayer \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I fulfilled my commitment to the Liturgy of the Hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I slept for at least seven hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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### Sacraments:

- I fulfilled my commitment to daily Mass this week. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to regular Confession. Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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### Virtue:

- I was faithful to my bodily fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I was faithful to my digital fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I was faithful to my dating fast. Yes / No
- I was faithful to the necessary practices from [www.hismercyeasures.org](http://www.hismercyeasures.org). Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Service:**

- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to altar serving. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to spiritual works of mercy. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to corporal works of mercy. Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Study:**

- I fulfilled my commitment to spiritual reading this week: Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my response, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Planning Ahead**

- What day(s) will I go to daily Mass this week? S M T W Th F S
- What day will I go to Confession this week? S M T W Th F S or [ ] not this week
- Am I scheduled for altar service this week? Spiritual works of mercy? Corporal works of mercy? Yes / No
- Have I scheduled my next spiritual direction? Yes / No
- Have I scheduled my seminary visit? Yes / No
- Have I scheduled my discernment retreat? Yes / No

**Day 50**

The Crucifixion of Our Lord: Luke 24:33-43

## Day 51

*The Road to Emmaus: Luke 24:13-33*

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## Day 52

*Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene: John 20:11-18*

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## Day 53

*Jesus Appears to Peter: John 21:1-19*

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## Day 54

*Doubting Thomas: John 20:19-30*

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## Part III: *The Discernment of Spirits*

### Days 55-91

Part II of *Discernment 180* exposed you to a few different ways to pray, giving you an opportunity to grow in friendship with Christ by praying with several passages from the Gospels. As you move to Part III, know that discerning one's vocation always remains, at its heart, growth in friendship with Christ. The more one knows the voice and heart of one's friend, the better he will be able to do his friend's will. It is no different with Christ.

However, one difference in pursuing deeper friendship with Christ is the presence of the enemy, who is actively working against that end. For that reason, it is necessary to discern the origin of the movements you experience in your spiritual life; we are to reject the movements that come from the enemy, and embrace the movements that come from our Lord. Part III of *Discernment 180* provides time for you to learn from the master in our tradition when it comes to discernment: St. Ignatius of Loyola.



Throughout the next month, you will meditate on excerpts from the autobiographies of three Saints: St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. Augustine of Hippo, and St. Therese of Lisieux. Most weeks, there will also be an *excursus* on St. Ignatius' discernment of spirits. Vocational discernment typically happens only once in someone's life, but discerning God's will remains your task, even after you have entered into your vocation. For example, a priest must discern what pastoral initiatives to undertake in his parish; a father must discern what school his children will attend; a single man must discern what woman to marry. Becoming familiar with the discernment of spirits will not only help you discern your vocation, it will help you remain faithful to it.

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## Day 55

*The Autobiography of St. Ignatius*

### CHAPTER I<sup>39</sup>

“Up to his twenty-sixth year the heart of Ignatius was enthralled by the vanities of the world. His special delight was in the military life, and he seemed led by a strong and empty desire of gaining for himself a great name. The citadel of Pampeluna was held in siege by the French. All the other soldiers were unanimous in wishing to surrender on condition of freedom to leave, since it was impossible to hold out any longer; but Ignatius so persuaded the commander, that, against the views of all the other nobles, he decided to hold the citadel against the enemy.”

“When the day of assault came, Ignatius made his confession to one of the nobles, his companion in arms. The soldier also made his to Ignatius. After the walls were destroyed, Ignatius stood fighting bravely until a cannon ball of the enemy broke one of his legs and seriously injured the other.”

“When he fell, the citadel was surrendered. When the French took possession of the town, they showed great admiration for Ignatius. After twelve or fifteen days at Pampeluna, where he received the best care from the physicians of the French army, he was borne on a litter to Loyola. His recovery was very slow, and doctors and surgeons were summoned from all parts for a consultation. They decided that the leg should be broken again, that the bones, which had knit badly, might be properly reset; for they had not been properly set in the beginning, or else had been so jostled on the journey that a cure was impossible. He submitted to have his flesh cut again. During the operation, as in all he suffered before and after, he uttered no word and gave no sign of suffering save that of tightly clenching his fists.”

“In the meantime his strength was failing. He could take no food, and showed other symptoms of approaching death. On the feast of St. John the doctors gave up hope of his recovery, and he was advised to make his confession. Having received the sacraments on the eve of the feasts of Sts. Peter and Paul, toward evening the doctors said that if by the middle of the night there were no change for the better, he would

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<sup>39</sup> St. Ignatius of Loyola, *The Autobiography of St. Ignatius*, ed. J.F.X. O’Conor, S.J., NY, Benzinger Brothers, 1899-1900, 20-23.

surely die. He had great devotion to St. Peter, and it so happened by the goodness of God that in the middle of the night he began to grow better.”

“His recovery was so rapid that in a few days he was out of danger. As the bones of his leg settled and pressed upon each other, one bone protruded below the knee. The result was that one leg was shorter than the other, and the bone causing a lump there, made the leg seem quite deformed. As he could not bear this, since he intended to live a life at court, he asked the doctors whether the bone could be cut away. They replied that it could, but it would cause him more suffering than all that had preceded, as everything was healed, and they would need space in order to cut it. He determined, however, to undergo this torture.”

“His elder brother looked on with astonishment and admiration. He said he could never have had the fortitude to suffer the pain which the sick man bore with his usual patience. When the flesh and the bone that protruded were cut away, means were taken to prevent the leg from becoming shorter than the other. For this purpose, in spite of sharp and constant pain, the leg was kept stretched for many days. Finally the Lord gave him health. He came out of the danger safe and strong with the exception that he could not easily stand on his leg, but was forced to lie in bed.”

*Scripture for further reflection - James 4:6*

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## Day 56

### CHAPTER I<sup>40</sup>

“As Ignatius had a love for fiction, when he found himself out of danger he asked for some romances to pass away the time. In that house there was no book of the kind. They gave him, instead, *The Life of Christ*, by Rudolph, the Carthusian, and another book called the *Flowers of the Saints*, both in Spanish. By frequent reading of these books he began to get some love for spiritual things. This reading led his mind to meditate on holy things, yet sometimes it wandered to thoughts which he had been accustomed to dwell upon before.”

“Among these there was one thought which, above the others, so filled his heart that he became, as it were, immersed and absorbed in it. Unconsciously, it engaged his attention for three and four hours at a time. He pictured to himself what he should do in honor of an illustrious lady, how he should journey to the city where she was, in what words he would address her, and what bright and pleasant sayings he would make use of, what manner of warlike exploits he should perform to please her. He was so carried away by this thought that he did not even perceive how far beyond his power it was to do what he proposed, for she was a lady exceedingly illustrious and of the highest nobility.”

“In the meantime the divine mercy was at work substituting for these thoughts others suggested by his recent readings. While perusing the life of Our Lord and the saints, he began to reflect, saying to himself: ‘What if I should do what St. Francis did?’ ‘What if I should act like St. Dominic?’ He pondered over these

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<sup>40</sup> St. Ignatius, *Autobiography*, 24-28.

things in his mind, and kept continually proposing to himself serious and difficult things. He seemed to feel a certain readiness for doing them, with no other reason except this thought: 'St. Dominic did this; I, too, will do it.' 'St. Francis did this; therefore I will do it.' These heroic resolutions remained for a time, and then other vain and worldly thoughts followed. This succession of thoughts occupied him for a long while, those about God alternating with those about the world. But in these thoughts there was this difference. When he thought of worldly things it gave him great pleasure, but afterward he found himself dry and sad. But when he thought of journeying to Jerusalem, and of living only on herbs, and practising austerities, he found pleasure not only while thinking of them, but also when he had ceased."

"This difference he did not notice or value, until one day the eyes of his soul were opened and he began to inquire the reason of the difference. He learned by experience that one train of thought left him sad, the other joyful. This was his first reasoning on spiritual matters. Afterward, when he began the Spiritual Exercises, he was enlightened, and understood what he afterward taught his children about the discernment of spirits. When gradually he recognized the different spirits by which he was moved, one, the spirit of God, the other, the devil, and when he had gained no little spiritual light from the reading of pious books, he began to think more seriously of his past life, and how much penance he should do to expiate his past sins."

"Amid these thoughts the holy wish to imitate saintly men came to his mind; his resolve was not more definite than to promise with the help of divine grace that what they had done he also would do. After his recovery his one wish was to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. He fasted frequently and scourged himself to satisfy the desire of penance that ruled in a soul filled with the spirit of God."

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## Week 9

### Preview of Next Week

#### **Prayer:**

This week consists of selections from the autobiography of St. Augustine: *The Confessions*

- On Day 58, there will be an *excursus* on the discernment of spirits. Schedule time apart from your dedicated prayer time to read this *excursus*.
- It may be advantageous to review some of the previous instructions on various ways to pray, including St. Francis de Sales' treatment of meditation.

#### **Study:**

In order to finish *To Save A Thousand Souls* within the 180 days, you will need to read two pages per day; by the end of Week 9, you should have made it to page 126, but do not limit yourself to that if you can and want to read more.

## Review of Past Week

### Prayer:

- I fulfilled my commitment to daily, personal prayer \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I fulfilled my commitment to the Liturgy of the Hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I slept for at least seven hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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### Sacraments:

- I fulfilled my commitment to daily Mass this week. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to regular Confession. Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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### Virtue:

- I was faithful to my bodily fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I was faithful to my digital fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I was faithful to my dating fast. Yes / No
- I was faithful to the necessary practices from [www.hismercyendures.org](http://www.hismercyendures.org). Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Service:**

- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to altar serving. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to spiritual works of mercy. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to corporal works of mercy. Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Study:**

- I fulfilled my commitment to spiritual reading this week: Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

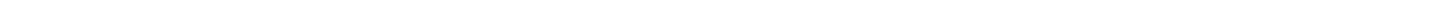
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- Based on my response, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Planning Ahead**

- What day(s) will I go to daily Mass this week? S M T W Th F S
- What day will I go to Confession this week? S M T W Th F S or [ ] not this week
- Am I scheduled for altar service this week? Spiritual works of mercy? Corporal works of mercy? Yes / No
- When will I make extra time to read the excursus on the discernment of spirits this week? \_\_\_\_\_
- Have I scheduled my next spiritual direction? Yes / No
- Have I scheduled my seminary visit? Yes / No
- Have I scheduled my discernment retreat? Yes / No



## Day 57

*The Confessions of St. Augustine*

BOOK I<sup>41</sup>

I

“Great art Thou, O Lord, and greatly to be praised; great is Thy power, and of Thy wisdom there is no number. And man desires to praise Thee. He is but a tiny part of all that Thou hast created. He bears about him his mortality, the evidence of his sinfulness, and the evidence that *Thou dost resist the proud*: yet this tiny part of all that Thou hast created desires to praise Thee.”

“Thou dost so excite him that to praise Thee is his joy. For Thou hast made us for Thyself and our hearts are restless till they rest in Thee. Grant me, O Lord, to know which is the soul's first movement toward Thee—to implore Thy aid or to utter its praise of Thee; and whether it must know Thee before it can implore. For it would seem clear that no one can call upon Thee without knowing Thee, for if he did he might invoke another than Thee, knowing Thee not. Yet may it be that a man must implore Thee before he can know Thee? But, *how shall they call on Him in Whom they have not believed? or how shall they believe without a preacher? And, they shall praise the Lord that seek Him*; for those that seek shall find; and finding Him they will praise Him. Let me seek Thee, Lord, by praying Thy aid, and let me utter my prayer believing in Thee: for Thou hast been preached to us. My faith, Lord, cries to Thee, the faith that Thou hast given me, that Thou hast inbreathed in me, through the humanity of Thy Son and by the ministry of Thy Preacher.”

II

“But how can I call unto my God, my God and Lord? For in calling unto Him, I am calling Him to me: and what room is there in me for my God, the God who made heaven and earth? Is there anything in me, O God, that can contain You? All heaven and earth cannot contain You for You made them, and me in them. Yet, since nothing that is could exist without You, You must in some way be in all that is: [therefore also in me, since I am]. And if You are already in me, since otherwise I should not be, why do I cry to You to enter into me? Even if I were in Hell You would be there *for if I go down into hell, Thou art there also*. Thus, O God, I should be nothing, utterly nothing, unless You were in me—or rather unless I were in You, *of Whom and by Whom and in Whom are all things*. So it is, Lord; so it is. Where do I call You to come to, since I am in You? Or where else are You that You can come to me? Where shall I go, beyond the bounds of heaven and earth, that God may come to me, since He has said: *Heaven and earth do I fill*.”

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<sup>41</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions of Saint Augustine Arranged According to the Liturgical Year*, trans. F.J. Sheed, NY, Sheed & Ward, 400ce;1943, 3-4.

## Day 58

### BOOK I<sup>42</sup>

#### III

“But if You fill heaven and earth, do they contain You? Or do You fill them, and yet have much over since they cannot contain You? Is there some other place into which that overplus of You pours that heaven and earth cannot hold? Surely You have no need of any place to contain You since You contain all things, and fill them indeed precisely by containing them. The vessels thus filled with You do not render You any support: for though they perished utterly, You would not be spilt out. And in pouring Yourself out upon us, You do not come down to us but rather elevate us to You: You are not scattered over us, but we are gathered into one by You. You fill all things: but with Your whole being? It is true that all things cannot wholly contain You: but does this mean that they contain part of You? and do they all contain the same part at the same time? or do different parts of creation contain different parts of You—greater parts or smaller according to their own magnitude? But are there in You parts greater and smaller? Or are You not in every place at once in the totality of Your being, while yet nothing contains You wholly?”

#### IV

“What then is my God, what but the Lord God? *For Who is Lord but the Lord, or Who is God but our God?* O Thou, the greatest and the best, mightiest, almighty, most merciful and most just, utterly hidden and utterly present, most beautiful and most strong, abiding yet mysterious, suffering no change and changing all things; never new, never old, making all things new, *bringing age upon the proud and they know it not*; ever in action, ever at rest, gathering all things to Thee and needing none; sustaining and fulfilling and protecting, creating and nourishing and making perfect; ever seeking though lacking nothing. Thou lovest without subjection to passion. Thou art jealous but not with fear; Thou canst know repentance but not sorrow, be angry yet unperturbed by anger. Thou canst change the works Thou hast made but Thy mind stands changeless. Thou dost find and receive back what Thou didst never lose; art never in need but dost rejoice in Thy gains, art not greedy but dost exact interest manifold. Men pay Thee more than is of obligation to win return from Thee, yet who has anything that is not already Thine? Thou owest nothing yet dost pay as if in debt to Thy creature, forgivest what is owed to Thee yet dost not lose thereby. And with all this, what have I said, my God and my Life and my sacred Delight? What can anyone say when he speaks of Thee? Yet woe to them that speak not of Thee at all, since those who say most are but dumb.”

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<sup>42</sup> St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 4-5.

## Excursus: The Discernment of Spirits

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The following is an excerpt from John Paul Thomas' book, *Probing the Depths: Ignatian Lessons and Meditations Arranged According to the Liturgical Year*.

A much fuller treatment of St. Ignatius' rules on the discernment of spirits can be found in Fr. Timothy Gallagher's book, *Discernment of Spirits: An Ignatian Guide for Everyday Living*. It is available on his website (<http://www.frtimothygallagher.org>) or on Amazon.

Fr. Gallagher has also recorded a 16-episode podcast series summarizing his book, which you can find for free at <http://www.austinvocations.com/gallagher>.

Know yourself and your bandwidth, and choose the option that you will be able to complete.

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### Chapter Five: *Discernment of Spirits*<sup>43</sup>

Whether you are making a guided Ignatian retreat or simply want to incorporate his spiritual lessons into your daily spiritual life, understanding some of his basic teachings on the “discernment of spirits” should be a central focus. These methods of discernment are meant to help you understand how God speaks to you, so that you can follow His gentle promptings. They are also meant to help you discern the ways that the evil one tries to mislead you, so that you can reject those agitations and temptations. Few people today are deeply aware of the various movements of God within their souls. Many live day after day in a distracted way, failing to be attentive to God at work. Likewise, many fail to understand that many interior impulses and desires actually are temptations from the evil one. Thus, the discernment of spirits is a way of becoming more and more tuned into the interior life of your own soul by shedding the many daily distractions you have.

Saint Ignatius breaks this teaching on the discernment of spirits into two parts:

*Rules for perceiving and knowing in some manner the different movements which are caused in the soul. The good, to receive them, and the bad, to reject them. And they are more proper for the First Week.*

*Rules for the same effect with greater discernment of spirits. And they are more proper for the Second Week.*

These are the titles of two sections toward the end of the *Exercises* in which you are given a total of twenty-two short, clear, concise and rich rules for discerning the various movements within your soul. These are movements that are caused either by God and His angels or by the evil one and the other demons. The first section above contains fourteen rules, and the second contains eight. Since the first set of rules are proper to the First Week of *The Spiritual Exercises*, we will only consider those fourteen rules in this chapter.

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<sup>43</sup> John Paul Thomas, *Probing the Depths: Ignatian Lessons and Meditations*, My Catholic Life! Inc., 2020, Chapter Five.

The rules proper to the Second Week will be covered in the next chapter.

### ***What are “Spirits”***

Before we even look at the rules of discernment, it is important to address one key question: What does Saint Ignatius mean by “Spirits?” Though not a direct and clear definition, the answer is found throughout the *Exercises* and is also found within the Scriptures and the Tradition of the Church. Essentially, we should understand “spirits” as referring to three *good* influences and their contrary three *bad* influences. The good influences can be seen as God (and His angels), the positive influences within the world, and the virtues. The bad influences are the devil, the world and the flesh.

**Spiritual Beings:** First of all, a spiritual being is either Satan and all the angels who fell from grace and now function as demons, or it is God and the good angels who remain in union with God, continuing to fulfill His will and their duty. Angelic beings are those who were created by God as pure spirits. They have an intellect and free will and are capable of either loving God and others, or of turning from God and thus living a life of hate and eternal separation from God. The Bible, in the Book of Revelation, states that a third of the angelic beings created by God turned from God with a definitive sinful choice and are now what the Church refers to as “demons.” Satan is thought to be the highest of these fallen angelic beings and the primary orchestrator of their diabolical activity.

The good angelic beings make up the two-thirds of these spiritual beings who never sinned, but instead they chose to fulfill their purpose of serving God and His holy will. They do so by fulfilling the natural duties they were given. Traditionally, based on Scripture, there are nine choirs (levels) of these angelic beings. Each level has certain functions. The highest level (Seraphim) has the function of surrounding the throne of God and entering into a perpetual worship and glorification of God, eternally crying out “Holy, holy, holy...” as they enter into deep communion with God. The lowest of these (guardian angels) have the duty to communicate to us humans the will of God for our lives and to act as mediators of God’s grace.

*The Angelic Nature:* The nature of these angelic beings provides them with various “natural spiritual powers” which they exercise either in union with the will of God (the two-thirds of the spirits who remained in union with God) or against His divine will (the one-third of the spirits that fell). It’s helpful to understand that, even though one-third of these spiritual beings fell from God’s favor through sin, they still retain their natural angelic powers. One such power is to communicate to us, especially through our imagination, various images and ideas, suggesting, prompting, poking, encouraging, discouraging, etc. Simply put, they have the natural power of communication, and they use it either for our eternal salvation or to destroy it. God permits this insofar as He allows the natural order to run its course in accord with free will.

*Power of Influence:* One of the natural powers of these angelic beings of which we should be aware is the power of influence and communication of suggestive thought. For example, demons have the natural ability to place before your imagination many erroneous thoughts that lead to confusion. For those who are very serious sinners, it may be easy for them to put forth the most heinous suggestions to one’s imagination such as: “This person does not deserve to live—kill!” However, most rational and good people would reject such an evil thought right away. Therefore, most often demons put forth more subtle lies, such as “Justice demands that

you humiliate this person!” or “This is really not that bad of a sin; God will understand.” And for those who are very close to God, these deceptive spirits will be even more subtle. For the person striving for holiness, a demon may put forth some idea that on the surface sounds good...but is actually not God’s will. These fallen angels will pretend to be “angels of light” so as to deceive. They may put into your imagination some “good” idea that you should do for God, knowing full well that this or that is not what God wills of you.

The good angels are also constantly “speaking” to you, communicating God’s will by their natural abilities. They may inspire you toward mercy, compassion and forgiveness. Or they may stir up courage within you to withstand some evil. Or they may open your mind to more fully understand God’s Word, teaching you about the beautiful mysteries of God’s inner life and will.

Discernment of spirits is the process of trying to decipher these various angelic communications so as to determine if the thought or impulse you have is from the good spirits (thus, ultimately God’s will) or from the evil spirits (thus, contrary to God’s will).

For our purposes here, as you consider the teachings of Saint Ignatius on the “discernment of spirits,” it is sufficient to understand that there are angelic beings (good and bad) who do communicate with you, influencing you one way or the other, for or against the divine will of God for your life. These rules for the discernment of spirits only apply to the movements in your soul caused by these good or bad spirits, such as your thoughts, feelings, desires, affections, emotions, impulses, etc. It should also be noted that, at times, you may have thoughts and other movements in your soul that come from yourself, caused by your own free will. The rules for “discernment of spirits” do not apply to these thoughts and movements in your soul. Nor do they apply to other natural phenomena such as negative feelings and thoughts that come from depression, physical exhaustion, chemical imbalances, etc., or to positive thoughts and feelings coming from things such as accomplishments, endorphins, exercise, excitement, etc. Only communications of a spiritual nature are included here.

**World:** Traditionally when we speak of the “world” from a biblical point of view, we mean the seductions and temptations that come our way to obtain all that this world can offer. For example, the temptation to worldly power, prestige, money, and the like can very powerfully draw us to act selfishly for these temporary satisfactions in life. So, part of the discernment of spirits is to understand and identify these worldly influences upon your life and, ultimately, to reject them completely.

With that said, you should also be aware of the many good influences you can encounter in this world. For example, you may witness another’s heroic virtue, such as an act of profound faith or hope, or any act of Christian charity that inspires one to be more like Christ. Perhaps you turn on the radio and hear an inspiring Christian song, or hear a moving sermon, or witness a person courageously persevering in the face of great persecution. Though the “world” is normally in reference to certain evil influences you encounter in life, there are also many good influences you daily encounter in the lives of those all around us. You should seek out those inspirations and reject those that are not of God.

**Flesh:** The fleshly temptations you encounter each day also make up part of the bad spiritual influences you must reject. These are most obvious and include things such as laziness, lusts, indulgence in food and drink. You will daily encounter “voices,” so to speak, that draw you to fleshly comforts that are contrary to the will of God and contrary to your human dignity. These temptations must also be rejected in their totality. Fasting and mortification are of great help in this regard.

On the contrary, there are great helps to fleshly temptations that should be accepted wholeheartedly. This includes the many human virtues you acquire by faithful Christian living, such as temperance, fortitude, prudence and justice. And, of course, the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity will also help you when these virtues become ingrained habits that compel you to act in accord with the will of God.

### ***Spiritual Experiences and Thinking***

Another important thing to understand is the relationship between your interior spiritual experiences and your thinking process. Spiritual communications (from both the good and bad spirits) are meant to influence your thinking process and the decisions you make. For example, a temptation from an evil spirit may come in the form of a strong desire to be harsh and critical of another who “deserves” it. That desire will lead to false thinking such as rash judgment. Once that thought is engaged, it grows and opens the door to more temptations of a similar nature. When this happens, the good spirit may stir up a desire for forgiveness and mercy. If this desire is accepted, then the rational thought process may clearly comprehend the great wisdom of mercy and forgiveness, and, thus, this desire and compulsion for good will grow.

In many ways, the end goal of the discernment of spirits is to cleanse your thoughts of errors and to feed your thoughts with Truth. Jesus is the Truth and His perfect will must dominate your mind. When this happens, faith grows and leads to authentic hope and charity. On the contrary, when erroneous thoughts grow, faith, hope and charity are slowly extinguished, and you are left with irrational thinking, feeling and acting.

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## **Day 59**

BOOK I<sup>44</sup>

V

“Who shall grant me to rest in Thee? By whose gift shalt Thou enter into my heart and fill it so compellingly that I shall turn no more to my sins but embrace Thee, my only good? What art Thou to me? Have mercy, that I may tell. What rather am I to Thee, that Thou shouldst demand my love and if I do not love Thee be angry and threaten such great woes? Surely not to love Thee is already a great woe. For Thy mercies’ sake, O Lord my God, tell me what Thou art to me. Say unto my soul, I am Thy salvation. So speak that I may hear. Lord, my heart is listening; open it that it may hear Thee say to my soul I am Thy salvation. Hearing that word, let

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<sup>44</sup> St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 5-6.

me come in haste to lay hold upon Thee. Hide not Thy face from me. Let me see Thy face even if I die, lest I die with longing to see it.”

“The house of my soul is too small to receive Thee: let it be enlarged by Thee. It is all in ruins: do Thou repair it. There are things in it that must offend Thy gaze, I confess and know. But who shall cleanse it? or to what other besides Thee shall I cry out: From my secret sins cleanse me, O Lord, and from those of others spare Thy servant? I believe, and therefore do I speak. Lord Thou knowest. Have I not confessed against myself my transgressions against Thee, and Thou, my God, hast forgiven the iniquities of my heart? I contend not in judgment with Thee, who art the truth; and I have no will to deceive myself, lest my iniquity lie unto itself. Therefore I contend not in judgment with Thee, for if Thou, O Lord, wilt mark iniquities, Lord, who shall endure it?”

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## Day 60

### BOOK II<sup>45</sup>

#### III

“But during that sixteenth year between Madaura and Carthage, owing to the narrowness of the family fortunes I did not go to school, but lived idly at home with my parents. The briars of unclean lusts grew so that they towered over my head, and there was no hand to root them out. On the contrary my father saw me one day in the public baths, now obviously growing towards manhood and showing the turbulent signs of adolescence. The effect upon him was that he already began to look forward to grandchildren, and went home in happy excitement to tell my mother. He rejoiced, indeed, through that intoxication in which the world forgets You its Creator and loves what You have created instead of You, the intoxication of the invisible wine of a will perverted and turned towards baseness. But in my mother’s breast You had already laid the foundation of Your temple and begun Your holy habitation: whereas my father was still only a catechumen, and a new catechumen at that. So that she was stricken with a holy fear. And though I was not as yet baptised, she was in terror of my walking in the crooked ways of those who walk with their backs towards You and not their faces.”

“I have dared to say that You were silent, my God, when I went afar from You. But was it truly so? Whose but Yours were the words You dinned into my ears through the voice of my mother. Your faithful servant? Not that at that time any of it sank into my heart to make me do it. I still remember her anxiety and how earnestly she urged upon me not to sin with women, above all not with any man’s wife. All this sounded to me womanish and I should have blushed to obey. Yet it was from You, though I did not know it and thought that You were silent and she speaking: whereas You were speaking to me through her, and in ignoring her I was ignoring You: I, her son, the son of Your handmaid. Your servant. But I realised none of this and went headlong on my course, so blinded that I was ashamed among the other youths that my viciousness was less than theirs; I heard them boasting of their exploits, and the viler the exploits the louder the boasting; and I set about the same exploits not only for the pleasure of the act but for the pleasure of the boasting.”

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<sup>45</sup> St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 29-31.



“Nothing is utterly condemnable save vice: yet I grew in vice through desire of praise; and when I lacked opportunity to equal others in vice, I invented things I had not done, lest I might be held cowardly for being innocent, or contemptible for being chaste. With the basest companions I walked the streets of Babylon [the city of this World as opposed to the city of God] and wallowed in its filth as if it had been a bed of spices and precious ointments. To make me cleave closer to that city’s very center, the invisible Enemy trod me down and seduced me, for I was easy to seduce. My mother had by now fled out of the center of Babylon, but she still lingered in its outskirts. She had urged me to chastity but she did not follow up what my father had told her of me: and though she saw my sexual passions as most evil now and full of peril for the future, she did not consider that if they could not be pared down to the quick, they had better be brought under control within the bounds of married love. She did not want me married because she feared that a wife might be a hindrance to my prospects—not those hopes of the world to come which my mother had in You, O God, but my prospects as a student. Both my parents were unduly set upon the success of my studies, my father because he had practically no thought of You and only vain ambition for me, my mother because she thought that the usual course of studies would be not only no hindrance to my coming to You but an actual help. Recalling the past as well as I can, that is how I read my parents’ characters. Anyhow, I was left to do pretty well as I liked, and go after pleasure not only beyond the limit of reasonable discipline but to sheer dissoluteness in many kinds of evil. And in all this, O God, a mist hung between my eyes and the brightness of Your truth: *and mine iniquity had come forth as it were from fatness.*”

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## Day 61

### BOOK II<sup>46</sup>

#### IV

“Your law, O Lord, punishes theft; and this law is so written in the hearts of men that not even the breaking of it blots it out: for no thief bears calmly being stolen from — not even if he is rich and the other steals through want. Yet I chose to steal, and not because want drove me to it — unless a want of justice and contempt for it and an excess for iniquity. For I stole things which I already had in plenty and of better quality. Nor had I any desire to enjoy the things I stole, but only the stealing of them and the sin. There was a pear tree near our vineyard, heavy with fruit, but fruit that was not particularly tempting either to look at or to taste. A group of young blackguards, and I among them, went out to knock down the pears and carry them off late one night, for it was our bad habit to carry on our games in the streets till very late. We carried off an immense load of pears, not to eat—for we barely tasted them before throwing them to the hogs. Our only pleasure in doing it was that it was forbidden. Such was my heart, O God, such was my heart: yet in the depth of the abyss You had pity on it. Let that heart now tell You what it sought when I was thus evil for no object, having no cause for wrongdoing save my wrongness. The malice of the act was base and I loved it — that is to say I loved my own undoing, I loved the evil in me—not the thing for which I did the evil, simply the evil: my soul was depraved, and hurled itself down from security in You into utter destruction, seeking no profit from wickedness but only to be wicked.”

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<sup>46</sup> St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 31-36.

“*What shall I render unto the Lord, that I can recall these things and yet not be afraid! I shall love Thee, Lord, and shall give thanks to Thee and confess Thy name, because Thou hast forgiven me such great sins and evil deeds. I know that it is only by Thy grace and mercy that Thou hast melted away the ice of my sins. And the evil I have not done, that also I know is by Thy grace: for what might I not have done, seeing that I loved evil solely because it was evil? I confess that Thou hast forgiven all alike—the sins I committed of my own motion, the sins I would have committed but for Thy grace.*”

“Would any man, considering his own weakness, dare to attribute his chastity or his innocence to his own powers and so love Thee less—as if he did not need the same mercy as those who return to Thee after sin. If any man has heard Thy voice and followed it and done none of the things he finds me here recording and confessing, still he must not scorn me: for I am healed by the same doctor who preserved him from falling into sickness, or at least into such grievous sickness. But let him love Thee even more: seeing me rescued out of such sickness of sin, and himself saved from falling into such sickness of sin, by the one same Saviour.”

## Day 62

Book III<sup>47</sup>

XI

“And You sent Your hand from above, and raised my soul out of that depth of darkness, because my mother. Your faithful one, wept to You for me more bitterly than mothers weep for the bodily deaths of their children. For by the faith and the spirit which she had from You, she saw me as dead; and You heard her, Lord. You heard her and did not despise her tears when they flowed down and watered the earth against which she pressed her face wherever she prayed. You heard her. What else could have been the cause of that dream by which You so comforted her that she consented to live with me and to eat at the same table in the house: which previously she had refused to do, because she shunned and detested the blasphemies of my error. In her dream she saw herself standing on a wooden rule and a youth all radiant coming to her cheerful and smiling upon her, whereas she was grieving and heavy with her grief. He asked her—not to learn from her but, as is the way of visions, to teach her—the causes of her sorrow and the tears she daily shed. She replied that she was mourning for the loss of my soul. He commanded her to be at peace and told her to observe carefully and she would see that where she was, there was I also. She looked, and saw me standing alongside her on the same rule. How should she have had this dream unless Your ears had heard her heart, O Good Omnipotent, You who have such care for each one of us as if You had care for him alone, and such care for all as if we were all but one person?”

“And the same must have been the reason for this too: that when she had told me her vision and I tried to interpret it to mean that she must not despair of one day being as I was, she answered without an instant's hesitation: “No. For it was not said to me where he is, you are, but where you are, he is.” I confess to You, O

<sup>47</sup> St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 55-56.

Lord, that if I remember aright—and I have often spoken of it since—I was more deeply moved by that answer which You gave through my mother—in that she was not disturbed by the false plausibility of my interpretation and so quickly saw what was to be seen (which I certainly had not seen until she said it)—than by the dream itself: by which the joy that was to come to that holy woman so long after was foretold so long before for the relief of her present anguish. Nine years were to follow in which I lay tossing in the mud of that deep pit and the darkness of its falsity, though I often tried to rise and only fell the more heavily. All that time this chaste, god-fearing and sober widow—for such You love — was all the more cheered up with hope. Yet she did not relax her weeping and mourning. She did not cease to pray at every hour and bewail me to You, and her prayers found entry into Your sight. But for all that You allowed me still to toss helplessly in that darkness.”

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## Day 63

### Book III

#### <sup>48</sup>XII

“One other answer I remember You gave her in that time. Many such things I pass over, because I am hastening on to the matters which I am more urgently pressed to confess to You, and many I have simply forgotten. But You gave her another assurance by the mouth of Your priest, a certain bishop reared up in the Church and well grounded in Your Scriptures. My mother asked him in his kindness to have some discussion with me, to refute my errors, to unteach me what was evil and teach me what was good, for he often did this when he found such people as it might profit. He refused, rightly as I have realized since. He told her that I was as yet not ripe for teaching because I was all puffed up with the newness of my heresy and had already upset a number of insufficiently skilled people with certain questions—as she had, in fact, told him. ‘But,’ said he, ‘let him alone. Only pray to the Lord for him: he will himself discover by reading what his error is and how great his impiety.’”

“The bishop went on to tell her that his mother had been seduced by the Manichees so that as a small child he had been given over to them; and he had not only read practically all their books but had also copied them out; and had found out for himself, with no need for anyone to argue or convince him, that he must leave the sect. And he had left it. When he had told her this, my mother would not be satisfied but urged him with repeated entreaties and floods of tears to see me and discuss with me. He, losing patience, said: ‘Go your way; as sure as you live, it is impossible that the son of these tears should perish.’ In the conversations we had afterwards, she often said that she had accepted this answer as if it had sounded from heaven.”

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<sup>48</sup> St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 56-57.

# Week 10

## Preview of Next Week

### Prayer:

This week consists of continued selections from the autobiography of St. Augustine of Hippo, also known as *The Confessions*.

- On Day 65, there will be an *excursus* on the discernment of spirits. Schedule time apart from your dedicated prayer time to read this *excursus*.
- It may be advantageous to review some of the previous instructions on various ways to pray, including St. Francis de Sales' treatment of meditation.

### Study:

In order to finish *To Save A Thousand Souls* within the 180 days, you will need to read two pages per day; by the end of Week 10, you should have made it to page 140, but do not limit yourself to that if you can and want to read more.

## Review of Past Week

### Prayer:

- I fulfilled my commitment to daily, personal prayer \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I fulfilled my commitment to the Liturgy of the Hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I slept for at least seven hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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### Sacraments:

- I fulfilled my commitment to daily Mass this week. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to regular Confession. Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Virtue:**

- I was faithful to my bodily fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I was faithful to my digital fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I was faithful to my dating fast. Yes / No
- I was faithful to the necessary practices from [www.hismercyendures.org](http://www.hismercyendures.org). Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Service:**

- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to altar serving. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to spiritual works of mercy. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to corporal works of mercy. Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Study:**

- I fulfilled my commitment to spiritual reading this week: Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my response, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Planning Ahead**

- What day(s) will I go to daily Mass this week? S M T W Th F S
- What day will I go to Confession this week? S M T W Th F S or [ ] not this week

- Am I scheduled for altar service this week? Spiritual works of mercy? Corporal works of mercy? Yes / No

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- When will I make extra time to read the excursus on the discernment of spirits this week? -----

- Have I scheduled my next spiritual direction? Yes / No

- Have I scheduled my seminary visit? Yes / No

- Have I scheduled my discernment retreat? Yes / No

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## Day 64

Book IV<sup>49</sup>

X

“Convert us, O God of hosts, and show us Thy face, and we shall be saved. Wherever the soul of man turns, unless towards God, it cleaves to sorrow, even though the things outside God and outside itself to which it cleaves may be things of beauty. For these lovely things would be nothing at all unless they were from Him. They rise and set: in their rising they begin to be, and they grow towards perfection, and once come to perfection they grow old, and they die: not all grow old but all die. Therefore when they rise and tend toward being, the more haste they make toward fullness of being, the more haste they make towards ceasing to be. That is their law. You have given them to be parts of a whole: they are not all existent at once, but in their departures and successions constitute the whole of which they are parts. Our own speech, which we utter by making sounds signifying meanings, follows the same principles. For there never could be a whole sentence unless one word ceased to be when its syllables had sounded and another took its place. In all such things let my soul praise You, O God, Creator of all things, but let it not cleave too close in love to them through the senses of the body. For they go their way and are no more; and they rend the soul with desires that can destroy it, for it longs to be one with the things it loves and to repose in them. But in them is no place of repose, because they do not abide. They pass, and who can follow them with any bodily sense? Or who can grasp them firm even while they are still here?”

“Our fleshly sense is slow because it is fleshly sense: and that is the limit of its being. It can do what it was made to do; but it has no power to hold things transient as they run their course from their due beginning to their due end. For in Your word, by which they are created, they hear their law: ‘From this point: not beyond that.’”

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<sup>49</sup> St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 70-71.

# Day 65

Book IV<sup>50</sup>

XI

“Be not foolish, my soul, nor let the ear of your heart be deafened with the clamor of your folly. Listen. The Word Himself calls to you to return, and with Him is the place of peace that shall not be broken, where your love will not be forsaken unless it first forsake. Things pass that other things may come in their place and this material universe be established in all its parts. ‘But do I depart anywhere?’ says the Word of God. Fix your dwelling in Him, commit to God whatsoever you have: for it is from God. O my soul, wearied at last with emptiness, commit to Truth’s keeping whatever Truth has given you, and you shall not lose any; and what is decayed in you shall be made clean, and what is sick shall be made well, and what is transient shall be reshaped and made new and established in you in firmness: and they shall not set you down where they themselves go, but shall stand and abide and you with them, before God who stands and abides forever.”

“Why, O perverse soul of mine, will you go on following your flesh? Rather turn, and let it follow you. Whatever things you perceive by fleshly sense you perceive only in part, not knowing the whole of which those things are but parts and yet they delight you so much. For if fleshly sense had been capable of grasping the whole—and had not for your punishment received part only of the whole as its just limit—you would wish that whatever exists in the present might pass on, that the whole might be perceived by you for your delight. What we speak, you hear by a bodily sense: and certainly you do not wish the same syllable to go on sounding but to pass away that other syllables may come and you may hear the whole speech. It is always so with all things that go to make up one whole: all that goes to make up the whole does not exist at one moment. If all could be perceived in one act of perception, it would obviously give more delight than any of the individual parts. But far better than all is He who made all; and He is our God. He does not pass away and there is none to take His place.”

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## ***Excursus: The Discernment of Spirits***

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The following is an excerpt from John Paul Thomas’ book, *Probing the Depths: Ignatian Lessons and Meditations Arranged According to the Liturgical Year*.

For options to engage fuller treatments of St. Ignatius’ Discernment of Spirits, see page 76.

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## ***Chapter Five: Discernment of Spirits Cont.***

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<sup>50</sup> St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 71-72.

## Overview of the First Rules for Discernment<sup>51</sup>

The fourteen rules set forth by Saint Ignatius in this first section could be divided more generally into four sections as follows:

1. **Initial Conversion:** Understanding the spiritual experiences in one's soul—one who is *living in serious sin* and who then begins *working intensely to overcome sin* (Rule 1–2).
2. **Spiritual Consolation:** What it is and how one should think and act when experiencing it (Rules 3, 10, 11).
3. **Spiritual Desolation:** What it is, where it comes from, and how one should think and act when experiencing it. (Rules 4–9, 11).
4. **Tactics of the Evil One:** Understanding his methods and how one can overcome his temptations (Rules 12–14).

### Initial Conversion

Begin by considering the various interior thoughts and experiences you will go through if you have struggled with one serious sin after another and remain trapped in this cycle. If that roughly depicts your personal moral life, then the information in Rule One and Two as summarized below will be helpful as you seek to break free of all habits of serious sin once and for all.

