

The Mist of Mercy- Spiritual Warfare and Purgatory

Study Guide

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THE MIST OF MERCY STUDY GUIDE

HOW THE STUDY BEGAN

In 2006, a number of Christian faithful in Dallas, Texas, became aware of an ordinary woman from Chicago, Illinois (now living in Ireland), who has an extraordinary calling. Anne, a lay apostle is receiving messages from heaven and was directed to record these messages in a set of “Volumes.” After reading the Volumes, many people were deeply moved by the simplicity of the words and the feeling that Jesus and Mary and others in heaven were speaking directly to them. Anne’s life reminds them of their own. She has a family, had a career, and by all accounts is an everyday woman like the rest of us. After recording the Volumes, Anne wrote her account of her extraordinary visits to heaven, with Jesus as her guide. These encounters were recorded in the book, *Climbing the Mountain*, which again greatly impacted the lives of those who read it.

Later, in the Fall of 2006, a Catholic lay woman in Dallas, Texas, felt called during Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament (and while studying another book) to prepare a study guide on Anne’s writings. That call was confirmed and others were invited to assist and reflect on Jesus’ words and message, as conveyed through Anne. The purpose was to build up the Kingdom of God through studying Anne’s writings and sharing this within community. Hence, the *Climbing the Mountain (CTM) Study Guide* Core Team was born.

The Core Team worked from January to August of 2007 to research, write and organize the CTM Study Guide and were able to offer a pilot book study program in the Fall of 2007 with over one hundred participants in Dallas. In the summer of 2008, the CTM Study Guide was published by Direction for Our Times, the official ministry for the Lay Apostolate of Jesus Christ the Returning King movement. In that same summer, the Core Team had the opportunity to meet with Anne, who expressed her appreciation for the CTM Study Guide and asked them to continue and to develop a Study Guide for *The Mist of Mercy* book on purgatory. In the fall of 2008, the work on *The Mist of Mercy Study Guide* began.

Similar to our experience working on the CTM Study Guide, the Core team met with many trials and tribulations throughout the process of this work. It was a significant battle to reach completion of the new Study Guide, but the Core Team, through grace received from the Holy Spirit, was determined to see it through as promised and also came to realize the blessings in their suffering.

Now, in October 2010, you are holding the results in your hands. With much prayer, time, trial and attention, the team is pleased to present this Study Guide for *The Mist of Mercy* book. Deep gratitude is expressed to our families and to the faith community who aided this effort by their prayers. A special thank you is given to the pastor of St. Monica Catholic Church who has graciously allowed the use of St. Monica’s facilities in Dallas, Texas, for this book study.

We warmly welcome you to this study, and we hope that you are truly inspired both by the words of Jesus, Mary and the other saints as conveyed by Anne, and by the encouragement of your fellow participants as you journey through the coming weeks. We also want to welcome our non-Catholic brothers and sisters to the study. Even though the study was written by and primarily for Catholics, it is our prayer that anyone of any faith who participates and hears the words of Jesus through Anne, will greatly enrich their own spiritual life and help to promote the unity between all Christian faiths that Jesus so ardently desires. Our prayer is that you will each take what you have learned and use it to continue to promote the Kingdom of God in your families, neighborhoods and workplaces and among your friends in the Body of Christ.

With love and blessings in Christ,

The *Mist of Mercy Study Guide* Core Team

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HOW TO USE THIS STUDY GUIDE

This *Mist of Mercy Study Guide* has been broken down into ten chapters to be delivered in twelve weekly sessions, each an hour and a half long. Week one of the study will be your get-acquainted week, when you will meet your small-group members, obtain your books and study guides and receive your first homework assignment. Each week from two through eleven will follow a similar format:

- Announcements
- Large-group prayer led by a facilitator
- Small-group shared prayer
- Audio or video from Anne, Speaker, or Musician
- Small-group discussion time
- Wrap-up and closing prayer

Each small group will have a facilitator whose purpose is to guide the discussion for that group. The facilitator is not an expert, just a participant who has felt called to direct a group. In preparation for each week from two through eleven, participants will have already read the pertinent pages in the book and written the answers to the questions in this Study Guide as their “homework.” The small-group discussions are an opportunity for each group member to speak and share his/her insight into the material for the benefit of the rest of the group. We strongly encourage each group member to contribute. Some questions may require additional study in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC),

Second Edition, 1997, and/or in the *New American Bible*. A full copy of both is available on the web at www.usccb.org.

Week twelve will be a celebration week, an opportunity for a small party and to hear testimonials from those who wish to share with the whole group about how they have enjoyed and benefited from the book and this study.

The feedback from the pilot group of the study indicated several chapters required additional discussion. These chapters were Chapters 3, 4, and 6. In conducting your study, you may consider splitting these chapters. Additionally, many participants enjoyed the video clips of Anne speaking. We selected them from the existing DFOT video and YouTube clips. Lastly, the concluding prayer each week consisted of a reading of one of the Monthly Messages at the end of the chapters.

If you are new to the subject of mystical phenomena, included in Appendix A is information from the CTM Study Guide on this subject.

AS A REMINDER

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All efforts have been made to accurately quote and attribute material from any outside sources, both electronic and printed. Still, mistakes can happen. Please contact any of us if you are aware of any incorrect citation of outside sources as referenced in this Study Guide. Saint biographical information contained in this Study Guide was gathered from various sources. Websites and books are listed as a tool for further investigation. Direct quotes are indicated by quotation marks.