**First Rule.** *The first Rule: In the persons who go from mortal sin to mortal sin, the enemy is commonly used to propose to them apparent pleasures, making them imagine sensual delights and pleasures in order to hold them more and make them grow in their vices and sins. In these persons the good spirit uses the opposite method, pricking them and biting their consciences through the process of reason.*

**Second Rule.** *The second: In the persons who are going on intensely cleansing their sins and rising from good to better in the service of God our Lord, it is the method contrary to that in the first Rule, for then it is the way of the evil spirit to bite, sadden and put obstacles, disquieting with false reasons, that one may not go on; and it is proper to the good to give courage and strength, consolations, tears, inspirations and quiet, easing, and putting away all obstacles, that one may go on in well doing.*

Serious Sin: Look at your life objectively, meaning, as if you were only a bystander. What do you see? Do you see actions that break one or more of the Seven Capital Sins (or the Ten Commandments)? If so, then you are one who is struggling with going from one serious sin to another.

Right away, you may object and rationalize that your sin is not serious. But that's exactly what the evil one wants you to believe and one of the first traps many fall into. So look at your sin objectively, as a bystander, and name what you see. If you see one or more serious sins over the past month or two, then pay close attention to these initial rules. Be honest and objective.

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<sup>51</sup> Thomas, *Probing the Depths*, Chapter Five.



Pleasure: If you have recently struggled with serious sin, then one of the most common tactics of the evil one is to place before your imagination some deceptive pleasure. The evil one will not tempt by displeasure because it would obviously not work. He uses things that are pleasurable in some base way. Every one of the Seven Capital Sins can produce a very base and distorted form of temporary pleasure. This is what the evil one uses.

How does he use these pleasures? He proposes to your imagination the thought that this or that action will produce some delight and that you want it or need it. He will propose to your imagination the idea that “it’s not that bad” or “this is good.” It could be overeating, rebuking someone in anger, lustful actions, theft of some sort, etc. But whatever it is, your imagination will see this temptation as a good that is pleasurable and, therefore, desirable. And as you continue to indulge in a habit of serious sin, the evil one will provide you with as much empty and deceptive pleasure that he can.

God, and the good angels, will fight for your soul using a contrary method as you indulge in one sin after another. He will prick your conscience, leading you to feel guilty for your sin so that you will know you ought to change. This is a grace and should be acknowledged as such if you want to break free from a cycle of sin. So pay attention to interior feelings of guilt. Not because it’s good to live in perpetual shame. Rather, because good guilt can help to break you out of your cycle of serious sin.

As you begin to break free of habitual sin, and as you begin to live a life of virtue and freedom, both the good and bad spirits will communicate to you in a way opposite to how they would with one who simply goes from one serious sin to another. In this case, Saint Ignatius identifies four actions from the evil one on your soul and seven actions from the good spirits. As for the evil one, he will:

1. **Bite your Conscience:** An action may unsettle you and cause an undue anxiety about serving God.
2. **Sadden you:** An unexplained sorrow may come over you as you seek to serve the will of God.
3. **Put obstacles in your way of virtue:** As you see what’s involved in serving the will of God, you may feel overwhelmed and think you are too weak to live a good Christian life of virtue. God’s will seems unattainable.
4. **Disquiet your soul with false reasoning:** You may be tempted to lose your peace of heart by doubting God’s love or His action in your life. Your thinking may become confused, and you may lose hope.

However, God and the good angels will also act on your soul in these contrary ways:

1. **Give courage:** Though you see the difficult road of virtue ahead, you may ponder Psalm 23: “The Lord is my Shepherd, there is nothing I shall want.” You know you can walk through the “dark valley” if God is at your side.
2. **Give strength:** You may sense God saying to you, “My grace is sufficient for you.” You sense that strength welling up within you.
3. **Produce consolations:** You will experience a spiritual energy, joy and excitement that can only be explained as a grace. “Freedom awaits you.”

4. **Bring forth tears:** These are not tears of sorrow but tears that heal. Tears will cleanse when you open your heart to God’s cleansing mercy and when you are filled with a holy sorrow for sin. The tears perceive the freedom that awaits.
5. **Inspire you:** A spiritual clarity will come to you. Things will make sense. You will understand and believe in the will of God more clearly.
6. **Bring interior quiet that eases your soul:** “Be at peace, all will be well.” You may breathe a sigh of relief as you are made aware of God’s action in your life, knowing that the God of the Universe loves you and is helping you. Anxiety and fear diminish.
7. **Eliminate all obstacles:** The life of virtue and freedom from sin seems attainable. The path toward holiness is exciting, and you look forward to walking it.

These lists of actions of God and the evil one should be pondered carefully and used to examine your experiences as you strive to conquer sin. Understanding your interior experiences will help you to discern whether your interior experiences are from God or from the evil one. Once you make that discernment, it will be easier to follow the will of God and reject the will of the evil one.

Simply put, when you strive to overcome sin, the evil one will cause what Saint Ignatius calls “desolation” within your soul, and God will cause “consolation.” Understanding the difference between these two interior experiences will help you to choose the will of God and reject the evil one and his lies.

### ***Spiritual Consolation***

“Spiritual Consolation” is one way that God communicates to you His action in your life. It’s His way of leading you, encouraging you and strengthening you to follow His perfect will. In Rule Three, Saint Ignatius identifies the types of spiritual consolation:

**Third Rule.** *The third: OF SPIRITUAL CONSOLATION. I call it consolation when some interior movement in the soul is caused, through which the soul comes to be inflamed with love of its Creator and Lord; and when it can in consequence love no created thing on the face of the earth in itself, but in the Creator of them all. Likewise, when it sheds tears that move to love of its Lord, whether out of sorrow for one’s sins, or for the Passion of Christ our Lord, or because of other things directly connected with His service and praise. Finally, I call consolation every increase of hope, faith and charity, and all interior joy which calls and attracts to heavenly things and to the salvation of one’s soul, quieting it and giving it peace in its Creator and Lord.*

These consolations can be simplified as follows:

1. Being inflamed with the love of God
2. Love of all created things with the Heart of God
3. Spiritual tears
4. Increase of faith, hope and charity

*Being inflamed with the love of God:* This form of spiritual consolation is an interior movement in your soul in which you simply “fall in love” with God. It’s hard to explain why you love—you just do. You may gain some new spiritual insight into the inner beauty and majesty of God, or you may just be made more clearly aware of the fact that God loves you. The result will be a clear and unmistakable love for God. When you experience such a movement within your heart, rejoice, savor it, receive it and bask in its delight. This experience may only be perceived for a moment, or for much longer.

*Love of all created things with the Heart of God:* As your heart is inflamed with a love of God, you will also love all things in this world with a new inspired love. You will love other people, nature and all created things more fully as God loves them. Oftentimes you may “love” things in a selfish way. Your “love” of things is more of a possessiveness. “I want this!” or “I need you!” or “This is mine!” or “I really like doing this.” But God’s grace will lead you to reorder your selfish “love” into a true selfless love. This selfless love will see all people and things in your life from the perspective of the Heart of Christ. You will love them as Christ loves them. This love is not something you necessarily learn; rather, it’s inspired and comes easily to your heart. It’s a gift. And when you receive it, you will realize that it’s simply the love of God alive in your heart, leading you to love all things as He loves them.

*Spiritual tears:* Tears can come from various sources. It is natural, normal and healthy to experience tears at the loss of a loved one or in the face of some other tragedy. But the tears spoken of here are not of a natural order, they are of the supernatural order. They are “spiritual tears.” Consider, for example, the sinful woman who came to Jesus in repentance and bathed His precious feet with her tears. These tears had the effect of cleansing her own heart. They were a gift from God. They are “spiritual” in that the origin of this holy sorrow is an inspiration from God. God’s communication to your soul is so profound that you express this in a bodily way, through tears. Perhaps it is on account of your sorrow for sin, a realization of the depth of suffering that our Lord endured, or a deep realization of His perfect love for you. The key is that this is a communication so deep and spiritually transforming that it is expressed in this bodily way, through tears.

*Increase of faith, hope and charity:* The increase of these three virtues is one of the most telling signs of God’s action in your life. If you perceive that your faith is growing, then this is God acting in your life. Faith is a deep and transforming knowledge of God and His will. It produces a certitude that cannot be explained through rational powers alone. And as faith grows, it produces an increase of hope in God. Hope also becomes certain. You “know” God is in control and will lead you through all you face in life. Consequently, with an increase of faith and hope, charity is sparked, and you discover within yourself a new love of God and a love of others that is simply there. You just love, and you know this love is possible only by the grace of God.

Regarding the increase of these three virtues, there is no limit to how much they can increase. God wants to bring them to perfection in you. And if they were to be perfected within you, you would be in perfect union with God and His holy will. The perfection of these virtues means that God perfectly possesses you and that the evil one has no hold on you whatsoever. The perfection of these virtues ultimately frees you from every sin, even the smallest spiritual imperfection. Very few attain this level of holiness in this life, but all are called and, by God’s grace, all can achieve this holiness.

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## Day 66

Book IV<sup>52</sup>

XII

“If material things please you then praise God for them, but turn back your love upon Him who made them: lest in the things that please you, you displease Him. If souls please you, then love them in God because they are mutable in themselves but in Him firmly established: without Him they would pass and perish. Love them, I say, in Him, and draw as many souls with you to Him as you can. saying to them: ‘Him let us love: He made this world and is not far from it.’ For He did not simply make it and leave it: but as it is from Him so it is in Him. See where He is, wherever there is a savour of truth: He is in the most secret place of the heart, yet the heart has strayed from Him. O sinners, return to your own heart and abide in Him that made you. Stand with Him and you shall stand, rest in Him and you shall be at peace. Where are you going, to what bleak places? Where are you going? The good that you love is from Him: and insofar as it is likewise *for* Him it is good and lovely; but it will rightly be turned into bitterness, if it is unrightly loved and He deserted by whom it is. What goal are you making for, wandering around and about by ways so hard and laborious? Rest is not where you seek it. Seek what you seek, but it is not where you seek it. You seek happiness of life in the land of death, and it is not there. For how shall there be happiness of life where there is no life?”

“But our Life came down to this our earth and took away our death, slew death with the abundance of His own life: and He thundered, calling to us to return to Him into that secret place from which He came forth to us—coming first into the Virgin’s womb, where humanity was wedded to Him, our mortal flesh, though not always to be mortal; and thence like a bridegroom coming out of his bride chamber, rejoicing as a giant to run his course. For He did not delay but rushed on, calling to us by what He said and what He did, calling to us by His death, life, descent, and ascension to return to Him. And He withdrew from our eyes, that we might return to our own heart and find Him. For He went away and behold He is still here. He would not be with us long, yet He did not leave us. He went back to that place which He had never left, for the world was made by Him. And He was in this world, and He came into this world to save sinners. Unto Him my soul confesses and He hears it, for it has sinned against Him. O ye sons of men, how long will ye be so slow of heart? Even now when Life has come down to you, will you not ascend and live? But to what high place shall you climb, since you are in a high place and have set your mouth against the heavens? First descend that you may ascend, ascend to God. For in mounting up against God you fell. Tell the souls of men to weep in this valley of tears, and so bear them up with you to God, because it is by His Spirit that you are speaking this to them, if in your speaking you are on fire with the fire of charity.”

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<sup>52</sup> St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 72-74.

## Day 67

Book V<sup>53</sup>

XIII

“When therefore a message from Milan came to Rome, to the prefect, asking for a professor of Rhetoric for that city and arranging for public funds to cover his journey, I applied for the post with support from men far gone in the follies of the Manichees—the purpose of my journey being to be quit of them, though neither they nor I realized it. The prefect Symmachus approved of a public oration I delivered for the occasion, and sent me. So I came to Milan, to the bishop and devout servant of God, Ambrose, famed among the best men of the whole world, whose eloquence did then most powerfully minister to *Thy people the fatness of Thy wheat and the joy of Thy oil and the sober intoxication of Thy wine*. All unknowing I was brought by God to him, that knowing I should be brought by him to God. That man of God received me as a father, and as bishop welcomed my coming. I came to love him, not at first as a teacher of the truth, which I had utterly despaired of finding in Your church, but for his kindness towards me. I attended carefully when he preached to the people, not with the right intention, but only to judge whether his eloquence was equal to his fame or whether it flowed higher or lower than had been told me. His words I listened to with the greatest care; his matter I held quite unworthy of attention. I enjoyed the charm of his speaking, though for all his learning it was not so pleasing and captivating as that of Faustus: I refer of course only to the actual speaking: for the rest there was no comparison at all. Faustus was simply straying about among the fallacies of the Manichees, Ambrose taught the doctrine of salvation most profitably. But salvation is far from sinners, of the sort that I then was. Yet little by little I was drawing closer, though I did not yet realize it.”

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## Day 68

Book V<sup>54</sup>

XIV

“Thus I did not take great heed to learn what he was saying but only to hear how he said it: that empty interest was all I now had since I despaired of man’s finding the way to You. Yet along with the words, which I admired, there also came into my mind the subject-matter, to which I attached no importance. I could not separate them. And while I was opening my heart to learn how eloquently he spoke, I came to feel, though only gradually, how truly he spoke. First I began to realize that there was a case for the things themselves, and I began to see that the Catholic faith, for which I had thought nothing could be said in the face of the Manichean objections, could be maintained on reasonable grounds: this especially after I had heard explained figuratively several passages of the Old Testament which had been a cause of death for me when taken literally. Many passages of these books were expounded in a spiritual sense and I came to blame my own hopeless folly in believing that the law and the prophets could not stand against those who hated and mocked at them. I did not yet feel that the Catholic way was to be followed, merely because it might have

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<sup>53</sup> St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 99-100.

<sup>54</sup> St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 100-101.

some learned men to maintain it and answer objections adequately and not absurdly; nor did I think that what I had so far held was to be condemned because both views were equally defensible. In fact the Catholic side was clearly not vanquished, yet it was not clearly victorious. I then bent my mind to see if I could by any clear proofs convict the Manicheans of error. If only I had been able to conceive of a substance that was spiritual, all their strong points would have been broken down and cast forth from my mind. But I could not.”

“Concerning the body of this world, and the whole of that nature which our bodily senses can attain to, I thought again and again and made many comparisons; and I still judged that the views of so many of the philosophers were more probable. So in what I thought to be the manner of the Academics—that is to say, doubting of all things and wavering between one and another—I decided that I must leave the Manichees; for in that time of doubt, I did not think I could remain in a sect to which I now preferred certain of the philosophers. Yet I absolutely refused to entrust the care of my sick soul to the philosophers, because they were without the saving name of Christ. I determined, then, to go on as a catechumen in the Catholic Church—the church of my parents—and to remain in that state until some certain light should appear by which I might steer my course.”

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## Day 69

### Book VII<sup>55</sup>

#### XVII

“And I marvelled to find that at last I loved You and not some phantom instead of You; yet I did not stably enjoy my God, but was ravished to You by Your beauty, yet soon was torn away from You again by my own weight, and fell again with torment to lower things. Carnal habit was that weight. Yet the memory of You remained with me and I knew without doubt that it was You to whom I should cleave, though I was not yet such as could cleave to You: *for the corruptible body is a load upon the soul, and the earthly habitation presses down the mind that muses upon many things.* I was altogether certain that Your *invisible things are clearly seen from the creation of the worlds being understood by the things that are made:* so too are Your everlasting power and Your Godhead. I was now studying the ground of my admiration for the beauty of bodies, whether celestial or of earth, and on what authority I might rightly judge of things mutable and say: ‘This ought to be so, that not so.’ Enquiring then what was the source of my judgement, when I did so judge I had discovered the immutable and true eternity of truth above my changing mind. Thus by stages I passed from bodies to the soul which uses the body for its perceiving, and from this to the soul’s inner power, to which the body’s senses present external things, as indeed the beasts are able; and from there I passed on to the reasoning power, to which is referred for judgement what is received from the body’s senses. This too realised that it was mutable in me, and rose to its own understanding. It withdrew my thought from its habitual way, abstracting from the confused crowds of fantasms that it might find what light suffused it, when with utter certainty it cried aloud that the immutable was to be preferred to the mutable, and how it had come to know the immutable itself: for if it had not come to some knowledge of the immutable, it could not have known it as certainly preferable to the mutable. Thus in the thrust of a trembling glance my mind arrived at That Which Is. Then indeed I saw clearly Your *invisible things which are understood by the things that are made;* but I

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<sup>55</sup> St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 149-150.

lacked the strength to hold my gaze fixed, and my weakness was beaten back again so that I returned to my old habits, bearing nothing with me but a memory of delight and a desire as for something of which I had caught the fragrance but which I had not yet the strength to eat.”

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## Day 70

Book VII<sup>56</sup>  
XVIII

“So I set about finding a way to gain the strength that was necessary for enjoying You. And I could not find it until I embraced the *Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, who is over all things, God blessed forever*, who was calling unto me and saying: *I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life*; and who brought into union with our nature that Food which I lacked the strength to take: for *the Word was made flesh* that Your Wisdom, by which You created all things, might give suck to our souls’ infancy. For I was not yet lowly enough to hold the lowly Jesus as my God, nor did I know what lesson His embracing of our weakness was to teach. For Your Word, the eternal Truth, towering above the highest parts of Your creation, lifts up to Himself those that were cast down. He built for Himself here below a lowly house of our clay, that by it He might bring down from themselves and bring up to Himself those who were to be made subject, healing the swollenness of their pride and fostering their love: so that their self-confidence might grow no further but rather diminish, seeing the deity at their feet, humbled by the assumption of our coat of human nature: to the end that weary at last they might cast themselves down upon His humanity and rise again in its rising.”

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## Week 11

### Preview of Next Week

#### **Prayer:**

This week consists of continued selections from the autobiography of St. Augustine of Hippo, also known as *The Confessions*.

- On Day 72, there will be an *excursus* on the discernment of spirits. Schedule time apart from your dedicated prayer time to read this *excursus*.
- It may be advantageous to review some of the previous instructions on various ways to pray, including St. Francis de Sales’ treatment of meditation.

#### **Study:**

In order to finish *To Save A Thousand Souls* within the 180 days, you will need to read two pages per day; by the end of Week 11, you should have made it to page 154, but do not limit yourself to that if you can and want to read more.

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<sup>56</sup> St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 150-151.

## Review of Past Week

### Prayer:

- I fulfilled my commitment to daily, personal prayer \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I fulfilled my commitment to the Liturgy of the Hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I slept for at least seven hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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### Sacraments:

- I fulfilled my commitment to daily Mass this week. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to regular Confession. Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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### Virtue:

- I was faithful to my bodily fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I was faithful to my digital fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I was faithful to my dating fast. Yes / No
- I was faithful to the necessary practices from [www.hismercyeasures.org](http://www.hismercyeasures.org). Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Service:**

- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to altar serving. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to spiritual works of mercy. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to corporal works of mercy. Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Study:**

- I fulfilled my commitment to spiritual reading this week: Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my response, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Planning Ahead**

- What day(s) will I go to daily Mass this week? S M T W Th F S
- What day will I go to Confession this week? S M T W Th F S or [ ] not this week
- Am I scheduled for altar service this week? Spiritual works of mercy? Corporal works of mercy? Yes / No
- When will I make extra time to read the excursus on the discernment of spirits this week? \_\_\_\_\_
- Have I scheduled my next spiritual direction? Yes / No
- Have I scheduled my seminary visit? Yes / No
- Have I scheduled my discernment retreat? Yes / No



# Day 71

## Book VII<sup>57</sup>

### XXI

“So now I seized greedily upon the adorable writing of Your Spirit, and especially upon the apostle Paul. And I found that those difficulties, in which it had once seemed to me that he contradicted himself and that the text of his discourse did not agree with the testimonies of the law and the prophets, vanished away. In that pure eloquence I saw One Face, and I learned to rejoice with trembling. I found that whatever truth I had read in the Platonists was said here with praise of Your grace: that he who sees should *not so glory as if he had not received*—and received, indeed, not only what he sees but even the power to see, *for what has he that he has not received!* And further, that he [who sees] is not only taught to *see* You who are always the same, but is also strengthened to take hold of You; and that he who cannot see You from afar off, may yet walk on that way by which he may come and see and take hold. For though a man be *delighted with the law of God according to the inward man*, what shall he do about *that other law in his members, fighting against the law of his mind and captivating him in the law of sin that is in his members?* For *Thou art just, O Lord, but we have sinned, we have committed iniquity, we have done wickedly* and Thy hand has grown heavy upon us and we are justly delivered over to that first sinner, the ruler of death, because he has turned our will to the likeness of his will, whereby he stood not in Thy truth. But what shall unhappy man do? *Who shall deliver him from the body of this death, save the grace of God by Jesus Christ our Lord whom Thou hast begotten coeternally with Thee and possessed in the beginning of Thy ways; in whom the prince of this world found nothing worthy of death yet killed Him; and the handwriting was blotted out of the decree which was contrary to us.*”

“The writings of the Platonists contain nothing of all this. Their pages show nothing of the face of that love, the tears of confession, Your sacrifice, an afflicted spirit, a contrite and humbled heart, the salvation of Your people, the espoused city, the promise of the Holy Spirit, the chalice of our redemption. In them no one sings: *Shall not my soul be submitted unto God? From Him is my salvation: for He is my God, my salvation, and my defense: I shall be no more moved.* And we hear no voice calling: *Come unto me, all you that labour.* They scorned to learn from Him, *because He is meek and humble of heart. For Thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them to the little ones.* It is one thing to see the land of peace from a wooded mountaintop, yet not find the way to it and struggle hopelessly far from the way, with hosts of those fugitive deserters from God, under their leader the Lion and the Dragon, besetting us about and ever lying in wait; and quite another to hold to the way that leads there, a way guarded by the care of our heavenly General, where there are no deserters from the army of heaven to practice their robberies—for indeed they avoid that way as a torment. Marvellously these truths graved themselves in my heart when I read that latest of Your apostles and looked upon Your works and trembled.”

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<sup>57</sup> St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 153-154.

## Day 72

Book VIII<sup>58</sup>

XI

“Thus I was sick at heart and in torment, accusing myself with a new intensity of bitterness, twisting and turning in my chain in the hope that it might be utterly broken, for what held me was so small a thing! But it still held me. And You stood in the secret places of my soul, O Lord, in the harshness of Your mercy redoubling the scourges of fear and shame lest I should give way again and that small slight tie which remained should not be broken but should grow again to full strength and bind me closer even than before. For I kept saying within myself: ‘Let it be now, let it be now,’ and by the mere words I had begun to move towards the resolution. I almost made it, yet I did not quite make it. But I did not fall back into my original state, but as it were stood near to get my breath. And I tried again and I was almost there, and now I could all but touch it and hold it: yet I was not quite there, I did not touch it or hold it. I still shrank from dying unto death and living unto life. The lower condition which had grown habitual was more powerful than the better condition which I had not tried. The nearer the point of time came in which I was to become different, the more it struck me with horror; but it did not force me utterly back nor turn me utterly away, but held me there between the two.”

“Those trifles of all trifles, and vanities of vanities, my one-time mistresses, held me back, plucking at my garment of flesh and murmuring softly: ‘Are you sending us away?’ And ‘From this moment shall we not be with you, now or forever?’ And ‘From this moment shall this or that not be allowed you, now or forever?’ What were they suggesting to me in the phrase I have written ‘this or that,’ what were they suggesting to me, O my God? Do you in your mercy keep from the soul of Your servant the vileness and uncleanness they were suggesting. And now I began to hear them not half so loud; they no longer stood against me face to face, but were softly muttering behind my back and, as I tried to depart, plucking stealthily at me to make me look behind. Yet even that was enough, so hesitating was I, to keep me from snatching myself free, from shaking them off and leaping upwards on the way I was called: for the strong force of habit said to me: ‘Do you think you can live without them?’”

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## ***Excursus: The Discernment of Spirits***

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The following is an excerpt from John Paul Thomas’ book, *Probing the Depths: Ignatian Lessons and Meditations Arranged According to the Liturgical Year*.

For options to engage fuller treatments of St. Ignatius’ Discernment of Spirits, see page 76.

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<sup>58</sup> St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 175-177.

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## Chapter Five: *Discernment of Spirits Cont.*

### *Exercises of Thought During Spiritual Consolation*<sup>59</sup>

Rules Ten and Eleven provide some practical suggestions regarding what you may term “thinking exercises” when you are experiencing spiritual consolation. The first “thinking exercise” from Rule Ten is as follows:

**Tenth Rule.** *The tenth: Let him who is in consolation think how he will be in the desolation which will come after, taking new strength for then.*

This rule is quite straightforward. It’s a way of storing up the grace of the spiritual consolation for use during the next time you experience spiritual desolation. This rule is also a way of reminding you that, unless you have achieved absolute perfection of life, spiritual desolation will most certainly return. In other words, the spiritual consolation you experience will not necessarily remain with you forever. So prepare now!

By analogy, recall the Scriptural story of Joseph being sold into slavery in Egypt. After he was elevated to the pharaoh’s service and made second in command, his country experienced a period of abundance of food. The crops produced more than they could use. Joseph was wise and decided to store the extra food for the future in case they experienced a famine. And that’s exactly what happened. But because he prepared, his people survived the drought. This is what you should do with the “abundance” you experience with spiritual consolation. You remember it, make mental notes of how you feel, what you experience and the good resolutions you make. And in the future, when you experience desolation, you should recall the experiences you had at the time of spiritual consolation and use this “food” to endure the trial you encounter as a result of the spiritual desolation.

The second “thinking exercise” Saint Ignatius recommends during a time of spiritual consolation is found in the first part of Rule Eleven:

**Eleventh Rule.** *The eleventh: Let him who is consoled see to humbling himself and lowering himself as much as he can, thinking how little he is able for in the time of desolation without such grace or consolation.*

This exercise is a sort of “reality check” for those experiencing a spiritual consolation. Though such a consolation is from God, you, in your weakness, may be tempted to misuse the gift of this grace. Humility will help you to avoid such a trap. Pride will lead you to think that you are more than you are. But this sort of thinking will lead you down the path of pride and is a temptation from the evil one. It will lead you to forget that all is a gift, all is grace and mercy, all glory belongs to God. Therefore, to counter such a temptation, Saint Ignatius encourages you to humble yourself in the midst of every spiritual consolation. In fact, the more powerful the consolation, the deeper you will need to humble yourself before God. This will keep you from going astray in prideful thinking.

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<sup>59</sup> Thomas, *Probing the Depths*, Chapter Five.

If you humble yourself in moments of spiritual consolation, those graces you receive are, in a sense, exponentially magnified. They are magnified because your humility will enable the effects of your spiritual consolations to extend more easily to future moments of temptation. For example, if you experience a spiritual consolation and feel as though you are on top of the world, and as a result you think very highly of yourself, the strength of that consolation will not endure. Thus, the next day, if you are in desolation and experience a testing of that faith, you may fail. But if you did humble yourself during your previous experience of spiritual consolation, the effect is that this grace is stored up and you will be able to face the testing with the enduring strength of that previous consolation. Humility in the midst of spiritual consolation produces a knowledge and right thinking that lasts far beyond the good feelings you have. That knowledge is a deeper form of faith, and that faith will be needed as you endure the trials of life. Faith will lead to hope and charity when needed the most.

### ***Spiritual Desolation***

Saint Ignatius explains the interior experiences of “Spiritual Desolation” in Rule Four in the following way:

**Fourth Rule.** *The fourth: OF SPIRITUAL DESOLATION. I call desolation all the contrary of the third rule, such as darkness of soul, disturbance in it, movement to things low and earthly, the unquiet of different agitations and temptations, moving to want of confidence, without hope, without love, when one finds oneself all lazy, tepid, sad, and as if separated from his Creator and Lord. Because, as consolation is contrary to desolation, in the same way the thoughts which come from consolation are contrary to the thoughts which come from desolation.*

And in Rule Nine, Saint Ignatius gives three causes of spiritual desolation:

**Ninth Rule.** *The ninth: There are three principal reasons why we find ourselves desolate.*

*The first is, because of our being tepid, lazy or negligent in our spiritual exercises; and so through our faults, spiritual consolation withdraws from us.*

*The second, to try us and see how much we are and how much we let ourselves out in His service and praise without such great pay of consolation and great graces.*

*The third, to give us true acquaintance and knowledge, that we may interiorly feel that it is not ours to get or keep great devotion, intense love, tears, or any other spiritual consolation, but that all is the gift and grace of God our Lord, and that we may not build a nest in a thing not ours, raising our intellect into some pride or vainglory, attributing to us devotion or the other things of the spiritual consolation.*

Let’s begin with an explanation of these three causes of spiritual desolation. Once you understand the causes, you will consider the actual interior experiences of desolation.

*First Cause: Being tepid and lazy or negligent* — The first of the three causes of spiritual desolation is your own sin. A clear connection is made between personal sin and the loss of consolation from God. This is the logical

consequence of sin. When you sin, you push God out of your life, and when you do that, you lose every clear sense of His closeness. For this reason, if you experience any form of spiritual desolation (as defined in the next section), then you should first examine your conscience to discern whether or not it is a result of your sin. Very often, you will see a connection between some sinful, or even negligent, action you have done and a loss of spiritual consolation and closeness with God. The reason God withdraws His consolation from you in these times is to invite you to change, to convert your heart so as to turn back to God and receive healing from your sin. This loss of consolation is a grace from God to help you become more keenly aware of your sin and turn back to God with all your heart.

Second Cause: To try us — If you have examined your conscience and do not see any clear connection between your experience of spiritual desolation and your sin, then you may want to consider that your interior experience of desolation may not be the result of sin but rather is a trial that God is permitting to help you on the road to salvation. Though God does not ever act as the primary cause of an interior trial, He does often permit us to go through interior trials to provide us many possible spiritual benefits.

For example, when you find yourself in a situation of desolation for no apparent reason (meaning, it is not because of your sin), then this is an opportunity (a trial) by which you can manifest a more pure love of God. It's an opportunity to love God out of love alone, not because of any good feeling or consolation.

Additionally, trials like this invite you to establish the truth of your identity as a servant of the great King. A true servant will love and serve the King in good times and difficult ones. If you can love God by your actions, in the midst of the trial of spiritual desolation, then your identity as a faithful servant is more fully established and lived. You will not love God because you “get something out of it”; rather, you will love God because He is your God and worthy of your love.

Furthermore, your love of God grows in determination and commitment. It's easy to love when there is a clear benefit (consolation), but it takes determination, commitment and integrity to love when the “benefit” is less apparent. Thus, you are strengthened in your determination to love through all things.

Trials also have the effect of helping you to grow in self knowledge. Specifically, you come to know who you are as children of God and why you do what you do. Why do I love God? Why do I serve Him? Trials help clarify the answers to these questions and purify them in their results.

Lastly, such a trial helps you to understand how close God is to you. At first, the experience of desolation may lead you to “feel” as if God is far away. However, by enduring the trial and by working through it, you will come to an understanding of God's intimate love for you and His closeness on a new level, a level of a more purified faith. You will believe not because of what you feel but because of what you come to know through faith. This will lead you to a new level of hope and love.

Third Cause: To give us true acquaintance and knowledge — The third cause of your interior experience of spiritual desolation is a specific type of knowledge: knowing that consolation is beyond your own ability to obtain and maintain. This knowledge enables you to grow in humility and dependence on God. You come to realize that all is a gift for which you must be eternally grateful. You realize that the good feelings of consolation are not

a right, they are not something you have earned, they are not something you deserve or have obtained by your own effort. Rather, you realize that without God, you are nothing. Without God's grace and mercy, you can do nothing and cannot obtain the fullness of life. This humble recognition will better prepare you to be more receptive of the unlimited gifts of grace God wants to bestow upon you. This humility reveals to you the truth of who you are and who God is.

After describing the above causes of spiritual desolation, it is time to outline the following interior experiences a person may have in this state:

1. **Darkness of soul:** A trouble within that directly attacks one's faith. A psychological depression or physical exhaustion. A temptation toward spiritual confusion that affects one's faith.
2. **Disturbance:** An interior restlessness. A lack of peace. Recall Saint Augustine's famous words from the *Confessions*, "Our hearts are restless, O Lord, until they rest in You."
3. **Movement to things low and earthly:** A temptation to seek "consolation" in things other than God, such as sins of the flesh.
4. **The unquiet of different agitations and temptations:** Unsettled interiorly to such a point that one is tempted by various interior agitations.
5. **Moving to want of confidence:** Self-doubt and uncertainty, especially of God and matters of faith. Approaching life with weakness and a lack of resolve.
6. **Without hope:** Confusion of faith leading to a "felt" loss of hope in God and His will. The lack of motivation to act without receiving "positive feedback."
7. **Without love:** An absence of feeling love, either for God or from God.
8. **Lazy, tepid, sad:** An attack on the spiritual energy that drives one to love and serve God.
9. **As if separated from his Creator and Lord:** A deep and painful experience of the total loss of God. This is perfectly manifest in the humanity of Jesus on the Cross when He cried out to the Father, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?"

Though these experiences of spiritual desolation may at first seem awful and undesirable, they are in fact incredible acts of mercy from God. They give you the opportunity to grow in faith, hope and love in the most pure and deepest way humanly possible. By making acts of faith, hope and love while experiencing these desolations, God makes you strong. He transforms you from being a child to a person who is spiritually mature and unwavering in your Christian walk.

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## Day 73

Book VIII<sup>60</sup>

XI

“But by this time its voice was growing fainter. In the direction towards which I had turned my face and was quivering in fear of going, I could see the austere beauty of Continnence, serene and indeed joyous but not evilly, honourably soliciting me to come to her and not linger, stretching forth loving hands to receive and embrace me, hands full of multitudes of good examples. With her I saw such hosts of young men and maidens, a multitude of youth and of every age, gray widows and women grown old in virginity, and in them all Continnence herself, not barren but the fruitful mother of children, her joys, by You, Lord, her Spouse. And she smiled upon me and her smile gave courage as if she were saying: ‘Can you not do what these men have done, what these women have done? Or could men or women have done such in themselves, and not in the Lord their God? The Lord their God gave me to them. Why do you stand upon yourself and so not stand at all? Cast yourself upon Him and be not afraid; He will not draw away and let you fall. Cast yourself without fear. He will receive you and heal you.’”

“Yet I was still ashamed, for I could still hear the murmuring of those vanities, and I still hung hesitant. And again it was as if she said: ‘Stop your ears against your unclean members, that they may be mortified. They tell you of delights, but not of such delights as the law of the Lord your God tells.’ This was the controversy raging in my heart, a controversy about myself against myself. And Alypius stayed by my side and awaited in silence the issue of such agitation as he had never seen in me.”

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## Day 74

Book VIII<sup>61</sup>

XII

“When my most searching scrutiny had drawn up all my vileness from the secret depths of my soul and heaped it in my heart’s sight, a mighty storm arose in me, bringing a mighty rain of tears. That I might give way to my tears and lamentations, I rose from Alypius: for it struck me that solitude was more suited to the business of weeping. I went far enough from him to prevent his presence from being an embarrassment to me. So I felt, and he realized it. I suppose I had said something and the sound of my voice was heavy with tears. I arose, but he remained where we had been sitting, still in utter amazement. I flung myself down somehow under a certain fig tree and no longer tried to check my tears, which poured forth from my eyes in a flood, *an acceptable sacrifice to Thee*. And much I said not in these words but to this effect: ‘*And Thou, O Lord, how long? How long, Lord; wilt Thou be angry forever? Remember not our former iniquities.*’ For I felt that I was still bound by them. And I continued my miserable complaining: ‘How long, how long shall I go on saying tomorrow and again tomorrow? Why not now, why not have an end to my uncleanness this very hour?’”

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<sup>60</sup> St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 177.

<sup>61</sup> St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 177-179.



“Such things I said, weeping in the most bitter sorrow of my heart. And suddenly I heard a voice from some nearby house, a boy’s voice or a girl’s voice, I do not know: but it was a sort of sing-song, repeated again and again, ‘Take and read, take and read.’ I ceased weeping and immediately began to search my mind most carefully as to whether children were accustomed to chant these words in any kind of game, and I could not remember that I had ever heard any such thing. Damming back the flood of my tears I arose, interpreting the incident as quite certainly a divine command to open my book of Scripture and read the passage at which I should open. For it was part of what I had been told about Anthony, that from the Gospel which he happened to be reading he had felt that he was being admonished as though what he read was spoken directly to himself: *Go, sell what thou hast and give to the poor and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come follow Me.* By this experience he had been in that instant converted to You. So I was moved to return to the place where Alypius was sitting, for I had put down the Apostle’s book there when I arose. I snatched it up, opened it and in silence read the passage upon which my eyes first fell: *Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and impurities, not in contention and envy, but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ and make not provision for the flesh in its concupiscences.* [Romans xiii, 13.] I had no wish to read further, and no need. For in that instant, with the very ending of the sentence, it was as though a light of utter confidence shone in all my heart, and all the darkness of uncertainty vanished away.”

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## Day 75

Book VIII<sup>62</sup>

XII

“Then leaving my finger in the place or marking it by some other sign, I closed the book and in complete calm told the whole thing to Alypius and he similarly told me what had been going on in himself, of which I knew nothing. He asked to see what I had read. I showed him, and he looked further than I had read. I had not known what followed. And this is what followed: *Now him that is weak in faith, take unto you.* He applied this to himself and told me so. And he was confirmed by this message, and with no troubled wavering gave himself to God’s good-will and purpose — a purpose indeed most suited to his character, for in these matters he had been immeasurably better than I.”

“Then we went in to my mother and told her, to her great joy. We related how it had come about: she was filled with triumphant exultation, and praised You who are mighty beyond what we ask or conceive: for she saw that You had given her more than with all her pitiful weeping she had ever asked. For You converted me to Yourself so that I no longer sought a wife nor any of this world’s promises, but stood upon that same rule of faith in which You had shown me to her so many years before. Thus You changed her mourning into joy, a joy far richer than she had thought to wish, a joy much dearer and purer than she had thought to find in grandchildren of my flesh.”

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<sup>62</sup> St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 179.

## Day 76

Book X<sup>63</sup>  
XXVII

“Late have I loved Thee, O Beauty so ancient and so new; late have I loved Thee! For behold Thou wert within me, and I outside; and I sought Thee outside and in my unloveliness fell upon those lovely things that Thou hast made. Thou wert with me and I was not with Thee. I was kept from Thee by those things, yet had they not been in Thee, they would not have been at all. Thou didst call and cry to me and break open my deafness: and Thou didst send forth Thy beams and shine upon me and chase away my blindness: Thou didst breathe fragrance upon me, and I drew in my breath and do now pant for Thee: I tasted Thee, and now hunger and thirst for Thee: Thou didst touch me, and I have burned for Thy peace.”

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## Day 77

Book X<sup>64</sup>  
XXVIII

“When once I shall be united to Thee with all my being, there shall be no more grief and toil, and my life will be alive, filled wholly with Thee. Thou dost raise up him whom Thou dost fill; whereas being not yet filled with Thee I am a burden to myself. The pleasures of this life for which I should weep are in conflict with the sorrows of this life in which I should rejoice, and I know not on which side stands the victory. Woe is me. Lord, have pity on me! For I have likewise sorrows which are evil and these are in conflict with joys that are good, and I know not on which side stands the victory. Woe is me. Lord have mercy upon me! Woe is me! See, I do not hide my wounds: Thou art the physician, I the sick man; Thou art merciful, I need mercy. Is not the life of man on earth a trial? Who would choose trouble and difficulty? Thou dost command us to endure them, not to love them. No one loves what he endures, though he may love to endure. For though he rejoices at his endurance, yet he would rather that there were nothing to endure. In adversity I desire prosperity, in prosperity I fear adversity. Yet what middle place is there between the two, where man’s life may be other than trial? There is woe and woe again in the prosperity of this world, woe from the fear of adversity, woe from the corruption of joy! There is woe in the adversity of this world, and a second woe and a third, from the longing for prosperity, and because adversity itself is hard, and for fear that endurance may break! Is not man’s life upon earth trial without intermission?”

XXIX

“All my hope is naught save in Thy great mercy. Grant what Thou dost command, and command what Thou wilt. Thou dost command continence. And *when I knew*, as it is said, *that no one could be continent unless God gave it, even this was a point of wisdom, to know whose gift it was*. For by continence we are collected and bound up into unity within ourself, whereas we had been scattered abroad in multiplicity. Too little does any man love

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<sup>63</sup> St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 236.

<sup>64</sup> St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 236-237.

Thee, who loves some other thing together with Thee, loving it not on account of Thee, O Thou Love, who art ever burning and never extinguished! O Charity, my God, enkindle me! Thou dost command continence: grant what Thou dost command and command what Thou wilt.”

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## Week 12

### Preview of Next Week

**Prayer:**

This week consists of continued selections from the autobiography of St. Therese of Lisieux, also known as *The Story of a Soul*.

- On Day 79, there will be an *excursus* on the discernment of spirits. Schedule time apart from your dedicated prayer time to read this *excursus*.
- It may be advantageous to review some of the previous instructions on various ways to pray, including St. Francis de Sales’ treatment of meditation.

**Study:**

In order to finish *To Save A Thousand Souls* within the 180 days, you will need to read two pages per day; by the end of Week 12, you should have made it to page 168, but do not limit yourself to that if you can and want to read more.

### Review of Past Week

**Prayer:**

- I fulfilled my commitment to daily, personal prayer \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I fulfilled my commitment to the Liturgy of the Hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I slept for at least seven hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Sacraments:**

- I fulfilled my commitment to daily Mass this week. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to regular Confession. Yes / No

- *These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:*

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- *Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:*

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**Virtue:**

- *I was faithful to my bodily fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.*
- *I was faithful to my digital fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.*
- *I was faithful to my dating fast. Yes / No*
- *I was faithful to the necessary practices from [www.hismercyeendures.org](http://www.hismercyeendures.org). Yes / No*

- *These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:*

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- *Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:*

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**Service:**

- *I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to altar serving. Yes / No*
- *I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to spiritual works of mercy. Yes / No*
- *I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to corporal works of mercy. Yes / No*
- *These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:*

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- *Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:*

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**Study:**

- *I fulfilled my commitment to spiritual reading this week: Yes / No*
- *These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:*

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 - Based on my response, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:  
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## Planning Ahead

- What day(s) will I go to daily Mass this week? S M T W Th F S
  - What day will I go to Confession this week? S M T W Th F S or [ ] not this week
  - Am I scheduled for altar service this week? Spiritual works of mercy? Corporal works of mercy? Yes / No
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- When will I make extra time to read the excursus on the discernment of spirits this week? \_\_\_\_\_
  - Have I scheduled my next spiritual direction? Yes / No
  - Have I scheduled my seminary visit? Yes / No
  - Have I scheduled my discernment retreat? Yes / No

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## Day 78

### CHAPTER I *Earliest Memories*<sup>65</sup>

“I often asked myself why God had preferences, why all souls did not receive an equal measure of grace. I was filled with wonder when I saw extraordinary favours showered on great sinners like St. Paul, St. Augustine, St. Mary Magdalen, and many others, whom He forced, so to speak, to receive His grace. In reading the lives of the Saints I was surprised to see that there were certain privileged souls, whom Our Lord favoured from the cradle to the grave, allowing no obstacle in their path which might keep them from mounting towards Him, permitting no sin to soil the spotless brightness of their baptismal robe. And again it puzzled me why so many poor savages should die without having even heard the name of God.”

“Our Lord has deigned to explain this mystery to me. He showed me the book of nature, and I understood that every flower created by Him is beautiful, that the brilliance of the rose and the whiteness of the lily do not lessen the perfume of the violet or the sweet simplicity of the daisy. I understood that if all the lowly flowers wished to be roses, nature would lose its springtide beauty, and the fields would no longer be enamelled with lovely hues. And so it is in the world of souls, Our Lord's living garden. He has been pleased to create great Saints who may be compared to the lily and the rose, but He has also created lesser ones, who must be content to be daisies or simple violets flowering at His Feet, and whose mission it is to gladden His

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<sup>65</sup> St. Thérèse of Lisieux, *The Story of a Soul*, trans. Thomas Taylor, London, Burns, Oates & Washbourne LD, 1912;2005, Chapter I.

Divine Eyes when He deigns to look down on them. And the more gladly they do His Will the greater is their perfection.”

“I understood this also, that God's Love is made manifest as well in a simple soul which does not resist His grace as in one more highly endowed. In fact, the characteristic of love being self-abasement, if all souls resembled the holy Doctors who have illuminated the Church, it seems that God in coming to them would not stoop low enough. But He has created the little child, who knows nothing and can but utter feeble cries, and the poor savage who has only the natural law to guide him, and it is to their hearts that He deigns to stoop. These are the field flowers whose simplicity charms Him; and by His condescension to them Our Saviour shows His infinite greatness. As the sun shines both on the cedar and on the floweret, so the Divine Sun illumines every soul, great and small, and all correspond to His care—just as in nature the seasons are so disposed that on the appointed day the humblest daisy shall unfold its petals.”

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## Day 79

### CHAPTER V<sup>66</sup> *Vocation of Thérèse*

“One Sunday, closing my book at the end of Mass, a picture of Our Lord on the Cross half slipped out, showing only one of His Divine Hands, pierced and bleeding. I felt an indescribable thrill such as I had never felt before. My heart was torn with grief to see that Precious Blood falling to the ground, and no one caring to treasure It as It fell, and I resolved to remain continually in spirit at the foot of the Cross, that I might receive the Divine Dew of Salvation and pour it forth upon souls. From that day the cry of my dying Saviour—“I thirst!”—sounded incessantly in my heart, and kindled therein a burning zeal hitherto unknown to me. My one desire was to give my Beloved to drink; I felt myself consumed with thirst for souls, and I longed at any cost to snatch sinners from the everlasting flames of hell.”

“In order still further to enkindle my ardour, Our Divine Master soon proved to me how pleasing to him was my desire. Just then I heard much talk of a notorious criminal, Pranzini, who was sentenced to death for several shocking murders, and, as he was quite impenitent, everyone feared he would be eternally lost. How I longed to avert this irreparable calamity! In order to do so I employed all the spiritual means I could think of, and, knowing that my own efforts were unavailing, I offered for his pardon the infinite merits of Our Saviour and the treasures of Holy Church.”

“Need I say that in the depths of my heart I felt certain my request would be granted? But, that I might gain courage to persevere in the quest for souls, I said in all simplicity: ‘My God, I am quite sure that Thou wilt pardon this unhappy Pranzini. I should still think so if he did not confess his sins or give any sign of sorrow, because I have such confidence in Thy unbounded Mercy; but this is my first sinner, and therefore I beg for just one sign of repentance to reassure me.’ My prayer was granted to the letter. My Father never allowed us

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<sup>66</sup> St. Thérèse, *Story*, Chapter V.

to read the papers, but I did not think there was any disobedience in looking at the part about Pranzini. The day after his execution I hastily opened the paper, *La Croix*, and what did I see? Tears betrayed my emotion; I was obliged to run out of the room. Pranzini had mounted the scaffold without confessing or receiving absolution, and the executioners were already dragging him towards the fatal block, when all at once, apparently in answer to a sudden inspiration, he turned round, seized the crucifix which the Priest was offering to him, and kissed Our Lord's Sacred Wounds three times. . . . I had obtained the sign I asked for, and to me it was especially sweet. Was it not when I saw the Precious Blood flowing from the Wounds of Jesus that the thirst for souls first took possession of me? I wished to give them to drink of the Blood of the Immaculate Lamb that It might wash away their stains, and the lips of 'my first born' had been pressed to these Divine Wounds. What a wonderful answer!"

"After receiving this grace my desire for the salvation of souls increased day by day. I seemed to hear Our Lord whispering to me, as He did to the Samaritan woman: 'Give me to drink!' [John 4:7]. It was indeed an exchange of love: upon souls I poured forth the Precious Blood of Jesus, and to Jesus I offered these souls refreshed with the Dew of Calvary. In this way I thought to quench His Thirst; but the more I gave Him to drink, so much the more did the thirst of my own poor soul increase, and I accepted it as the most delightful recompense."

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## Excursus: The Discernment of Spirits

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The following is an excerpt from John Paul Thomas' book, *Probing the Depths: Ignatian Lessons and Meditations Arranged According to the Liturgical Year*.

For options to engage fuller treatments of St. Ignatius' Discernment of Spirits, see page 76.

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### Chapter Five: *Discernment of Spirits Cont.*

#### *Spiritual Desolation Cont.*<sup>67</sup>

With that said, if the desolation and the temptation that come from that experience of desolation are not fully rejected, you will suffer greatly by being drawn into confusion and sin. This is especially true because the one who fails to reject the desolation also struggles with false thinking, allowing one's own thoughts to entertain ideas that are contrary to the truth. If given into, desolation will lead to thoughts such as giving up prayer, turning from faith, questioning God, being confused about life and giving into despair. But these

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<sup>67</sup> Thomas, *Probing the Depths*, Chapter Five.

thoughts must be rejected so that the grace of the trial you go through will produce the good effect God wants to bestow upon you.

Since these temptations are real, Saint Ignatius offers four rules to guide your thinking during the experiences of spiritual desolation. They can be found in **Rules Five–Eight** and in the second part of **Rule Eleven** of *The Spiritual Exercises*. Read them carefully and return to them whenever you find yourself experiencing any form of spiritual desolation:

**Fifth Rule.** *The fifth: In time of desolation never to make a change; but to be firm and constant in the resolutions and determination in which one was the day preceding such desolation, or in the determination in which he was in the preceding consolation. Because, as in consolation it is rather the good spirit who guides and counsels us, so in desolation it is the bad, with whose counsels we cannot take a course to decide rightly.*

**Sixth Rule.** *The sixth: Although in desolation we ought not to change our first resolutions, it is very helpful intensely to change ourselves against the same desolation, as by insisting more on prayer, meditation, on much examination, and by giving ourselves more scope in some suitable way of doing penance.*

**Seventh Rule.** *The seventh: Let him who is in desolation consider how the Lord has left him in trial in his natural powers, in order to resist the different agitations and temptations of the enemy; since he can with the Divine help, which always remains to him, though he does not clearly perceive it: because the Lord has taken from him his great fervor, great love and intense grace, leaving him, however, grace enough for eternal salvation.*

**Eighth Rule.** *The eighth: Let him who is in desolation labor to be in patience, which is contrary to the vexations which come to him: and let him think that he will soon be consoled, employing against the desolation the devices, as is said in the sixth Rule.*

**Eleventh Rule.** *The eleventh: ...On the contrary, let him who is in desolation think that he can do much with the grace sufficient to resist all his enemies, taking strength in his Creator and Lord.*

### **Tactics of the Evil One**

Saint Ignatius ends his first set of rules by giving three insights into the tactics of the evil one. Understanding these tactics will help you to undermine his evil attack and thwart his oppressive action.

**Twelfth Rule.** *The twelfth: ...in the same manner, it is the way of the enemy to weaken and lose heart, his temptations taking flight, when the person who is exercising himself in spiritual things opposes a bold front against the temptations of the enemy, doing diametrically the opposite. And on the contrary, if the person who is exercising himself commences to have fear and lose heart in suffering the temptations, there is no beast so wild on the face of the earth as the enemy of human nature in following out his damnable intention with so great malice.*

The clear advice from Saint Ignatius here is to be strong, confident and filled with faith. The evil one tries to cause fear and anxiety. And when he succeeds in creating this fear, he gains influence and power over you.



However, when he and his lies are immediately rebuked with confidence in Christ, then he is greatly weakened and cowers before your faith. The evil one's power to oppress is in direct correlation to either your spiritual strength or your spiritual weakness. When you are weak, he is strong. When you are strong, he is weak.

**Thirteenth Rule.** *...in the same way, when the enemy of human nature brings his wiles and persuasions to the just soul, he wants and desires that they be received and kept in secret; but when one reveals them to his good Confessor or to another spiritual person that knows his deceits and evil ends, it is very grievous to him, because he gathers, from his manifest deceits being discovered, that he will not be able to succeed with his wickedness begun.*

The evil one gains power over you when you keep his evil attacks hidden in fear. However, when you humbly bring his attacks into the light, especially by revealing them to a spiritual director or confessor, he loses power over you. His attacks are like mold. When mold remains in the dark, it grows. When it is exposed to light, it dies. Thus, it is always spiritually fruitful to be open and honest about what you are experiencing on a spiritual level.

**Fourteenth Rule.** *...in like manner the enemy of human nature, roaming about, looks in turn at all our virtues, theological, cardinal and moral; and where he finds us weakest and most in need for our eternal salvation, there he attacks us and aims at taking us.*

The evil one will usually attack you at your weakest point. Therefore, be aware of your weaknesses! If you have struggled with habitual sin, then he will most likely attack there. In fact, anything you struggle with is a potential area of attack from the evil one. Perhaps you struggle with overextending yourself, or struggle with sins of the flesh, or tend to gossip, etc. Whatever your weakness is, that is where he will attack. If, however, you are very aware of who you are and what weaknesses you struggle with the most, then you will be in a good position to rebuke and overcome his attacks when they come.

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## Day 80

### CHAPTER VIII<sup>68</sup>

#### *Profession of Soeur Thérèse*

“Need I tell you, dear Mother, about the retreat before my profession? Far from receiving consolation, I went through it in a state of utter dryness and as if abandoned by God. Jesus, as was His wont, slept in my little barque. How rarely do souls suffer Him to sleep in peace! This Good Master is so wearied with continually making fresh advances that He eagerly avails Himself of the repose I offer Him, and, no doubt, He will sleep on until my great and everlasting retreat; but, instead of being grieved at this, I am glad.”

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<sup>68</sup> St. Thérèse, *Story*, Chapter VIII.

“In truth I am no Saint, as this frame of mind well shows. I ought not to rejoice in my dryness of soul, but rather attribute it to my want of fervour and fidelity. That I fall asleep so often during meditation, and thanksgiving after Communion, should distress me. Well, I am not distressed. I reflect that little children are equally dear to their parents whether they are asleep or awake; that, in order to perform operations, doctors put their patients to sleep; and finally that ‘The Lord knoweth our frame, He remembereth that we are but dust,’ [Psalm 103:14]. Yet, apparently barren as was my retreat—and those which followed have been no less so—I unconsciously received many interior lights on the best means of pleasing God, and practising virtue. I have often observed that Our Lord will not give me any store of provisions, but nourishes me each moment with food that is ever new; I find it within me without knowing how it has come there. I simply believe that it is Jesus Himself hidden in my poor heart, who is secretly at work, inspiring me with what He wishes me to do as each occasion arises.”

“Shortly before my profession I received the Holy Father's blessing, through the hands of Brother Simeon; and this precious Blessing undoubtedly helped me through the most terrible storm of my whole life.”

“On the eve of the great day, instead of being filled with the customary sweetness, my vocation suddenly seemed to me as unreal as a dream. The devil—for it was he—made me feel sure that I was wholly unsuited for life in the Carmel, and that I was deceiving my superiors by entering on a way to which I was not called. The darkness was so bewildering that I understood but one thing—I had no religious vocation, and must return to the world. I cannot describe the agony I endured. What was I to do in such a difficulty? I chose the right course, deciding to tell my Novice Mistress of the temptation without delay. I sent for her to come out of choir, and though full of confusion, I confessed the state of my soul. Fortunately she saw more clearly than I did, and reassured me completely by laughing frankly at my story. The devil was put to instant flight by my humble avowal; what he wanted was to keep me from speaking, and thus draw me into his snares. But it was my turn now to ensnare him, for, to make my humiliation more complete, I also told you everything, dear Mother, and your consoling words dispelled my last fears.”

“On the morning of September 8, a wave of peace flooded my soul, and, in that peace which surpasseth all understanding,’ [Philippians 4:7] I pronounced my holy vows.”

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## Day 81

### CHAPTER VIII<sup>69</sup> *Profession of Soeur Thérèse*

“Full sweet is the way of Love. It is true one may fall and be unfaithful to grace; but Love, knowing how to profit by everything, quickly consumes whatever is displeasing to Jesus, leaving in the heart only a deep and humble peace. I have obtained many spiritual lights through the works of St. John of the Cross. When I was seventeen and eighteen they were my only food; but, later on, and even now, all spiritual authors leave me cold and dry. However beautiful and touching a book may be, my heart does not respond, and I read without

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<sup>69</sup> St. Thérèse, *Story*, Chapter VIII.

understanding, or, if I understand, I cannot meditate. In my helplessness the Holy Scriptures and the Imitation are of the greatest assistance; in them I find a hidden manna, genuine and pure. But it is from the Gospels that I find most help in the time of prayer; from them I draw all that I need for my poor soul. I am always discovering in them new lights and hidden mysterious meanings. I know and I have experienced that ‘the Kingdom of God is within us’ [Luke 17:21]. Our Lord has no need of books or teachers to instruct our souls. He, the Teacher of Teachers, instructs us without any noise of words. I have never heard Him speak, yet I know He is within me. He is there, always guiding and inspiring me; and just when I need them, lights, hitherto unseen, break in. This is not as a rule during my prayers, but in the midst of my daily duties. Sometimes, however, as this evening, at the close of a meditation spent in utter dryness, a word of comfort is given to me: ‘Here is the Master I give thee, He will teach thee all that thou shouldst do. I wish thee to read in the Book of Life in which is contained the science of love<sup>70</sup>. . . .’”

“The Science of Love! How sweetly do these words echo in my soul! That science alone do I desire. Having given all my substance for it, like the Spouse in the Canticles, ‘I think that I have given nothing.’ After so many graces, may I not sing with the Psalmist that ‘the Lord is good, that His Mercy endureth for ever’?”

“It seems to me that if everyone were to receive such favours God would be feared by none, but loved to excess; that no one would ever commit the least wilful fault—and this through love, not fear.”

“Yet all souls cannot be alike. It is necessary that they should differ from one another in order that each Divine Perfection may receive its special honour. To me, He has given His Infinite Mercy, and it is in this ineffable mirror that I contemplate his other attributes. Therein all appear to me radiant with Love. His Justice, even more perhaps than the rest, seems to me to be clothed with Love. What joy to think that Our Lord is just, that is to say, that He takes our weakness into account, that He knows perfectly the frailty of our nature! Of what, then, need I be afraid?”

“Will not the God of Infinite Justice, Who deigns so lovingly to pardon the sins of the Prodigal Son, be also just to me who am always with Him [Luke 15:31]?”

“In the year 1895 I received the grace to understand, more than ever, how much Jesus desires to be loved. Thinking one day of those who offer themselves as victims to the Justice of God, in order to turn aside the punishment reserved for sinners by taking it upon themselves, I felt this offering to be noble and generous, but was very far from feeling myself drawn to make it. ‘O my Divine Master,’ I cried from the bottom of my heart, ‘shall Thy Justice alone receive victims of holocaust? Has not Thy Merciful Love also need thereof? On all sides it is ignored, rejected . . . the hearts on which Thou wouldst lavish it turn to creatures, there to seek their happiness in the miserable satisfaction of a moment, instead of casting themselves into Thine Arms, into the unfathomable furnace of Thine Infinite Love.’”

“O my God! must Thy Love which is disdained lie hidden in Thy Heart? Methinks, if Thou shouldst find souls offering themselves as victims of holocaust to Thy Love, Thou wouldst consume them rapidly; Thou wouldst be well pleased to suffer the flames of infinite tenderness to escape that are imprisoned in Thy Heart.”

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<sup>70</sup> Revelation of Our Lord to Bd. Margaret Mary.

“If Thy Justice—which is of earth—must needs be satisfied, how much more must Thy Merciful Love desire to inflame souls, since *Thy mercy reacheth even to the Heavens?* [Psalm 36:6] O Jesus! Let me be that happy victim—consume Thy holocaust with the Fire of Divine Love!”

“Dear Mother, you know the love, or rather the oceans of grace which flooded my soul immediately after I made that Act of Oblation on June 9, 1895. From that day I have been penetrated and surrounded with love. Every moment this Merciful Love renews me and purifies me, leaving in my soul no trace of sin. I cannot fear Purgatory; I know I do not merit to enter, even, into that place of expiation with the Holy Souls, but I also know that the fire of Love is more sanctifying than the fire of Purgatory. I know that Jesus could not wish useless suffering for us, and He would not inspire me with the desires I feel, were He not willing to fulfill them.”

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## Day 82

### CHAPTER IX<sup>71</sup> *The Night of The Soul*

“You know it has ever been my desire to become a Saint, but I have always felt, in comparing myself with the Saints, that I am as far removed from them as the grain of sand, which the passer-by tramples underfoot, is remote from the mountain whose summit is lost in the clouds.”

“Instead of being discouraged, I concluded that God would not inspire desires which could not be realised, and that I may aspire to sanctity in spite of my littleness. For me to become great is impossible. I must bear with myself and my many imperfections; but I will seek out a means of getting to Heaven by a little way—very short and very straight, a little way that is wholly new. We live in an age of inventions; nowadays the rich need not trouble to climb the stairs, they have lifts instead. Well, I mean to try and find a lift by which I may be raised unto God, for I am too tiny to climb the steep stairway of perfection. I have sought to find in Holy Scripture some suggestion as to what this lift might be which I so much desired, and I read these words uttered by the Eternal Wisdom Itself: ‘Whosoever is a little one, let him come to Me’ [Proverbs 9:4]. Then I drew near to God, feeling sure that I had discovered what I sought; but wishing to know further what He would do to the little one, I continued my search and this is what I found: ‘You shall be carried at the breasts and upon the knees; as one whom the mother caresseth, so will I comfort you’ [Isaiah 66:12-13].”

“Never have I been consoled by words more tender and sweet. Thine Arms, then, O Jesus, are the lift which must raise me up even unto Heaven. To get there I need not grow; on the contrary, I must remain little, I must become still less. O my God, thou hast gone beyond my expectation, and I . . . ‘I will sing Thy mercies! Thou hast taught me, O Lord, from my youth and till now I have declared Thy wonderful works, and thus unto old age and grey hairs’ [Psalm 70:17-18].”

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<sup>71</sup> St. Thérèse, *Story*, Chapter IX.

## Day 83

### CHAPTER X<sup>72</sup> *The New Commandment*

“I remember an act of charity with which God inspired me while I was still a novice, and this act, though seemingly small, has been rewarded even in this life by Our Heavenly Father, ‘Who seeth in secret.’”

“Shortly before Sister St. Peter became quite bedridden, it was necessary every evening, at ten minutes to six, for someone to leave meditation and take her to the refectory. It cost me a good deal to offer my services, for I knew the difficulty, or I should say the impossibility, of pleasing the poor invalid. But I did not want to lose such a good opportunity, for I recalled Our Lord's words: ‘As long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to Me’ [Matthew 25:40]. I therefore humbly offered my aid. It was not without difficulty I induced her to accept it, but after considerable persuasion I succeeded. Every evening, when I saw her shake her sand-glass, I understood that she meant: ‘Let us go!’ Summoning up all my courage I rose, and the ceremony began. First of all, her stool had to be moved and carried in a particular way, and on no account must there be any hurry. The solemn procession ensued. I had to follow the good Sister, supporting her by her girdle; I did it as gently as possible, but if by some mischance she stumbled, she imagined I had not a firm hold, and that she was going to fall. ‘You are going too fast,’ she would say, ‘I shall fall and hurt myself!’ Then when I tried to lead her more quietly: ‘Come quicker . . . I cannot feel you . . . you are letting me go! I was right when I said you were too young to take care of me.’”

“When we reached the refectory without further mishap, more troubles were in store. I had to settle my poor invalid in her place, taking great pains not to hurt her. Then I had to turn back her sleeves, always according to her own special rubric, and after that I was allowed to go.”

“But I soon noticed that she found it very difficult to cut her bread, so I did not leave her till I had performed this last service. She was much touched by this attention on my part, for she had not expressed any wish on the subject; it was by this unsought-for kindness that I gained her entire confidence, and chiefly because—as I learnt later—at the end of my humble task I bestowed upon her my sweetest smile.”

“Dear Mother, it is long since all this happened, but Our Lord allows the memory of it to linger with me like a perfume from Heaven. One cold winter evening, I was occupied in the lowly work of which I have just spoken, when suddenly I heard in the distance the harmonious strains of music outside the convent walls. I pictured a drawing-room, brilliantly lighted and decorated, and richly furnished. Young ladies, elegantly dressed, exchanged a thousand compliments, as is the way of the world. Then I looked on the poor invalid I was tending. Instead of sweet music I heard her complaints, instead of rich gilding I saw the brick walls of our bare cloister, scarcely visible in the dim light. The contrast was very moving. Our Lord so illuminated my soul with the rays of truth, before which the pleasures of the world are but as darkness, that for a thousand years of such worldly delights, I would not have bartered even the ten minutes spent in my act of charity.”

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<sup>72</sup> St. Thérèse, *Story*, Chapter X.

“If even now, in days of pain and amid the smoke of battle, the thought that God has withdrawn us from the world is so entrancing, what will it be when, in eternal glory and everlasting repose, we realise the favour beyond compare He has done us here, by singling us out to dwell in His Carmel, the very portal of Heaven?”

“I have not always felt these transports of joy in performing acts of charity, but at the beginning of my religious life Jesus wished to make me feel how sweet to Him is charity, when found in the hearts of his Spouses. Thus when I led Sister St. Peter, it was with so much love that I could not have shown more were I guiding Our Divine Lord Himself.”

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## Day 84

### CHAPTER X<sup>73</sup>

#### *The New Commandment*

“The practice of charity has not always been so pleasant as I have just pointed out, dear Mother, and to prove it I will recount some of my many struggles.”

“For a long time my place at meditation was near a Sister who fidgeted continually, either with her Rosary, or something else; possibly, as I am very quick of hearing, I alone heard her, but I cannot tell you how much it tried me. I should have liked to turn round, and by looking at the offender, make her stop the noise; but in my heart I knew that I ought to bear it tranquilly, both for the love of God and to avoid giving pain. So I kept quiet, but the effort cost me so much that sometimes I was bathed in perspiration, and my meditation consisted merely in suffering with patience. After a time I tried to endure it in peace and joy, at least deep down in my soul, and I strove to take actual pleasure in the disagreeable little noise. Instead of trying not to hear it, which was impossible, I set myself to listen, as though it had been some delightful music, and my meditation—which was not the ‘prayer of quiet’—was passed in offering this music to Our Lord.”

“Another time I was working in the laundry, and the Sister opposite, while washing handkerchiefs, repeatedly splashed me with dirty water. My first impulse was to draw back and wipe my face, to show the offender I should be glad if she would behave more quietly; but the next minute I thought how foolish it was to refuse the treasures God offered me so generously, and I refrained from betraying my annoyance. On the contrary, I made such efforts to welcome the shower of dirty water, that at the end of half an hour I had taken quite a fancy to this novel kind of aspersion, and I resolved to come as often as I could to the happy spot where such treasures were freely bestowed.”

“Dear Mother, you see that I am a very little soul, who can only offer very little things to Our Lord. It still happens that I frequently let slip the occasion of these slender sacrifices, which bring so much peace, but this does not discourage me; I bear the loss of a little peace, and I try to be more watchful for the future.”

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<sup>73</sup> St. Thérèse, *Story*, Chapter X.

“How happy does Our Lord make me, and how sweet and easy is His service on this earth! He has always given me what I desired, or rather He has made me desire what He wishes to give. A short time before my terrible temptation against Faith, I had reflected how few exterior trials, worthy of mention, had fallen to my lot, and that if I were to have interior trials, God must change my path; and this I did not think He would do. Yet I could not always live at ease. Of what means, then, would He make use?”

“I had not long to wait for an answer, and it showed me that He whom I love is never at a loss, for without changing my way, He sent me this great trial; and thus mingled a healing bitterness with all the sweet.”

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## Week 13

### Preview of Next Week

#### Prayer:

This week concludes our continued selections from the autobiography of St. Therese of Lisieux, also known as *The Story of a Soul*. It also concludes Part III of *Discernment 180*.

- On Day 86, there will be an *excursus* on Ignatius’ guidance for how to make an election. While the previous instructions have been on discernment of spirits, this *excursus* is more focused on decision making - so, it is particularly important for vocation discernment. Schedule time apart from your dedicated prayer time to read this *excursus*.
- It may be advantageous to review some of the previous instructions on various ways to pray, including St. Francis de Sales’ treatment of meditation.

#### Study:

In order to finish *To Save A Thousand Souls* within the 180 days, you will need to read two pages per day; by the end of Week 13, you should have made it to page 182, but do not limit yourself to that if you can and want to read more.

### Review of Past Week

#### Prayer:

- I fulfilled my commitment to daily, personal prayer \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I fulfilled my commitment to the Liturgy of the Hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I slept for at least seven hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Sacraments:**

- I fulfilled my commitment to daily Mass this week. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to regular Confession. Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Virtue:**

- I was faithful to my bodily fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I was faithful to my digital fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I was faithful to my dating fast. Yes / No
- I was faithful to the necessary practices from [www.hismercyendures.org](http://www.hismercyendures.org). Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Service:**

- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to altar serving. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to spiritual works of mercy. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to corporal works of mercy. Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Study:**

- I fulfilled my commitment to spiritual reading this week: Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my response, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Planning Ahead**

- What day(s) will I go to daily Mass this week?    S M T W Th F S
- What day will I go to Confession this week?    S M T W Th F S or [ ] not this week
- Am I scheduled for altar service this week? Spiritual works of mercy? Corporal works of mercy?    Yes / No
- When will I make extra time to read the excursus on Ignatius' rules on making an election this week?
- Have I scheduled my next spiritual direction?    Yes / No
- Have I scheduled my seminary visit?    Yes / No
- Have I scheduled my discernment retreat?    Yes / No

**Day 85**

CHAPTER XI<sup>74</sup>  
*A Canticle of Love*

“O my Beloved! this was but the prelude of graces yet greater which Thou didst desire to heap upon me. Let me remind Thee of them today, and forgive my folly if I venture to tell Thee once more of my hopes, and my heart's well nigh infinite longings—forgive me and grant my desire, that it may be well with my soul. To be Thy Spouse, O my Jesus, to be a daughter of Carmel, and by my union with Thee to be the mother of souls, should not all this content me? And yet other vocations make themselves felt—I feel called to the Priesthood and to the Apostolate—I would be a Martyr, a Doctor of the Church. I should like to accomplish the most

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<sup>74</sup> St. Thérèse, *Story*, Chapter XI.

heroic deeds—the spirit of the Crusader burns within me, and I long to die on the field of battle in defence of Holy Church.”

“The vocation of a Priest! With what love, my Jesus, would I bear Thee in my hand, when my words brought Thee down from Heaven! With what love would I give Thee to souls! And yet, while longing to be a Priest, I admire and envy the humility of St. Francis of Assisi, and am drawn to imitate him by refusing the sublime dignity of the Priesthood. How reconcile these opposite tendencies<sup>75</sup>?”

“Like the Prophets and Doctors, I would be a light unto souls, I would travel to every land to preach Thy name, O my Beloved, and raise on heathen soil the glorious standard of Thy Cross. One mission alone would not satisfy my longings. I would spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth, even to the most distant isles. I would be a Missionary, not for a few years only, but, were it possible, from the beginning of the world till the consummation of time. Above all, I thirst for the Martyr's crown. It was the desire of my earliest days, and the desire has deepened with the years passed in the Carmel's narrow cell. But this too is folly, since I do not sigh for one torment; I need them all to slake my thirst. Like Thee, O Adorable Spouse, I would be scourged, I would be crucified! I would be flayed like St. Bartholomew, plunged into boiling oil like St. John, or, like St. Ignatius of Antioch, ground by the teeth of wild beasts into a bread worthy of God<sup>76</sup>.”

“With St. Agnes and St. Cecilia I would offer my neck to the sword of the executioner, and like Joan of Arc I would murmur the name of Jesus at the stake.”

“My heart thrills at the thought of the frightful tortures Christians are to suffer at the time of Anti-Christ, and I long to undergo them all. Open, O Jesus, the Book of Life, in which are written the deeds of Thy Saints: all the deeds told in that book I long to have accomplished for Thee. To such folly as this what answer wilt Thou make? Is there on the face of this earth a soul more feeble than mine? And yet, precisely because I am feeble, it has delighted Thee to accede to my least and most child-like desires, and today it is Thy good pleasure to realise those other desires, more vast than the Universe. These aspirations becoming a true martyrdom, I opened, one day, the Epistles of St. Paul to seek relief in my sufferings. My eyes fell on the 12th and 13th chapters of the First Epistle to the Corinthians. I read that all cannot become Apostles, Prophets, and Doctors; that the Church is composed of different members; that the eye cannot also be the hand. The answer was clear, but it did not fulfill my desires, or give to me the peace I sought. ‘Then descending into the depths of my nothingness, I was so lifted up that I reached my aim<sup>77</sup>.’”

“Without being discouraged I read on, and found comfort in this counsel: ‘Be zealous for the better gifts. And I show unto you a yet more excellent way [1 Corinthians 12:31].’ The Apostle then explains how all perfect gifts are nothing without Love, that Charity is the most excellent way of going surely to God. At last I had found rest.”

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<sup>75</sup> St. Francis of Assisi, out of humility, refused to accept the sublime dignity of the Priesthood, and remained a Deacon until his death.

<sup>76</sup> An allusion to the beautiful words of the martyr St. Ignatius of Antioch, uttered when he heard the roar of the lions in the Roman arena. "I am the wheat of Christ; let me be ground by the teeth of the wild beasts, that I may become clean bread."

<sup>77</sup> St. John of the Cross.

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## Day 86

### CHAPTER XI<sup>78</sup> *A Canticle of Love*

“Meditating on the mystical Body of Holy Church, I could not recognise myself among any of its members as described by St. Paul, or was it not rather that I wished to recognise myself in all? Charity provided me with the key to my vocation. I understood that since the Church is a body composed of different members, the noblest and most important of all the organs would not be wanting. I knew that the Church has a heart, that this heart burns with love, and that it is love alone which gives life to its members. I knew that if this love were extinguished, the Apostles would no longer preach the Gospel, and the Martyrs would refuse to shed their blood. I understood that love embraces all vocations, that it is all things, and that it reaches out through all the ages, and to the uttermost limits of the earth, because it is eternal.”

“Then, beside myself with joy, I cried out: ‘O Jesus, my Love, at last I have found my vocation. My vocation is love! Yes, I have found my place in the bosom of the Church, and this place, O my God, Thou hast Thyself given to me: in the heart of the Church, my Mother, I will be LOVE! . . . Thus I shall be all things: thus will my dream be realised. . . .’”

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## Excursus: *St. Ignatius on Making an Election*

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The following is an excerpt from St. Ignatius’ *Spiritual Exercises*.

A helpful commentary on these rules can be found in Fr. Timothy Gallagher’s book, *Discerning the Will of God: An Ignatian Guide for Christian Decision Making*. It is available on his website (<http://www.frtimothygallagher.org>) or on Amazon.

Fr. Gallagher has also recorded a 12-episode podcast series summarizing his book, which you can find for free at <http://www.austinvocations.com/gallagher>.

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<sup>78</sup> St. Thérèse, *Story*, Chapter XI.

## *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola* TIMES FOR MAKING AN ELECTION<sup>79</sup>

### THREE TIMES

#### *For Making, in Any One of Them, a Sound and Good Election*

**First Time.** The first time is, when God our Lord so moves and attracts the will, that without doubting, or being able to doubt, such devout soul follows what is shown it, as St. Paul and St. Matthew did in following Christ our Lord.

**Second Time.** The second, when enough light and knowledge is received by experience of consolations and desolations, and by the experience of the discernment of various spirits.

**Third Time.** The third time is quiet, when one considers, first, for what man is born -- namely, to praise God our Lord and save his soul -- and desiring this chooses as means a life or state within the limits of the Church, in order that he may be helped in the service of his Lord and the salvation of his soul.

I said time of quiet, when the soul is not acted on by various spirits, and uses its natural powers freely and tranquilly.

If election is not made in the first or the second time, two ways follow as to this third time for making it.

### THE FIRST WAY

#### *To Make a Sound and Good Election*

It contains six Points.

**First Point.** The first Point is to put before me the thing on which I want to make election, such as an office or benefice, either to take or leave it; or any other thing whatever which falls under an election that can be changed.

**Second Point.** Second: It is necessary to keep as aim the end for which I am created, which is to praise God our Lord and save my soul, and, this supposed, to find myself indifferent, without any inordinate propensity; so that I be not more inclined or disposed to take the thing proposed than to leave it, nor more to leave it than to take it, but find myself as in the middle of a balance, to follow what I feel to be more for the glory and praise of God our Lord and the salvation of my soul.

**Third Point.** Third: To ask of God our Lord to be pleased to move my will and put in my soul what I ought to do regarding the thing proposed, so as to promote more His praise and glory; discussing well and faithfully with my intellect, and choosing agreeably to His most holy pleasure and will.

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<sup>79</sup> St. Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises*, Second Week: Times for Making an Election.

**Fourth Point.** Fourth: To consider, reckoning up, how many advantages and utilities follow for me from holding the proposed office or benefice for only the praise of God our Lord and the salvation of my soul, and, to consider likewise, on the contrary, the disadvantages and dangers which there are in having it. Doing the same in the second part, that is, looking at the advantages and utilities there are in not having it, and likewise, on the contrary, the disadvantages and dangers in not having the same.

**Fifth Point.** Fifth: After I have thus discussed and reckoned up on all sides about the thing proposed, to look where reason more inclines: and so, according to the greater inclination of reason, and not according to any inclination of sense, deliberation should be made on the thing proposed.

**Sixth Point.** Sixth, such election, or deliberation, made, the person who has made it ought to go with much diligence to prayer before God our Lord and offer Him such election, that His Divine Majesty may be pleased to receive and confirm it, if it is to His greater service and praise.

## THE SECOND WAY

### *To Make a Sound and Good Election*

It contains four Rules and one Note.

**First Rule.** The first is that that love which moves me and makes me choose such thing should descend from above, from the love of God, so that he who chooses feel first in himself that that love, more or less, which he has for the thing which he chooses, is only for his Creator and Lord.

**Second Rule.** The second, to set before me a man whom I have never seen nor known, and I desiring all his perfection, to consider what I would tell him to do and elect for the greater glory of God our Lord, and the greater perfection of his soul, and I, doing likewise, to keep the rule which I set for the other.

**Third Rule.** The third, to consider, as if I were at the point of death, the form and measure which I would then want to have kept in the way of the present election, and regulating myself by that election, let me make my decision in everything.

**Fourth Rule.** The fourth, looking and considering how I shall find myself on the Day of Judgment, to think how I would then want to have deliberated about the present matter, and to take now the rule which I would then wish to have kept, in order that I may then find myself in entire pleasure and joy.

**Note.** The above-mentioned rules for my eternal salvation and peace having been taken, I will make my election and offering to God our Lord, conformably to the sixth Point of the First Way of making election.

## Day 87

CHAPTER XI<sup>80</sup>  
*A Canticle of Love*

“Why do I say I am beside myself with joy? This does not convey my thought. Rather is it peace which has become my portion—the calm peace of the sailor when he catches sight of the beacon which lights him to port. O luminous Beacon of Love! I know how to come even unto Thee, I have found the means of borrowing Thy Fires.”

“I am but a weak and helpless child, yet it is my very weakness which makes me dare to offer myself, O Jesus, as victim to Thy Love.”

“In olden days pure and spotless holocausts alone were acceptable to the Omnipotent God. Nor could His Justice be appeased, save by the most perfect sacrifices. But the law of fear has given place to the law of love, and Love has chosen me, a weak and imperfect creature, as its victim. Is not such a choice worthy of God's Love? Yea, for in order that Love may be fully satisfied, it must stoop even unto nothingness, and must transform that nothingness into fire. O my God, I know it—'Love is repaid by love alone<sup>81</sup>.' Therefore I have sought, I have found, how to ease my heart, by rendering Thee love for love.”

“‘Use the riches that make men unjust, to find you friends who may receive you into everlasting dwellings’ [Luke 16:9]. This, O Lord, is the advice Thou gavest to Thy disciples after complaining that ‘the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light’ [Luke 16:8].”

“Child of light, as I am, I understood that my desires to be all things, and to embrace all vocations, were riches that might well make me unjust; so I set to work to use them for the making of friends. Mindful of the prayer of Eliseus when he asked the Prophet Elias for his double spirit, I presented myself before the company of the Angels and Saints and addressed them thus: ‘I am the least of all creatures. I know my mean estate, but I know that noble and generous hearts love to do good. Therefore, O Blessed Inhabitants of the Celestial City, I entreat you to adopt me as your child. All the glory that you help me to acquire, will be yours; only deign to hear my prayer, and obtain for me a double portion of the love of God.’”