Chapter 1 – Introduction to Spiritual Warfare (5-6; 135-143)

INTRODUCTION

This is a study guide for *The Mist of Mercy* by Anne, a lay apostle for the promotion of the Kingdom of God. Those involved in the creation of this study guide believe the study of these works brings us ever closer to the path God is marking out for us. Our prayer is that you will discover God’s love and mercy anew.

“Have mercy on me, God, in your goodness; in your abundant compassion blot out my offense.” In this Psalm 51:1, King David begged God’s forgiving love and mercy after his affair with Bathsheba. Just as we would, David wanted the sin gone so he could enjoy intimacy again with God. When we die, the Church teaches there is a time of cleansing in purgatory if necessary. The existence of purgatory is debated by other Christian faiths, but it makes sense that to be at peace among the saints, we must cross the chasm of our sinful nature.

1. Can you find some Scripture and Catechism quotes that directly refer to purgatory?

The Mist of Mercy gives us a greater glimpse of God’s forgiving love. Anne describes a place where God’s mercy and love are represented by a mist that provides security and intimacy with Jesus in a process of self-awareness and self-acceptance through God’s eyes of truth, reconciling us with our mistakes and failures in love. The process that Jesus shared with Anne when He took her mystically to the heavenly Kingdom conveys a cleansing of the soul, bringing us back to communion with God and His goodness. This is also a place of self-purgation that makes us worthy of being in God’s presence.

The Mist of Mercy helps us to look deep within ourselves and work on our own flaws, rather than the flaws of others. Thus we will concentrate on the Ten Commandments in this study, to lead us to a detailed examination of our own conscience. Within the study of the Ten Commandments, we will also look at the Seven Deadly Sins that relate to those commandments. Finally we will look at the “Snapshots of Reality” which are detailed by Anne on pages 55 to 143 and how these incidences of life relate to the commandments. We will look at each Snapshot as if we were in it, examining our own conscience and discovering the antidotes to sin that would evolve from a fruitful examination of conscience in each of those situations. Lastly, we have added some of the

Monthly Messages which are reprinted in the book on pages 187-212 for you to ponder each week, along with the lesson.

- 2. (6) What is a way we can be aware of our flaws and overcome the temptation to only identify flaws of others?**

WE BEGIN WITH LOVE

- 3. (5) What does Anne tell us about real love?**

Heaven is all about love. Here on earth we sometimes get a glimmer of authentic love.

- 4. Describe one experience of authentic love you have had. How did it affect you?**

In the Gospels, Jesus' love is omnipresent. In John's Gospel, he records Jesus' direct teachings on love.

- 5. Read and summarize the following Scripture passages: John 13:34-35; John 14:21 and John 15:9-17.**

Genuine love requires sacrifice.

- 6. If you look at your relationships do you see that you are following Godly principles of sacrifice? How?**

St. John Mary Vianney
Patron of all Parish Priests
Feast Day: August 4

*I love you, O my God, and my only desire is to love you until the last breath of my life. I love you, oh my infinitely lovable God, and I would rather die loving you, than live without loving you. I love you Lord, and the only grace I ask is to love you eternally....
My God, if my tongue cannot say in every moment that I love you, I want my heart to repeat it to You as often as I draw breath.*

www.catholicity.com/prayer/saint-john-vianney.html

The Cure of Ars, St. John Vianney, was born in Dardelly, near Lyons, France, on May 8, 1786. His boyhood was spent during a tumultuous time in France and as a result he received very little formal schooling in his youth. John was not introduced to serious study until he was nineteen. He found school very hard, especially the study of Latin. But because of his great desire to be a priest, a very kind priest named Fr. Bailey helped him. As a seminarian, John struggled greatly with the course work. Several times he was reviewed by the bishop for final ordination, but John could not convince the bishop of his readiness.

It was only through Fr. Bailey's persuasive defense before the bishop that his ordination was approved. Fr. Bailey told the bishop that John Vianney was very close to God, that he had good common sense and would be able to give people the right spiritual answers in Confession and otherwise. John Vianney was elated when the bishop ordained him a priest and sent him to the same parish as Fr. Bailey, his friend and mentor. At last, his heart's desire from childhood, to enter the priesthood was a reality. He could serve God and His children by hearing Confessions and saying Mass.

When Fr. Bailey died, Fr. John Vianney was appointed pastor of the rural parish of Ars. God gave him a very special gift. He could read souls. There were times people came to Confession with mortal sins on their soul, but through fear they had the intention of keeping them a secret. When they discovered that God revealed their sins to Fr. John Vianney, they repented and made a good Confession, humbled by God's loving mercy. This special gift God gave him became known all over the world. He spent hours in the confessional. He got little sleep and ate very little food. Because of his holiness, he was often tormented by the devil.

St. John Mary Vianney (cont.)

Fr. Vianney worshiped long hours before the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. Many who saw him offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass would remark about the admirable and pious way that he gazed upon the Lord. Many a sinful or lukewarm soul would come back to God after seeing him offer Holy Mass.

He was not known for his human eloquence, but he spoke from his heart. He touched souls because of his pure love, and many were converted or pursued a religious vocation after hearing him speak. Fr. John Vianney labored all of his priesthood to unite himself to Christ as priest and victim. He suffered intense persecution from the devil, but he also received immense joy from administering the sacraments and observing the repentance of so very many sinners.