“O my God! I cannot measure the extent of my request, I should fear to be crushed by the very weight of its audacity. My only excuse is my claim to childhood, and that children do not grasp the full meaning of their words. Yet if a father or mother were on the throne and possessed vast treasures, they would not hesitate to grant the desires of those little ones, more dear to them than life itself. To give them pleasure they will stoop even unto folly.”

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<sup>80</sup> St. Thérèse, *Story*, Chapter XI.

<sup>81</sup> St. John of the Cross.

## Day 88

CHAPTER XI<sup>82</sup>  
*A Canticle of Love*

“Well, I am a child of Holy Church, and the Church is a Queen, because she is now espoused to the Divine King of Kings. I ask not for riches or glory, not even the glory of Heaven—that belongs by right to my brothers the Angels and Saints, and my own glory shall be the radiance that streams from the queenly brow of my Mother, the Church. Nay, I ask for Love. To love Thee, Jesus, is now my only desire. Great deeds are not for me; I cannot preach the Gospel or shed my blood. No matter! My brothers work in my stead, and I, a little child, stay close to the throne, and love Thee for all who are in the strife.”

“But how shall I show my love, since love proves itself by deeds? Well! The little child will strew flowers . . . she will embrace the Divine Throne with their fragrance, she will sing Love's Canticle in silvery tones. Yes, my Beloved, it is thus my short life shall be spent in Thy sight. The only way I have of proving my love is to strew flowers before Thee—that is to say, I will let no tiny sacrifice pass, no look, no word. I wish to profit by the smallest actions, and to do them for Love. I wish to suffer for Love's sake, and for Love's sake even to rejoice: thus shall I strew flowers. Not one shall I find without scattering its petals before Thee . . . and I will sing . . . I will sing always, even if my roses must be gathered from amidst thorns; and the longer and sharper the thorns, the sweeter shall be my song.”

“But of what avail to thee, my Jesus, are my flowers and my songs? I know it well: this fragrant shower, these delicate petals of little price, these songs of love from a poor little heart like mine, will nevertheless be pleasing unto Thee. Trifles they are, but Thou wilt smile on them. The Church Triumphant, stooping towards her child, will gather up these scattered rose leaves, and, placing them in Thy Divine Hands, there to acquire an infinite value, will shower them on the Church Suffering to extinguish its flames, and on the Church Militant to obtain its victory.”

“O my Jesus, I love Thee! I love my Mother, the Church; I bear in mind that ‘the least act of pure love is of more value to her than all other works together<sup>83</sup>.’”

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## Day 89

CHAPTER XI<sup>84</sup>  
*A Canticle of Love*

“But is this pure love really in my heart? Are not my boundless desires but dreams—but foolishness? If this be so, I beseech Thee to enlighten me; Thou knowest I seek but the truth. If my desires be rash, then deliver me from them, and from this most grievous of all martyrdoms. And yet I confess, if I reach not those heights to

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<sup>82</sup> St. Thérèse, *Story*, Chapter XI.

<sup>83</sup> St. John of the Cross.

<sup>84</sup> St. Thérèse, *Story*, Chapter XI.

which my soul aspires, this very martyrdom, this foolishness, will have been sweeter to me than eternal bliss will be, unless by a miracle Thou shouldst take from me all memory of the hopes I entertained upon earth. Jesus, Jesus! If the mere desire of Thy Love awakens such delight, what will it be to possess it, to enjoy it for ever?”

“How can a soul so imperfect as mine aspire to the plenitude of Love? What is the key of this mystery? O my only Friend, why dost Thou not reserve these infinite longings to lofty souls, to the eagles that soar in the heights? Alas! I am but a poor little unfledged bird. I am not an eagle, I have but the eagle's eyes and heart! Yet, notwithstanding my exceeding littleness, I dare to gaze upon the Divine Sun of Love, and I burn to dart upwards unto Him! I would fly, I would imitate the eagles; but all that I can do is to lift up my little wings—it is beyond my feeble power to soar. What is to become of me? Must I die of sorrow because of my helplessness? Oh, no! I will not even grieve. With daring self-abandonment there will I remain until death, my gaze fixed upon that Divine Sun. Nothing shall affright me, nor wind nor rain. And should impenetrable clouds conceal the Orb of Love, and should I seem to believe that beyond this life there is darkness only, that would be the hour of perfect joy, the hour in which to push my confidence to its uttermost bounds. I should not dare to detach my gaze, well knowing that beyond the dark clouds the sweet Sun still shines.”

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## Day 90

### CHAPTER XI<sup>85</sup> *A Canticle of Love*

“So far, O my God, I understand Thy Love for me. But Thou knowest how often I forget this, my only care. I stray from Thy side, and my scarcely fledged wings become draggled in the muddy pools of earth; then I lament ‘like a young swallow,’ [Isaiah 38:14] and my lament tells Thee all, and I remember, O Infinite Mercy! that ‘Thou didst not come to call the just, but sinners’ [Luke 5:32].”

“Yet shouldst Thou still be deaf to the plaintive cries of Thy feeble creature, shouldst Thou still be veiled, then I am content to remain benumbed with cold, my wings bedraggled, and once more I rejoice in this well-deserved suffering.”

“O Sun, my only Love, I am happy to feel myself so small, so frail in Thy sunshine, and I am in peace . . . I know that all the eagles of Thy Celestial Court have pity on me, they guard and defend me, they put to flight the vultures—the demons that fain would devour me. I fear them not, these demons, I am not destined to be their prey, but the prey of the Divine Eagle.”

“O Eternal Word! O my Saviour! Thou art the Divine Eagle Whom I love—Who lurest me. Thou Who, descending to this land of exile, didst will to suffer and to die, in order to bear away the souls of men and plunge them into the very heart of the Blessed Trinity—Love's Eternal Home! Thou Who, reascending into inaccessible light, dost still remain concealed here in our vale of tears under the snow-white semblance of the

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<sup>85</sup> St. Thérèse, *Story*, Chapter XI.



Host, and this, to nourish me with Thine own substance! O Jesus! forgive me if I tell Thee that Thy Love reacheth even unto folly. And in face of this folly, what wilt Thou, but that my heart leap up to Thee? How could my trust have any limits?"

"I know that the Saints have made themselves as fools for Thy sake; being 'eagles,' they have done great things. I am too little for great things, and my folly it is to hope that Thy Love accepts me as victim; my folly it is to count on the aid of Angels and Saints, in order that I may fly unto Thee with thine own wings, O my Divine Eagle! For as long a time as Thou wilt I shall remain—my eyes fixed upon Thee. I long to be allured by Thy Divine Eyes; I would become Love's prey. I have the hope that Thou wilt one day swoop down upon me, and, bearing me away to the Source of all Love, Thou wilt plunge me at last into that glowing abyss, that I may become for ever its happy Victim."

"O Jesus! would that I could tell all little souls of Thine ineffable condescension! I feel that if by any possibility Thou couldst find one weaker than my own, Thou wouldst take delight in loading her with still greater favours, provided that she abandoned herself with entire confidence to Thine Infinite Mercy. But, O my Spouse, why these desires of mine to make known the secrets of Thy Love? Is it not Thyself alone Who hast taught them to me, and canst Thou not unveil them to others? Yea! I know it, and this I implore Thee!"

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## Day 91

LETTERS OF SOEUR THÉRÈSE

*To Her Sister Céline*<sup>86</sup>

XVI

"MY DEAR CÉLINE,—You tell me that my letters do good to you. I am indeed glad, but I assure you that I am under no misapprehension: 'Unless the Lord build the house, they labour in vain who build it' [Psalm 127:1]. The greatest eloquence cannot call forth a single act of love without that grace which touches the heart."

"Think of a beautiful peach with its delicate tint of rose, with its flavour so sweet that no human skill could invent such nectar. Tell me, Céline, is it for the peach's own sake that God created that colour so fair to the eye, that velvety covering so soft to the touch? Is it for itself that He made it so sweet? Nay, it is for us; the only thing that is all its own and is essential to its being, is the stone; it possesses nothing beyond."

"Thus also it pleases Jesus to lavish His gifts on certain souls in order to draw yet others to Himself; in His Mercy He humbles them inwardly and gently compels them to recognise their nothingness and His Almighty Power. Now this sentiment of humility is like a kernel of grace which God hastens to develop against that blessed day, when, clothed with an imperishable beauty, they will be placed, without danger, on the banqueting-table of Paradise. Dear little sister, sweet echo of my soul, Thérèse is far from the heights of fervour at this moment; but when I am in this state of spiritual dryness, unable to pray, or to practise virtue, I look for little opportunities, for the smallest trifles, to please my Jesus: a smile or a kind word, for instance,

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<sup>86</sup> St. Thérèse, *Story*, "To Céline," XVI.

when I would wish to be silent, or to show that I am bored. If no such occasion offer, I try at least to say over and over again that I love Him. This is not hard, and it keeps alive the fire in my heart. Even should the fire of love seem dead, I would still throw my tiny straws on the ashes, and I am confident it would light up again.”

“It is true I am not always faithful, but I never lose courage. I leave myself in the Arms of Our Lord. He teaches me to draw profit from everything, from the good and from the bad which He finds in me<sup>87</sup>. He teaches me to speculate in the Bank of Love, or rather it is He Who speculates for me, without telling me how He does it—that is His affair, not mine. I have but to surrender myself wholly to Him, to do so without reserve, without even the satisfaction of knowing what it is all bringing to me. . . . After all, I am not the prodigal child, and Jesus need not trouble about a feast for me, because I am always with Him [Luke 15:31].”

“I have read in the Gospel that the Good Shepherd leaves the faithful ones of His flock in the desert to hasten after the lost sheep. This confidence touches me deeply. You see He is sure of them. How could they stray away? They are prisoners of Love. In like manner does the Beloved Shepherd of our souls deprive us of the sweets of His Presence, to give His consolations to sinners; or if He lead us to Mount Thabor it is but for one brief moment . . . the pasture land is nearly always in the valleys, ‘it is there that He takes His rest at mid-day’ [Song of Songs 1:7].”

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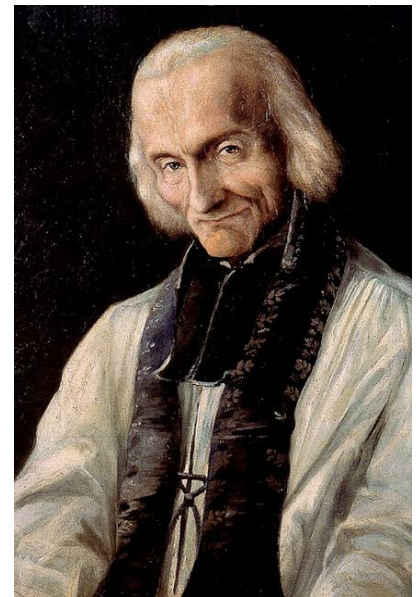
## Part IV: *The Priesthood*

### Days 92-127

With Part III of *Discernment 180* concluded, it is now time to reflect explicitly on the priesthood. You have been faithful to this period of intentional discernment for three months now, which has included a formal resolution to take up the devout life, exposure to several ways of praying with Scripture, and learning to discern between the different spirits that move in your mind and heart. You have meditated on the Gospels and walked with the Saints. The question now, “Is priesthood the way God is calling you to be a Saint?”

That is and always will be the goal: to be a Saint. God has known from all eternity the particular way He wants you to be a Saint, and He has planted the call deep within your heart.

Throughout the next month, you will meditate on excerpts from a classic papal encyclical on the priesthood, *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii*, by Pope Pius XI. Then, you will pray with various reflections on the priesthood offered by Pope Benedict XVI during, “The Year of the Priest,” which the Church celebrated in 2008-2009. Be attentive to the thoughts, feelings, and desires that arise as you reflect on these passages. Listen closely for



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<sup>87</sup> St. John of the Cross.

the voice of God registering in your mind and heart, and speak honestly with Him. He came that you might have life and have it to the full. If God is calling you to the priesthood, it is because that is the way He has made you to know His abundant life. Nothing less will do.

In his reflections throughout “The Year of the Priest,” Pope Benedict often refers to St. John Vianney (pictured here), who is the patron saint of priests. Two famous quotes from this humble parish priest are worth including here: “O, how great is the priest! ... If he realized what he is, he would die... God obeys him: he utters a few words and the Lord descends from heaven at his voice, to be contained within a small host...” And, “The priesthood is the love of the heart of Jesus.” As you move on to Part IV, may St. John Vianney be an inspiration and intercessor to help you grow in love with the Sacred Heart of Jesus and follow wherever He leads.

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## Week 14

### Preview of Next Week

**Prayer:**

This week includes selected passages from *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii*, an encyclical by Pope Pius XI on the priesthood.

**Study:**

In order to finish *To Save A Thousand Souls* within the 180 days, you will need to read two pages per day; by the end of Week 14, you should have made it to page 196, but do not limit yourself to that if you can and want to read more.

### Review of Past Week

**Prayer:**

- *I fulfilled my commitment to daily, personal prayer \_\_\_/7 days this week.*
- *I fulfilled my commitment to the Liturgy of the Hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.*
- *I slept for at least seven hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.*
- *These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:*

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- *Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:*

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**Sacraments:**

- I fulfilled my commitment to daily Mass this week. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to regular Confession. Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Virtue:**

- I was faithful to my bodily fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I was faithful to my digital fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I was faithful to my dating fast. Yes / No
- I was faithful to the necessary practices from [www.hismercyendures.org](http://www.hismercyendures.org). Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Service:**

- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to altar serving. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to spiritual works of mercy. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to corporal works of mercy. Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Study:**

- I fulfilled my commitment to spiritual reading this week: Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my response, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Planning Ahead**

- What day(s) will I go to daily Mass this week?    S M T W Th F S
- What day will I go to Confession this week?    S M T W Th F S or [ ] not this week
- Am I scheduled for altar service this week? Spiritual works of mercy? Corporal works of mercy?    Yes / No

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- Have I scheduled my next spiritual direction?    Yes / No
  - Have I scheduled my seminary visit?    Yes / No
  - Have I scheduled my discernment retreat?    Yes / No

**Day 92**

*AD CATHOLICI SACERDOTII*<sup>88</sup>  
 Encyclical of Pope Pius XI  
 on the Catholic Priesthood

8. “The human race has always felt the need of a priesthood: of men, that is, who have the official charge to be mediators between God and humanity, men who should consecrate themselves entirely to this mediation, as to the very purpose of their lives, men set aside to offer to God public prayers and sacrifices in the name of human society. For human society as such is bound to offer to God public and social worship. It is bound to acknowledge in Him its Supreme Lord and first beginning, and to strive toward Him as to its last end, to give Him thanks and offer Him propitiation. In fact, priests are to be found among all peoples whose customs are known, except those compelled by violence to act against the most sacred laws of human nature. They may, indeed, be in the service of false divinities; but wherever religion is professed, wherever altars are built, there also is a priesthood surrounded by particular marks of honor and veneration.”

9. “Yet in the splendor of Divine Revelation the priest is seen invested with a dignity far greater still. This dignity was foreshadowed of old by the venerable and mysterious figure of Melchisedech, Priest and King, whom St. Paul recalls as prefiguring the Person and Priesthood of Christ Our Lord Himself.”

<sup>88</sup> Pope Pius XI, *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii*: Encyclical on the Catholic Priesthood, The Holy See, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1935, Sec. 8-10.

10. “The priest, according to the magnificent definition given by St. Paul is indeed a man *Ex hominibus assumptus*, ‘taken from amongst men,’ *yet pro hominibus constituitur in his quae sunt ad Deum*, ‘ordained for men in the things that appertain to God’: his office is not for human things, and things that pass away, however lofty and valuable these may seem; but for things divine and enduring. These eternal things may, perhaps, through ignorance, be scorned and contemned, or even attacked with diabolical fury and malice, as sad experience has often proved, and proves even today; but they always continue to hold the first place in the aspirations, individual and social, of humanity, because the human heart feels irresistibly it is made for God and is restless till it rests in Him.”

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## Day 93<sup>89</sup>

11. “The Old Law, inspired by God and promulgated by Moses, set up a priesthood, which was, in this manner, of divine institution; and determined for it every detail of its duty, residence and rite. It would seem that God, in His great care for them, wished to impress upon the still primitive mind of the Jewish people one great central idea. This idea throughout the history of the chosen people, was to shed its light over all events, laws, ranks and offices: the idea of sacrifice and priesthood. These were to become, through faith in the future Messiah, a source of hope, glory, power and spiritual liberation. The temple of Solomon, astonishing in richness and splendor, was still more wonderful in its rites and ordinances. Erected to the one true God as a tabernacle of the divine Majesty upon earth, it was also a sublime poem sung to that sacrifice and that priesthood, which, though type and symbol, was still so august, that the sacred figure of its High Priest moved the conqueror Alexander the Great, to bow in reverence; and God Himself visited His wrath upon the impious king Balthasar because he made revel with the sacred vessels of the temple. Yet that ancient priesthood derived its greatest majesty and glory from being a foretype of the Christian priesthood; the priesthood of the New and eternal Covenant sealed with the Blood of the Redeemer of the world, Jesus Christ, true God and true Man.”

12. “The Apostle of the Gentiles thus perfectly sums up what may be said of the greatness, the dignity and the duty of the Christian priesthood: *Sic nos existimet homo Ut ministros Christi et dispensatores mysteriorum Dei* - ‘Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ and the dispensers of the mysteries of God.’ The priest is the minister of Christ, an instrument, that is to say, in the hands of the Divine Redeemer. He continues the work of the redemption in all its world-embracing universality and divine efficacy, that work that wrought so marvelous a transformation in the world. Thus the priest, as is said with good reason, is indeed ‘another Christ;’ for, in some way, he is himself a continuation of Christ. ‘As the Father hath sent Me, I also send you,’ is spoken to the priest, and hence the priest, like Christ, continues to give ‘glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men of good will.’”

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<sup>89</sup> Pope Pius XI, *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii*, Sec. 11-12.

## Day 94<sup>90</sup>

13. “For, in the first place, as the Council of Trent teaches, Jesus Christ at the Last Supper instituted the sacrifice and the priesthood of the New Covenant: ‘our Lord and God, although once and for all, by means of His death on the altar of the cross, He was to offer Himself to God the Father, that thereon He might accomplish eternal Redemption; yet because death was not to put an end to his priesthood, at the Last Supper, the same night in which He was betrayed in order to leave to His beloved spouse the Church, a sacrifice which should be visible (as the nature of man requires), which should represent that bloody sacrifice, once and for all to be completed on the cross, which should perpetuate His memory to the end of time, and which should apply its saving power unto the remission of sins we daily commit, showing Himself made a priest forever according to the order of Melchisedech, offered to God the Father, under the appearance of bread and wine, His Body and Blood, giving them to the apostles (whom He was then making priests of the New Covenant) to be consumed under the signs of these same things, and commanded the Apostles and their successors in the priesthood to offer them, by the words *Do this in commemoration of Me.*”

14. “And thenceforth, the Apostles, and their successors in the priesthood, began to lift to heaven that ‘clean oblation’ foretold by Malachy, through which the name of God is great among the gentiles. And now, that same oblation in every part of the world and at every hour of the day and night, is offered and will continue to be offered without interruption till the end of time: a true sacrificial act, not merely symbolical, which has a real efficacy unto the reconciliation of sinners with the Divine Majesty.”

15. “‘Appeased by this oblation, the Lord grants grace and the gift of repentance, and forgives iniquities and sins, however great.’ The reason of this is given by the same Council in these words: ‘For there is one and the same Victim, there is present the same Christ who once offered Himself upon the Cross, who now offers Himself by the ministry of priests, only the manner of the offering being different.’”

16. “And thus the ineffable greatness of the human priest stands forth in all its splendor; for he has power over the very Body of Jesus Christ, and makes It present upon our altars. In the name of Christ Himself he offers It a victim infinitely pleasing to the Divine Majesty. ‘Wondrous things are these,’ justly exclaims St. John Chrysostom, ‘so wonderful, they surpass wonder.’”

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## Day 95<sup>91</sup>

17. “Besides this power over the real Body of Christ, the priest has received other powers, august and sublime, over His Mystical Body of Christ, a doctrine so dear to St. Paul; this beautiful doctrine that shows us the Person of the Word-made-Flesh in union with all His brethren. For from Him to them comes a supernatural influence, so that they, with Him as Head, form a single Body of which they are the members. Now a priest is the appointed ‘dispenser of the mysteries of God,’ for the benefit of the members of the mystical Body of Christ; since he is the ordinary minister of nearly all the Sacraments, - those channels through which the

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<sup>90</sup> Pope Pius XI, *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii*, Sec. 13-16.

<sup>91</sup> Pope Pius XI, *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii*, Sec. 17-19.

grace of the Savior flows for the good of humanity. The Christian, at almost every important stage of his mortal career, finds at his side the priest with power received from God, in the act of communicating or increasing that grace which is the supernatural life of his soul.”

18. “Scarcely is he born before the priest baptizing him, brings him by a new birth to a more noble and precious life, a supernatural life, and makes him a son of God and of the Church of Jesus Christ. To strengthen him to fight bravely in spiritual combats, a priest invested with special dignity makes him a soldier of Christ by holy chrism. Then, as soon as he is able to recognize and value the Bread of Angels, the priest gives It to him, the living and life-giving Food come down from Heaven. If he fall, the priest raises him up again in the name of God, and reconciles him to God with the Sacrament of Penance. Again, if he is called by God to found a family and to collaborate with Him in the transmission of human life throughout the world, thus increasing the number of the faithful on earth and, thereafter, the ranks of the elect in Heaven, the priest is there to bless his espousals and unblemished love; and when, finally, arrived at the portals of eternity, the Christian feels the need of strength and courage before presenting himself at the tribunal of the Divine Judge, the priest with the holy oils anoints the failing members of the sick or dying Christian, and reconsecrates and comforts him.”

19. “Thus the priest accompanies the Christian throughout the pilgrimage of this life to the gates of Heaven. He accompanies the body to its resting place in the grave with rites and prayers of immortal hope. And even beyond the threshold of eternity he follows the soul to aid it with Christian suffrages, if need there be of further purification and alleviation. Thus, from the cradle to the grave the priest is ever beside the faithful, a guide, a solace, a minister of salvation and dispenser of grace and blessing.”

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## Day 96<sup>92</sup>

20. “But among all these powers of the priest over the Mystical Body of Christ for the benefit of the faithful, there is one of which the simple mention made above will not content Us. This is that power which, as St. John Chrysostom says: ‘God gave neither to Angels nor Archangels’ - the power to remit sins. ‘Whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven them: and whose sins you shall retain they are retained;’ a tremendous power, so peculiar to God that even human pride could not make the mind conceive that it could be given to man. ‘Who can forgive sins but God alone?’ And, when we see it exercised by a mere man there is reason to ask ourselves, not, indeed, with pharisaical scandal, but with reverent surprise at such a dignity: ‘Who is this that forgiveth sins also?’ But it is so: the God-Man who possessed the ‘power on earth to forgive sins’ willed to hand it on to His priests; to relieve, in His divine generosity and mercy, the need of moral purification which is rooted in the human heart.”

21. “What a comfort to the guilty, when, stung with remorse and repenting of his sins, he hears the word of the priest who says to him in God's name: ‘I absolve thee from thy sins!’ These words fall, it is true, from the lips of one who, in his turn, must needs beg the same absolution from another priest. This does not debase the merciful gift; but makes it, rather, appear greater; since beyond the weak creature is seen more clearly

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<sup>92</sup> Pope Pius XI, *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii*, Sec. 20-21.



the hand of God through whose power is wrought this wonder. As an illustrious layman has written, treating with rare competence of spiritual things: ‘. . . when a priest, groaning in spirit at his own unworthiness and at the loftiness of his office, places his consecrated hands upon our heads; when, humiliated at finding himself the dispenser of the Blood of the Covenant; each time amazed as he pronounces the words that give life; when a sinner has absolved a sinner; we, who rise from our knees before him, feel we have done nothing debasing. . . We have been at the feet of a man who represented Jesus Christ, . . . we have been there to receive the dignity of free men and of sons of God.’”

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## Day 97<sup>93</sup>

22. “These august powers are conferred upon the priest in a special Sacrament designed to this end: they are not merely passing or temporary in the priest, but are stable and perpetual, united as they are with the indelible character imprinted on his soul whereby he becomes ‘a priest forever;’ whereby he becomes like unto Him in whose eternal priesthood he has been made a sharer. Even the most lamentable downfall, which, through human frailty, is possible to a priest, can never blot out from his soul the priestly character. But along with this character and these powers, the priest through the Sacrament of Orders receives new and special grace with special helps. Thereby, if only he will loyally further, by his free and personal cooperation, the divinely powerful action of the grace itself, he will be able worthily to fulfill all the duties, however arduous, of his lofty calling. He will not be overborne, but will be able to bear the tremendous responsibilities inherent to his priestly duty; responsibilities which have made fearful even the stoutest champions of the Christian priesthood, men like St. John Chrysostom, St. Ambrose, St. Gregory the Great, St. Charles and many others.”

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## Day 98<sup>94</sup>

23. “The Catholic priest is minister of Christ and dispenser of the mysteries of God in another way, that is, by his words. The ‘ministry of the word’ is a right which is inalienable; it is a duty which cannot be disallowed; for it is imposed by Jesus Christ Himself: ‘Going, therefore, teach ye all nations . . . teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.’ The Church of Christ, depository and infallible guardian of divine revelation, by means of her priests, pours out the treasures of heavenly truth; she preaches Him who is ‘the true Light which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world;’ she sows with divine bounty that seed which is small and worthless to the profane eyes of the world, but which is like the mustard seed of the Gospel. For it has within itself power to strike strong deep roots in souls which are sincere and thirsting for the truth, and make them like sturdy trees able to withstand the wildest storms.”

24. “Amidst all the aberrations of human thought, infatuated by a false emancipation from every law and curb; and amidst the awful corruptions of human malice, the Church rises up like a bright lighthouse warning

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<sup>93</sup> Pope Pius XI, *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii*, Sec. 22.

<sup>94</sup> Pope Pius XI, *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii*, Sec. 23-24.

by the clearness of its beam every deviation to right or left from the way of truth, and pointing out to one and all the right course that they should follow. Woe if ever this beacon should be - We do not say extinguished, for that is impossible owing to the unfailing promises on which it is founded - but if it should be hindered from shedding far and wide its beneficent light! We see already with Our own eyes whither the world has been brought by its arrogant rejection of divine revelation, and its pursuit of false philosophical and moral theories that bear the specious name of 'science.' That it has not fallen still lower down the slope of error and vice is due to the guidance of the light of Christian truth that always shines in the world. Now the Church exercises her 'ministry of the word' through her priests of every grade of the Hierarchy, in which each has his wisely allotted place. These she sends everywhere as unwearied heralds of the good tidings which alone can save and advance true civilization and culture, or help them to rise again. The word of the priest enters the soul and brings light and power; the voice of the priest rises calmly above the storms of passion, fearlessly to proclaim the truth, and exhort to the good; that truth which elucidates and solves the gravest problems of human life; that good which no misfortune can take from us, which death but secures and renders immortal."

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## Week 15

### Preview of Next Week

#### **Prayer:**

This week concludes the selected passages from *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii*, an encyclical by Pope Pius XI on the priesthood. It introduces passages from various reflections by Pope Benedict XVI given throughout "The Year of the Priest," which was celebrated by the Church in 2008-2009.

- While some of the reflections are directed to priests, it is advantageous to imagine them as directed to you. Be attentive to how you experience his exhortations and encouragements when considering yourself hearing them as a priest.

#### **Study:**

In order to finish *To Save A Thousand Souls* within the 180 days, you will need to read two pages per day; by the end of Week 15, you should have made it to page 210, but do not limit yourself to that if you can and want to read more.

### Review of Past Week

#### **Prayer:**

- I fulfilled my commitment to daily, personal prayer \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I fulfilled my commitment to the Liturgy of the Hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I slept for at least seven hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Sacraments:**

- I fulfilled my commitment to daily Mass this week. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to regular Confession. Yes / No
  
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Virtue:**

- I was faithful to my bodily fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I was faithful to my digital fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I was faithful to my dating fast. Yes / No
- I was faithful to the necessary practices from [www.hismercyendures.org](http://www.hismercyendures.org). Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Service:**

- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to altar serving. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to spiritual works of mercy. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to corporal works of mercy. Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Study:**

- I fulfilled my commitment to spiritual reading this week: Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my response, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Planning Ahead**

- What day(s) will I go to daily Mass this week?    S M T W Th F S
  - What day will I go to Confession this week?    S M T W Th F S or [ ] not this week
  - Am I scheduled for altar service this week? Spiritual works of mercy? Corporal works of mercy?    Yes / No
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- Have I scheduled my next spiritual direction?    Yes / No
  - Have I scheduled my seminary visit?    Yes / No
  - Have I scheduled my discernment retreat?    Yes / No

**Day 99<sup>95</sup>**

25. “Consider the truths themselves which the priest if faithful to his ministry, must frequently inculcate. Ponder them one by one and dwell upon their inner power; for they make plain the influence of the priest, and how strong and beneficent it can be for the moral education, social concord and peaceful development of peoples. He brings home to young and old the fleeting nature of the present life; the perishableness of earthly goods; the value of spiritual goods and of the immortal soul; the severity of divine judgment; the spotless holiness of the divine gaze that reads the hearts of all; the justice of God, which ‘will render to every man according to his works.’ These and similar lessons the priest teaches; a teaching fitted indeed to moderate the feverish search for pleasure, and the uncontrolled greed for worldly goods, that debase so much of modern life, and spur on the different classes of society to fight one another like enemies, instead of helping one another like friends. In this clash of selfish interest, and unleashed hate, and dark plans of revenge, nothing could be better or more powerful to help, than loudly to proclaim the ‘new commandment’ of Christ. That commandment enjoins a love which extends to all, knows no barriers nor national boundaries, excludes no race, excepts not even its own enemies.”

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<sup>95</sup> Pope Pius XI, *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii*, Sec. 25-27.

26. “The experience of twenty centuries fully and gloriously reveals the power for good of the word of the priest. Being the faithful echo and reecho of the ‘word of God,’ which ‘is living and effectual and more piercing than any two-edged sword,’ it too reaches ‘unto the division of the soul and spirit;’ it awakens heroism of every kind, in every class and place, and inspires the self forgetting deeds of the most generous hearts. All the good that Christian civilization has brought into the world is due, at least radically, to the word and works of the Catholic priesthood. Such a past might, to itself, serve as sufficient guarantee for the future; but we have a still more secure guarantee, ‘a more firm prophetic word’ in the infallible promises of Christ.”

27. “The work, too, of the Missions manifests most vividly the power of expansion given by divine grace to the Church. This work is advanced and carried on principally by priests. Pioneers of faith and love, at the cost of innumerable sacrifices, they extend and widen the Kingdom of God upon earth.”

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## Day 100<sup>96</sup>

28. “Finally, the priest, in another way, follows the example of Christ. Of Him it is written that He ‘passed the whole night in the prayer of God’ and ‘ever lives to make intercession for us;’ and like Him, the priest, is public and official intercessor of humanity before God; he has the duty and commission of offering to God in the name of the Church, over and above sacrifice strictly so-called, the ‘sacrifice of praise,’ in public and official prayer; for several times each day with psalms, prayers and hymns taken in great part from the inspired books, he pays to God this dutiful tribute of adoration and thus performs his necessary office of interceding for humanity. And never did humanity, in its afflictions, stand more in need of intercession and of the divine help which it brings. Who can tell how many chastisements priestly prayer wards off from sinful mankind, how many blessings it brings down and secures?”

29. “If Our Lord made such magnificent and solemn promises even to private prayers, how much more powerful must be that prayer which is said *ex officio* in the name of the Church, the beloved Spouse of the Savior? The Christian, though in prosperity so often forgetful of God, yet in the depth of his heart keeps his confidence in prayer, feels that prayer is all powerful, and as by a holy instinct, in every distress, in every peril whether private or public, has recourse with special trust to the prayer of the priest. To it the unfortunate of every sort look for comfort; to it they have recourse, seeking divine aid in all the vicissitudes of this exile here on earth. Truly does the ‘priest occupy a place midway between God and human nature: from Him bringing to us absolving beneficence, offering our prayers to Him and appeasing the wrathful Lord.’”

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## Day 101<sup>97</sup>

30. “A last tribute to the priesthood is given by the enemies of the Church. For as We have said on a previous page, they show that they fully appreciate the dignity and importance of the Catholic priesthood, by

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<sup>96</sup> Pope Pius XI, *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii*, Sec. 28-29.

<sup>97</sup> Pope Pius XI, *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii*, Sec. 30-32.

directing against it their first and fiercest blows; since they know well how close is the tie that binds the Church to her priests. The most rabid enemies of the Catholic priesthood are today the very enemies of God; a homage indeed to the priesthood, showing it the more worthy of honor and veneration.”

31. “Most sublime, then, Venerable Brethren, is the dignity of the priesthood. Even the falling away of the few unworthy in the priesthood, however deplorable and distressing it may be, cannot dim the splendor of so lofty a dignity. Much less can the unworthiness of a few cause the worth and merit of so many to be overlooked; and how many have been, and are, in the priesthood, preeminent in holiness, in learning, in works of zeal, nay, even in martyrdom.”

32. “Nor must it be forgotten that personal unworthiness does not hinder the efficacy of a priest's ministry. For the unworthiness of the minister does not make void the Sacraments he administers; since the Sacraments derive their efficacy from the Blood of Christ, independently of the sanctity of the instrument, or, as scholastic language expresses it, the Sacraments work their effect *ex opere operato*.”

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## Day 102<sup>98</sup>

*Letter of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI:  
“Proclaiming a Year for Priests”*

“Dear Brother Priests,

On the forthcoming Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, Friday 19 June 2009 – a day traditionally devoted to prayer for the sanctification of the clergy –, I have decided to inaugurate a ‘Year for Priests’ in celebration of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ‘*dies natalis*’ of John Mary Vianney, the patron saint of parish priests worldwide<sup>99</sup>. This Year, meant to deepen the commitment of all priests to interior renewal for the sake of a stronger and more incisive witness to the Gospel in today’s world, will conclude on the same Solemnity in 2010. ‘*The priesthood is the love of the heart of Jesus*’, the saintly Curé of Ars would often say<sup>100</sup>. This touching expression makes us reflect, first of all, with heartfelt gratitude on the immense gift which priests represent, not only for the Church, but also for humanity itself. I think of all those priests who quietly present Christ’s words and actions each day to the faithful and to the whole world, striving to be one with the Lord in their thoughts and their will, their sentiments and their style of life. How can I not pay tribute to their apostolic labours, their tireless and hidden service, their universal charity? And how can I not praise the courageous fidelity of so many priests who, even amid difficulties and incomprehension, remain faithful to their vocation as ‘friends of Christ,’ whom he has called by name, chosen and sent?”

“I still treasure the memory of the first parish priest at whose side I exercised my ministry as a young priest: he left me an example of unreserved devotion to his pastoral duties, even to meeting his own death in the act

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<sup>98</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, “Letter of His Holiness: Proclaiming a Year for Priests,” The Holy See, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2009. [*Broken up over days 102 - 108*].

<sup>99</sup> He was proclaimed as such by Pope Pius XI in 1929.

<sup>100</sup> “*Le Sacerdoce, c’est l’amour du cœur de Jésus*” (in *Le curé d’Ars. Sa pensée – Son cœur*. Présentés par l’Abbé Bernard Nodet, éd. Xavier Mappus, Foi Vivante, 1966, p. 98). Hereafter: *NODET*. The expression is also quoted in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 1589).

of bringing viaticum to a gravely ill person. I also recall the countless confreres whom I have met and continue to meet, not least in my pastoral visits to different countries: men generously dedicated to the daily exercise of their priestly ministry. Yet the expression of Saint John Mary also makes us think of Christ's pierced Heart and the crown of thorns which surrounds it. I also think, therefore, of the countless situations of suffering endured by many priests, either because they themselves share in the manifold human experience of pain or because they encounter misunderstanding from the very persons to whom they minister. How can we not also think of all those priests who are offended in their dignity, obstructed in their mission and persecuted, even at times to offering the supreme testimony of their own blood?"

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## Day 103

"The Curé of Ars was very humble, yet as a priest he was conscious of being an immense gift to his people: 'A good shepherd, a pastor after God's heart, is the greatest treasure which the good Lord can grant to a parish, and one of the most precious gifts of divine mercy'<sup>101</sup>.' He spoke of the priesthood as if incapable of fathoming the grandeur of the *gift* and *task* entrusted to a human creature: 'O, how great is the priest! ... If he realized what he is, he would die... God obeys him: he utters a few words and the Lord descends from heaven at his voice, to be contained within a small host...'<sup>102</sup>.' Explaining to his parishioners the importance of the sacraments, he would say: 'Without the Sacrament of Holy Orders, we would not have the Lord. Who put him there in that tabernacle? The priest. Who welcomed your soul at the beginning of your life? The priest. Who feeds your soul and gives it strength for its journey? The priest. Who will prepare it to appear before God, bathing it one last time in the blood of Jesus Christ? The priest, always the priest. And if this soul should happen to die [as a result of sin], who will raise it up, who will restore its calm and peace? Again, the priest... After God, the priest is everything! ... Only in heaven will he fully realize what he is'<sup>103</sup>.' These words, welling up from the priestly heart of the holy pastor, might sound excessive. Yet they reveal the high esteem in which he held the sacrament of the priesthood. He seemed overwhelmed by a boundless sense of responsibility: 'Were we to fully realize what a priest is on earth, we would die: not of fright, but of love... Without the priest, the passion and death of our Lord would be of no avail. It is the priest who continues the work of redemption on earth... What use would be a house filled with gold, were there no one to open its door? The priest holds the key to the treasures of heaven: it is he who opens the door: he is the steward of the good Lord; the administrator of his goods ... Leave a parish for twenty years without a priest, and they will end by worshipping the beasts there ... The priest is not a priest for himself, he is a priest for you'<sup>104</sup>.'"

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## Day 104

"He arrived in Ars, a village of 230 souls, warned by his Bishop beforehand that there he would find religious practice in a sorry state: 'There is little love of God in that parish; you will be the one to put it there.' As a

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<sup>101</sup> NODET, p. 101.

<sup>102</sup> NODET, p. 97.

<sup>103</sup> NODET, p. 98-99.

<sup>104</sup> NODET, p. 98-100.

result, he was deeply aware that he needed to go there to embody Christ's presence and to bear witness to his saving mercy: '[Lord,] grant me the conversion of my parish; I am willing to suffer whatever you wish, for my entire life!': with this prayer he entered upon his mission<sup>105</sup>. The Curé devoted himself completely to his parish's conversion, setting before all else the Christian education of the people in his care. Dear brother priests, let us ask the Lord Jesus for the grace to learn for ourselves something of the pastoral plan of Saint John Mary Vianney! The first thing we need to learn is the complete identification of the man with his ministry. In Jesus, person and mission tend to coincide: all Christ's saving activity was, and is, an expression of his 'filial consciousness' which from all eternity stands before the Father in an attitude of loving submission to his will. In a humble yet genuine way, every priest must aim for a similar identification. Certainly this is not to forget that the efficacy of the ministry is independent of the holiness of the minister; but neither can we overlook the extraordinary fruitfulness of the encounter between the ministry's objective holiness and the subjective holiness of the minister. The Curé of Ars immediately set about this patient and humble task of harmonizing his life as a minister with the holiness of the ministry he had received, by deciding to 'live,' physically, in his parish church: As his first biographer tells us: 'Upon his arrival, he chose the church as his home. He entered the church before dawn and did not leave it until after the evening Angelus. There he was to be sought whenever needed<sup>106</sup>.'

"The pious excess of his devout biographer should not blind us to the fact that the Curé also knew how to 'live' actively within the entire territory of his parish: he regularly visited the sick and families, organized popular missions and patronal feasts, collected and managed funds for charitable and missionary works, embellished and furnished his parish church, cared for the orphans and teachers of the 'Providence' (an institute he founded); provided for the education of children; founded confraternities and enlisted lay persons to work at his side."

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## Day 105

"Saint John Mary Vianney taught his parishioners primarily by the witness of his life. It was from his example that they learned to pray, halting frequently before the tabernacle for a visit to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament<sup>107</sup>. 'One need not say much to pray well' – the Curé explained to them – 'We know that Jesus is there in the tabernacle: let us open our hearts to him, let us rejoice in his sacred presence. That is the best prayer<sup>108</sup>.' And he would urge them: 'Come to communion, my brothers and sisters, come to Jesus. Come to live from him in order to live with him...<sup>109</sup>.' 'Of course you are not worthy of him, but you need him!<sup>110</sup>.' This way of educating the faithful to the Eucharistic presence and to communion proved most effective when they saw him celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Those present said that 'it was not possible to find a finer example of worship... He gazed upon the Host with immense love<sup>111</sup>.' 'All good works, taken together, do not

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<sup>105</sup> NODET, p. 183.

<sup>106</sup> MONNIN, A., *Il Curato d'Ars. Vita di Gian.Battista-Maria Vianney*, vol. I, ed. Marietti, Turin, 1870, p. 122.

<sup>107</sup> "Contemplation is a gaze of faith, fixed on Jesus. 'I look at him and he looks at me': this is what a certain peasant of Ars used to say to his holy Curé about his prayer before the tabernacle" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 2715).

<sup>108</sup> NODET, p. 85.

<sup>109</sup> NODET, p. 114.

<sup>110</sup> NODET, p. 119.

<sup>111</sup> MONNIN, A., op. cit., II, pp. 430ff.



equal the sacrifice of the Mass' – he would say – 'since they are human works, while the Holy Mass is the work of God<sup>112</sup>.' He was convinced that the fervour of a priest's life depended entirely upon the Mass: 'The reason why a priest is lax is that he does not pay attention to the Mass! My God, how we ought to pity a priest who celebrates as if he were engaged in something routine!<sup>113</sup>.' He was accustomed, when celebrating, also to offer his own life in sacrifice: 'What a good thing it is for a priest each morning to offer himself to God in sacrifice!<sup>114</sup>.'”

“This deep personal identification with the Sacrifice of the Cross led him – by a sole inward movement – from the altar to the confessional. Priests ought never to be resigned to empty confessionals or the apparent indifference of the faithful to this sacrament. In France, at the time of the Curé of Ars, confession was no more easy or frequent than in our own day, since the upheaval caused by the revolution had long inhibited the practice of religion. Yet he sought in every way, by his preaching and his powers of persuasion, to help his parishioners to rediscover the meaning and beauty of the sacrament of Penance, presenting it as an inherent demand of the Eucharistic presence. He thus created a ‘*virtuous*’ circle. By spending long hours in church before the tabernacle, he inspired the faithful to imitate him by coming to visit Jesus with the knowledge that their parish priest would be there, ready to listen and offer forgiveness. Later, the growing numbers of penitents from all over France would keep him in the confessional for up to sixteen hours a day. It was said that Ars had become ‘a great hospital of souls<sup>115</sup>.’ His first biographer relates that ‘the grace he obtained [for the conversion of sinners] was so powerful that it would pursue them, not leaving them a moment of peace!<sup>116</sup>.’ The saintly Curé reflected something of the same idea when he said: ‘It is not the sinner who returns to God to beg his forgiveness, but God himself who runs after the sinner and makes him return to him<sup>117</sup>.’ ‘This good Saviour is so filled with love that he seeks us everywhere<sup>118</sup>.’”

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## Week 16

### Preview of Next Week

#### **Prayer:**

This week continues with selected passages from various reflections by Pope Benedict XVI given throughout “The Year of the Priest,” which was celebrated by the Church in 2008-2009.

- While some of the reflections are directed to priests, it is advantageous to imagine them as directed to you. Be attentive to how you experience his exhortations and encouragements when considering yourself hearing them as a priest.

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<sup>112</sup> NODET, p. 105.

<sup>113</sup> NODET.

<sup>114</sup> NODET, p. 104.

<sup>115</sup> MONNIN, A., op. cit., II, p. 293.

<sup>116</sup> MONNIN, A., op. cit., II, p. 10.

<sup>117</sup> NODET, p. 128.

<sup>118</sup> NODET, p. 50.

**Study:**

In order to finish *To Save A Thousand Souls* within the 180 days, you will need to read two pages per day; by the end of Week 16, you should have made it to page 224, but do not limit yourself to that if you can and want to read more.

**Review of Past Week**

**Prayer:**

- I fulfilled my commitment to daily, personal prayer \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I fulfilled my commitment to the Liturgy of the Hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I slept for at least seven hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Sacraments:**

- I fulfilled my commitment to daily Mass this week. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to regular Confession. Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Virtue:**

- I was faithful to my bodily fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I was faithful to my digital fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I was faithful to my dating fast. Yes / No
- I was faithful to the necessary practices from [www.hismercyendures.org](http://www.hismercyendures.org). Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:
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**Service:**

- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to altar serving. Yes / No
  - I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to spiritual works of mercy. Yes / No
  - I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to corporal works of mercy. Yes / No
  - These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:
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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:
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**Study:**

- I fulfilled my commitment to spiritual reading this week: Yes / No
  - These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:
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- Based on my response, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:
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**Planning Ahead**

- What day(s) will I go to daily Mass this week? S M T W Th F S
  - What day will I go to Confession this week? S M T W Th F S or [ ] not this week
  - Am I scheduled for altar service this week? Spiritual works of mercy? Corporal works of mercy? Yes / No

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  - Have I scheduled my next spiritual direction? Yes / No
  - Have I scheduled my seminary visit? Yes / No
  - Have I scheduled my discernment retreat? Yes / No
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## Day 106

“We priests should feel that the following words, which he put on the lips of Christ, are meant for each of us personally: ‘I will charge my ministers to proclaim to sinners that I am ever ready to welcome them, that my mercy is infinite<sup>119</sup>.’ From Saint John Mary Vianney we can learn to put our unfailing trust in the sacrament of Penance, to set it once more at the centre of our pastoral concerns, and to take up the ‘dialogue of salvation’ which it entails. The Curé of Ars dealt with different penitents in different ways. Those who came to his confessional drawn by a deep and humble longing for God’s forgiveness found in him the encouragement to plunge into the ‘flood of divine mercy’ which sweeps everything away by its vehemence. If someone was troubled by the thought of his own frailty and inconstancy, and fearful of sinning again, the Curé would unveil the mystery of God’s love in these beautiful and touching words: ‘The good Lord knows everything. Even before you confess, he already knows that you will sin again, yet he still forgives you. How great is the love of our God: he *even forces himself to forget the future*, so that he can grant us his forgiveness!<sup>120</sup>’ But to those who made a lukewarm and rather indifferent confession of sin, he clearly demonstrated by his own tears of pain how ‘abominable’ this attitude was: ‘I weep because you don’t weep<sup>121</sup>,’ he would say. ‘If only the Lord were not so good! *But he is so good!* One would have to be a brute to treat so good a Father this way!<sup>122</sup>’ He awakened repentance in the hearts of the lukewarm by forcing them to see God’s own pain at their sins reflected in the face of the priest who was their confessor. To those who, on the other hand, came to him already desirous of and suited to a deeper spiritual life, he flung open the abyss of God’s love, explaining the untold beauty of living in union with him and dwelling in his presence: ‘Everything in God’s sight, everything with God, everything to please God... How beautiful it is!<sup>123</sup>.’ And he taught them to pray: ‘My God, grant me the grace to love you as much as I possibly can<sup>124</sup>.’”

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## Day 107

“In his time the Curé of Ars was able to transform the hearts and the lives of so many people because he enabled them to experience the Lord’s merciful love. Our own time urgently needs a similar proclamation and witness to the truth of Love: *Deus caritas est* [1 John 4:8]. Thanks to the word and the sacraments of Jesus, John Mary Vianney built up his flock, although he often trembled from a conviction of his personal inadequacy, and desired more than once to withdraw from the responsibilities of the parish ministry out of a sense of his unworthiness. Nonetheless, with exemplary obedience he never abandoned his post, consumed as he was by apostolic zeal for the salvation of souls. He sought to remain completely faithful to his own vocation and mission through the practice of an austere asceticism: ‘The great misfortune for us parish priests – he lamented – is that our souls grow tepid;’ meaning by this that a pastor can grow dangerously inured to the state of sin or of indifference in which so many of his flock are living<sup>125</sup>. He himself kept a tight

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<sup>119</sup> NODET, p. 131.

<sup>120</sup> NODET, p. 130.

<sup>121</sup> NODET, p. 27.

<sup>122</sup> NODET, p. 139.

<sup>123</sup> NODET, p. 28.

<sup>124</sup> NODET, p. 77.

<sup>125</sup> NODET, p. 102.

rein on his body, with vigils and fasts, lest it rebel against his priestly soul. Nor did he avoid self-mortification for the good of the souls in his care and as a help to expiating the many sins he heard in confession. To a priestly confrere he explained: 'I will tell you my recipe: I give sinners a small penance and the rest I do in their place<sup>126</sup>.' Aside from the actual penances which the Curé of Ars practised, the core of his teaching remains valid for each of us: souls have been won at the price of Jesus' own blood, and a priest cannot devote himself to their salvation if he refuses to share personally in the 'precious cost' of redemption."

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## Day 108

"It was complete commitment to this "new style of life" which marked the priestly ministry of the Curé of Ars. Pope John XXIII, in his Encyclical Letter *Sacerdotii Nostri Primordia*, published in 1959 on the first centenary of the death of Saint John Mary Vianney, presented his asceticism with special reference to the 'three evangelical counsels' which the Pope considered necessary also for diocesan priests: 'even though priests are not bound to embrace these evangelical counsels by virtue of the clerical state, these counsels nonetheless offer them, as they do all the faithful, the surest road to the desired goal of Christian perfection<sup>127</sup>.' The Curé of Ars lived the 'evangelical counsels' in a way suited to his priestly state. His *poverty* was not the poverty of a religious or a monk, but that proper to a priest: while managing much money (since well-to-do pilgrims naturally took an interest in his charitable works), he realized that everything had been donated to his church, his poor, his orphans, the girls of his '*Providence*<sup>128</sup>', his families of modest means. Consequently, he 'was rich in giving to others and very poor for himself<sup>129</sup>.' As he would explain: 'My secret is simple: give everything away; hold nothing back<sup>130</sup>.' When he lacked money, he would say amiably to the poor who knocked at his door: 'Today I'm poor just like you, I'm one of you<sup>131</sup>.' At the end of his life, he could say with absolute tranquillity: 'I no longer have anything. The good Lord can call me whenever he wants!<sup>132</sup>.' His *chastity*, too, was that demanded of a priest for his ministry. It could be said that it was a chastity suited to one who must daily touch the Eucharist, who contemplates it blissfully and with that same bliss offers it to his flock. It was said of him that 'he radiated chastity;' the faithful would see this when he turned and gazed at the tabernacle with loving eyes<sup>133</sup>.' Finally, Saint John Mary Vianney's *obedience* found full embodiment in his conscientious fidelity to the daily demands of his ministry. We know how he was tormented by the thought of his inadequacy for parish ministry and by a desire to flee 'in order to bewail his poor life, in solitude<sup>134</sup>.' Only obedience and a thirst for souls convinced him to remain at his post. As he explained to himself and his flock: 'There are no two good ways of serving God. There is only one: serve him as he desires

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<sup>126</sup> NODET, p. 189.

<sup>127</sup> P.I.

<sup>128</sup> The name given to the house where more than sixty abandoned girls were taken in and educated. To maintain this house he would do anything: "*J'ai fait tous les commerces imaginables*", he would say with a smile (NODET, p. 214).

<sup>129</sup> NODET, p. 216.

<sup>130</sup> NODET, p. 215.

<sup>131</sup> NODET, p. 216.

<sup>132</sup> NODET, p. 214.

<sup>133</sup> NODET, p. 112.

<sup>134</sup> NODET, pp. 82-84; 102-103.

to be served<sup>135</sup>.’ He considered this the golden rule for a life of obedience: ‘Do only what can be offered to the good Lord<sup>136</sup>.’”

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## Day 109

BENEDICT XVI

*General Audience*

*Wednesday, 12 August 2009*

“Connection Between the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Priesthood<sup>137</sup>”

*“Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

The celebration of the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, next Saturday, is at hand and we are in the context of the Year for Priest. I therefore wish to speak of the link between Our Lady and the priesthood. This connection is deeply rooted in the Mystery of the Incarnation.”

“When God decided to become man in his Son, he needed the freely-spoken ‘yes’ of one of his creatures. God does not act against our freedom. And something truly extraordinary happens: God makes himself dependent on the free decision, the ‘yes’ of one of his creatures; he waits for this ‘yes.’ St Bernard of Clairvaux explained dramatically in one of his homilies this crucial moment in universal history when Heaven, earth and God himself wait for what this creature will say.”

“Mary’s ‘yes’ is therefore the door through which God was able to enter the world, to become man. So it is that Mary is truly and profoundly involved in the Mystery of the Incarnation, of our salvation. And the Incarnation, the Son’s becoming man, was the beginning that prepared the ground for the gift of himself; for giving himself with great love on the Cross to become Bread for the life of the world. Hence sacrifice, priesthood and Incarnation go together and Mary is at the heart of this mystery.”

“Let us now go to the Cross. Before dying, Jesus sees his Mother beneath the Cross and he sees the beloved son. This beloved son is certainly a person, a very important individual, but he is more; he is an example, a prefiguration of all beloved disciples, of all the people called by the Lord to be the ‘beloved disciple’ and thus also particularly of priests. Jesus says to Mary: ‘Woman, behold, your son!’ [John 19: 26]. It is a sort of testament: he entrusts his Mother to the care of the son, of the disciple. But he also says to the disciple: ‘Behold, your mother!’ [John 19: 27]. The Gospel tells us that from that hour St John, the beloved son, took his mother Mary ‘to his own home.’ This is what it says in the [English] translation; but the Greek text is far deeper, far richer. We could translate it: he took Mary into his inner life, his inner being, ‘eis tà ìdia,’ into the depths of his being. To take Mary with one means to introduce her into the dynamism of one’s own entire existence it is not something external and into all that constitutes the horizon of one’s own apostolate. It seems to me that one can, therefore, understand how the special relationship of motherhood that exists

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<sup>135</sup> NODET, p. 75.

<sup>136</sup> NODET, p. 76.

<sup>137</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, “Connection Between the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Priesthood,” The Holy See, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2009.

between Mary and priests may constitute the primary source, the fundamental reason for her special love for each one of them. In fact, Mary loves them with predilection for two reasons: because they are more like Jesus, the supreme love of her heart, and because, like her, they are committed to the mission of proclaiming, bearing witness to and giving Christ to the world. Because of his identification with and sacramental conformation to Jesus, Son of God and Son of Mary, every priest can and must feel that he really is a specially beloved son of this loftiest and humblest of Mothers.”

“The Second Vatican Council invites priests to look to Mary as to the perfect model for their existence, invoking her as ‘Mother of the supreme and eternal Priest, as Queen of Apostles, and as Protectress of their ministry.’ The Council continues, ‘priests should always venerate and love her, with a filial devotion and worship<sup>138</sup>.’ The Holy Curé d’Ars, whom we are remembering in particular in this Year, used to like to say: ‘Jesus Christ, after giving us all that he could give us, wanted further to make us heirs to his most precious possession, that is, his Holy Mother<sup>139</sup>.’ This applies for every Christian, for all of us, but in a special way for priests. Dear brothers and sisters, let us pray that Mary will make all priests, in all the problems of today’s world, conform with the image of her Son Jesus, as stewards of the precious treasure of his love as the Good Shepherd. Mary, Mother of priests, pray for us!”

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## Day 110

BENEDICT XVI  
*General Audience*  
Wednesday, 14 April 2010  
“*Munus Docendi*<sup>140</sup>”

“Dear Friends,

In this Easter Season that brings us to Pentecost and also ushers us into the celebrations for the closure of the Year for Priests, scheduled for this coming 9-11 June, I am eager to devote a few more reflections to the topic of the ordained Ministry, elaborating on the fruitful realities of the priest’s configuration to Christ the Head in the exercise of the *tria munera* that he receives: namely, the three offices of teaching, sanctifying and governing.”

“In order to understand what it means for the priest to act *in persona Christi Capitis* in the person of Christ the Head and to realize what consequences derive from the duty of representing the Lord, especially in the exercise of these three offices, it is necessary first of all to explain what ‘representation’ means. The priest represents Christ. What is implied by ‘representing’ someone? In ordinary language it usually means being delegated by someone to be present in his place, to speak and act in his stead because the person he represents is absent from the practical action. Let us ask ourselves: does the priest represent the Lord in this way? The answer is no, because in the Church Christ is never absent, the Church is his living Body and he is

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<sup>138</sup> cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, n. 18.

<sup>139</sup> B. Nodet, *Il pensiero e l’anima del Curato d’Ars*, Turin 1967, p. 305.

<sup>140</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, “*Munus Docendi*,” *The Holy See, Libreria Editrice Vaticana*, 2010. [*Broken up over days 110 - 112*].

the Head of the Church, present and active within her. Christ is never absent, on the contrary he is present in a way that is untrammelled by space and time through the event of the Resurrection that we contemplate in a special way in this Easter Season.”

“Therefore the priest, who acts *in persona Christi Capitis* and representing the Lord, never acts in the name of someone who is absent but, rather, in the very Person of the Risen Christ, who makes himself present with his truly effective action. He really acts today and brings about what the priest would be incapable of: the consecration of the wine and the bread so that they may really be the Lord's presence, the absolution of sins. The Lord makes his own action present in the person who carries out these gestures. These three duties of the priest which Tradition has identified in the Lord's different words about mission: teaching, sanctifying and governing in their difference and in their deep unity are a specification of this effective representation. In fact, they are the three actions of the Risen Christ, the same that he teaches today, in the Church and in the world. Thereby he creates faith, gathers together his people, creates the presence of truth and really builds the communion of the universal Church; and sanctifies and guides.”

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## Day 111

“The first duty of which I wish to speak today is the *munus docendi*, that is, the task of teaching. Today, in the midst of the educational emergency, the *munus docendi* of the Church, exercised concretely through the ministry of each priest, is particularly important. We are very confused about the fundamental choices in our life and question what the world is, where it comes from, where we are going, what we must do in order to do good, how we should live and what the truly pertinent values are. Regarding all this, there are numerous contrasting philosophies that come into being and disappear, creating confusion about the fundamental decisions on how to live; because collectively we no longer know from what and for what we have been made and where we are going. In this context the words of the Lord who took pity on the throng because the people were like sheep without a shepherd came true [cf. Mark 6: 34]. The Lord had noticed this when he saw the thousands of people following him in the desert because, in the diversity of the currents of that time, they no longer knew what the true meaning of Scripture was, what God was saying. The Lord, moved by compassion, interpreted God's word, he himself is the Word of God, and thus provided an orientation. This is the function *in persona Christi* of the priest: making present, in the confusion and bewilderment of our times, the light of God's Word, the light that is Christ himself in this our world. Therefore the priest does not teach his own ideas, a philosophy that he himself has invented, that he has discovered or likes; the priest does not speak of himself, he does not speak for himself, to attract admirers, perhaps, or create a party of his own; he does not say his own thing, his own inventions but, in the medley of all the philosophies, the priest teaches in the name of Christ present, he proposes the truth that is Christ himself, his word and his way of living and of moving ahead. What Christ said of himself applies to the priest: ‘My teaching is not mine’ [John 7:16]; Christ, that is, does not propose himself but, as the Son he is the voice, the Word of the Father. The priest too must always speak and act in this way: ‘My teaching is not mine, I do not spread my own ideas or what I like, but I am the mouthpiece and heart of Christ and I make present this one, shared teaching that has created the universal Church and creates eternal life.’”



“This fact, namely that the priest does not invent, does not create or proclaim his own ideas, since the teaching he announces is not his own but Christ's does not mean, however, that he is neutral, as if he were a spokesman reading a text that he does not, perhaps, make his own. In this case too the model of Christ who said: ‘I do not come from myself and I do not live for myself but I come from the Father and live for the Father’ applies. Therefore, in this profound identification, Christ's teaching is that of the Father and he himself is one with the Father. The priest who proclaims Christ's word, the faith of the Church, and not his own ideas, must also say: ‘I do not live by myself and for myself, but I live with Christ and by Christ and therefore all that Christ said to us becomes my word even if it is not mine.’ The priest's life must be identified with Christ and, in this manner, the word that is not his own becomes, nevertheless, a profoundly personal word. On this topic St Augustine, speaking of priests said: ‘And as for us, what are we? Ministers (of Christ), his servants; for what we distribute to you is not ours but we take it from his store. And we too live of it, because we are servants like you<sup>141</sup>.’”

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## Day 112

“The teaching that the priest is called to offer, the truth of the faith, must be internalized and lived in an intense personal and spiritual process so that the priest really enters into a profound inner communion with Christ himself. The priest believes, accepts and seeks to live, first of all as his own, all that the Lord taught and that the Church has passed on in that process of identification with his own ministry of which St John Mary Vianney is an exemplary witness<sup>142</sup>. ‘For in charity itself we are all listening to him, who is our One Master in heaven.’”

“Consequently the priest's voice may often seem to be ‘the voice of one crying in the wilderness’ [Mark 1:3], but his prophetic power consists precisely in this: in never being conformist, in never conforming to any dominant culture or mindset but, rather, in showing the one newness that can bring about an authentic and profound renewal of the human being, that is, that Christ is the Living One, he is the close God, the God who works in the life and for the life of the world and gives us the truth, the way to live.”

“In the careful preparation of Sunday preaching, without excluding weekday preaching, in imparting catechetical formation in schools, in academic institutions and, in a special way, through that unwritten book which is his own life, the priest is always an ‘educator,’ he teaches; yet not with the presumption of one who imposes his own truth but on the contrary with the humble, glad certainty of someone who has encountered the Truth, who has been grasped and transformed by it, hence cannot but proclaim it. In fact, no one can choose the priesthood on his own, it is not a means of obtaining security in life or achieving a social position: no one can give it to him nor can he seek it by himself. The priesthood is the response to the Lord's call, to his will, in order to become a herald of his truth, not a personal truth but of his truth.”

“‘Priestly ordination... means... to be immersed in the Truth<sup>143</sup>, that Truth which is not merely a concept or a collection of ideas to be assimilated and passed on but, rather, is the Person of Christ with whom, for whom

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<sup>141</sup> *Sermo 229/E, 4.*

<sup>142</sup> *cf. Letter for the inauguration of the Year for Priests.*

<sup>143</sup> *Homily at the Chrism Mass, Holy Thursday, 9 April 2009.*

and in whom to live and thus, necessarily, the timeliness and comprehensibility of the proclamation are also born. Only this knowledge of a Truth that became a Person in the Incarnation of the Son justifies the missionary mandate: 'Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation' [Mark 16:15]. Only if it is the Truth is it intended for every creature, it is not the imposition of some thing but openness of heart to what the creature has been created for."

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## Week 17

### Preview of Next Week

#### Prayer:

This week continues with selected passages from various reflections by Pope Benedict XVI given throughout "The Year of the Priest," which was celebrated by the Church in 2008-2009.

- While some of the reflections are directed to priests, it is advantageous to imagine them as directed to you. Be attentive to how you experience his exhortations and encouragements when considering yourself hearing them as a priest.

#### Study:

In order to finish *To Save A Thousand Souls* within the 180 days, you will need to read two pages per day; by the end of Week 17, you should have made it to page 238, but do not limit yourself to that if you can and want to read more.

### Review of Past Week

#### Prayer:

- *I fulfilled my commitment to daily, personal prayer \_\_\_/7 days this week.*
- *I fulfilled my commitment to the Liturgy of the Hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.*
- *I slept for at least seven hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.*
- *These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:*

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- *Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:*

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#### Sacraments:

- *I fulfilled my commitment to daily Mass this week. Yes / No*
- *I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to regular Confession. Yes / No*
- *These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:*

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Virtue:**

- I was faithful to my bodily fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I was faithful to my digital fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I was faithful to my dating fast. Yes / No
- I was faithful to the necessary practices from [www.hismercyendures.org](http://www.hismercyendures.org). Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Service:**

- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to altar serving. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to spiritual works of mercy. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to corporal works of mercy. Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Study:**

- I fulfilled my commitment to spiritual reading this week: Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my response, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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## Planning Ahead

- What day(s) will I go to daily Mass this week? S M T W Th F S
  - What day will I go to Confession this week? S M T W Th F S or [ ] not this week
  - Am I scheduled for altar service this week? Spiritual works of mercy? Corporal works of mercy? Yes / No
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- Have I scheduled my next spiritual direction? Yes / No
  - Have I scheduled my seminary visit? Yes / No
  - Have I scheduled my discernment retreat? Yes / No

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## Day 113

BENEDICT XVI  
General Audience  
Wednesday, 5 May 2010  
“*Munus Sanctificandi*”<sup>144</sup>”

“Today I would like to reflect with you briefly on the priest's second duty, that of sanctifying people, above all through the sacraments and the worship of the Church. Here we must ask ourselves first of all: what does the word ‘Holy’ mean? The answer is: ‘Holy’ is God's specific quality of being, namely, absolute truth, goodness, love, beauty, pure light. Thus sanctifying a person means putting him or her in touch with God, with this being light, truth, pure love. It is obvious that such contact transforms the person. The ancients had this firm conviction: no one can see God without dying instantly. The power of truth and light is too great! If the human being touches this absolute current, he cannot survive. On the other hand there is also the conviction: without a minimal contact with God man cannot live. Truth, goodness and love are fundamental conditions of his being. The question is: how can man find that contact with God, which is fundamental, without dying overpowered by the greatness of his divine being? The Church's faith tells us that God himself creates this contact that gradually transforms us into true images of God.”

“Thus we have once again arrived at the priest's task of ‘sanctifying.’ No man on his own, relying on his own power, can put another in touch with God. An essential part of the priest's grace is the gift, the task of creating this contact. This is achieved in the proclamation of God's word in which his light comes to meet us. It is achieved in a particularly concentrated manner in the Sacraments. Immersion in the Paschal Mystery of the death and Resurrection of Christ takes place in Baptism, is reinforced in Confirmation and Reconciliation and is nourished by the Eucharist, a sacrament that builds the Church as the People of God, Body of Christ, Temple of the Holy Spirit <sup>145</sup>. Thus it is Christ himself who makes us holy, that is, who draws us into God's

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<sup>144</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, “*Munus Sanctificandi*,” The Holy See, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2010. [Broken up over days 113 - 115].

<sup>145</sup> cf. John Paul II, *Apostolic Exhortation Pastores Gregis*, n. 32.

sphere. However, as an act of his infinite mercy, he calls some 'to be' with him [cf. Mark 3: 14] and to become, through the Sacrament of Orders, despite their human poverty, sharers in his own priesthood, ministers of this sanctification, stewards of his mysteries, 'bridges' to the encounter with him and of his mediation between God and man and between man and God<sup>146</sup>."

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## Day 114

"Who, therefore, saves the world and man? The only answer we can give is: Jesus of Nazareth, Lord and Christ, Crucified and Risen. And where is the Mystery of the death and Resurrection of Christ that brings about salvation? In Christ's action through the Church, and in particular in the sacrament of the Eucharist, which makes the redemptive sacrificial offering of the Son of God present in the sacrament of Reconciliation in which from the death of sin one returns to new life, and in every other sacramental act of sanctification<sup>147</sup>. It is therefore important to encourage an appropriate catechesis to help the faithful understand the value of the sacraments; but it is likewise necessary, after the example of the Holy Curé d'Ars, to be available, generous and attentive in giving the brothers and sisters the treasures of grace that God has placed in our hands, and of which we are not the 'masters' but rather caretakers and stewards. Especially in this time of ours, in which, on the one hand it seems that faith is weakening, and, on the other, a profound need and a widespread quest for spirituality are emerging, it is essential that every priest remember that in his mission the missionary proclamation and worship and the sacraments are never separate and encourage a healthy sacramental ministry, to form the People of God and to help it experience to the full the Liturgy, the Church's worship and the sacraments as freely given gifts of God, free and effective gestures of his saving action."

"As I recalled in the Holy Chrism Mass this year: 'At the centre of the Church's worship is the notion of *sacrament*.' This means that it is not primarily we who act, but God comes first to meet us through his action, he looks upon us and he leads us to himself.... God touches us through material things... that he takes up into his service, making them instruments of the encounter between us and himself<sup>148</sup>.' The truth according to which in the Sacrament 'it is not primarily we who act<sup>149</sup>,' also concerns and must concern priestly awareness: each priest knows well that he is an instrument necessary to God's saving action but also that he is always only an instrument. This awareness must make priests humble and generous in the administration of the Sacraments, in respect of the canonical norms, but also in the deep conviction that their mission is to ensure that all people, united to Christ, may offer themselves to God as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to him [cf. Romans 12:1]. St John Mary Vianney, once again, is exemplary with regard to the *munus sanctificandi* and the correct interpretation of the sacramental ministry; one day, to a man who was saying that he had no faith and wished to ask him about it, the parish priest answered: 'Oh! My friend, you are not really speaking to the right person, I do not know how to reason... but if you need some comfort, sit there... (and he pointed to the ever present stool in the confessional) and believe me, many others have sat there before you and have had nothing to regret<sup>150</sup>.'"

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<sup>146</sup> cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, n. 5.

<sup>147</sup> cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, n. 5.

<sup>148</sup> *Chrism Mass*, 1 April 2010.

<sup>149</sup> *Chrism Mass*.

<sup>150</sup> cf. Monnin, A., *Il Curato d'Ars, Vita di Gian-Battista-Maria Vianney*, Vol. I, Turin 1870, pp. 163-164.

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## Day 115

“Dear priests, experience the Liturgy and worship with joy and love: it is an action which the Risen One carries out with the power of the Holy Spirit in us, with us and for us. I would like to renew the invitation made recently to ‘return to the confessional as a place in which to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation, but also as a place in which *to dwell* more often, so that the faithful may find compassion, advice and comfort, feel that they are loved and understood by God and experience the presence of Divine Mercy beside the Real Presence in the Eucharist<sup>151</sup>.’ And I would also like to ask each priest to celebrate and to live intensely the Eucharist which is at the heart of the duty of sanctifying; it is Jesus who wants to be with us, to live in us, to give himself to us, to show us God's infinite mercy and tenderness; it is the one sacrifice of the love of Christ who makes himself present, who makes himself real among us and arrives at the throne of Grace, at God's presence... embraces humanity... and unites us with him<sup>152</sup>. And the priest is called to be a minister of this great Mystery, in the Sacrament and in life... It is in the celebration of the Holy Mysteries that the priest finds the root of his holiness<sup>153</sup>.”

“Dear Friends, may you be aware of the great gift that priests are for the Church and for the world; through their ministry the Lord continues to save men, to make himself present, to sanctify. May you be able to thank God and above all be close to your priests with prayer and support, especially in difficulty, so that there may be more and more Pastors in accordance with the Heart of God. Many thanks.”

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## Day 116

BENEDICT XVI  
*General Audience*  
*Wednesday, 26 May 2010*  
*“Munus Regendi”<sup>154</sup>*

“It remains for me today to speak of the priest's mission to govern, to guide - with the authority of Christ, not his own the portion of the People that God has entrusted to him.”

“How can we comprehend in our modern day culture a dimension of this kind that implies the concept of authority and has its origins in the Lord's own mandate to tend his flock? What is authority really, for us Christians? The cultural, political and historical experiences of the recent past, above all the dictatorships in Eastern and Western Europe in the 20th century, have made contemporary man suspicious of this concept. A suspicion which is often expressed in a conviction that it is necessary to eliminate every kind of authority that does not come exclusively from man, and is not regulated and controlled by him. But it is precisely in

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<sup>151</sup> Address to participants in the course on the Internal Forum organized by the Apostolic Penitentiary, 11 March 2010.

<sup>152</sup> cf. Discourse to the Parish Priests of the Diocese of Rome, 18 February 2010.

<sup>153</sup> cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, nn. 12-13.

<sup>154</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, “*Munus Regendi*,” The Holy See, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2010. [*Broken up over days 116 - 118*].

reviewing those regimes which in the last century disseminated terror and death, that we are forcibly reminded that authority, in every circumstance, when it is exercised without reference to the Transcendent, if it neglects the Supreme Authority, which is God, inevitably finishes by turning against man. It is important, therefore, to recognize that human authority is never an end in itself but always and only a means and that, necessarily and in every age, the end is the person, created by God with his own inviolable dignity and called to relate to his Creator, both along the path of his earthly journey and in eternal life; it is an authority exercised in responsibility before God, before the Creator. An authority whose sole purpose is understood to be to serve the true good of the person and to be a glass through which we can see the one and supreme Good, which is God. Not only is it not foreign to man, but on the contrary, it is a precious help on our journey towards a total fulfilment in Christ, towards salvation.”

“The Church is called and commits herself to exercise this kind of authority which is service and exercises it not in her own name, but in the name of Jesus Christ, who received from his Father all authority both in Heaven and on Earth [cf. Matthew 28: 18]. Christ tends his flock through the Pastor of the Church, in fact: it is he who guides, protects and corrects them, because he loves them deeply. But the Lord Jesus, the supreme Shepherd of our souls, has willed that the Apostolic College, today the Bishops, in communion with the Successor of Peter and the priests, their most precious collaborators, to participate in his mission of taking care of God's People, of educating them in the faith and of guiding, inspiring and sustaining the Christian community, or, as the Council puts it, ‘to see to it... that each member of the faithful shall be led in the Holy Spirit to the full development of his own vocation in accordance with Gospel preaching, and to sincere and active charity’ and to exercise that liberty with which Christ has set us free<sup>155</sup>. Every Pastor, therefore, is a means through whom Christ himself loves men: it is through our ministry, dear priests, it is through us that the Lord reaches souls, instructs, guards and guides them. St Augustine, in his *Commentary on the Gospel of St John*, says: ‘let it therefore be a commitment of love to feed the flock of the Lord’<sup>156</sup>; this is the supreme rule of conduct for the ministers of God, an unconditional love, like that of the Good Shepherd, full of joy, given to all, attentive to those close to us and solicitous for those who are distant<sup>157</sup>, gentle towards the weakest, the little ones, the simple, the sinners, to manifest the infinite mercy of God with the reassuring words of hope<sup>158</sup>.”

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## Day 117

“Even if this pastoral task is founded on the Sacraments, its efficacy is not independent of the personal existence of the priest. In order to be a priest according to the heart of God [cf. Jeremiah 3:15] it is necessary that not only the mind, but also the freedom and the will be deeply rooted in living friendship with Christ, a clear awareness of the identity received in Priestly Ordination, an unconditional readiness to lead the flock entrusted to him where the Lord desires and not in the direction which might, apparently, seem easier or more convenient. This requires, above all, a continuous and progressive willingness to allow Christ himself to govern the sacerdotal life. In fact, no one is really able to feed Christ's flock, unless he lives in profound and

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<sup>155</sup> cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 6.

<sup>156</sup> cf. 123, 5.

<sup>157</sup> cf. *St Augustine, Discourse 340*, 1; *Discourse 46*, 15.

<sup>158</sup> cf. *ibid.*, *Epistle*, 95, 1.

true obedience to Christ and the Church, and the docility of the people towards their priests depends on the docility of the priests towards Christ; for this reason the personal and constant encounter with the Lord, profound knowledge of him and the conformation of the individual will to Christ's will is always at the root of the pastoral ministry.”

“During the last decades, we have heard the adjective ‘pastoral’ used almost as if it were in opposition to the concept of ‘hierarchical,’ and in the same way the idea of ‘communion’ has also been set against it. At this point it may be useful to make a brief comment on the word ‘hierarchy,’ which is the traditional designation of the structure of sacramental authority within the Church, ordered according to the three levels of the Sacrament of Holy Orders, episcopate, presbyterate, diaconate: The concept of ‘hierarchy’ carries, in public opinion, an element of subordination and of judgement; therefore to many the concept of hierarchy appears to be in contrast with the flexibility and vitality of the pastoral meaning and also appears contrary to the humility of the Gospel. However, this is a misunderstanding of the meaning of hierarchy, which arose in historical times from abuses of authority and careerism. But these are, in fact, abuses, and have nothing to do with the essential meaning of ‘hierarchy’ itself. Common opinion holds that ‘hierarchy’ is something connected with dominion and therefore cannot correspond to the real sense of the Church, that is unity in the love of Christ. But, as I have said, this is a mistaken interpretation, which has its origins in the abuses of the past, but does not correspond to the real meaning of hierarchy. Let us begin with the word. The word hierarchy is generally said to mean ‘sacred dominion,’ yet the real meaning is not this, but rather ‘sacred origin,’ that is to say: this authority does not come from man himself, but it has its origins in the sacred, in the Sacrament; so it subjects the person in second place to the vocation, to the mystery of Christ; it makes of the individual a servant of Christ, and only as a servant of Christ can he govern and guide for Christ and with Christ. Therefore he who enters into the Sacred Order of the Sacrament, the ‘hierarchy,’ is not an autocrat but he enters into a new bond of obedience to Christ: he is tied to Christ in communion with the other members of the Sacred Order, the Priesthood. Nor can the Pope, reference point for all the Pastors and for the communion of the Church, do what he likes; on the contrary, the Pope is the custodian of obedience to Christ, to his word summed up in the *‘regula fidei,’* in the Creed of the Church, and must lead the way in obedience to Christ and to his Church. Thus hierarchy implies a triple bond: in the first place the bond with Christ and with the order given by Our Lord to his Church; then the bond with the other Pastors in the one communion of the Church; and lastly, the bond with the faithful who are entrusted to the individual, in the order of the Church.”

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## Day 118

“Therefore it is clear that communion and hierarchy are not contrary to each other, but they influence each other. Together they form one thing (hierarchical communion). The Pastor fulfils his role precisely when he guides and protects his flock and sometimes prevents it from scattering. Except in a vision which is clearly and explicitly supernatural, the task of governing which belongs to the priest is incomprehensible. On the contrary, sustained by a sincere desire for the salvation of each believer, he is particularly precious and necessary, also in our time. If the aim is to spread the message of Christ and to lead men and women towards a saving encounter with him, so that they may have life, then the task of guiding appears as a service lived in



pure giving, for the edification of the flock in truth and holiness, often going against the tide, and remembering that he who is greater must act as the lesser, and he who governs as he who serves<sup>159</sup>.”

“Where can a priest today find the strength for such an exercise of his ministry, in full fidelity to Christ and to the Church, and complete devotion to his flock? There is only one answer: in Christ the Lord. Jesus' way of governing was not through dominion, but in the humble and loving service of the Washing of the feet, and the kingship of Christ over the Universe is not an earthly triumph, but reaches its highest point on the wood of the Cross, which becomes a judgement for the world and a point of reference for the exercising of that authority which is the true expression of pastoral charity. The saints, among them St John Mary Vianney, carried out with love and devotion the task of caring for the portion of God's People entrusted to them, showing themselves to be strong and determined men with the single aim of promoting the true good of souls, and capable of paying a price in person, even to martyrdom, in order to remain faithful to the truth and justice of the Gospel.”

“Dear priests, ‘tend the flock of God that is your charge, not by constraint but willingly... being examples to the flock’ [1 Peter 5:2]. Therefore, do not be afraid to lead to Christ each one of the brethren whom he has entrusted to you, certain that every word and every action will bear fruit if they come from obedience to God's will: know how to live in appreciating the merits and in recognition of the limits of the culture in which we find ourselves, with the firm assurance that the proclamation of the Gospel is the greatest service to render to man. In fact, there is no greater good, in this earthly life, than to lead people to God, to reawaken faith, to lift the person out of his inertia and desperation, to give the hope that God is near and directs our personal histories and that of the world: this, in the ultimate analysis, is the deep and final meaning of the task of governing that the Lord has given to us. To form Christ in believers, through that process of sanctification that is a conversion of criteria, scale of values, and patterns of behaviour, to allow Christ to live in every one of the faithful. St Paul sums up his pastoral action in these words, ‘my little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you’ [Galatians 4:19].”

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## Day 119

Chrism Mass

*Homily of His Holiness Benedict XVI<sup>160</sup>*

*Holy Thursday, 20 March 2008*

*“Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

Every year the Chrism Mass exhorts us to enter into that ‘yes’ to God's call, which we pronounced on the day of our priestly ordination. ‘*Adsum* - here I am!,’ we have said like Isaiah, when he heard God's voice asking: ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?’ ‘Here am I! Send me,’ Isaiah responded [Isaiah 6:8]. Then the Lord himself, through the hands of the Bishop, placed his hands on us and we gave ourselves to his mission.

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<sup>159</sup> cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 27

<sup>160</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, “Chrism Mass: Homily of His Holiness Benedict XVI,” The Holy See, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2010. [*Broken up over days 119-121*].