St. John Mary Vianney remains to this day the living image of the priest after the Heart of Christ. He died on August 4, 1859 and was canonized on May 31, 1925 by Pope Pius XI.

Document Information: Excerpts from: www.newadvent.org

Saints and Heroes Speak, Fr. Robert J. Fox, Washington, NJ: AMI Press Inc., 1981

Lives of the Saints, Rev. Hugo Hoever, S.O. Cist. Ph.D, New Jersey: Catholic Book Publishing Corp., 2005

SERVANTS OF GOD

Before we begin to discuss the subject of spiritual warfare, we would like to spend some time discussing God's friends, the angels. The existence of the spiritual, non-corporeal beings that Sacred Scripture usually calls "angels" is a truth of faith. The angels, by definition, are God's messengers. Although one-third of them fell with Satan, two-thirds are still faithful to God. It is through God's mercy that angels are sent to help, guide, and assist us in our daily effort to remain close to God.

St. Augustine says: “‘Angel’ is the name of their office, not of their nature. If you seek the name of their nature, it is ‘spirit’; if you seek the name of their office, it is ‘angel’” ... With their whole being the angels are servants and messengers of God. Because they ‘always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven’, they are the ‘mighty ones who do his word, hearkening to the voice of his word.’

(CCC 329; Mt 18:10; Ps 103:20)

7. Describe angels according to the Catechism. (CCC 330)

8. Distinguish guardian angels as described in the Catechism. (CCC 336)

9. Read the following Scripture passages and discuss: Psalm 103:20 and Matt 18:10.

10. Have you ever had an experience of being aware of your guardian angel’s intercession or intervention in your life? Discuss.

Our Guardian Angel

St. John Vianney had great devotion to the Guardian Angels. This reminds us that:

- God gave us a Guardian Angel when we were first conceived in the womb because He loves us.
- Our Guardian Angel has God-given wisdom, power and holiness to protect, guide and help us all through the day and night.
- No one is too old, too sophisticated, or too learned to have daily devotion to their Guardian Angel. *“Guardian Angels are our most faithful friends. We ought often to invoke them.”* (St. John Vianney)

In gratitude for God’s gift of Guardian Angels, we are encouraged to:

- ✓ Love and honor our Guardian Angel as our best friend.
- ✓ Thank and obey our Guardian Angels when they tell us to do what is right and to stay away from what is evil.
- ✓ Pray to our Guardian Angels each morning and night and when we need their help.
- ✓ Our Guardian Angel loves us because our souls are so precious to God that Jesus shed His Blood on the cross to save us. We should ask our Guardian Angels to help us to save our souls so that we may be with God in heaven forever.

Guardian Angel Prayer

Angel of God, my guardian dear, to whom God’s love commits thee here. Ever this day (night) be at my side, to light and guard, to rule and guide. Amen.

(www.catholic.org/saints/anglchoi.php)

NINE CHOIRS OF ANGELS

Angels have a hierarchy which is broken down into nine choirs or groups. The following helps us understand God's order with regard to His angels.

1. Seraphim - the highest order, radiating perfect love
 - ❖ Attendants or guardians before God's throne
 - ❖ Praise God calling 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of Hosts'
2. Cherubim - the second highest, possess perfect knowledge or wisdom
 - ❖ Have an intimate knowledge of God and continually praise Him
 - ❖ Guardians of God's glory
3. Thrones - perfect peace
 - ❖ Angels of pure humility, peace and submission
 - ❖ The lower choirs of angels need the Thrones to access God
4. Dominions - make known the commands of God
 - ❖ Angels of leadership
5. Virtues - referred to as "the shining ones" and providers of strength
 - ❖ Known as spirits of motion
 - ❖ Govern all nature – seasons, sun, stars, moon
 - ❖ In charge of miracles and they provide courage, grace and valor
6. Powers - the special fighters against all evil
 - ❖ Warrior angels against evil, defending the cosmos and humans
 - ❖ They fight against evil spirits
7. Principalities - symbolize Christ's reign over all events in the world
 - ❖ They watch over the earthly principalities and take care of their needs
 - ❖ They intercede on behalf of nations
8. Archangels - the chief or leading angels
Unique role as God's messengers at critical times in history and salvation:
 - ❖ St. Michael – Patron and protector of the Church. He is the general in Mary's army. He leads the forces of heaven in their triumph over satan and his followers
 - ❖ St. Gabriel – Messenger who proclaimed the Annunciation of Mary
 - ❖ St. Raphael – Special helper in time of sickness and hardship
9. Angels - the closest to the material world and human beings
 - ❖ Deliver prayers and messages
 - ❖ Assist those who ask for help



Origins of St. Michael Prayer

“This is how this prayer came to be written: It is said that one day having celebrated the Holy Sacrifice, the aged Pontiff Leo XIII was in conference with the Cardinals. Suddenly he sank to the floor in a deep swoon. Physicians who hastened to his side feared that he had already expired, for they could find no trace of his pulse. However, after a short interval the Holy Father rallied, and opening his eyes exclaimed with great emotion: „Oh what a horrible picture I was permitted to see!’ He had been shown in spirit the tremendous activities of the evil spirits and their ravings against the Church. But in the midst of this vision of horror he had also beheld consoling visions of the glorious Archangel Michael, who had appeared and cast satan and his legions back into the abyss of hell. Soon afterward he composed the following well-known prayer.”

Saint Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle. Be our defense against the wickedness and snares of the devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray and do thou, O Prince of the Heavenly Host, by the power of God, cast into hell satan and all the evil spirits who prowl throughout the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.