Subsequently, we have followed many ways in the range of his call. Can we always affirm what Paul wrote to the Corinthians after years of Gospel service, often marked by fatigue and suffering of every type: 'Our zeal has not slackened in this ministry which has been entrusted to us by God's mercy' [cf. II Corinthians 4:1]? 'Our zeal has not slackened.' Let us pray on this day that it may always be kindled anew, that it may be ever nourished by the living flame of the Gospel."

"At the same time Holy Thursday is an occasion for us to ask ourselves over and over again: to what did we say our 'yes'? What does this 'being a priest of Jesus Christ' mean? The Second Canon of our Missal, which was probably compiled in Rome already at the end of the second century, describes the essence of the priestly ministry with the words with which, in the *Book of Deuteronomy* [18:5,7], the essence of the Old Testament priesthood is described: *astare coram te et tibi ministrare* ['to stand and minister in the name of the Lord']. There are therefore two duties that define the essence of the priestly ministry: in the first place, 'to stand in his [the Lord's] presence.' In the *Book of Deuteronomy* this is read in the context of the preceding disposition, according to which priests do not receive any portion of land in the Holy Land - they live of God and for God. They did not attend to the usual work necessary to sustain daily life. Their profession was to 'stand in the Lord's presence' - to look to him, to be there for him. Hence, ultimately, the word indicated a life in God's presence, and with this also a ministry of representing others. As the others cultivated the land, from which the priest also lived, so he kept the world open to God, he had to live with his gaze on him. Now if this word is found in the Canon of the Mass immediately after the consecration of the gifts, after the entrance of the Lord in the assembly of prayer, then for us this points to being before the Lord present, that is, it indicates the Eucharist as the centre of priestly life. But here too, the meaning is deeper. During Lent the hymn that introduces the Office of Readings of the Liturgy of the Hours - the Office that monks once recited during the night vigil before God and for humanity - one of the duties of Lent is described with the imperative: *arctius perstemus in custodia* - we must be even more intensely alert. In the tradition of Syrian monasticism, monks were qualified as 'those who remained standing.' This standing was an expression of vigilance. What was considered here as a duty of the monks, we can rightly see also as an expression of the priestly mission and as a correct interpretation of the word of Deuteronomy: the priest must be on the watch. He must be on his guard in the face of the imminent powers of evil."

"He must keep the world awake for God. He must be the one who remains standing: upright before the trends of time. Upright in truth. Upright in the commitment for good. Being before the Lord must always also include, at its depths, responsibility for humanity to the Lord, who in his turn takes on the burden of all of us to the Father. And it must be a taking on of him, of Christ, of his word, his truth, his love. The priest must be upright, fearless and prepared to sustain even offences for the Lord, as referred to in the *Acts of the Apostles*: they were 'rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the name' [5:41] of Jesus."

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# Week 18

## Preview of Next Week

### Prayer:

This week concludes the selected passages from various reflections by Pope Benedict XVI given throughout “The Year of the Priest,” which was celebrated by the Church in 2008-2009. It also concludes Part IV of *Discernment 180*.

### Study:

In order to finish *To Save A Thousand Souls* within the 180 days, you will need to read two pages per day; by the end of Week 18, you should have made it to page 252, but do not limit yourself to that if you can and want to read more.

## Review of Past Week

### Prayer:

- I fulfilled my commitment to daily, personal prayer \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I fulfilled my commitment to the Liturgy of the Hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I slept for at least seven hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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### Sacraments:

- I fulfilled my commitment to daily Mass this week. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to regular Confession. Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Virtue:**

- I was faithful to my bodily fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I was faithful to my digital fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I was faithful to my dating fast. Yes / No
- I was faithful to the necessary practices from [www.hismercyendures.org](http://www.hismercyendures.org). Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Service:**

- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to altar serving. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to spiritual works of mercy. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to corporal works of mercy. Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Study:**

- I fulfilled my commitment to spiritual reading this week: Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my response, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Planning Ahead**

- What day(s) will I go to daily Mass this week? S M T W Th F S
- What day will I go to Confession this week? S M T W Th F S or [ ] not this week

- Am I scheduled for altar service this week? Spiritual works of mercy? Corporal works of mercy? Yes / No

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- Have I scheduled my next spiritual direction? Yes / No

- Have I scheduled my seminary visit? Yes / No

- Have I scheduled my discernment retreat? Yes / No

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## Day 120

“Now let us move on to the second word that the Second Canon repeats from the Old Testament text - ‘to stand in your presence and serve you.’ The priest must be an upright person, vigilant, a person who remains standing. Service is then added to all this. In the Old Testament text this word has an essentially ritualistic meaning: all acts of worship foreseen by the Law are the priests' duty. But this action, according to the rite, was classified as service, as a duty of service, and thus it explains in what spirit this activity must take place. With the assumption of the word ‘serve’ in the Canon, the liturgical meaning of this term was adopted in a certain way - to conform with the novelty of the Christian cult. What the priest does at that moment, in the Eucharistic celebration, is to serve, to fulfill a service to God and a service to humanity. The cult that Christ rendered to the Father was the giving of himself to the end for humanity. Into this cult, this service, the priest must insert himself. Thus, the word ‘serve’ contains many dimensions. In the first place, part of it is certainly the correct celebration of the liturgy and of the sacraments in general, accomplished through interior participation. We must learn to increasingly understand the sacred liturgy in all its essence, to develop a living familiarity with it, so that it becomes the soul of our daily life. It is then that we celebrate in the correct way; it is then that the *ars celebrandi*, the art of celebrating, emerges by itself. In this art there must be nothing artificial. If the liturgy is the central duty of the priest, this also means that prayer must be a primary reality, to be learned ever anew and ever more deeply at the school of Christ and of the Saints of all the ages. Since the Christian liturgy by its nature is also always a proclamation, we must be people who are familiar with the Word of God, love it and live by it: only then can we explain it in an adequate way. ‘To serve the Lord’ - priestly service precisely also means to learn to know the Lord in his Word and to make it known to all those he entrusts to us.”

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## Day 121

“Lastly, two other aspects are part of service. No one is closer to his master than the servant who has access to the most private dimensions of his life. In this sense ‘to serve’ means closeness, it requires familiarity. This familiarity also bears a danger: when we continually encounter the sacred it risks becoming habitual for us. In this way, reverential fear is extinguished. Conditioned by all our habits we no longer perceive the great, new and surprising fact that he himself is present, speaks to us, gives himself to us. We must ceaselessly struggle against this becoming accustomed to the extraordinary reality, against the indifference of the heart, always recognizing our insufficiency anew and the grace that there is in the fact that he consigned himself into our hands. To serve means to draw near, but above all it also means obedience. The servant is under the

word: 'not my will, but thine, be done' [Luke 22:42]. With this word Jesus, in the Garden of Olives, has resolved the decisive battle against sin, against the rebellion of the sinful heart. Adam's sin consisted precisely in the fact that he wanted to accomplish his own will and not God's. Humanity's temptation is always to want to be totally autonomous, to follow its own will alone and to maintain that only in this way will we be free; that only thanks to a similarly unlimited freedom would man be completely man. But this is precisely how we pit ourselves against the truth. Because the truth is that we must share our freedom with others and we can be free only in communion with them. This shared freedom can be true freedom only if we enter into what constitutes the very measure of freedom, if we enter into God's will. This fundamental obedience that is part of the human being - a person cannot be merely for and by himself - becomes still more concrete in the priest: we do not preach ourselves, but him and his Word, which we could not have invented ourselves. We proclaim the Word of Christ in the correct way only in communion with his Body. Our obedience is a believing with the Church, a thinking and speaking with the Church, serving through her. What Jesus predicted to Peter also always applies: 'You will be taken where you do not want to go.' This letting oneself be guided where one does not want to be led is an essential dimension of our service, and it is exactly what makes us free. In this being guided, which can be contrary to our ideas and plans, we experience something new - the wealth of God's love."

"'To stand in his presence and serve him': Jesus Christ as the true High Priest of the world has conferred to these words a previously unimaginable depth. He, who as Son was and is the Lord, has willed to become that Servant of God which the vision of the *Book of the Prophet Isaiah* had foreseen. He has willed to be the Servant of all. He has portrayed the whole of his high priesthood in the gesture of the washing of the feet. With the gesture of love to the end he washes our dirty feet, with the humility of his service he purifies us from the illness of our pride. Thus, he makes us able to become partakers of God's banquet. He has descended, and the true ascent of man is now accomplished in our descending with him and toward him. His elevation is the Cross. It is the deepest descent and, as love pushed to the end, it is at the same time the culmination of the ascent, the true 'elevation' of humanity. 'To stand in his presence and serve him': this now means to enter into his call to serve God. The Eucharist as the presence of the descent and ascent of Christ thus always recalls, beyond itself, the many ways of service through love of neighbour. Let us ask the Lord on this day for the gift to be able to say again in this sense our 'yes' to his call: 'Here am I! Send me' [Isaiah 6:8]. Amen."

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## Day 122

"Conclusion of the Year for Priests<sup>161</sup>"  
"Homily of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI"  
*Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus*  
Friday, 11 June 2010

"Dear Brothers in the Priestly Ministry,  
Dear Brothers and Sisters,

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<sup>161</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, "Homily of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI: Conclusion of the Year for Priests," The Holy See, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2010. [Broken up over days 122-127].

The Year for Priests which we have celebrated on the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the death of the holy Curé of Ars, the model of priestly ministry in our world, is now coming to an end. We have let the Curé of Ars guide us to a renewed appreciation of the grandeur and beauty of the priestly ministry. The priest is not a mere office-holder, like those which every society needs in order to carry out certain functions. Instead, he does something which no human being can do of his own power: in Christ's name he speaks the words which absolve us of our sins and in this way he changes, starting with God, our entire life. Over the offerings of bread and wine he speaks Christ's words of thanksgiving, which are words of transubstantiation – words which make Christ himself present, the Risen One, his Body and Blood – words which thus transform the elements of the world, which open the world to God and unite it to him. The priesthood, then, is not simply 'office' but sacrament: God makes use of us poor men in order to be, through us, present to all men and women, and to act on their behalf. This audacity of God who entrusts himself to human beings – who, conscious of our weaknesses, nonetheless considers men capable of acting and being present in his stead – this audacity of God is the true grandeur concealed in the word 'priesthood.' That God thinks that we are capable of this; that in this way he calls men to his service and thus from within binds himself to them: this is what we wanted to reflect upon and appreciate anew over the course of the past year. We wanted to reawaken our joy at how close God is to us, and our gratitude for the fact that he entrusts himself to our infirmities; that he guides and sustains us daily. In this way we also wanted to demonstrate once again to young people that this vocation, this fellowship of service for God and with God, does exist – and that God is indeed waiting for us to say 'yes.' Together with the whole Church we wanted to make clear once again that we have to ask God for this vocation. We have to beg for workers for God's harvest, and this petition to God is, at the same time, his own way of knocking on the hearts of young people who consider themselves able to do what God considers them able to do."

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## Day 123

"We are celebrating the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and in the liturgy we peer, as it were, into the heart of Jesus opened in death by the spear of the Roman soldier. Jesus' heart was indeed opened for us and before us – and thus God's own heart was opened. The liturgy interprets for us the language of Jesus' heart, which tells us above all that God is the shepherd of mankind, and so it reveals to us Jesus' priesthood, which is rooted deep within his heart; so too it shows us the perennial foundation and the effective criterion of all priestly ministry, which must always be anchored in the heart of Jesus and lived out from that starting-point. Today I would like to meditate especially on those texts with which the Church in prayer responds to the word of God presented in the readings. In those chants, word (*Wort*) and response (*Antwort*) interpenetrate. On the one hand, the chants are themselves drawn from the word of God, yet on the other, they are already our human response to that word, a response in which the word itself is communicated and enters into our lives. The most important of those texts in today's liturgy is Psalm 23(22) – 'The Lord is my shepherd' – in which Israel at prayer received God's self-revelation as shepherd, and made this the guide of its own life. 'The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want': this first verse expresses joy and gratitude for the fact that God is present to and concerned for us. The reading from the Book of Ezechiel begins with the same theme: 'I myself will look after and tend my sheep' [Ezechiel 34:11]. God personally looks after me, after us, after all mankind. I am not abandoned, adrift in the universe and in a society which leaves me ever more lost and bewildered.

God looks after me. He is not a distant God, for whom my life is worthless. The world's religions, as far as we can see, have always known that in the end there is only one God. But this God was distant. Evidently he had abandoned the world to other powers and forces, to other divinities. It was with these that one had to deal. The one God was good, yet aloof. He was not dangerous, nor was he very helpful. Consequently one didn't need to worry about him. He did not lord it over us. Oddly, this kind of thinking re-emerged during the Enlightenment. There was still a recognition that the world presupposes a Creator. Yet this God, after making the world, had evidently withdrawn from it. The world itself had a certain set of laws by which it ran, and God did not, could not, intervene in them. God was only a remote cause. Many perhaps did not even want God to look after them. They did not want God to get in the way. But wherever God's loving concern is perceived as getting in the way, human beings go awry. It is fine and consoling to know that there is someone who loves me and looks after me. But it is far more important that there is a God who knows me, loves me and is concerned about me. 'I know my own and my own know me' [John 10:14], the Church says before the Gospel with the Lord's words. God knows me, he is concerned about me. This thought should make us truly joyful. Let us allow it to penetrate the depths of our being. Then let us also realize what it means: God wants us, as priests, in one tiny moment of history, to share his concern about people. As priests, we want to be persons who share his concern for men and women, who take care of them and provide them with a concrete experience of God's concern. Whatever the field of activity entrusted to him, the priest, with the Lord, ought to be able to say: 'I know my sheep and mine know me.' 'To know,' in the idiom of sacred Scripture, never refers to merely exterior knowledge, like the knowledge of someone's telephone number. 'Knowing' means being inwardly close to another person. It means loving him or her. We should strive to 'know' men and women as God does and for God's sake; we should strive to walk with them along the path of God's friendship."

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## Day 124

"Let us return to our Psalm. There we read: 'He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff – they comfort me' [23(2):3ff.]. The shepherd points out the right path to those entrusted to him. He goes before them and leads them. Let us put it differently: the Lord shows us the right way to be human. He teaches us the art of being a person. What must I do in order not to fall, not to squander my life in meaninglessness? This is precisely the question which every man and woman must ask and one which remains valid at every moment of one's life. How much darkness surrounds this question in our own day! We are constantly reminded of the words of Jesus, who felt compassion for the crowds because they were like a flock without a shepherd. Lord, have mercy on us too! Show us the way! From the Gospel we know this much: he is himself the way. Living with Christ, following him – this means finding the right way, so that our lives can be meaningful and so that one day we might say: 'Yes, it was good to have lived.' The people of Israel continue to be grateful to God because in the Commandments he pointed out the way of life. The great Psalm 119(118) is a unique expression of joy for this fact: we are not fumbling in the dark. God has shown us the way and how to walk aright. The message of the Commandments was synthesized in the life of Jesus and became a living model. Thus we understand that these rules from God are not chains, but the way which he is pointing out to us. We can be glad for them and rejoice that in Christ they stand before us as a lived reality. He himself has made us



glad. By walking with Christ, we experience the joy of Revelation, and as priests we need to communicate to others our own joy at the fact that we have been shown the right way of life.”

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## Day 125

“Then there is the phrase about the ‘darkest valley’ through which the Lord leads us. Our path as individuals will one day lead us into the valley of the shadow of death, where no one can accompany us. Yet he will be there. Christ himself descended into the dark night of death. Even there he will not abandon us. Even there he will lead us. ‘If I sink to the nether world, you are present there,’ says Psalm 139(138). Truly you are there, even in the throes of death, and hence our Responsorial Psalm can say: even there, in the darkest valley, I fear no evil. When speaking of the darkest valley, we can also think of the dark valleys of temptation, discouragement and trial through which everyone has to pass. Even in these dark valleys of life he is there. Lord, in the darkness of temptation, at the hour of dusk when all light seems to have died away, show me that you are there. Help us priests, so that we can remain beside the persons entrusted to us in these dark nights. So that we can show them your own light.”

“Your rod and your staff – they comfort me’: the shepherd needs the rod as protection against savage beasts ready to pounce on the flock; against robbers looking for prey. Along with the rod there is the staff which gives support and helps to make difficult crossings. Both of these are likewise part of the Church’s ministry, of the priest’s ministry. The Church too must use the shepherd’s rod, the rod with which he protects the faith against those who falsify it, against currents which lead the flock astray. The use of the rod can actually be a service of love. Today we can see that it has nothing to do with love when conduct unworthy of the priestly life is tolerated. Nor does it have to do with love if heresy is allowed to spread and the faith twisted and chipped away, as if it were something that we ourselves had invented. As if it were no longer God’s gift, the precious pearl which we cannot let be taken from us. Even so, the rod must always become once again the shepherd’s staff – a staff which helps men and women to tread difficult paths and to follow the Lord.”

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## Day 126

“At the end of the Psalm we read of the table which is set, the oil which anoints the head, the cup which overflows, and dwelling in the house of the Lord. In the Psalm this is an expression first and foremost of the prospect of the festal joy of being in God’s presence in the temple, of being his guest, whom he himself serves, of dwelling with him. For us, who pray this Psalm with Christ and his Body which is the Church, this prospect of hope takes on even greater breadth and depth. We see in these words a kind of prophetic foreshadowing of the mystery of the Eucharist, in which God himself makes us his guests and offers himself to us as food – as that bread and fine wine which alone can definitively sate man’s hunger and thirst. How can we not rejoice that one day we will be guests at the very table of God and live in his dwelling-place? How can we not rejoice at the fact that he has commanded us: ‘Do this in memory of me’? How can we not rejoice that he has enabled us to set God’s table for men and women, to give them his Body and his Blood, to offer them the precious gift

of his very presence. Truly we can pray together, with all our heart, the words of the Psalm: ‘Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life’ [Ps 23(22):6].”

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## Week 19

### Preview of Next Week

**Prayer:**

This week concludes Part IV of *Discernment 180* with one final selection from various reflections by Pope Benedict XVI given throughout “The Year of the Priest,” which was celebrated by the Church in 2008-2009. This week introduces Part V, which is on celibacy; it consists of selected passages from *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, Pope St. Paul VI’s encyclical on priestly celibacy.

- On Day 133, there is an *excursus* from the beginning of the encyclical, which includes many objections to priestly celibacy. Pope St. Paul VI does not shy away from these objections; on the contrary, by answering them throughout the rest of the encyclical, the true nature of priestly celibacy shines with all the more radiance. Schedule time apart from your dedicated prayer time to read this *excursus*.

### Study

In order to finish *To Save A Thousand Souls* within the 180 days, you will need to read two pages per day; by the end of Week 19, you should have made it to page 266, but do not limit yourself to that if you can and want to read more.

### Review of Past Week

**Prayer:**

- I fulfilled my commitment to daily, personal prayer \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I fulfilled my commitment to the Liturgy of the Hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I slept for at least seven hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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### Sacraments:

- I fulfilled my commitment to daily Mass this week. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to regular Confession. Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Virtue:**

- I was faithful to my bodily fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I was faithful to my digital fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I was faithful to my dating fast. Yes / No
- I was faithful to the necessary practices from [www.hismercyendures.org](http://www.hismercyendures.org). Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Service:**

- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to altar serving. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to spiritual works of mercy. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to corporal works of mercy. Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Study:**

- I fulfilled my commitment to spiritual reading this week: Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my response, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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## Planning Ahead

- *What day(s) will I go to daily Mass this week?*    S M T W Th F S
- *What day will I go to Confession this week?*    S M T W Th F S or [ ] not this week
- *Am I scheduled for altar service this week? Spiritual works of mercy? Corporal works of mercy?*    Yes / No

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- *When will I make extra time to read the excursus on the objections to celibacy this week?* \_\_\_\_\_
- *Have I scheduled my next spiritual direction?*    Yes / No
- *Have I scheduled my seminary visit?*    Yes / No
- *Have I scheduled my discernment retreat?*    Yes / No

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## Day 127

“Finally, let us take a brief look at the two communion antiphons which the Church offers us in her liturgy today. First there are the words with which Saint John concludes the account of Jesus’ crucifixion: ‘One of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out’ [John 19:34]. The heart of Jesus is pierced by the spear. Once opened, it becomes a fountain: the water and the blood which stream forth recall the two fundamental sacraments by which the Church lives: Baptism and the Eucharist. From the Lord’s pierced side, from his open heart, there springs the living fountain which continues to well up over the centuries and which makes the Church. The open heart is the source of a new stream of life; here John was certainly also thinking of the prophecy of Ezechiel who saw flowing forth from the new temple a torrent bestowing fruitfulness and life [Ezechiel 47]: Jesus himself is the new temple, and his open heart is the source of a stream of new life which is communicated to us in Baptism and the Eucharist.”

“The liturgy of the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus also permits another phrase, similar to this, to be used as the communion antiphon. It is taken from the Gospel of John: Whoever is thirsty, let him come to me. And let the one who believes in me drink. As the Scripture has said: ‘Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water’ [cf. John 7:37ff.] In faith we drink, so to speak, of the living water of God’s Word. In this way the believer himself becomes a wellspring which gives living water to the parched earth of history. We see this in the saints. We see this in Mary, that great woman of faith and love who has become in every generation a wellspring of faith, love and life. Every Christian and every priest should become, starting from Christ, a wellspring which gives life to others. We ought to be offering life-giving water to a parched and thirst world. Lord, we thank you because for our sake you opened your heart; because in your death and in your resurrection you became the source of life. Give us life, make us live from you as our source, and grant that we too may be sources, wellsprings capable of bestowing the water of life in our time. We thank you for the grace of the priestly ministry. Lord bless us, and bless all those who in our time are thirsty and continue to seek. Amen.”

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## Part V: Celibacy

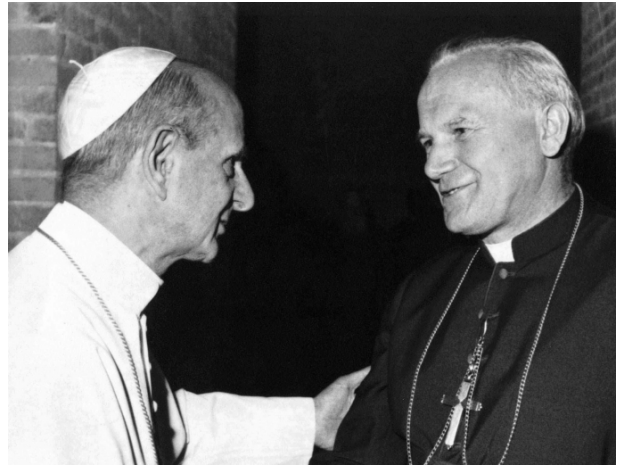
### Days 128-150

Perhaps the most common obstacle to considering and answering the call to the priesthood is celibacy. It is the discipline of the Roman Catholic Church that her clergy be celibate, and as you will read in the reflections to come, that discipline will not change.

Why such a demand? Is it not an undue burden on men otherwise willing to serve the Church as priests? Part V of *Discernment 180* gives the theological and pastoral reasons for the Church's discipline. Celibacy is not a burden that Jesus imposes on some unlucky souls who have to "take one for the team." It is a gift that He wants to share: "Let him who can receive it, receive it" (Matthew 19:12).

Throughout the next month, you will meditate on excerpts from the writings of Saints John Paul II and Paul VI (pictured here), who reflected beautifully and realistically on the gift of celibacy. The majority of these days consist of Pope St. Paul VI's encyclical on the celibacy of the priest, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, which directly addresses the objections to priestly celibacy and brilliantly expounds the blessing that it is for the whole Church, including the priests themselves.

While celibacy was certainly the biggest obstacle in my own discernment of the priesthood, I have come to appreciate it as one of God's greatest gifts to me. It has drawn me into a deeper intimacy with Him than what I knew was possible, and I am genuinely grateful that He chose me to receive it on this side of heaven. If that is God's will for you, too, may the reflections and prayers of these two saintly pontiffs help you to embrace it.



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## Day 128

John Paul II  
*Pastores Dabo Vobis*  
"On the Formation of Priests  
in the Circumstances of the Present Day"<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Pope John Paul II, "On the Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of Present Day," The Holy See, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1992, Ch. III, Sec. 29.

“Referring to the evangelical counsels, the Council states that ‘preeminent among these counsels is that precious gift of divine grace given to some by the Father [cf. Matthew 19:11; 1 Corinthians 7:7] in order more easily to devote themselves to God alone with an undivided heart [cf. 1 Corinthians 7:32-34] in virginity or celibacy. This perfect continence for love of the Kingdom of Heaven has always been held in high esteem by the Church as a sign and stimulus of love, and as a singular source of spiritual fertility in the world<sup>163</sup>. In virginity and celibacy, chastity retains its original meaning, that is, of human sexuality lived as a genuine sign of and precious service to the love of communion and gift of self to others. This meaning is fully found in virginity which makes evident, even in the renunciation of marriage, the ‘nuptial meaning’ of the body through a communion and a personal gift to Jesus Christ and his Church which prefigures and anticipates the perfect and final communion and self-giving of the world to come: ‘In virginity or celibacy, the human being is awaiting, also in a bodily way, the eschatological marriage of Christ with the Church, giving himself or herself completely to the Church in the hope that Christ may give himself to the Church in the full truth of eternal life<sup>164</sup>.’”

“In this light one can more easily understand and appreciate the reasons behind the centuries-old choice which the Western Church has made and maintained--despite all the difficulties and objections raised down the centuries--of conferring the Order of Presbyter only on men who have given proof that they have been called by God to the gift of chastity in absolute and perpetual celibacy.”

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## Day 129<sup>165</sup>

“It is especially important that the priest understand the theological motivation of the Church's law on celibacy. Inasmuch as it is a law, it expresses the Church's will, even before the will of the subject expressed by his readiness. But the will of the Church finds its ultimate motivation in the link between celibacy and sacred Ordination, which configures the priest to Jesus Christ the Head and Spouse of the Church. The Church, as the Spouse of Jesus Christ, wishes to be loved by the priest in the total and exclusive manner in which Jesus Christ her Head and Spouse loved her. Priestly celibacy, then, is the gift of self in and with Christ to his Church and expresses the priest's service to the Church in and with the Lord.”

“For an adequate priestly spiritual life, celibacy ought not to be considered and lived as an isolated or purely negative element, but as one aspect of a positive, specific and characteristic approach to being a priest. Leaving father and mother, the priest follows Jesus the Good Shepherd, in an apostolic communion, in the service of the People of God. Celibacy, then, is to be welcomed and continually renewed with a free and loving decision as a priceless gift from God, as an ‘incentive to pastoral charity<sup>166</sup>,’ as a singular sharing in God's fatherhood and in the fruitfulness of the Church, and as a witness to the world of the eschatological Kingdom. To put into practice all the moral, pastoral and spiritual demands of priestly celibacy it is absolutely necessary that the priest pray humbly and trustingly, as the Council points out: ‘In the world today, many

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<sup>163</sup> Lumen Gentium, 42.

<sup>164</sup> Apostolic exhortation Familiaris Consortio (Nov. 22,1981) 16: AAS 74 (1982), 98.

<sup>165</sup> Pope John Paul II, “On the Formation,” Ch. III, Sec. 29.

<sup>166</sup> Presbyterorum Ordinis, 16.

people call perfect continence impossible. The more they do so, the more humbly and perseveringly priests should join with the Church in praying for the grace of fidelity. It is never denied to those who ask. At the same time let priests make use of all the supernatural and natural helps which are now available to all<sup>167</sup>. Once again it is prayer, together with the Church's Sacraments and ascetical practice, which will provide hope in difficulties, forgiveness in failings, and confidence and courage in resuming the journey.”

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## Day 130<sup>168</sup>

“The spiritual formation of one who is called to live celibacy should pay particular attention to preparing the future priest so that he may know, appreciate, love and live celibacy according to its true nature and according to its real purposes, that is for evangelical, spiritual and pastoral motives. The virtue of chastity is a premise for this preparation and is its content. It colours all human relations and leads ‘to experiencing and showing... a sincere, human, fraternal and personal love, one that is capable of sacrifice, following Christ's example, a love for all and for each person<sup>169</sup>.’”

“The celibacy of priests brings with it certain characteristics, thanks to which they ‘renounce marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven [cf. Matthew 19:12] and hold fast to their Lord with that undivided love which is profoundly in harmony with the New Covenant; they bear witness to the resurrection in a future life [cf. Luke 20:36] and obtain the most useful assistance towards the constant exercise of that perfect charity by which they can become all things to all men in their priestly ministry<sup>170</sup>.’ And so priestly celibacy should not be considered just as a legal norm, or as a totally external condition for admission to ordination, but rather as a value that is profoundly connected with ordination, whereby a man takes on the likeness of Jesus Christ, the good Shepherd and Spouse of the Church, and therefore as a choice of a greater and undivided love for Christ and his Church, as a full and joyful availability in his heart for the pastoral ministry. Celibacy is to be considered as a special grace, as a gift, for ‘not all men can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given’ [Matthew 19:11]. Certainly it is a grace which does not dispense with, but counts most definitely on, a conscious and free response on the part of the receiver. This charism of the Spirit also brings with it the grace for the receiver to remain faithful to it for all his life and be able to carry out generously and joyfully its concomitant commitments. Formation in priestly celibacy should also include helping people to be aware of the ‘precious gift of God<sup>171</sup>,’ which will lead to prayer and to vigilance in guarding the gift from anything which could put it under threat.”

“Through his celibate life, the priest will be able to fulfil better his ministry on behalf of the People of God. In particular, as he witnesses to the evangelical value of virginity, he will be able to aid Christian spouses to live

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<sup>167</sup> Presbyterorum Ordinis, 16.

<sup>168</sup> Pope John Paul II, “On the Formation,” Ch. V, Sec. 50.

<sup>169</sup> Ratio Fundamental Institutionis Sacerdotalis, (Jan. 6, 1970) AAS 62 (1970), 354.

<sup>170</sup> Optatam Totius, 10.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*

fully the 'great sacrament' of the love of Christ the Bridegroom for his Spouse the Church, just as his own faithfulness to celibacy will help them to be faithful to each other as husband and wife<sup>172</sup>.”

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## Day 131

Encyclical of Pope Paul VI  
on the Celibacy of the Priest  
*Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*<sup>173</sup>

### REASONS FOR PRIESTLY CELIBACY

17. “Virginity undoubtedly, as the Second Vatican Council declared, ‘is not, of course, required by the nature of the priesthood itself. This is clear from the practice of the early Church and the traditions of the Eastern Churches<sup>174</sup>.’ But at the same time the Council did not hesitate to confirm solemnly the ancient, sacred and providential present law of priestly celibacy. In addition, it set forth the motives which justify this law for those who, in a spirit of faith and with generous fervor, know how to appreciate the gifts of God.”

18. “Consideration of how celibacy is ‘particularly suited<sup>175</sup>’ to God's ministers is not something recent. Even if the explicit reasons have differed with different mentalities and different situations, they were always inspired by specifically Christian considerations; and from these considerations we can get an intuition of the more fundamental motives underlying them<sup>176</sup>. These can be brought into clearer light only under the influence of the Holy Spirit, promised by Christ to His followers for the knowledge of things to come [John 16:13] and to enable the People of God to increase in the understanding of the mystery of Christ and of the Church. In this process the experience gained through the ages from a deeper penetration of spiritual things also has its part.”

### *Christological Significance*

19. “The Christian priesthood, being of a new order, can be understood only in the light of the newness of Christ, the Supreme Pontiff and eternal Priest, who instituted the priesthood of the ministry as a real participation in His own unique priesthood<sup>177</sup>. The minister of Christ and dispenser of the mysteries of God [1 Corinthians 4:1], therefore, looks up to Him directly as his model and supreme ideal [1 Corinthians 11:1]. The Lord Jesus, the only Son of God, was sent by the Father into the world and He became man, in order that humanity which was subject to sin and death might be reborn, and through this new birth [John 3:5; Titus 3:5] might enter the kingdom of heaven. Being entirely consecrated to the will of the Father, [John 4:34; 17:4] Jesus brought forth this new creation by means of His Paschal mystery; [2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15]

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<sup>172</sup> Letter to all the priests of the Church on Holy Thursday 1979 (April 8, 1979): *Insegnamenti* 11/1 (1979), 841-862.

<sup>173</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*: On the Celibacy of the Priest, The Holy See, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1967, nos. 17-20.

<sup>174</sup> *Decree on the Priestly Ministry and Life*, no. 16: AAS 58 (1966), 1015 [TPS XI, 461].

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>176</sup> See Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, no. 8: AAS 58 (1966), 820 [TPS XI, 75-76].

<sup>177</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, no. 28: AAS 57 (1965), 33-36 [TPS X, 378-79]; *Decree on the Priestly Ministry and Life*, no. 2: AAS 58 (1966), 991-93 [TPS XI, 442-44].



thus, He introduced into time and into the world a new form of life which is sublime and divine and which radically transforms the human condition [Galatians 3:28].”

#### *Matrimony and Celibacy*

20. “Matrimony, according to the will of God, continues the work of the first creation; [Genesis 2:18] and considered within the total plan of salvation, it even acquired a new meaning and a new value. Jesus, in fact, has restored its original dignity, [Matthew 19:3-8] has honored it [John 2:1-11] and has raised it to the dignity of a sacrament and of a mysterious symbol of His own union with the Church. [Ephesians 5:32]. Thus, Christian couples walk together toward their heavenly fatherland in the exercise of mutual love, in the fulfillment of their particular obligations, and in striving for the sanctity proper to them. But Christ, ‘Mediator of a superior covenant,’ [Hebrews 8:6] has also opened a new way, in which the human creature adheres wholly and directly to the Lord, and is concerned only with Him and with His affairs; [1 Corinthians 7:33-35] thus, he manifests in a clearer and more complete way the profoundly transforming reality of the New Testament.”

## **Day 132**<sup>178</sup>

#### *Christ's Example*

21. “Christ, the only Son of the Father, by the power of the Incarnation itself was made Mediator between heaven and earth, between the Father and the human race. Wholly in accord with this mission, Christ remained throughout His whole life in the state of celibacy, which signified His total dedication to the service of God and men. This deep concern between celibacy and the priesthood of Christ is reflected in those whose fortune it is to share in the dignity and mission of the Mediator and eternal Priest; this sharing will be more perfect the freer the sacred minister is from the bonds of flesh and blood<sup>179</sup>.”

#### *The Motive for Celibacy*

22. “Jesus, who selected the first ministers of salvation, wished them to be introduced to the understanding of the ‘mysteries of the kingdom of heaven,’ [Matthew 13:11; Mark 4:11; Luke 8:10] but He also wished them to be coworkers with God under a very special title, and His ambassadors [2 Corinthians 5:20]. He called them friends and brethren [John 15:15; 20:17], for whom He consecrated Himself so that they might be consecrated in truth [John 17:19]; He promised a more than abundant recompense to anyone who should leave home, family, wife and children for the sake of the kingdom of God [Luke 18:29-30]. More than this, in words filled with mystery and hope, He also commended an even more perfect consecration<sup>180</sup> to the kingdom of heaven by means of celibacy, as a special gift [Matthew 19:11]. The motive of this response to the divine call is the kingdom of heaven [Matthew 19:12]; similarly, this very kingdom [Luke 18:29-30], the Gospel [Mark 10:29-30] and the name of Christ [Matthew 19:29] motivate those called by Jesus to undertake the work of the apostolate, freely accepting its burdens, that they may participate the more closely in His lot.”

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<sup>178</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, nos. 21-23.

<sup>179</sup> See *Decree on the Priestly Ministry and Life*, no. 16: AAS 58 (1966), 1015-17 [TPS XI, 461-62].

<sup>180</sup> See *Decree on the Priestly Ministry and Life*, no. 16: AAS 58 (1966), 1015-17 [TPS XI, 461-62].

23. “To them this is the mystery of the newness of Christ, of all that He is and stands for; it is the sum of the highest ideals of the Gospel and of the kingdom; it is a particular manifestation of grace, which springs from the Paschal mystery of the Savior. This is what makes the choice of celibacy desirable and worthwhile to those called by our Lord Jesus. Thus they intend not only to participate in His priestly office, but also to share with Him His very condition of living.”

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## Day 133<sup>181</sup>

### *Fullness of Love*

24. “The response to the divine call is an answer of love to the love which Christ has shown us so sublimely [John 3:16; 15, 13]. This response is included in the mystery of that special love for souls who have accepted His most urgent appeals [Mark 10:21]. With a divine force, grace increases the longings of love. And love, when it is genuine, is all-embracing, stable and lasting, an irresistible spur to all forms of heroism. And so the free choice of sacred celibacy has always been considered by the Church ‘as a symbol of, and stimulus to, charity<sup>182</sup>’: it signifies a love without reservations; it stimulates to a charity which is open to all. In a life so completely dedicated and motivated, who can see the sign of spiritual narrowness or self seeking, and not see rather that celibacy is and ought to be a rare and very meaningful example of a life motivated by love, by which man expresses his own unique greatness? Who can doubt the moral and spiritual richness of such a life, consecrated not to any human ideal, no matter how noble, but to Christ and to His work to bring about a new form of humanity in all places and for all generations?”

### *Invitation to Study*

25. “This biblical and theological view associates our ministerial priesthood with the priesthood of Christ; the total and exclusive dedication of Christ to His mission of salvation provides reason and example for our assimilation to the form of charity and sacrifice proper to Christ our Savior. This vision seems to Us so profound and rich in truth, both speculative and practical, that We invite you, venerable brothers, and you, eager students of Christian doctrine and masters of the spiritual life, and all you priests who have gained a supernatural insight into your vocation, to persevere in the study of this vision, and to go deeply into the inner recesses and wealth of its reality. In this way, the bond between the priesthood and celibacy will more and more be seen as closely knit—as the mark of a heroic soul and the imperative call to unique and total love for Christ and His Church.”

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## **Excursus: Objections to Priestly Celibacy**

Encyclical of Pope Paul VI

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<sup>181</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, nos. 24-25.

<sup>182</sup> *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, no. 42: AAS 57 (1965), 48 [TPS X, 388].

on the Celibacy of the Priest  
*Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*<sup>183</sup>

*“To the Bishops, Priests and Faithful of the Whole Catholic World.*

Priestly celibacy has been guarded by the Church for centuries as a brilliant jewel, and retains its value undiminished even in our time when the outlook of men and the state of the world have undergone such profound changes.

Amid the modern stirrings of opinion, a tendency has also been manifested, and even a desire expressed, to ask the Church to re-examine this characteristic institution. It is said that in the world of our time the observance of celibacy has come to be difficult or even impossible.”

2. “This state of affairs is troubling consciences, perplexing some priests and young aspirants to the priesthood; it is a cause for alarm in many of the faithful and constrains Us to fulfill the promise We made to the Council Fathers. We told them that it was Our intention to give new luster and strength to priestly celibacy in the world of today<sup>184</sup>. Since saying this We have, over a considerable period of time earnestly implored the enlightenment and assistance of the Holy Spirit and have examined before God opinions and petitions which have come to Us from all over the world, notably from many pastors of God's Church.”

*Some Serious Questions*

3. “The great question concerning the sacred celibacy of the clergy in the Church has long been before Our mind in its deep seriousness: must that grave, ennobling obligation remain today for those who have the intention of receiving major orders? Is it possible and appropriate nowadays to observe such an obligation? Has the time not come to break the bond linking celibacy with the priesthood in the Church? Could the difficult observance of it not be made optional? Would this not be a way to help the priestly ministry and facilitate ecumenical approaches? And if the golden law of sacred celibacy is to remain, what reasons are there to show that it is holy and fitting? What means are to be taken to observe it, and how can it be changed from a burden to a help for the priestly life?”

4. “Our attention has rested particularly on the objections which have been and are still made in various forms against the retention of sacred celibacy. in virtue of Our apostolic office We are obliged by the importance, and indeed the complexity, of the subject to give faithful consideration to the facts and the problems they involve, at the same time bringing to them—as it is Our duty and Our mission to do—the light of truth which is Christ. Our intention is to do in all things the will of Him who has called Us to this office and to show what we are in the Church: the servant of the servants of God.”

OBJECTIONS AGAINST PRIESTLY CELIBACY

5. “It may be said that today ecclesiastical celibacy has been examined more penetratingly than ever before and in all its aspects. It has been examined from the doctrinal, historical, sociological, psychological and

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<sup>183</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, nos. 1-16.