Excerpted from www.smcenter.org

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

In this study, we shall closely examine the Ten Commandments or Decalogue (literally “ten words”)—those precepts written in stone that God gave to Moses on Mt. Sinai and that detail what our response should be to God’s love. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains, “*God has loved us first. The love of the One God is recalled in the first of the ‘ten words’. The commandments then make explicit the response of love that man is called to give to his God.*” (CCC 2083)

This study will discuss a different commandment each week. After a brief discussion of the commandment, we have provided a detailed examination of conscience that may be used in preparation for the Sacrament of Confession. We have also highlighted the seven capital (or deadly) sins along with their respective commandments. These are the sins from which every other sin stems, according to St. Thomas Aquinas, and they are the sources of many other sinful acts. Finally, as we begin with the First Commandment, let us prayerfully consider for a moment and take comfort in “*what God commands he makes possible by his grace.*” (CCC 2082)

The Catechism discusses the commandments in great detail in sections 2052 to 2557. What follows is a simple summary of those points starting in this section with the First Commandment.

PRIDE – One of the Seven Deadly Sins

“Pride was the first sin committed. It was the sin of Lucifer. It was also the root of the Original Sin committed by Adam and Eve. Pride is the greatest of sins because it is the summit of self-love and is directly opposed to the submission to God. It is, therefore, the sin most hated by God, and the one He punishes most severely.” (*The Seven Capital Sins*, Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, Rockford, IL: TAN Books, 2000, 7) Anne says, “Pride is the bridge we cross to other sins.” The lie of the devil is that of freedom without responsibility. This manifestation of pride then becomes license to do as one wishes, not as one should.

11. Why is pride the root of all evil? What is it about pride that supersedes other sins? Discuss.

First Commandment

“I am the Lord thy God, thou shalt not have strange gods before me.”

Jesus said, *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.”* (Mt 22:37) The Catechism outlines the First Commandment in three parts. The first part is *“You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve.”* Our most important obligation to God is our faith or our belief in Him; thus, we should work to *“nourish and protect our faith with prudence and vigilance, and to reject everything that is opposed to it.”* Our next obligation, hope *“is the confident expectation of divine blessing and the beatific vision of God.”* Lastly, charity *“enjoins us to love God above everything and all creatures for him and because of him.”*

The second part described by the Catechism is, as Jesus said, *“...Him only shall you serve.”* (Lk 4:8; cf. Deut 6:13) This aspect concerns the worship and adoration owed to God by His people. We are to admit our nothingness, *“to praise and exalt him and to humble [ourselves] . . . confessing with gratitude that he has done great things and holy is his name.”* As Christians we have a social duty of religion and a right, along with all humanity, to religious freedom.

The third and last part of the First Commandment is *“You shall have no other gods before Me.”* This part details practices that are offensive to God. The Catechism notes that idolatry *“consists in divinizing what is not God. Man commits idolatry whenever he honors and reveres a creature in place of God....power, pleasure, race, ancestors, the state, money, etc.”*
(CCC 2083-2141)

Examination of Conscience

First Commandment

- Did I deny or doubt God’s existence?
- Have I committed heresy, apostasy or been party to schism?
- Did I despair or commit the sin of presumption of God’s mercy?
- Did I refuse to believe God’s Revelation?
- Have I gone to a fortune teller or practiced any other form of the occult (tarot cards, ouija boards, horoscopes, new age philosophies)?
- Do I strongly practice my faith or do I deny God in situations that are difficult or fearful?
- Have I been indifferent to God, lukewarm or ungrateful?
- Do I see the Catholic faith as just one of many (i.e., they’re all the same) or as the Church founded by Jesus Christ? Did I leave the Catholic faith?
- Do I pray often and not just words, but raise my heart and mind to God?
- Do I offer myself and my day to God, counting on Him through all difficulties and trials in life?
- Is there anything in my life that is more important than God, such as money, fame, family or material possessions?
- Did I receive Holy Communion in a state of mortal sin?

SNAPSHOT OF REALITY: The May Crowning (135)

Since this first week talks about love, in this Snapshot we realize that Jesus wants us to be like little children and to put all of our trust in Him. These two children provide a sweet example of how God wants all of us to live.

Examination of conscience: not loving God, hating others, doing what we know is wrong

Antidotes to sin: try to be good, ask forgiveness when we fail, pray to overcome sin

12. Read and consider this Snapshot. Discuss with your group.

Monthly Messages:

November 1, 2005, page 199 and December 1, 2005, page 201

Suggestions for further reading:

CCC 328-336 on Angels

CCC 1866 on Capital Sins

The Seven Capital Sins, Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, Rockford, IL:
TAN Books, 2000

Chapter 2 – Spiritual Warfare – The Battle (5-10; 75-84)

THE BATTLE

(5) Anne tells us from the start that God’s enemy is everywhere, looking for souls that he can lure to hell. Many in the modern world deny the reality of satan. The world often assumes, whether through misguided compassion or “anything goes” tolerance, that everyone will be welcomed with open arms at the gates of heaven. Many today who don’t truly believe in God, work under the assumption that all will be right for them after they die. This naïve belief can be deadly for a soul’s eternity.

What is moral relativism? Moral relativism is the position that moral or ethical propositions do not reflect universal moral truths. Moral relativists hold that no universal standard exists by which to assess an ethical truth. Moral relativism is, “*Any doctrine which denies ... the existence of absolute values.*”

(<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12731d.htm>)

Pope John Paul II spoke of this: “*The advanced secularization of society brings with it a tendency to blur the boundaries between the Church and the world. Certain aspects of the prevailing culture are allowed to condition the Christian community in ways which the Gospel does not permit. There is sometimes an unwillingness to challenge cultural assumptions as the Gospel demands. This often goes hand in hand with an uncritical approach to the problem of moral evil, and a reluctance to recognize the reality of sin and the need for forgiveness...A distorted respect for pluralism leads to a relativism which questions the truths taught by faith and accessible to human reason; and this in turn leads to confusion about what constitutes true freedom.*”

(Ad Limina Address to Australian Bishops, December 14, 1998)

1. Do you find yourself espousing moral relativism (blurring the lines) or are you hearing this philosophy from those around you? Discuss.

2. Do you recognize the reality of sin and the need for forgiveness?

3. What does the CCC say about fallen angels and spiritual warfare in Paragraphs 391-395? Discuss.

4. Do you believe the devil is present in our world? How does the devil manifest himself in your life?

We cannot use spiritual warfare as an excuse for our sinful choices. Spiritual warfare is real, but not to be confused with our personal decisions to be out of control or to allow the world to influence us negatively. The world, the flesh and the devil are obstacles that

prevent us from being the people that God wants us to be. The world draws us toward power and materialism. The flesh succumbs to the weakness within our fallen nature; God's enemy plots our destruction through distortion of the truth.

5. What do you think spiritual warfare is? Do you believe that spiritual warfare exists in the world today?

(7) Anne states, "God's enemy wants only our destruction." This is a perfect description, in a nutshell, of spiritual warfare. Whenever satan can work on us, by preying on our weaknesses and faults, he will do so with a vengeance. As St. Peter said, "Your opponent the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion looking for [someone] to devour." (1 Peter 5:8) However, many of us are oblivious to satan and his wiles. Many people, Catholics included, say that they don't believe in either the devil or hell. This is satan's greatest weapon in the world, convincing us that he doesn't even exist!

In *The Screwtape Letters* by C.S. Lewis, a fictional dialogue takes place between an adult demon and his younger nephew. In this series of letters between the two demons, they discuss how to work satan's will in the modern world. In an excerpt from the preface to the 1961 edition, Lewis writes:

"The commonest question is whether I really 'believe in the devil'. Now, if by 'the devil' you mean a power opposite to God and, like God, self-existent from all eternity, the answer is certainly No. There is no uncreated being except God. God has no opposite. No being could attain a 'perfect badness' opposite to the perfect goodness of God; for when you have taken away every kind of good thing (intelligence, will, memory, energy, and existence itself) there would be none of him left. The proper question is whether I believe in devils. I do. That is to say, I believe in angels, and I believe that some of these, by the abuse of their free will, have become enemies to God and, as a corollary, to us. These we may call devils. They do not differ in nature from good angels, but their nature is depraved. Devil is the opposite of angel only as Bad Man is the opposite of Good Man. Satan, the leader or dictator of devils, is the opposite, not of God, but of [St.] Michael." (6)

(6) Anne tells us, "Souls have forgotten the need for allegiance to God. The enemy, emboldened, hides by standing in the open."

6. (7-9) Can you give one or two examples how the devil “hides by standing in the open”?

The devil is the title given to the chief fallen angel who is the tempter of mankind. The name "devil" derives from the Greek word diabolos, which means "slanderer" or "accuser." This entity can also be referred to by a variety of names, including satan, beelzebub, lucifer, belial, ruler of the world, and baal. The devil is commonly associated with heretics, infidels, and other unbelievers, and he commands a force of lesser evil spirits, commonly known as demons.

7. Now that we have begun to discuss spiritual warfare, can you remember an incident when it happened to you? How did you react?

8. In Scripture there are many quotes on spiritual warfare. Which of the following quotes touches you the most about the reality of the existence of the devil and why?

- Genesis 3:1-5 (Temptation in the Garden)**
- Wisdom 2:24 (Death entered the world through the devil)**
- Luke 4:1-13 (Jesus’ temptation in the desert)**
- John 8:44 (Father of Lies)**

(6) We need to take very seriously Anne’s words: “*There is, after all, a constant battle being waged for our souls.*” Think about how different the world would be if all people understood this. We are not to blame the devil for all of our faults and failings—many are our own responsibility as a result of our pride or our poor decision making—but if we understood that this is a spiritual battle, then perhaps we could see our lives and the world around us in a different light. By choosing sides in the battle, we might be better able to deal with our own failings and to be more patient and compassionate with others as well.

(8) Anne speaks at length about having moral courage. “*The devil arranges for the murder of God’s children and calls it choice. Anyone who objects is roared at and accused of being judgmental or against liberty. People are sluggish because they do not pray, and thereby do not fuel their souls with heavenly courage and the light that is truth.*”

9. Often, making a decision to expose the truth is difficult. Discuss.

10. (8) The enemy uses mimicry and camouflage to work against God. What is the difference between mimicry and camouflage?

Saint Peter Chrysologus

Doctor of the Church

Homilies

Feast Day: July 30

“The devil does not wish to possess a man, but to destroy him. Why? Because he does not wish, he does not dare, he does not allow the man to arrive at the Heaven from which the devil fell. Jealousy, envy, pride and anger, to name only a few capital sins, rage in Lucifer, the prince of devils.”