<sup>184</sup> See letter of Oct. 10, 1965, to Cardinal Tisserant, read in the general session of the next day.

pastoral point of view. The intentions prompting this examination have frequently been basically correct although reports may sometimes have distorted them.”

“Let us look openly at the principal objections against the law that links ecclesiastical celibacy with the priesthood.”

“The first seems to come from the most authoritative source, the New Testament which preserves the teaching of Christ and the Apostles. It does not openly demand celibacy of sacred ministers but proposes it rather as a free act of obedience to a special vocation or to a special spiritual gift [Matthew 19:11-12]. Jesus Himself did not make it a prerequisite in His choice of the Twelve, nor did the Apostles for those who presided over the first Christian communities [Timothy 3:2-5; Titus 1:5-6].”

#### *The Fathers of the Church*

6. “The close relationship that the Fathers of the Church and ecclesiastical writers established over the centuries between the ministering priesthood and celibacy has its origin partly in a mentality and partly in historical circumstances far different from ours. In patristic texts we more frequently find exhortations to the clergy to abstain from marital relations rather than to observe celibacy; and the reasons justifying the perfect chastity of the Church's ministers seem often to be based on an overly pessimistic view of man's earthly condition or on a certain notion of the purity necessary for contact with sacred things. In addition, it is said that the old arguments no longer are in harmony with the different social and cultural milieus in which the Church today, through her priests, is called upon to work.”

#### *Vocation and Celibacy*

7. “Many see a difficulty in the fact that in the present discipline concerning celibacy the gift of a vocation to the priesthood is identified with that of perfect chastity as a state of life for God's ministers. And so people ask whether it is right to exclude from the priesthood those who, it is claimed, have been called to the ministry without having been called to lead a celibate life.”

#### *The Shortage of Priests*

8. “It is asserted, moreover, that the maintaining of priestly celibacy in the Church does great harm in those regions where the shortage of the clergy—a fact recognized with sadness and deplored by the same Council<sup>185</sup>—gives rise to critical situations: that it prevents the full realization of the divine plan of salvation and at times jeopardizes the very possibility of the initial proclamation of the Gospel. Thus the disquieting decline in the ranks of the clergy is attributed by some to the heavy burden of the obligation of celibacy.”

9. “Then there are those who are convinced that a married priesthood would remove the occasions for infidelity, waywardness and distressing defections which hurt and sadden the whole Church. These also maintain that a married priesthood would enable Christ's ministers to witness more fully to Christian living by including the witness of married life, from which they are excluded by their state of life.”

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<sup>185</sup> See Second Vatican Council, *Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church*, no. 35: AAS 58 (1966), 690 [TPS XI, 195-96]; *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*, no. 1: AAS 58 (1966), 837 [TPS XI, 119-20]; *Decree on the Priestly Ministry and Life*, nos. 10 ff.: AAS 58 (1966), 1007-08 [TPS XI, 455-56]; *Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church*, nos. 19, 38; AAS 58 (1966), 969, 984 [TPS XI, 426, 437-38].

### *Human Values*

10. “There are also some who strongly maintain that priests by reason of their celibacy find themselves in a situation that is not only against nature but also physically and psychologically detrimental to the development of a mature and well-balanced human personality. And so it happens, they say, that priests often become hard and lacking in human warmth; that, excluded from sharing fully the life and destiny of the rest of their brothers, they are obliged to live a life of solitude which leads to bitterness and discouragement.”

“So they ask: Don't all these things indicate that celibacy does unwarranted violence to nature and unjustifiably disparages human values which have their source in the divine work of creation and have been made whole through the work of the Redemption accomplished by Christ?”

### *Inadequate Formation*

11. “Again, in view of the way in which a candidate for the priesthood comes to accept an obligation as momentous as this, the objection is raised that in practice this acceptance results not from an authentically personal decision, but rather from an attitude of passivity, the fruit of a formation that neither is adequate nor makes sufficient allowance for human liberty. For the degree of knowledge and power of decision of a young person and his psychological and physical maturity fall far below—or at any rate are disproportionate to—the seriousness of the obligation he is assuming, its real difficulties and its permanence.”

12. “We well realize that there are other objections that can be made against priestly celibacy. This is a very complex question, which touches intimately upon the very meaning of being alive, yet is penetrated and resolved by the light of divine revelation. A never-ending series of difficulties will present themselves to those who cannot ‘receive this precept’ [Matthew 19:11] and who do not know or have forgotten it is a ‘gift of God,’ [John 4:10] and who moreover are unaware of the loftier reasoning, wonderful efficacy and abundant riches of this new insight into life.”

### *Testimony of the Past and Present*

13. “The sum of these objections would appear to drown out the solemn and age-old voice of the pastors of the Church and of the masters of the spiritual life, and to nullify the living testimony of the countless ranks of saints and faithful ministers of God, for whom celibacy has been the object of the total and generous gift of themselves to the mystery of Christ, as well as its outward sign. But no, this voice, still strong and untroubled, is the voice not just of the past but of the present too. Ever intent on the realities of today, we cannot close our eyes to this magnificent, wonderful reality: that there are still today in God's holy Church, in every part of the world where she exercises her beneficent influence, great numbers of her ministers—subdeacons, deacons, priests and bishops—who are living their life of voluntary and consecrated celibacy in the most exemplary way.”

“Nor can we overlook the immense ranks of men and women in religious life, of laity and of young people too, united in the faithful observance of perfect chastity. They live in chastity, not out of disdain for the gift of life, but because of a greater love for that new life which springs from the Paschal mystery. They live this life of courageous self-denial and spiritual joyfulness with exemplary fidelity and also with relative facility. This magnificent phenomenon bears testimony to an exceptional facet of the kingdom of God living in the

midst of modern society, to which it renders humble and beneficial service as the ‘light of the world’ and the ‘salt of the earth’ [Matthew 5:13-14]. We cannot withhold the expression of Our admiration; the spirit of Christ is certainly breathing here.”

#### *The Law of Celibacy Confirmed*

14. “Hence We consider that the present law of celibacy should today continue to be linked to the ecclesiastical ministry. This law should support the minister in his exclusive, definitive and total choice of the unique and supreme love of Christ; it should uphold him in the entire dedication of himself to the public worship of God and to the service of the Church; it should distinguish his state of life both among the faithful and in the world at large.”

15. “The gift of the priestly vocation dedicated to the divine worship and to the religious and pastoral service of the People of God, is undoubtedly distinct from that which leads a person to choose celibacy as a state of consecrated life<sup>186</sup>. But the priestly vocation, although inspired by God, does not become definitive or operative without having been tested and accepted by those in the Church who hold power and bear responsibility for the ministry serving the ecclesial community. It is, therefore, the task of those who hold authority in the Church to determine, in accordance with the varying conditions of time and place, who in actual practice are to be considered suitable candidates for the religious and pastoral service of the Church, and what should be required of them.”

#### *Purpose of the Encyclical*

16. “In a spirit of faith, therefore, We look on this occasion afforded Us by Divine Providence as a favorable opportunity for setting forth anew, and in a way more suited to the men of our time, the fundamental reasons for sacred celibacy. If difficulties against faith ‘can stimulate our minds to a more accurate and deeper understanding’ of it<sup>187</sup>, the same is true of the ecclesiastical discipline which guides and directs the life of the faithful.”

“We are deeply moved by the joy this occasion gives Us of contemplating the richness in virtue and the beauty of the Church of Christ. These may not always be immediately apparent to the human eye, because they derive from the love of the divine Head of the Church and because they are revealed in the perfection of holiness [Ephesians 5:25-27] which moves the human spirit to admiration, and which human resources cannot adequately explain.”

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<sup>186</sup> See above, nos. 5 and 7.

<sup>187</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today*, no. 62: AAS 58 (1966), 1082 [TPS XI, 300].

# Week 20

## Preview of Next Week

### Prayer:

This week concludes the selected passages from *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, Pope St. Paul VI's encyclical on priestly celibacy.

- On Day 140, there is an *excursus* that gives the historical foundation of the Church's teachings on priestly celibacy, which - in addition to the rest of the encyclical - responds to the objections put forward against it. Schedule time apart from your dedicated prayer time to read this *excursus*.

## Study

In order to finish *To Save A Thousand Souls* within the 180 days, you will need to read two pages per day; by the end of Week 20, you should have made it to page 280, but do not limit yourself to that if you can and want to read more.

## Review of Past Week

### Prayer:

- I fulfilled my commitment to daily, personal prayer \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I fulfilled my commitment to the Liturgy of the Hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I slept for at least seven hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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### Sacraments:

- I fulfilled my commitment to daily Mass this week. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to regular Confession. Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Virtue:**

- I was faithful to my bodily fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I was faithful to my digital fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I was faithful to my dating fast. Yes / No
- I was faithful to the necessary practices from [www.hismercyendures.org](http://www.hismercyendures.org). Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Service:**

- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to altar serving. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to spiritual works of mercy. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to corporal works of mercy. Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Study:**

- I fulfilled my commitment to spiritual reading this week: Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my response, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Planning Ahead**

- What day(s) will I go to daily Mass this week? S M T W Th F S
- What day will I go to Confession this week? S M T W Th F S or [ ] not this week



- Am I scheduled for altar service this week? Spiritual works of mercy? Corporal works of mercy? Yes / No

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- When will I make extra time to read the excursus on the objections to celibacy this week? -----

- Have I scheduled my next spiritual direction? Yes / No

- Have I scheduled my seminary visit? Yes / No

- Have I scheduled my discernment retreat? Yes / No

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## Day 134<sup>188</sup>

### *Ecclesiological Significance*

26. “‘Laid hold of by Christ’ [Phillipians 3:12] unto the complete abandonment of one's entire self to Him, the priest takes on a closer likeness to Christ, even in the love with which the eternal Priest has loved the Church His Body and offered Himself entirely for her sake, in order to make her a glorious, holy and immaculate Spouse [Ephesians 5:25-27].”

“The consecrated celibacy of the sacred ministers actually manifests the virginal love of Christ for the Church, and the virginal and supernatural fecundity of this marriage, by which the children of God are born, ‘not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh<sup>189</sup>’ [John 1:13].”

27. “The priest dedicates himself to the service of the Lord Jesus and of His Mystical Body with complete liberty, which is made easier by his total offering, and thus he depicts more fully the unity and harmony of the priestly life<sup>190</sup>. His ability for listening to the word of God and for prayer increases. Indeed, the word of God, as preserved by the Church, stirs up vibrant and profound echoes in the priest who daily meditates on it, lives it and preaches it to the faithful.”

### *The Divine Office and Prayer*

28. “Like Christ Himself, His minister is wholly and solely intent on the things of God and the Church [Luke 2:49; 1 Corinthians 7:32-33], and he imitates the great High priest who lives ever in the presence of God in order to intercede in our favor [Hebrews 9:24; 7:25]. So he receives joy and encouragement unceasingly from the attentive and devout recitation of the Divine Office, by which he dedicates his voice to the Church who prays together with her Spouse<sup>191</sup>, and he recognizes the necessity of continuing his diligence at prayer, which is the profoundly priestly occupation [Acts 6:4].”

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<sup>188</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, nos. 26-28.

<sup>189</sup> See *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, no. 42: AAS 57 (1965), 48 [TPS X, 388]; *Decree on the Priestly Ministry and Life*, no. 16: AAS 58 (1966), 1015-17 [TPS XI, 461-62].

<sup>190</sup> See *Decree on the Priestly Ministry and Life*, no. 14: AAS 58 (1966), 1013 [TPS XI, 459-60].

<sup>191</sup> *Decree on the Priestly Ministry and Life*, no. 13: AAS 58 (1966), 1012 [TPS XI, 458-59].

## Day 135<sup>192</sup>

### *A Full and Fruitful Life*

29. “The rest of a priest's life also acquires a greater richness of meaning and sanctifying power. In fact, his individual efforts at his own sanctification find new incentives in the ministry of grace and in the ministry of the Eucharist, in which “the whole spiritual good of the Church is contained<sup>193</sup>,” acting in the person of Christ, the priest unites himself most intimately with the offering, and places on the altar his entire life, which bears the marks of the holocaust.”

30. “What other considerations can We offer to describe the increase of the priest's power, his service, his love and sacrifice for the entire people of God? Christ spoke of Himself when He said: ‘Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit’ [John 12:24-25]. And the Apostle Paul did not hesitate to expose himself to a daily death in order to obtain among his faithful glory in Christ Jesus [1 Corinthians 15:31]. In a similar way, by a daily dying to himself and by giving up the legitimate love of a family of his own for the love of Christ and of His kingdom, the priest will find the glory of an exceedingly rich and fruitful life in Christ, because like Him and in Him, he loves and dedicates himself to all the children of God.”

31. “In the community of the faithful committed to his charge, the priest represents Christ. Thus, it is most fitting that in all things he should reproduce the image of Christ and in particular follow His example, both in his personal and in his apostolic life. To his children in Christ, the priest is a sign and a pledge of that sublime and new reality which is the kingdom of God; he dispenses it and he possesses it to a more perfect degree. Thus he nourishes the faith and hope of all Christians, who, as such, are bound to observe chastity according to their proper state of life.”

### *The Pastoral Efficacy of Celibacy*

32. “The consecration to Christ under an additional and lofty title like celibacy evidently gives to the priest, even in the practical field, the maximum efficiency and the best disposition of mind, mentally and emotionally, for the continuous exercise of a perfect charity<sup>194</sup>. This charity will permit him to spend himself wholly for the welfare of all, in a fuller and more concrete way [2 Corinthians 12:15]. It also obviously guarantees him a greater freedom and flexibility in the pastoral ministry<sup>195</sup>, in his active and living presence in the world, to which Christ has sent him [John 17:18] so that he may pay fully to all the children of God the debt due to them [Romans 1:14].”

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<sup>192</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, nos. 29-31..

<sup>193</sup> *Decree on the Priestly Ministry and Life*, no. 5: AAS 58 (1966), 997 [TPS XI, 447].

<sup>194</sup> See Second Vatican Council, *Decree on Training for the Priesthood*, no. 10: AAS 58 (1966), 719-20 [TPS XI, 23-24].

<sup>195</sup> See *Decree on the Priestly Ministry and Life*, no. 16: AAS 58 (1966), 1015-17 [TPS XI, 461 -62].

## Day 136<sup>196</sup>

### *Eschatological Significance*

33. “The kingdom of God, which ‘is not of this world,’ [John 18:36] is present here on earth in mystery, and will reach its perfection only with the glorious coming of the Lord Jesus<sup>197</sup>. The Church here below constitutes the seed and the beginning of this kingdom. And as she continues to grow slowly but surely, she longs for the perfect kingdom and ardently desires with all her energy to unite herself with her King in glory<sup>198</sup>.”

“The pilgrim People of God are on a journey through the vicissitudes of this life toward their heavenly homeland [Philippians 3:20], where the divine sonship of the redeemed [1 John 3:2] will be fully revealed and where the transformed loveliness of the Spouse of the Lamb of God will shine completely<sup>199</sup>.”

### *A Sign of Heavenly Treasures*

34. “Our Lord and Master has said that ‘in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven’ [Matthew 22:30]. In the world of man, so deeply involved in earthly concerns and too often enslaved by the desires of the flesh [1 John 2:16], the precious and almost divine gift of perfect continence for the kingdom of heaven stands out precisely as ‘a special token of the rewards of heaven<sup>200</sup>,’ it proclaims the presence on earth of the final stages of salvation [1 Corinthians 7:29-31] with the arrival of a new world, and in a way it anticipates the fulfillment of the kingdom as it sets forth its supreme values which will one day shine forth in all the children of God. This continence, therefore, stands as a testimony to the ever-continuing progress of the People of God toward the final goal of their earthly pilgrimage, and as a stimulus for all to raise their eyes to the things above, ‘where Christ is seated at the right hand of God’ and where ‘our life is hid with Christ in God’ until it appears ‘with him in glory’ [Colossians 3:1-4].”

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## Day 137<sup>201</sup>

### CELIBACY AND HUMAN VALUES

50. “As We said above [no. 10], the Church is not unaware that the choice of consecrated celibacy, since it involves a series of hard renunciations which affect the very depths of a man, presents also grave difficulties and problems to which the men of today are particularly sensitive. In fact, it might seem that celibacy conflicts with the solemn recognition of human values by the Church in the recent Council. And yet more careful consideration reveals that this sacrifice of the human love experienced by most men in family life and given up by the priest for the love of Christ, is really a singular tribute paid to that great love. For it is universally recognized that man has always offered to God that which is worthy of both the giver and the receiver.”

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<sup>196</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, nos. 33-34.

<sup>197</sup> See *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today*, no. 39: AAS 58 (1966), 1056-57 [TPS XI, 282-83].

<sup>198</sup> See *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, no. 5: AAS 57 (1965), 7-8 [TPS X, 361].

<sup>199</sup> See *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, no. 48: AAS 57 (1965), 53-54 [TPS X, 391-92].

<sup>200</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of the Religious Life*, no. 12: AAS 58 (1966), 107 [TPS XI, 147].

<sup>201</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, nos. 50-52.

## *Grace and Nature*

51. “Moreover, the Church cannot and should not fail to realize that the choice of celibacy—provided that it is made with human and Christian prudence and responsibility—is governed by grace which, far from destroying or doing violence to nature, elevates it and imparts to it supernatural powers and vigor. God, who has created and redeemed man, knows what He can ask of him and gives him everything necessary to be able to do what his Creator and Redeemer asks of him. St. Augustine, who had fully and painfully experienced in himself the nature of man, exclaimed: ‘Grant what You command, and command what You will<sup>202</sup>.’”

52. “A true knowledge of the real difficulties of celibacy is very useful, even necessary, for the priest, so that he may be fully aware of what his celibacy requires in order to be genuine and beneficial. But with equal fidelity to the truth, these difficulties must not be given greater value or weight than they actually have in the human or religious sphere, or be declared impossible of solution.”

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## **Day 138**<sup>203</sup>

### *Celibacy Not Against Nature*

53. “Considering what contemporary scholarly investigation has ascertained, it is not right to continue repeating [no. 10] that celibacy is against nature because it runs counter to lawful physical, psychic and affective needs, or to claim that a completely mature human personality demands fulfillment of these needs. Man, created to God's image and likeness [Genesis 1:26-27], is not just flesh and blood; the sexual instinct is not all that he has; man has also, and pre-eminently, understanding, choice, freedom, and thanks to these powers he is, and must remain, the chief work of creation; they give him mastery over his physical, mental and emotional appetites.”

54. “The true, profound reason for dedicated celibacy is, as We have said, the choice of a closer and more complete relationship with the mystery of Christ and the Church for the good of all mankind: in this choice there is no doubt that those highest human values are able to find their fullest expression.”

### *An Exaltation of Man*

55. “The choice of celibacy does not connote ignorance of or contempt for the sexual instinct and man's capacity for giving himself in love. That would certainly do damage to his physical and psychological balance. On the contrary, it demands clear understanding, careful self-control and a wise elevation of the mind to higher realities. In this way celibacy sets the whole man on a higher level and makes an effective contribution to his perfection.”

### *The Development of Personality*

56. “We readily grant that the natural and lawful desire a man has to love a woman and to raise a family is renounced by the celibate in sacred orders; but it cannot be said that marriage and the family are the only

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<sup>202</sup> St. Augustine, *Confessions*, X, 29, 40: PL 32. 796.

<sup>203</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, nos. 53-56.

way for fully developing the human person. In the priest's heart love is by no means extinct. His charity is drawn from the purest source [1 John 4:8-16], practiced in the imitation of God and Christ, and is no less demanding and real than any other genuine love [1 John 3:16-18]. It gives the priest a limitless horizon, deepens and gives breadth to his sense of responsibility—a mark of mature personality—and inculcates in him, as a sign of a higher and greater fatherhood, a generosity and refinement of heart [1 Thessalonians 2:11; 1 Corinthians 6:13; Galatians 4:19; 1 Timothy 5:1-2] which offer a superlative enrichment.”

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## Day 139<sup>204</sup>

### *The Testimony of Total Dedication*

57. “All the People of God must give testimony to the mystery of Christ and His kingdom, but this witnessing does not take the same form for all. The Church leaves to her married children the function of giving the necessary testimony of a genuinely and fully Christian married and family life. She entrusts to her priests the testimony of a life wholly dedicated to pondering and seeking the new and delightful realities of God's kingdom.”

“If this means that the priest is without a direct personal experience of married life, he nevertheless will be able through his training, his ministry and the grace of his office, to gain even deeper insights into every human yearning. This will allow him to meet problems of this kind at their source and give solid support by his advice and assistance to married persons and Christian families [1 Corinthians 2:15]. For the Christian family, the example of the priest who is living his life of celibacy to the full will underscore the spiritual dimension of every love worthy of the name, and his personal sacrifice will merit for the faithful united in the holy bond of matrimony the grace of a true union.”

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## Day 140<sup>205</sup>

### *The Priest and Solitude*

58. “By reason of his celibacy the priest is a man alone: that is true, but his solitude is not meaningless emptiness because it is filled with God and the brimming riches of His kingdom. Moreover, he has prepared himself for this solitude—which should be an internal and external plenitude of charity—if he has chosen it with full understanding, and not through any proud desire to be different from the rest of men, or to withdraw himself from common responsibilities, or to alienate himself from his brothers, or to show contempt for the world. Though set apart from the world, the priest is not separated from the People of God, because he has been ‘appointed to act on behalf of men’ [Hebrews 5:1], since he is ‘consecrated’ completely to charity [1 Corinthians 14:4] and to the work for which the Lord has chosen him<sup>206</sup>.”

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<sup>204</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, Sec. 57.

<sup>205</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, nos. 58-59.

<sup>206</sup> See *Decree on the Priestly Ministry and Life*, no. 3: AAS 58 (1966), 993-95 [TPS XI, 444-45].

59. “At times loneliness will weigh heavily on the priest, but he will not for that reason regret having generously chosen it. Christ, too, in the most tragic hours of His life was alone—abandoned by the very ones whom He had chosen as witnesses to, and companions of, His life, and whom He had loved ‘to the end’ [John 13:1]—but He stated, ‘I am not alone, for the Father is with me’ [John 16:32]. He who has chosen to belong completely to Christ will find, above all, in intimacy with Him and in His grace, the power of spirit necessary to banish sadness and regret and to triumph over discouragement. He will not be lacking the protection of the Virgin Mother of Jesus nor the motherly solicitude of the Church, to whom he has given himself in service. He will not be without the kindly care of his father in Christ, his bishop; nor will the fraternal companionship of his fellow priests and the love of the entire People of God, most fruitful of consolations, be lacking to him. And if hostility, lack of confidence and the indifference of his fellow men make his solitude quite painful, he will thus be able to share, with dramatic clarity, the very experience of Christ, as an apostle who must not be ‘greater than he who sent him’ [John 13:16; 15:18], as a friend admitted to the most painful and most glorious secret of his divine Friend who has chosen him to bring forth the mysterious fruit of life in his own life, which is only apparently one of death [John 15:15-16, 20].”

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## **Excursus: Teachings of the Church through the Centuries, Prayers for Vocations<sup>207</sup>**

### CELIBACY IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

35. “Although it would be highly instructive to go through the writings of past centuries on ecclesiastical celibacy, this would take so long that We will let a brief account suffice. In Christian antiquity the Fathers and ecclesiastical writers testify to the spread through the East and the West of the voluntary practice of celibacy by sacred ministers<sup>208</sup> because of its profound suitability for their total dedication to the service of Christ and His Church.”

36. “From the beginning of the 4th century, the Church of the West strengthened, spread and confirmed this practice by means of various provincial councils and through the supreme pontiffs<sup>209</sup>. More than anyone else, the supreme pastors and teachers of the Church of God, the guardians and interpreters of the patrimony of the faith and of holy Christian practices, promoted, defended, and restored ecclesiastical celibacy in successive eras of history, even when they met opposition from the clergy itself and when the practices of a decadent society did not favor the heroic demands of virtue. The obligation of celibacy was then solemnly sanctioned by the Sacred Ecumenical Council of Trent<sup>210</sup> and finally included in the Code of Canon Law<sup>211</sup>.”

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<sup>207</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, nos. 35-49.

<sup>208</sup> See tertullian, *De exhort. castitatis*, 13: PL 2. 930; St. Epiphanius, *Adv. Haer.* II, 48.9 and 59.4: PG 41.869, 1025; St. Efreem, *Carmina nisibena*, XVIII, XIX: ed. G. Bickell, Leipzig (1866), p. 122; Eusebius of Caesarea, *Demonstr. evan.*, 1.9: PG 22.81; St. Cyril of Jerusalem. *Catechesis*, 12.25: PG 33.757; St. Ambrose, *De officiis ministr.*, 1.50: PL 16.97 ff.; St. Augustine, *De moribus Eccl. cath.*, 1.32: PL 32.1339; St. Jerome, *Adversus Vigilantium*, 2: PL 23.340-41; Bishop Synesius of Ptolemais, *Epist.* 105: PG 66.1485.

<sup>209</sup> First done at the Council of Elvira, c. 300, can. 33: Mansi II, 11.

<sup>210</sup> Sess. XXIV, can. 9-10.

<sup>211</sup> Can. 132, §1.

37. “The most recent sovereign pontiffs who preceded Us, making use of their doctrinal knowledge and spurred on by ardent zeal, strove to enlighten the clergy on this matter and to urge them to its observance<sup>212</sup>. We do not wish to fail to pay homage to them, especially to Our well-loved immediate predecessor, whose memory is still fresh in the hearts of men all over the world. During the Roman Synod, with the sincere approval of all the clergy of the city, he spoke as follows: ‘It deeply hurts Us that . . . anyone can dream that the Church will deliberately or even suitably renounce what from time immemorial has been, and still remains, one of the purest and noblest glories of her priesthood. The law of ecclesiastical celibacy and the efforts necessary to preserve it always recall to mind the struggles of the heroic times when the Church of Christ had to fight for and succeeded in obtaining her threefold glory, always an emblem of victory, that is, the Church of Christ, free, chaste and catholic<sup>213</sup>.’”

#### *The Church of the East*

38. “If the legislation of the Eastern Church is different in the matter of discipline with regard to clerical celibacy, as was finally established by the Council of Trullo held in the year 692<sup>214</sup>, and which has been clearly recognized by the Second Vatican Council<sup>215</sup>, this is due to the different historical background of that most noble part of the Church, a situation which the Holy Spirit has providentially and supernaturally influenced.”

“We Ourselves take this opportunity to express Our esteem and Our respect for all the clergy of the Eastern Churches, and to recognize in them examples of fidelity and zeal which make them worthy of sincere veneration.”

39. “We find further comforting reasons for continuing to adhere to the observance of the discipline of clerical celibacy in the exaltation of virginity by the Eastern Fathers. We hear within Us, for example, the voice of St. Gregory of Nyssa, reminding us that ‘the life of virginity is the image of the blessedness that awaits us in the life to come<sup>216</sup>.’ We are no less assured by St. John Chrysostom’s treatise on the priesthood, which is still a fruitful subject for reflection. Intent on throwing light on the harmony which must exist between the private life of him who ministers at the altar and the dignity of the order to which his sacred duties belong, he affirmed: ‘. . . it is becoming that he who accepts the priesthood be as pure as if he were in heaven<sup>217</sup>.’”

40. “Further, it is by no means futile to observe that in the East only celibate priests are ordained bishops, and priests themselves cannot contract marriage after their ordination to the priesthood. This indicates that these venerable Churches also possess to a certain extent the principle of a celibate priesthood and even of the appropriateness of celibacy for the Christian priesthood, of which the bishops possess the summit and fullness<sup>218</sup>.”

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<sup>212</sup> See St. Pius X, apost. exhortation *Haerent animo*: AAS 41 (1908), 555-57; Benedict XV, letter to Francis Kordac, Archbishop of Prague: AAS 12 (1920), 57-58; consistorial address, Dec. 16, 1920: AAS 12 (1920), 585-88; Pius XI, encyc. letter *Ad catholici sacerdotii*: AAS 28 (1936), 24-30; Pius XII, apost. exhortation *Menti Nostrae*: AAS 42.

<sup>213</sup> Second address, Jan. 26, 1960: AAS 52 (1960), 226.

<sup>214</sup> Can. 6, 12, 13, 48; Mansi XI, 944-48, 965.

<sup>215</sup> See *Decree on the Priestly Ministry and Life*, no. 16: AAS 58 (1966), 1015-16 [TPS XI, 461-62].

<sup>216</sup> *De Virginitate*, 13: PG 381-82.

<sup>217</sup> *De Sacerdotio*, 1, 111: PG 48. 642.

<sup>218</sup> *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, nos. 21, 28, 64: AAS 57 (1965), 24-25; 33-36; 64 [TPS X, 372-73, 378-79, 398].

## *The Tradition of the Western Church*

41. “In any case, the Church of the West cannot weaken her faithful observance of her own tradition. Nor can she be regarded as having followed for centuries a path which instead of favoring the spiritual richness of individual souls and of the People of God, has in some way compromised it, or of having stifled, with arbitrary juridical prescriptions, the free expansion of the most profound realities of nature and of grace.”

### *Particular Cases*

42. “In virtue of the fundamental norm of the government of the Catholic Church, to which We alluded above<sup>219</sup>, while on the one hand, the law requiring a freely chosen and perpetual celibacy of those who are admitted to Holy Orders remains unchanged, on the other hand, a study may be allowed of the particular circumstances of married sacred ministers of Churches or other Christian communities separated from the Catholic communion, and of the possibility of admitting to priestly functions those who desire to adhere to the fullness of this communion and to continue to exercise the sacred ministry. The circumstances must be such, however, as not to prejudice the existing discipline regarding celibacy.”

“And that the authority of the Church does not hesitate to exercise her power in this matter can be seen from the recent Ecumenical Council, which foresaw the possibility of conferring the holy diaconate on men of mature age who are already married<sup>220</sup>.”

43. “All this, however, does not signify a relaxation of the existing law, and must not be interpreted as a prelude to its abolition. There are better things to do than to promote this hypothesis, which tears down that vigor and love in which celibacy finds security and happiness, and which obscures the true doctrine that justifies its existence and exalts its splendor. It would be much better to promote serious studies in defense of the spiritual meaning and moral value of virginity and celibacy<sup>221</sup>.”

### *The Mind of the Council*

44. “Holy virginity is a very special gift. Nevertheless, the whole present-day Church, solemnly and universally represented by the pastors responsible for her welfare (with due respect, as We have said, for the discipline of the Eastern Churches), manifested her absolute faith ‘in the Holy Spirit that the grace of leading a celibate life, so desirable in the priesthood of the New Testament, will be readily granted by God the Father if those who by ordination share the priesthood of Christ humbly and earnestly ask it together with the whole Church<sup>222</sup>.’”

### *The Prayer of the People of God*

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<sup>219</sup> See above, no. 15.

<sup>220</sup> See *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, no. 29: AAS 57 (1965), 36 [TPS X, 380].

<sup>221</sup> See *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, no. 29: AAS 57 (1965), 47-49 [TPS X, 387-88].

<sup>222</sup> *Decree on the Priestly Ministry and Life*, no. 16: AAS 58 (1966), 1015-16 [TPS XI, 462].



45. “We wholeheartedly call on the entire People of God to do their duty in bringing about an increase in priestly vocations<sup>223</sup>. We ask them fervently to beg the Father of all, the divine Spouse of the Church, and the Holy Spirit, her principle of life, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Christ and of His Church, to pour out, especially at present, this divine gift, which the Father certainly does not wish to give stintingly. They should also fervently pray, in like manner, that souls may dispose themselves to receive this gift by a profound faith and a generous love. In this way, in our world which needs God's glory [Romans 3:23], priests, ever more perfectly conformed to the one and supreme Priest, will be a real glory to Christ [2 Corinthians 8:23], and, through them, ‘the glory of the grace’ of God will be magnified in the world of today [Ephesians 1:6].”

46. “Yes, venerable and well-beloved brothers in the priesthood, whom We cherish ‘with the affection of Christ Jesus’ [Philippians 1:8], it is indeed this world in which we live, tormented by the pains of growth and change, justly proud of its human values and human conquests, which urgently needs the witness of lives consecrated to the highest and most sacred spiritual values. This witness is necessary in order that the rare and incomparable light radiating from the most sublime virtues of the spirit may not be wanting to our times.”

#### *The Hidden Wisdom of God*

47. “Our Lord Jesus Christ did not hesitate to confide the formidable task of evangelizing the then-known world to a handful of men to all appearances lacking in number and quality. He bade this little flock not to lose heart [Luke 12:32], for, thanks to His constant assistance [Matthew 28:20], through Him and with Him, they would overcome the world [John 16:33]. Jesus has also taught us that the kingdom of God has an intrinsic and unobservable dynamism which enables it to grow ‘without [man's] knowing it’ [Mark 4:26-29]. The harvest of God's kingdom is great, but the laborers, as in the beginning, are few. Actually, they have never been as numerous as human standards would have judged sufficient. But the heavenly King demands that we pray ‘the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest’ [Matthew 9:37-38]. The counsels and prudence of man cannot supersede the hidden wisdom of Him who, in the history of salvation, has challenged man's wisdom and power by His own foolishness and weakness [1 Corinthians 1:20-31].”

#### *The Courage of Faith*

48. “Supported by the power of faith, We express the Church's conviction on this matter. Of this she is certain: if she is prompter and more persevering in her response to grace, if she relies more openly and more fully on its secret but invincible power, if, in short, she bears more exemplary witness to the mystery of Christ, then she will never fall short in the performance of her salvific mission to the world—no matter how much opposition she faces from human ways of thinking or misrepresentations. We must all realize that we can do all things in Him who alone gives strength to souls [Philippians 4:13] and increase to His Church [1 Corinthians 3:67].”

49. “We are not easily led to believe that the abolition of ecclesiastical celibacy would considerably increase the number of priestly vocations: the contemporary experience of those Churches and ecclesial communities

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<sup>223</sup> See *Decree on Training for the Priesthood*, no. 2: AAS 58 (1966), 714-15 [TPS XI, 17-19]; *Decree on the Priestly Ministry and Life*, no. 11: AAS 58 (1966), 1008-09 [TPS XI, 455-56].

which allow their ministers to marry seems to prove the contrary. The causes of the decrease in vocations to the priesthood are to be found elsewhere—for example, in the fact that individuals and families have lost their sense of God and of all that is holy, their esteem for the Church as the institution of salvation through faith and the sacraments. The problem must be examined at its real source.”

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## Week 21

### Preview of Next Week

**Prayer:**

This week includes the selected passages from Pope St. John Paul II’s Wednesday Audiences, popularly known as “The Theology of the Body.”

**Study:**

In order to finish *To Save A Thousand Souls* within the 180 days, you will need to read two pages per day; by the end of Week 21, you should have made it to page 294, but do not limit yourself to that if you can and want to read more.

### Review of Past Week

**Prayer:**

- I fulfilled my commitment to daily, personal prayer \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I fulfilled my commitment to the Liturgy of the Hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I slept for at least seven hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Sacraments:**

- I fulfilled my commitment to daily Mass this week. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to regular Confession. Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Virtue:**

- I was faithful to my bodily fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I was faithful to my digital fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I was faithful to my dating fast. Yes / No
- I was faithful to the necessary practices from [www.hismercyendures.org](http://www.hismercyendures.org). Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Service:**

- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to altar serving. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to spiritual works of mercy. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to corporal works of mercy. Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Study:**

- I fulfilled my commitment to spiritual reading this week: Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my response, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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## Planning Ahead

- What day(s) will I go to daily Mass this week? S M T W Th F S
  - What day will I go to Confession this week? S M T W Th F S or [ ] not this week
  - Am I scheduled for altar service this week? Spiritual works of mercy? Corporal works of mercy? Yes / No
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- When will I make extra time to read the excursus on the historical foundations of priestly celibacy this week?
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- Have I scheduled my next spiritual direction? Yes / No
  - Have I scheduled my seminary visit? Yes / No
  - Have I scheduled my discernment retreat? Yes / No
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## Day 141

St. John Paul II  
General Audience  
24 March 1982

“Continence for the Sake of the Kingdom  
Meant to Have Spiritual Fulfillment<sup>224</sup>”

1. “We continue our reflections on celibacy and virginity for the kingdom of heaven. Continence for the kingdom of heaven is certainly linked to the revelation of the fact that in the kingdom of heaven people ‘will no longer marry’ [Matthew 22:30]. It is a charismatic sign. The human being, male and female, who, in the earthly situation where people usually marry [Luke 20:34], freely chooses continence for the kingdom of heaven, indicates that in that kingdom, which is the other world of the resurrection, people will no longer marry [Mark 12:25], because God will be ‘everything to everyone’ [1 Corinthians 15:28].”

“Such a human being, man and woman, indicates the eschatological virginity of the risen man. In him there will be revealed, I would say, the absolute and eternal nuptial meaning of the glorified body in union with God himself through the ‘face to face’ vision of him, and glorified also through the union of a perfect intersubjectivity. This will unite all who participate in the other world, men and women, in the mystery of the communion of saints.”

“Earthly continence for the kingdom of heaven is undoubtedly a sign that indicates this truth and this reality. It is a sign that the body, whose end is not the grave, is directed to glorification. Already by this very fact, continence for the kingdom of heaven is a witness among men that anticipates the future resurrection. However, this charismatic sign of the other world expresses the force and the most authentic dynamics of the mystery of the redemption of the body. Christ has inscribed this mystery in man's earthly history and it has been deeply rooted by him in this history. So, then, continence for the kingdom of heaven bears, above all,

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<sup>224</sup> Pope John Paul II, “Continence for the Sake of the Kingdom Meant to Have Spiritual Fulfillment,” *The Holy See, L'Osservatore Romano*, 1982, Page 3, no. 1.

the imprint of the likeness to Christ. In the work of redemption, he himself made this choice for the kingdom of heaven.”

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## Day 142

### *The Virginal Mystery*<sup>225</sup>

2. “Indeed, Christ's whole life, right from the beginning, was a discreet but clear distancing of himself from that which in the Old Testament had so profoundly determined the meaning of the body. Christ—as if against the expectations of the whole Old Testament tradition—was born of Mary, who, at the moment of the annunciation, clearly says of herself: ‘How can this be, since I know not man’ [Luke 1:34], and thereby professes her virginity. Though he is born of her like every other man, as a son of his mother, even though his coming into the world is accompanied by the presence of a man who is Mary's spouse and, in the eyes of the law and of men, her husband, nonetheless Mary's maternity is virginal. The virginal mystery of Joseph corresponds to this virginal maternity of Mary. Following the voice from on high, Joseph does not hesitate to ‘take Mary...for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit’ [Matthew 1:20].”

“Even though Jesus Christ's virginal conception and birth were hidden from men, even though in the eyes of his contemporaries of Nazareth he was regarded as ‘the carpenter's son’ [Matthew 13:55] [*ut putabatur filius Joseph*: Luke 3:23], the reality and essential truth of his conception and birth was in itself far removed from what in the Old Testament tradition was exclusively in favor of marriage, and which rendered continence incomprehensible and out of favor. Therefore, how could continence for the kingdom of heaven be understood, if the expected Messiah was to be David's descendant, and as was held, was to be a son of the royal stock according to the flesh? Only Mary and Joseph, who had lived the mystery of his conception and birth, became the first witnesses of a fruitfulness different from that of the flesh, that is, of a fruitfulness of the Spirit: ‘That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit’ [Matthew 1:20].”

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## Day 143

### *Example of Jesus*<sup>226</sup>

4. “This image [of fruitfulness in the Holy Spirit] had to be gradually revealed to the Church's awareness in the ever new generations of confessors of Christ. This happened when—together with the infancy Gospel—there was consolidated in them the certainty of the divine maternity of the Virgin, who had conceived by the Holy Spirit. Even though only indirectly—yet essentially and fundamentally—this certainly should help one to understand, on the one hand, the sanctity of marriage, and on the other, the disinterestedness in view of the kingdom of heaven, of which Christ had spoken to his disciples. Nonetheless, when he spoke to them about it for the first time (as attested by the evangelist Matthew in chapter 19:10-12),

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<sup>225</sup> Pope John Paul II, “Continence,” no. 2.

<sup>226</sup> Pope John Paul II, “Continence,” no. 4.

that great mystery of his conception and birth was completely unknown to them. It was hidden from them as it was from all the hearers and interlocutors of Jesus of Nazareth.”