Homily of St. Peter Chrysologus

Peter was born in Imola, Italy around 400 AD, and little is known of his childhood. He was ordained a deacon of the same city. The Bishop of Imola took him as a companion on a trip to speak to Pope Sixtus III about a replacement for the Archbishop of Ravenna, who had recently died. Ravenna, at that time, was the capital of the Roman Empire in the west. Once Sixtus III met Peter, he chose him for the Archbishop position instead of the proposed candidate of the clergy and people of the Ravenna.

Peter, at first, was only grudgingly accepted by the people of Ravenna. *“His first efforts were to root out abuses and carry on a campaign of preaching and special care of the poor.”* It is because of his sermons that Peter is known as Chrysologus (*“the golden word”*). *“Peter was a vigorous defender of the truth and proponent of Christian morality.”* *“He spoke with such vehemence that he sometimes became speechless from the excitement he was aiming to share...”* He was infused with the Word of God and a passion to communicate it to all. As stated by a quote from his ninety-sixth sermon, *“May our God deign to give me the grace of speaking and you the desire of hearing.”* In the eighth century a collection of 176 of his homilies was compiled ranging in subject from explaining Bible texts, the mystery of the Incarnation, and the Apostles’ Creed, to disputing the heresies of Arius and Eutyches, as well as discussions of the Blessed Virgin and St. John the Baptist.

Some priceless advice given in one of St. Peter Chrysologus’ homilies is worth reflecting on: *“There are three things, my brethren, which causes faith to stand firm, devotion to remain constant and virtue to endure. They are prayer, fasting and mercy. Prayer knocks at the door, fasting obtains and mercy receives. Prayer, mercy and fasting are one. They give life to each other.”*

St. Peter Chrysologus died in 450AD in his birthplace of Imola. He was canonized pre-congregation which means before there was an official process. In 1729, Pope Benedict XIII declared him a Doctor of the Church.

Document Information: Excerpts from: www.passionistsnuns.org
www.doctorsofthecatholicchurch.com
www.newadvent.org

SATAN'S DISTORTION - ABORTION

In *Climbing the Mountain* (Anne, a lay apostle, Justice, IL: Direction for Our Times, 2007), Jesus says to His lay apostles: “*the [serious] sin of abortion ... [grieves Me] in the extreme....Would you like to repent and serve as My beloved apostle? I know that you would and it is for this reason that I have come to you with these words. You are forgiven.*” (CTM 137-138)

(9-10) Anne writes a great deal about the current issues in the modern world regarding treatment of women, abortion and contraception. Her clear, concise message regarding how our Lord wants us to live is refreshing. When she says, “‘*choice*’ sounds like a good and compassionate thing but there is a dead baby at the other end of it,” (8) we nod our heads in agreement. But, we too can often fall into the devil’s trap of false “compassion” for others, by failing to speak up and clearly state the truth without fear. True compassion involves caring for and loving others, but not remaining silent when we could help another with gentle correction. Jesus talks about this when He says, “*If your brother sins against you go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. . . If he refuses to listen even to the church, then treat him as you would a Gentile or a tax collector.*” (Matthew 18:15, 17) In other words, we have an obligation to correct faults when we encounter them, but in a loving way, as Christ would.

In the modern world, many good women have fallen into the enemy’s trap of abortion and contraception. Over fifty million babies in this country have been the victims of abortion, and in some countries around the world, over fifty percent of all pregnancies end in abortion. Consider how this evil may be trapping good souls in shame and isolation because of the sin of abortion. Many souls never share or confess this sin and are living wounded lives. We are all sinners, and God’s good mercy is offered to each of us to heal our brokenness.

11. How might you personally be able to bring healing into our world?

12. Read below what heaven says to women who have had or helped someone have an abortion. What does it bring to mind?

St. Mary Magdalene: “...you must never allow yourself to consider, even for a moment, that a pregnancy does not equal a life, a person, a divine plan. Do not back away from this fact, this irrefutable truth ...Your children love you and have complete understanding of the fears that moved you to your decision. You will see them and you will spend eternity with them. There is only joy in heaven ... And when someone is used as an object for sin, all of heaven is disappointed. You are God’s cherished woman. Do not allow your body to be misused. If this occurs against your will, you must be certain to talk to others who have been misused in this way ... your sexuality is intact and as beautiful as God created it.” (CTM 138-142)

Blessed Mother: “I have seen every pain that you have suffered. I have witnessed each bitter tear. You will be fine now if you let us heal you ... Jesus needs you. I, your heavenly mother, need you. Will you help us? ...You do not see me but I promise you that I am with you. I will never leave you.” (CTM 142-143)

13. Do you know of any services for healing that the Church provides for those who have participated in abortion?

Blessed Mary Angela Truszkowska

*Turn to the Lord your God,
Accept his unconditional love,
Be Eucharist...
Centered in Jesus
Gift given, gift received
Be sister...
Live the Paschal Mystery.
Nurture, encourage, and celebrate.
Be servant...
Faithful daughter of Mary and of Blessed Mary Angela
Embrace all in Franciscan joy.
Be compassionate and merciful,
Be a prophetic witness to a world in need of healing,
Proclaim the saving presence of God.
To All.*

Vision Statement of The Congregation of the Sisters of St. Felix (Third Order Regular Franciscans) founded by Blessed Mary Angela Truszkowska.

Blessed Mary Angela Truszkowska (cont.)

Blessed Mary Angela was baptized Sophia Camille Truszkowska in Kalisz, Poland in 1825. She was the eldest of seven. Her parents were from noble families and were well-educated, devout Catholics. Sophia was educated at home and for a time was enrolled in a prestigious academy in Warsaw but had to withdraw because of health issues. She read extensively and was influenced by her father's stories of social evils he witnessed as a judge in juvenile court. At the age of twenty-three, Sophia experienced a change in her spiritual life. She called it a "conversion." This began a period of intensive interior prayer and a growing devotion to the Holy Eucharist. At this time she seriously considered joining the cloistered Visitation sisters but was unable to leave her ailing father.

She joined the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and worked for five years among the poor. Through intense prayer and discernment Sophia felt called to undertake the moral and religious education of poor neglected children as well as the widowed homeless.

In 1854, she leased a two room garret with her father's financial help and her cousin, Clothilde's assistance. This garret became known as the "Institute of Sophia Truszkowska." It was a home and an educational center for girls.

In 1855, during a simple ceremony, before an icon of Our Lady of Czestochowa, Sophia (now Angela) and Clothilde, dedicated themselves to doing the will of Jesus Christ in all things. This was recorded as the official founding day of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Felix of Cantalice. Mother Angela's motto, "*in all and by all, God may be known, loved and glorified,*" was the aim of her congregation. Her vision of service to God's Kingdom was all-embracing with a charity that made no distinctions between political sides. "*When the Church called, the Felician Sisters responded. The myriad of ministries in which they engaged ranged from social and catechetical centers to converted makeshift hospitals for the wounded...*" Today the Sisters have houses in Poland, USA, Brazil, Kenya, Mexico, and Russia, continuing Mother Angela's innovative techniques in giving service to the poor and meeting the social needs of the times.

From the founding of the Congregation, Mother discerned that there were sisters with a vocation to the contemplative life, so a branch of cloistered contemplatives was established. In 1873, these sisters became the Capuchin Sisters of St. Felix and became independent of the Felician Congregation.

At the age of forty-four, Mother Angela resigned her role as superior general of the Congregation. "*She abandoned herself to God's will and for thirty years lived in complete seclusion, suffering deafness, malignant tumors, and headaches. This time of purgation and suffering brought her to a union with God in complete submission to His will ... Hers was a spirituality of essentials. There were no extraordinary forms of prayer, no visions, ecstasies, or divine revelations. Her lasting legacy of love is the childlike love and imitation of the virtues of Mary and the Eucharistic spirituality which she bequeaths to her spiritual daughters as a way of life.*"

Mother Mary Angela died on October 10, 1899. In 1993 she was beatified by Pope John Paul II.

Document Information: Excerpts from www.catholic.org and www.felicianslodi.org

Second Commandment

“Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.”

The Catechism of the Catholic Church divides the Second Commandment into three parts. The first part recognizes that the Lord’s name is holy and requires our respect. Jesus said, *“You have heard that it was said to the men of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely’ ...But I say to you, ‘Do not swear at all.’”* Man must think of God’s name with *“silent, loving adoration,”* and must speak it only *“to bless, praise and glorify it.”*

Blasphemy is the use of the name of God, of Jesus Christ, of the Virgin Mary, and of the saints in an offensive way and is a grave sin. It is also blasphemous to speak offensive language against Christ’s Church or sacred things or to commit a crime *“in the name of God.”*

The second part of the Second Commandment forbids taking the name of the Lord in vain. *“False oaths call on God to be witness to a lie. Perjury is a grave offense against the Lord who is always faithful to His promises.”*

The third part of the Second Commandment discusses the importance of the Christian name. *“In Baptism, the Christian receives his name in Church. Parents, godparents, and the pastor are to see that he be given a Christian name. The patron saint provides a model of charity and the assurance of his prayer.”*
(CCC 2142-2159)

Examination of Conscience

Second Commandment

- Did I blaspheme God or take God’s name lightly, in surprise or in anger?
- Did I curse, swear false oaths or lie under oath?
- Do I always use the name of God and of Jesus with great reverence?
- When others take God’s name in vain, do I attempt to speak to them charitably in order to help them correct this fault?
- Have I used the name of the Blessed Virgin Mary or a saint irreverently?
- Did I speak badly of the Church or sacred persons or objects?
- Have I made an oath in a secret society such as the Masons?

SNAPSHOT OF REALITY: The Brown Jacket (75)

In this Snapshot, we see a troubled family which easily could be our own at times. The mother is overwhelmed. She is focused on superficial distractions until she finally allows heaven to come to her assistance.

Examination of conscience: focus on material things; picky, pushy, angry; ignored by kids/husband; running away, depression

Antidotes to sin: pray for charity; let go and let God; change self, not others

14. Read and consider this Snapshot. Discuss with your group.

Monthly Message:

June 1, 2006, page 211

Suggestions for further reading:

The Screwtape Letters, C.S. Lewis, New York, NY: Touchstone, 1961

Climbing the Mountain, Anne, a lay apostle, Justice, IL: Direction for Our Times, 2007

Chapter 3 - Spiritual Warfare – Our Response (10-17; 123-134)

OUR RESPONSE – SEXUAL SELF-CONTROL, PURITY AND CHASTITY

(10-11) Anne talks about God’s plan for sexuality, which is totally opposite to that of Satan’s plan: “*God intends that a man and woman enter into a blessed union and then share their sexuality with each other. When God ordains, He blesses the union with a child.*” God’s plan is that we live in harmony with His decrees and not in antagonism toward them. He wants us to accept what He sends us and remain in union with Him, even though we may suffer and perhaps life doesn’t work out quite the way we’d planned.