“When Christ spoke of those who ‘had made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’ [Matthew 19:12], the disciples could understand it only on the basis of his personal example. Such a continence must have impressed itself on their consciousness as a particular trait of likeness to Christ, who had himself remained celibate ‘for the kingdom of heaven.’ In the tradition of the old covenant, marriage and procreative fruitfulness in the body were a religiously privileged condition. The departure from this tradition had to be effected especially on the basis of the example of Christ himself. Only little by little did it come to be realized that ‘for the sake of the kingdom of heaven’ attaches a particular meaning to that spiritual and supernatural fruitfulness of man which comes from the Holy Spirit (Spirit of God), and that fruitfulness, in a specific sense and in determined cases, is served precisely by continence for the kingdom of heaven.”

“More or less all these elements of Gospel awareness (that is, of an exact consciousness of the new covenant in Christ) concerning continence are found in Paul. We shall seek to show that at a suitable time. To sum up, we can say that the principal theme of today's reflection has been the relationship between continence for the kingdom of heaven, proclaimed by Christ, and the supernatural fruitfulness of the human spirit which comes from the Holy Spirit.”

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## Day 144

St. John Paul II  
*General Audience*  
*April 21, 1982*

“The Value of Continence Is Found in Love<sup>227</sup>”

1. “Let us continue our reflections on Christ's words about continence for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. It is impossible to understand fully the significance and the nature of continence if the last phrase of Christ's statement, ‘for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven,’ is not complete in its adequate, concrete and objective content. We have previously said that this phrase expresses the motive, or in a certain sense places in relief, the subjective purpose of Christ's call to continence. However, the expression in itself has an objective character. It indicates an objective reality for which individual persons, men and women, can ‘make themselves’ eunuchs (as Christ says). The reality of the Kingdom in Christ's statement according to Matthew [19:11-12] is defined in a precise, but at the same time general way, so as to be able to include all the determinations and particular meanings that are proper to it.”

7. “The Kingdom of Heaven is certainly the definitive fulfillment of the aspirations of all men, to whom Christ addressed his message. It is the fullness of the good that the human heart desires beyond the limits of all that can be his lot in this earthly life. It is the maximum fullness of God's bounty toward man. In his conversation with the Sadducees [Matthew 22:24-30; Mark 12:18-27; Luke 20:27-40], which we have previously analyzed, we

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<sup>227</sup> Pope John Paul II, “The Value of Continence is Found in Love,” *The Holy See, L'Osservatore Romano*, 1982, Page 3, nos. 1; 7; 9.

find other details about that kingdom, or rather about that other world. There are still more in the whole New Testament. Therefore, it seems that to clarify what the Kingdom of Heaven is for those who choose voluntary continence for its sake, the revelation of the nuptial relationship of Christ with the Church has a particular significance.”

9. “It is natural for the human heart to accept demands, even difficult ones, in the name of love for an ideal, and above all in the name of love for a person (love, in fact, is by its very nature directed toward a person). Therefore, in the call to continence for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven, first the disciples themselves, and then the whole living Tradition of the Church, will soon discover the love that is referred to Christ himself as the Spouse of the Church, the Spouse of souls, to whom He has given himself to the very limit, in the Paschal and Eucharistic Mystery.”

“In this way, continence for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven, the choice of virginity or celibacy for one's whole life, has become, in the experience of Christ's disciples and followers, the act of a particular response of love for the divine Spouse, and therefore has acquired the significance of an act of nuptial love, that is, a nuptial giving of oneself for the purpose of reciprocating in a particular way the nuptial love of the Redeemer: a giving of oneself understood as renunciation, but made above all out of love.”

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## Day 145

St. John Paul II  
*General Audience*  
30 June 1982

“The Unmarried Person is Anxious to Please the Lord<sup>228</sup>”

1. “Saint Paul, in explaining in the seventh chapter of the First Letter to the Corinthians the question of marriage and virginity (or continence for the sake of the kingdom of God), tries to give the reason why one who chooses marriage does well, while one who decides on a life of continence or virginity does better. He writes: ‘I tell you this, brothers, the time is already short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none....’ And then: ‘...those who buy, as though they had no goods; those who deal with the world, as though they had no dealings with it, for the form of this world is passing away. I want you to be free from anxieties...’ [1 Corinthians 7:29-32].”

6. “While Christ emphasized the greatness of the renunciation, inseparable from such a decision, Paul demonstrates above all what the kingdom of God must mean in the life of the person who has renounced marriage in view of it. While the triple parallelism of Christ's statement reaches its climax in the word that signifies the greatness of the renunciation voluntarily made [‘...and there are others who have become eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven:’ Matthew 19:12], Paul describes the situation with only one word: the ‘unmarried’ (*agamos*). Further on, however, he expresses the whole content of the expression

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<sup>228</sup> Pope John Paul II, “The Unmarried Person is Anxious to Please the Lord,” *The Holy See, L'Osservatore Romano*, 1982, Page 3, nos. 1; 6-7.

'kingdom of heaven' in a splendid synthesis. He says: 'The unmarried person is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord' [1 Corinthians 7:32]. Each word of this statement deserves a special analysis."

7. "The context of the word 'to be anxious' or 'to try' in the Gospel of Luke, Paul's disciple, indicates that one must truly seek only the kingdom of God [Luke 12:31], that which constitutes the better part, the *unum necessarium*, the one thing necessary [Luke 10:41]. Paul himself speaks directly about his 'anxiety for all the churches' [2 Corinthians 11:28], about his search for Christ through his concern for the problems of the brethren, for the members of the Body of Christ [Philippians 2:20-21; 1 Corinthians 12:25]. Already from this context the whole vast field of the 'anxiety' emerges, to which the unmarried can totally dedicate his mind, his toil, his heart. Man can 'be anxious' only about what is truly in his heart."

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## Day 146<sup>229</sup>

8. "In Paul's statement, the unmarried person is anxious about the affairs of the Lord (*ta tou kyriou*). With this concise expression, Paul embraces the entire objective reality of the kingdom of God. 'The earth is the Lord's and everything in it,' he himself will say a little further on in this letter [1 Corinthians 10:26; Psalm 24:1]." "The object of the Christian's concern is the whole world! But Paul, with the name 'Lord,' describes first of all Jesus Christ [Philippians 2:11]. Therefore the 'affairs of the Lord' signify in the first place the kingdom of Christ, his Body which is the Church [Colossians 1:18] and all that contributes to its growth. The unmarried person is anxious about all this. Therefore Paul, being in the full sense of the term the 'Apostle of Jesus Christ' [1 Corinthians 1:1] and minister of the Gospel [Colossians 1:23], writes to the Corinthians: 'I wish that all of you were as I myself am' [1 Corinthians 7:7]."

9. "Nevertheless, apostolic zeal and most fruitful activity do not yet exhaust what is contained in the Pauline motivation for continence. We could even say that their root or source is found in the second part of the sentence, which demonstrates the subjective reality of the kingdom of God: 'The unmarried person is anxious...how to please the Lord.' This observation embraces the whole field of man's personal relationship with God. 'To please God'—the expression is found in ancient books of the Bible [Deuteronomy 13:19]—is synonymous with life in God's grace and expresses the attitude of one who seeks God, of one who behaves according to his will so as to please him. In one of the last books of Sacred Scripture this expression becomes a theological synthesis of sanctity. Saint John applies it only once to Christ: 'I always do what is pleasing to him [the Father]' [John 8:29]. Saint Paul observes in his letter to the Romans that Christ 'did not please himself' [Romans 15:3]."

"Between these two observations all that makes up the content of 'pleasing God' is contained, understood in the New Testament as following in the footsteps of Christ."

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<sup>229</sup> Pope John Paul II, "The Unmarried Person" nos. 8-9.



“It seems that both parts of the Pauline expression overlap. In fact, to be anxious about what ‘pertains to the Lord,’ about the ‘affairs of the Lord,’ one must ‘please the Lord.’ On the other hand, one who pleases God cannot be closed in upon himself, but is open to the world, to everything that is to be led to Christ. These evidently are only two aspects of the same reality of God and his kingdom. Paul nevertheless had to distinguish them in order to show more clearly the nature and the possibility of continence ‘for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.’”

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## Day 147

Pope John Paul II

*General Audience*

*Wednesday 7 July 1982*

”Everyone Has His Own Gift from God,  
Suited to His Vocation<sup>230</sup>”

1. “During last Wednesday's meeting, we tried to investigate the reasoning St. Paul uses in his First Letter to the Corinthians to convince them that whoever chooses marriage does well, while whoever chooses virginity (or continence according to the spirit of the evangelical counsel) does better [1 Corinthians 7:38]. Continuing this meditation today, let us remember that according to Paul, ‘the unmarried person is anxious...how to please the Lord’ [1 Corinthians 7:32].”

“‘To please the Lord’ has love as its foundation. This foundation arises from a further comparison. The unmarried person is anxious about how to please God, while the married man is anxious also about how to please his wife. In a certain sense, the spousal character of ‘continence for the sake of the kingdom of God’ is apparent here. Man always tries to please the person he loves. Therefore, ‘to please God’ is not without this character that distinguishes the interpersonal relationship between spouses. On the one hand, it is an effort of the man who is inclined toward God and seeks the way to please him, that is, to actively express his love. On the other hand, an approval by God corresponds to this aspiration. By accepting man's efforts, God crowns his own work by giving a new grace. Right from the beginning, this aspiration has been his gift. ‘Being anxious how to please God’ is therefore a contribution of man in the continual dialogue of salvation that God has begun. Evidently, every Christian who lives his faith takes part in this dialogue.”

2. “However, Paul observes that the man who is bound by the marriage bond ‘is divided’ [1 Corinthians 7:34] by reason of his family obligations [1 Corinthians 7:34]. From this remark it apparently follows that the unmarried person would be characterized by an interior integration, by a unification that would allow him to dedicate himself completely to the service of the kingdom of God in all its dimensions. This attitude presupposes abstention from marriage, exclusively for the sake of the kingdom of God, and a life uniquely directed to this goal.”

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<sup>230</sup> Pope John Paul II, “Everyone Has His Own Gift from God, Suited to His Vocation,” *The Holy See, L'Osservatore Romano*, 1982, Page 3, nos. 1-2.

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# Week 22

## Preview of Next Week

### Prayer:

This week concludes Part V of *Discernment 180* with three more selections from from Pope St. John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortation writings on celibacy. It then moves on to Part VI, which begins the conclusion of *Discernment 180*. The final part consists of passages from Scripture ordered to assist in discerning whether you should apply to seminary.

### Study:

In order to finish *To Save A Thousand Souls* within the 180 days, you will need to read two pages per day; by the end of Week 21, you should have made it to page 308, but do not limit yourself to that if you can and want to read more.

## Review of Past Week

### Prayer:

- I fulfilled my commitment to daily, personal prayer \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I fulfilled my commitment to the Liturgy of the Hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I slept for at least seven hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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### Sacraments:

- I fulfilled my commitment to daily Mass this week. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to regular Confession. Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Virtue:**

- I was faithful to my bodily fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I was faithful to my digital fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I was faithful to my dating fast. Yes / No
- I was faithful to the necessary practices from [www.hismercyendures.org](http://www.hismercyendures.org). Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Service:**

- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to altar serving. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to spiritual works of mercy. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to corporal works of mercy. Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Study:**

- I fulfilled my commitment to spiritual reading this week: Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my response, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Planning Ahead**

- What day(s) will I go to daily Mass this week? S M T W Th F S
- What day will I go to Confession this week? S M T W Th F S or [ ] not this week

- Am I scheduled for altar service this week? Spiritual works of mercy? Corporal works of mercy? Yes / No

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- Have I scheduled my next spiritual direction? Yes / No

- Have I scheduled my seminary visit? Yes / No

- Have I scheduled my discernment retreat? Yes / No

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## Day 148

John Paul II

*Familiaris Consortio*:

On the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World<sup>231</sup>

### ***Marriage and Virginit***

16. “Virginit

“Rightly indeed does St. John Chrysostom say: ‘Whoever denigrates marriage also diminishes the glory of virginit

“In virginit

“By virtue of this witness, virginit

“Virginit

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<sup>231</sup> Pope John Paul II, “*Familiaris Consortio*,” The Holy See, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1981, no. 16.

<sup>232</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Virginit*, X: PG 48: 540.

<sup>233</sup> Second Vatican Council *Perfectae caritatis*, 12.

defended the superiority of this charism to that of marriage, by reason of the wholly singular link which it has with the Kingdom of God<sup>234</sup>.”

“In spite of having renounced physical fecundity, the celibate person becomes spiritually fruitful, the father and mother of many, cooperating in the realization of the family according to God's plan.”

“Christian couples therefore have the right to expect from celibate persons a good example and a witness of fidelity to their vocation until death. Just as fidelity at times becomes difficult for married people and requires sacrifice, mortification and self-denial, the same can happen to celibate persons, and their fidelity, even in the trials that may occur, should strengthen the fidelity of married couples.”

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## Day 149

John Paul II  
*Letter to Priests 1979*<sup>235</sup>

### **8. Meaning of Celibacy**

“Allow me at this point to touch upon the question of priestly celibacy... In fact, this tradition constitutes a characteristic, a peculiarity and a heritage of the Latin Catholic Church, a tradition to which she owes much and in which she is resolved to persevere, in spite of all the difficulties to which such fidelity could be exposed, and also in spite of the various symptoms of weakness and crisis in individual priests. We are all aware that ‘we have this treasure in earthen vessels’ [2 Corinthians 4:7]; yet we know very well that it is precisely a treasure.”

“Why is it a treasure? Do we wish thereby to reduce the value of marriage and the vocation to family life? Or are we succumbing to a Manichean contempt for the human body and its functions? Do we wish in some way to devalue love, which leads a man and a woman to marriage and the wedded unity of the body, thus forming ‘one flesh’? [Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:6]. How could we think and reason like that, if we know, believe and proclaim, following Saint Paul, that marriage is a ‘great mystery’ in reference to Christ and the Church? [Ephesians 5:32]. However, none of the reasons whereby people sometimes try to ‘convince us’ of the inopportuneness of celibacy corresponds to the truth, the truth that the Church proclaims and seeks to realize in life through the commitment to which Priests oblige themselves before ordination. The essential, proper and adequate reason, in fact, is contained in the truth that Christ declared when he spoke about the renunciation of marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven, and which Saint Paul proclaimed when he wrote that each person in the Church has his or her own particular gifts [1 Corinthians 7:7]. Celibacy is precisely a ‘gift of the Spirit.’ A similar though different gift is contained in the vocation to true and faithful married love, directed towards procreation according to the flesh, in the very lofty context of the sacrament of Matrimony. It is obvious that this gift is fundamental for the building up of the great community of the Church, the People of God. But if this community wishes to respond fully to its vocation in Jesus Christ, there

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<sup>234</sup> Cf. Pius XII, Encyclical *Sacra Virginitas*, II: AAS 46 (1954), 174 ff.

<sup>235</sup> Pope John Paul II, “Letter of His Holiness to All the Priests on the Occasion of Holy Thursday,” The Holy See, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1979, no. 8.

will also have to be realized in it, in the correct proportion, that other 'gift,' the gift of celibacy 'for the sake of the kingdom of heaven' [Matthew 19:12]."

"Why does the Latin Catholic Church link this gift not only with the life of those who accept the strict programme of the evangelical counsels in Religious Institutes but also with the vocation to the hierarchical and ministerial priesthood? She does it because celibacy 'for the sake of the kingdom' is not only an eschatological sign; it also has a great social meaning, in the present life, for the service of the People of God. Through his celibacy, the Priest becomes the 'man for others,' in a different way from the man who, by binding himself in conjugal union with a woman, also becomes, as husband and father, a man 'for others,' especially in the radius of his own family: for his wife, and, together with her, for the children, to whom he gives life. The Priest, by renouncing this fatherhood proper to married men, seeks another fatherhood and, as it were, even another motherhood, recalling the words of the Apostle about the children whom he begets in suffering [1 Corinthians 4:15; Galatians 4:19]."

"These are children of his spirit, people entrusted to his solicitude by the Good Shepherd. These people are many, more numerous than an ordinary human family can embrace. The pastoral vocation of priests is great, and the Council teaches that it is universal: it is directed towards the whole Church<sup>236</sup>, and therefore it is of a missionary character. Normally, it is linked to the service of a particular community of the People of God, in which each individual expects attention, care and love. The heart of the priest, in order that it may be available for this service, must be free. Celibacy is a sign of a freedom that exists for the sake of service. According to this sign, the hierarchical or 'ministerial' priesthood is, according to the tradition of our Church, more strictly 'ordered' to the common priesthood of the faithful."

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## Day 150

### **9. Test and Responsibility<sup>237</sup>**

"The often widespread view that priestly celibacy in the Catholic Church is an institution imposed by law on those who receive the sacrament of Orders is the result of a misunderstanding, if not of downright bad faith. We all know that it is not so. Every Christian who receives the sacrament of Orders commits himself to celibacy with full awareness and freedom, after a training lasting a number of years, and after profound reflection and assiduous prayer. He decides upon a life of celibacy only after he has reached a firm conviction that Christ is giving him this 'gift' for the good of the Church and the service of others. Only then does he commit himself to observe celibacy for his entire life. It is obvious that such a decision obliges not only by virtue of a law laid down by the Church but also by virtue of personal responsibility. It is a matter here of *keeping one's word to Christ and the Church*. Keeping one's word is, at one and the same time, a duty and a proof of the priest's inner maturity; it is the expression of his personal dignity. It is shown in all its clarity when this keeping one's promise to Christ, made through a conscious and free commitment to celibacy for the

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<sup>236</sup> Cf. Decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 3, 6, 10, 12.

<sup>237</sup> Pope John Paul II, "Letter of His Holiness," no. 9.

whole of one's life, encounters difficulties, is put to the test, or is exposed to temptation—all things that do not spare the Priest, any more than they spare any other Christian. At such a moment, the individual must seek support in more fervent prayer. Through prayer, he must find within himself that attitude of humility and sincerity before God and his own conscience; prayer is indeed the source of strength for sustaining what is wavering. Then it is that there is born a confidence like the confidence expressed by Saint Paul in the words: 'There is nothing that I cannot master with the help of the One who gives me strength' [Philippians 4:13]. These truths are confirmed by the experience of many Priests and proved by the reality of life. The acceptance of these truths constitutes the basis of fidelity to the promise made to Christ and the Church, and that promise is at the same time the proof of genuine fidelity to oneself, one's own conscience, and one's own humanity and dignity. One must think of all these things especially at moments of crisis, and not have recourse to a dispensation, understood as an 'administrative intervention,' as though in fact it were not, on the contrary, a matter of a profound question of conscience and a test of humanity. God has a right to test each one of us in this way, since this earthly life is a time of testing for every human being. But God also wishes us all to emerge victorious from such tests, and he gives us adequate help for this."

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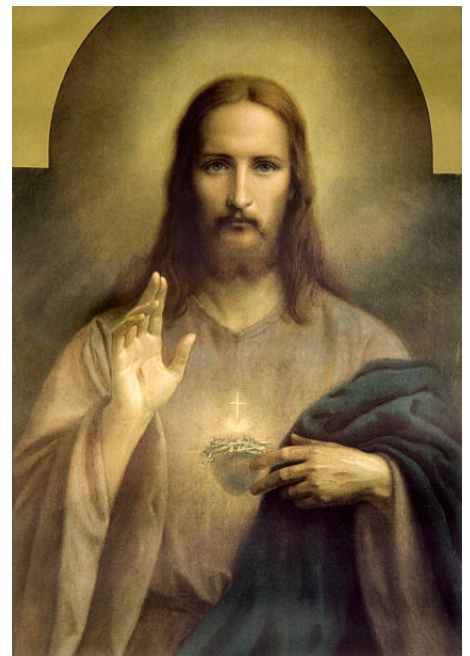
## Part VI: *Should I Apply to Seminary?*

### Days 151-180

You are in the home stretch. After taking up the devout life, growing in friendship with Christ through prayer with Scripture, learning how to discern between the spirits that move in your heart, and reflecting upon the priesthood and celibacy, it is time to make a decision: "Should I apply to seminary?"

Depending on how the Lord has moved in your discernment, whether to apply to seminary may seem completely out of the question. Or, perhaps the question is completely moot because you made the decision to apply on Day 3. Maybe you are somewhere in between. Regardless, the reaction you have to the question is a good barometer of the direction you are leaning: away from seminary, unsure, or towards seminary. That direction is good to keep in mind as we begin the final section of *Discernment 180*.

Part VI consists of several passages from Scripture that are ordered to help you make a graced decision about whether to apply to seminary. As you prepare to complete this last month, it would be especially helpful to review the rules of discernment (Part III), St. Ignatius' counsel on how to make an election (Part III), and the overall trends of how God has moved in your life over the past 150 days.



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## Days 151-154: Making a Graced Decision

The following section is worth taking several days to pray over and complete.

As you consider the question, “Should I apply to seminary,” here are a few things to keep in mind:

1. The decision to enter the seminary is not a final decision to become a priest. In this discernment you’re asking: “Is the seminary the next logical step for me to continue on my path of discerning the priesthood?” The seminary provides a fertile ground in which one may continue to discern God’s will through human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral formation. The seminary is equipped with the personnel and tools necessary to clarify and deepen a possible calling to the priesthood.
2. Clarity in your decision may come only gradually and often without absolute certainty. A graced decision always allows for an element of faith and may invite greater trust in God. Even the struggling back and forth can eventually lead to a greater ownership and integration of the decision to be made. Thus, making a graced decision is also an act of love.
3. A graced decision is made in freedom. God is not going to force you against your own will. But God desires that your will be more and more formed by the seeking of His divine will. As Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, “Not my will, but yours be done,” (Luke 22: 42).

Before beginning to pray with the Scripture passages, dedicate this final month to specific discernment of the seminary through the following actions:

**1. State a proposition:**

The proposition must be stated as concretely as possible, including specific details. The proposition should also be formulated affirmatively in a way that is attractive to you. Here is an example of a proposition: “To apply to the seminary for this coming fall in order that I may continue to discern and begin priestly formation for the Diocese of Austin.”

*(For actions 2-5, be sure to return to St. Ignatius’ counsel on how to make an election; see excursus on Day 86)*

**2. List the advantages and disadvantages.**

Make a list of advantages and disadvantages (‘pros’ and ‘cons’), including all the reasons that bear upon your thinking. Do not discriminate at this point between ‘good’ or ‘bad’ reasons, but be as comprehensive as possible. The list should not be made hastily but allowed to develop over a few days as is appropriate and possible.

**3. Observe your feelings and desires.**

Be attentive to how you feel about the various advantages and disadvantages that you list. Consider why you might feel that way. Feelings are important to pay attention to because the indwelling Holy



Spirit could be working through them. However, feelings are not absolute indicators of God's will. Their causes need to be discerned. Feelings can indicate a movement of the Holy Spirit but could also be triggered by selfishness, insecurity, weakness or brokenness.

**4. *Begin to sense what reasons are more significant.***

You will notice that some advantages and disadvantages may weigh more heavily upon your thinking and feeling. Take note of this. How does the weight of such reasons compare with others? It may be that one or a few reasons seem more significant than others.

**5. *Pray over the list and consider it from God's perspective.***

When you pray over the list, what impressions strike you when the reasons are considered within the context of your relationship with God? Speak to the Father and/or Jesus about the various advantages and disadvantages in the list. How does God respond? Are there any thoughts or feelings that have changed when you pray with the list?

**6. *Consider your motives and detect a leaning of your will.***

You have thought about the advantages and disadvantages of your proposition, observed your feelings about them, and prayed with them. Bringing this all together, consider the sources of your motives. How do you feel God is motivating you? Have you identified any motives coming from selfishness or fear? Although your motives may or may not be 100% pure, is God possibly drawing you in one direction? Consider how the Holy Spirit may or may not be inclining your will. At this point you should be able to notice and identify an inclination or 'leaning' that is relatively more consistent in one direction over the other.

**7. *Make a Tentative Decision.***

We cannot assume our decisions are infallible or always accurate, but if we try to move honestly and lovingly with God's guidance, then we can assume that we are sincerely abiding with Him. Live with a tentative decision for a short while to see whether it is affirmed by peace.

**8. *Await confirmation and make a final decision.***

Bring your final decision to prayer and ask God to continue to confirm it by a sense of trust and peace.

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## Week 23

### Preview of Next Week

***Prayer:***

This week begins the selected passages from Scripture ordered to assist in discerning whether you should apply to seminary.

- As you meditate on these Scripture passages, you may find that some speak to you powerfully, while others do not speak to you at all. That is to be expected; keep these things in mind when you experience them:

- Stay with the dry passages for the entire time you have dedicated for prayer that day; do not bounce around to try to find something “better.” The Lord is inviting you to fidelity and perseverance in the dry times.
- If you pray with a passage that speaks to you so powerfully that the time of prayer ended before you were finished, pray with that passage again the following day.
  - The goal is not to get through all the passages - it is to grow in friendship with Jesus Christ. Do not leave Him behind by moving to a new passage if He is still speaking to you in the old one. St. Ignatius calls this exercise a “repetition”: “I will remain quietly meditating upon the point in which I have found what I desire without any eagerness to go on till I have been satisfied” ~ St. Ignatius, Exercise #76

**Study:**

In order to finish *To Save A Thousand Souls* within the 180 days, you will need to read two pages per day; by the end of Week 22, you should have made it to page 322, but do not limit yourself to that if you can and want to read more.

**Review of Past Week**

**Prayer:**

- *I fulfilled my commitment to daily, personal prayer \_\_\_/7 days this week.*
- *I fulfilled my commitment to the Liturgy of the Hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.*
- *I slept for at least seven hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.*
- *These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:*

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- *Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:*

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**Sacraments:**

- *I fulfilled my commitment to daily Mass this week. Yes / No*
- *I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to regular Confession. Yes / No*
- *These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:*

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- *Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:*

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**Virtue:**

- I was faithful to my bodily fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I was faithful to my digital fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I was faithful to my dating fast. Yes / No
- I was faithful to the necessary practices from [www.hismercyendures.org](http://www.hismercyendures.org). Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Service:**

- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to altar serving. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to spiritual works of mercy. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to corporal works of mercy. Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Study:**

- I fulfilled my commitment to spiritual reading this week: Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my response, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Planning Ahead**

- What day(s) will I go to daily Mass this week? S M T W Th F S
- What day will I go to Confession this week? S M T W Th F S or [ ] not this week

- *Am I scheduled for altar service this week? Spiritual works of mercy? Corporal works of mercy?* Yes / No

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- *Have I scheduled my next spiritual direction?* Yes / No

- *Have I scheduled my seminary visit?* Yes / No

- *Have I scheduled my discernment retreat?* Yes / No

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## **Day 155**

1 Samuel 3:1-10

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## **Day 156**

Psalm 139

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## **Day 157**

Isaiah 43:1-5

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## **Day 158**

1 Samuel 16:1-13

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## **Day 159**

Matthew 6:25-34

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## **Day 160**

Psalm 23

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# Day 161

Jeremiah 20:7-9

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## Week 24

### Preview of Next Week

**Prayer:**

This week continues the selected passages from Scripture ordered to assist in discerning whether you should apply to seminary.

- On Day 163, there is an *excursus* from *The Spiritual Diary of St. Ignatius*. It describes the manner by which he decided upon what type of poverty the Jesuits would embrace. Schedule time apart from your dedicated prayer time to read this *excursus*.
- Remember the call to fidelity in dry passages and the invitation to repetition in the passages that speak to you powerfully.

**Study:**

In order to finish *To Save A Thousand Souls* within the 180 days, you will need to read two pages per day; by the end of Week 23, you should have made it to page 336, but do not limit yourself to that if you can and want to read more.

### Review of Past Week

**Prayer:**

- I fulfilled my commitment to daily, personal prayer \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I fulfilled my commitment to the Liturgy of the Hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I slept for at least seven hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Sacraments:**

- I fulfilled my commitment to daily Mass this week. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to regular Confession. Yes / No

- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Virtue:**

- I was faithful to my bodily fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I was faithful to my digital fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I was faithful to my dating fast. Yes / No
- I was faithful to the necessary practices from [www.hismercyeasures.org](http://www.hismercyeasures.org). Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Service:**

- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to altar serving. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to spiritual works of mercy. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to corporal works of mercy. Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Study:**

- I fulfilled my commitment to spiritual reading this week: Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my response, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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## Planning Ahead

- What day(s) will I go to daily Mass this week?    S M T W Th F S
  - What day will I go to Confession this week?    S M T W Th F S or [ ] not this week
  - Am I scheduled for altar service this week? Spiritual works of mercy? Corporal works of mercy?    Yes / No
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- Have I scheduled my next spiritual direction?    Yes / No
  - Have I scheduled my seminary visit?    Yes / No
  - Have I scheduled my discernment retreat?    Yes / No

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## Day 162

Matthew 16:24-28

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## Day 163

John 15:9-17

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## Excursus: St. Ignatius' Election of Poverty<sup>238</sup>

### **Context:**

St. Ignatius has embarked upon offering several Masses in order to discern what kind of poverty the Jesuits will embrace. At this point, he had already received several graces indicating that they should take on perfect poverty. The section quoted at length begins with his description of prayer.

Note how desolation enters St. Ignatius' heart when, despite having already received an answer from God, he seeks further confirmations, signs, and a particular conclusion to his prayer. If you have already received sufficient confirmation from God, there is no need to wait to make a decision.

*From St. Ignatius' Spiritual Diary:*

“—Great devotion in the customary prayer, and from midway on there was much of it, clear, lucid and as it were warm. In the chapel, because I looked down hurriedly, not preparing myself for the Mass, returned to the room to prepare myself, and composing myself with tears, went to the chapel, and later to Mass, having

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<sup>238</sup> St. Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Journal of Ignatius Loyola*, trans. William. J. Young, S.J., *Woodstock Letters*, Volume LXXXVII, Number 3, 1958, p. 236-37.

great devotion in part of it, sometimes with movements to tears. On the other hand, often with struggle, which happened at the end, because I did not find what I was looking for. In these intervals there was no sign of visions or lights.”

“Finishing Mass, and afterwards in my room, I found myself alone and without help of any kind, without power to relish any of my mediators, or any of the Divine Persons, but so remote and separated, as if I had never felt anything of Them, or would never feel anything again. Rather, thoughts came to me sometimes against Jesus, sometimes against another, being so confused with different thoughts, such as to quit the house and hire a room to get away from the noise, or to go without eating, or to begin the Masses over again, or to put the altar on a higher floor. Nowhere finding peace, I had a desire to finish up at a time when my soul was consoled and completely at rest. Examining, however, whether I should proceed, I thought that I wanted to look for too many signs, both in time and in the Masses ended for my satisfaction, the matter being so clear in itself, without seeking certainty in it, but only that stopping it all would be much to my liking; on the other hand, I thought that if I gave up altogether in such distress, I would not be satisfied later on, etc.”

“Finally, I thought that since there was no difficulty in the matter itself, it would be more pleasing to God our Lord to end it, without waiting or looking for further proof, or saying more Masses for it. Placing it thus in an election, I felt that it would be more pleasing to God our Lord to bring it to an end, and felt in myself the wish that the Lord would condescend to my desire, that is to finish at a time when I had special consolation.”

“Realizing at once my inclination, and on the other hand, the will of God our Lord, began at once to take notice and to wish to succeed in pleasing God our Lord. With this, the darkness began to leave me gradually, and the tears to come, and these increasing, lost all desire to say more Masses for this purpose. And when the thought of saying three Masses of the Holy Trinity in thanksgiving came to me, thought it came from the evil spirit, and, deciding that I would say none, grew much in divine love, and had such tears and sobs and strength, kneeling for long time, and walking about, and kneeling again, with many different reasonings, and with so much interior satisfaction. Although so great consolation as this (which caused great pain in my eyes) lasted for the space of an hour, more or less, the tears stopped at last, and, doubting whether I should finish by night with such a flood, or now, the flood having stopped, it seemed better to do so now. To keep on seeking, or to wait for the evening, would still be wishing to seek, there being no reason to, and so proposed in the presence of God our Lord, and all His court, etc., putting an end to this point, not to proceed any further in this matter. Although in this last proposal, experienced interior movements, sobbing and tears, even in the time of their great abundance, considered everything concluded, with no further seeking, or Masses, or consolation of any kind, but that this day would see the end. Finished.”

“After the stroke of one, as I sat down to eat, and for good space, the tempter did nothing, but he sought to have me make some sign of hesitating, and answering at once, without any disturbance, rather as in the event of victory, “Down, where you belong!” I felt confirmation with tears and every security concerning all that had been determined.”

“A quarter of an hour after this, I awoke to knowledge or clear understanding of how during the time the tempter was suggesting thoughts against the Divine Persons and my mediators, he placed, or wanted to cause some hesitation in the matter, and, on the other hand, when I felt the consolations and visions of the Divine



Persons and mediators, I had every firmness and confirmation of the matter and this with feeling of spiritual relish, and my eyes filled with tears with great security of soul.”

“On saying grace at table, partial revelation of the Being of the Father, and likewise of the Being of the Most Holy Trinity, with certain spiritual movement to tears, something which all the day had not felt or seen, although looked for it often. The great consolations of this day did not terminate distinctly in any Person in particular, but in general way in the Giver of graces.”

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## **Day 164**

1 Corinthians 7:34

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## **Day 165**

Matthew 19:10-12

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## **Day 166**

Luke 18:29-30

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## **Day 167**

Hosea 2:21-22

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## **Day 168**

Luke 15:11-32

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## **Week 25**

### **Preview of Next Week**

#### ***Prayer:***

This week continues the selected passages from Scripture ordered to assist in discerning whether you should apply to seminary.

- Remember the call to fidelity in dry passages and the invitation to repetition in the passages that speak to you powerfully.

**Study:**

In order to finish *To Save A Thousand Souls* within the 180 days, you will need to read two pages per day; by the end of Week 24, you should have made it to page 350, but do not limit yourself to that if you can and want to read more.

**Review of Past Week**

**Prayer:**

- I fulfilled my commitment to daily, personal prayer \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I fulfilled my commitment to the Liturgy of the Hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I slept for at least seven hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Sacraments:**

- I fulfilled my commitment to daily Mass this week. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to regular Confession. Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Virtue:**

- I was faithful to my bodily fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I was faithful to my digital fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I was faithful to my dating fast. Yes / No
- I was faithful to the necessary practices from [www.hismercyendures.org](http://www.hismercyendures.org). Yes / No

- *These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:*

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- *Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:*

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**Service:**

- *I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to altar serving. Yes / No*
- *I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to spiritual works of mercy. Yes / No*
- *I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to corporal works of mercy. Yes / No*
- *These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:*

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- *Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:*

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**Study:**

- *I fulfilled my commitment to spiritual reading this week: Yes / No*
- *These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:*

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- *Based on my response, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:*

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**Planning Ahead**

- *What day(s) will I go to daily Mass this week? S M T W Th F S*
- *What day will I go to Confession this week? S M T W Th F S or [ ] not this week*
- *Am I scheduled for altar service this week? Spiritual works of mercy? Corporal works of mercy? Yes / No*
- *Have I scheduled my next spiritual direction? Yes / No*
- *Have I scheduled my seminary visit? Yes / No*
- *Have I scheduled my discernment retreat? Yes / No*

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## **Day 169**

Mark 10:17-31

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## **Day 170**

Galatians 5:1-2, 13-26

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## **Day 171**

Luke 5:1-11

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## **Day 172**

Luke 9:23-27, 57-62

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## **Day 173**

Mark 1:16-20

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## **Day 174**

Matthew 14:22-33

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## **Day 175**

John 13:1-20

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# Week 26

## Preview of Next Week

### Prayer:

This week concludes the selected passages from Scripture ordered to assist in discerning whether you should apply to seminary.

- Remember the call to fidelity in dry passages and the invitation to repetition in the passages that speak to you powerfully.
- Day 179 is a “repetition” day; pick the passage from the past weeks that moved you the most and pray with it again.
- Day 180 is the final day; spend it by praying to God about how you would like to conclude this time of intentional, vocational discernment.

### Study:

In order to finish *To Save A Thousand Souls* within the 180 days, you will need to finish the book this week.

## Review of Past Week

### Prayer:

- I fulfilled my commitment to daily, personal prayer \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I fulfilled my commitment to the Liturgy of the Hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I slept for at least seven hours \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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### Sacraments:

- I fulfilled my commitment to daily Mass this week. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to regular Confession. Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Virtue:**

- I was faithful to my bodily fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I was faithful to my digital fast \_\_\_/7 days this week.
- I was faithful to my dating fast. Yes / No
- I was faithful to the necessary practices from [www.hismercyendures.org](http://www.hismercyendures.org). Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Service:**

- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to altar serving. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to spiritual works of mercy. Yes / No
- I fulfilled (or am on track to fulfill) my commitment to corporal works of mercy. Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my responses, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Study:**

- I fulfilled my commitment to spiritual reading this week: Yes / No
- These were the experiences (if any) that I need to bring to prayer and/or spiritual direction:

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- Based on my response, I will make the following (if any) adjustments:

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**Planning Ahead**

- What day(s) will I go to daily Mass this week? S M T W Th F S
- What day will I go to Confession this week? S M T W Th F S or [ ] not this week

- Am I scheduled for altar service this week? Spiritual works of mercy? Corporal works of mercy? Yes / No

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- Have I scheduled my next spiritual direction? Yes / No

- Have I scheduled my seminary visit? Yes / No

- Have I scheduled my discernment retreat? Yes / No

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## Day 176

John 10

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## Day 177

John 19:17-37

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## Day 178

John 21:15-19

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## Day 179

*Repetition:* choose the passage from the past month that moved you the most.

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## Day 180

Spend some time reflecting upon the past six months in prayer to God. Speak to Him about what way you would like to conclude *Discernment 180*. You may return to the section, “The Night Before Day 1,” on Day 0 for ideas. You may also read the Conclusion: Day 181.

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## Conclusion: Day 181

“A voice proclaims: In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD! Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God!” - Isaiah 40:3

You started *Discernment 180* with this verse, and now we return to it at the end of these six months. It is clear that you prepared well. You have given God half of a year of intense, vocational discernment, and regardless of what graces you did or did not receive, I am confident that this time has borne fruit for you and the whole Church.

Perhaps you came away with a deeper appreciation of and admiration for the priesthood, but without the peace to move forward towards seminary or towards marriage. Do not be discouraged. I mentioned in the preface that we cannot “force” God to act on our timeline, to answer our prayers in the way we expect - nor would it be good to do so. Thanks be to God for the graces you did and did not receive! He is our providential Father who is laboring to love us, who wants our holiness even more than we do. He knows the time and place to give us each grace necessary to draw us more deeply in communion with Him, and He will wait accordingly. It was in the “fullness of time” that Jesus took flesh in the womb of the Virgin - not a moment before or after (Galatians 4:4). The Lord also has a “fullness of time” for each grace He will give us, including the grace of knowing our vocation, and discernment means waiting accordingly.

But even in the waiting God is at work. He is not content to inform you; He wants to transform you. It would be easy for God to send you a text message, but that would not lead to holiness. The time of waiting serves to stretch your heart so that when the hour comes to inform you, there will be so much more of you to inform. By waiting and longing, God purifies and strengthens you. He knows what He is about. He does not waste any time. Use the ways that you have grown in prayer, virtue, and discernment to choose with God the next steps to take.

Perhaps you came away with a deeper appreciation of and admiration for the priesthood, and despite that, you have peace with the knowledge that you are not called to the priesthood. Glory to God! Move forward with joy and confidence. When discussing marriage and celibacy, St. Paul states, “each has a particular gift from God” (1 Corinthians 7:7). Thank God for the gift He has given you, and follow where He leads. If you are moving towards marriage, I highly recommend reading, *Christian Dating in a Godless World*, by Rev. T. G. Morrow.

Or, perhaps you received peace, joy, and desire to give your life to God as a priest. Glory to God! Give your vocation director a call to know the next steps, and continue seeking holiness as you are; the path is only beginning. If he has not already, your vocation director will spend some time getting to know you, discerning on behalf of the Church if this is the right time for you to apply to seminary, sharing with you the next steps.



Regardless of what grace you received, use the ways that you have grown in prayer, virtue, and discernment to choose with God which parts of your *Rule of Life*, which you embraced so fully, should remain with you for Day 181 onward.

My brother, it is not a small thing to consecrate six months of your life to God in this way. Thank you for your faith and courage to give God this time. I am grateful for your willingness to follow where Christ leads you. May God bless you and reward you, and may our paths cross in the Eucharist and in our heavenly home!