1. How does the devil distort our view of children as a blessing?

2. Read the excerpt from *Humane Vitae* on the following page and discuss the foresight of Pope Paul VI, over forty years ago, in 1968 on the results of contraception.

Humane Vitae

Consequences of Artificial Methods

17. Responsible men can become more deeply convinced of the truth of the doctrine laid down by the Church on this issue if they reflect on the consequences of methods and plans for artificial birth control. **Let them first consider how easily this course of action could open wide the way for marital infidelity and a general lowering of moral standards.** Not much experience is needed to be fully aware of human weakness and to understand that human beings—and especially the young, who are so exposed to temptation—need incentives to keep the moral law, and it is an evil thing to make it easy for them to break that law. Another effect that gives cause for alarm is that **a man who grows accustomed to the use of contraceptive methods may forget the reverence due to a woman,** and, disregarding her physical and emotional equilibrium, reduce her to being a mere instrument for the satisfaction of his own desires, no longer considering her as his partner whom he should surround with care and affection.

Finally, careful consideration should be given to the danger of this power passing into the hands of those public authorities who care little for the precepts of the moral law. Who will blame a government which in its attempt to resolve the problems affecting an entire country resorts to the same measures as are regarded as lawful by married people in the solution of a particular family difficulty? Who will prevent public authorities from favoring those contraceptive methods which they consider more effective? Should they regard this as necessary, they may even impose their use on everyone. It could well happen, therefore, that when people, either individually or in family or social life, experience the inherent difficulties of the divine law and are determined to avoid them, **they may give into the hands of public authorities the power to intervene in the most personal and intimate responsibility of husband and wife.**

Limits to Man's Power

Consequently, unless we are willing that the responsibility of procreating life should be left to the arbitrary decision of men, we must accept that there are certain limits, beyond which it is wrong to go, to the power of man over his own body and its natural functions—limits, let it be said, which no one, whether as a private individual or as a public authority, can lawfully exceed. These limits are expressly imposed because of the reverence due to the whole human organism and its natural functions, in the light of the principles. Stated earlier, and in accordance with a correct understanding of the "principle of totality" enunciated by our predecessor Pope Pius XII. (21)

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae_en.html (Emphasis added)

The Pope saw that, through the use of contraception, women would be treated like objects and men would feel little responsibility for their sexual behavior and offspring. Confusion and chaos would reign supreme in these matters. Today, many are convinced that the Pope was a prophet, although this is one prophecy that we would have preferred to remain unfulfilled, particularly on such a grand scale as we see it today.

3. How do you see this confusion and chaos today?

The Catechism considers a couple’s legitimate desire to space the births of their children. While the end is the same whether a couple practices natural family planning (NFP), direct sterilization or contraception, the means in each case is judged either legitimate or illegitimate. Similarly, while a starving man may obtain money (the “end”) through either a second job or by robbing a bank, one means is clearly judged legitimate and the other is clearly illegitimate. As Christians, we are called to choose the legitimate means. How is NFP legitimate? Because the sexual act remains both unitive and procreative; whereas with both sterilization and contraception, the sexual act, while unitive, is divorced from any procreative purposes. *“The regulation of births represents one of the aspects of responsible fatherhood and motherhood. Legitimate intentions on the part of the spouses do not justify recourse to morally unacceptable means (for example, direct sterilization or contraception).”* (CCC 2399; see also CCC 2368-2372)

4. What does the Catholic Catechism say about contraception and spacing pregnancies in Paragraphs 2366-2372?

The Church also explains that no one has a right to a child, as though a child were a piece of property. Instead, a child is a gift from God. (CCC 2378; Gen 15:2, 30:1) Therefore, there are limits on measures infertile couples may use to become parents. The sexual act

must remain both procreative and unitive. Attempts to disassociate the sexual act from the procreative act include third-party sperm or ovum donation or surrogate uterus, in vitro fertilization and in many cases, artificial insemination. (CCC 2373-2377) The end does not justify the means, and as Christians, infertile couples are called to choose legitimate means to becoming parents. Of course, one such legitimate means is through adoption. (CCC 2379)

5. What does the Catechism teach about fertility treatments in Paragraphs 2373-2379? Why do you think that is the Church’s position?

(13) Anne’s discussion about today’s children gives us much food for thought. Perhaps if we teach our children what God expects from them, we can give them the tools to withstand the barrage from the enemy, which usually is in the disguise of “what everyone else is doing.” *“The issue, I believe, is partially one of expectation. The bar of behavior needs to be raised back up to a standard that provides spiritual safety for our youth. The devil’s plan for our children must be exposed.”* As adults we are modeling the expected behavior – good or bad – for children. While setting standards of behavior is burdensome at times, we all need to participate in helping children fulfill God’s plan for their life.

6. What resources are available for adults to help children grow morally upright?

This standard applies not only to sexual behavior, but to materialism, drug and alcohol use and a whole host of other issues. Parents who fight the tide of the world should be commended and assisted by the rest of us, as they are those that Anne speaks of on page eight when she talks about those with moral courage.

7. Discuss with your group someone you know who is fighting the tide and how others could help them.

We finish this section with a beautiful Psalm which describes families fighting the tide of our culture:

**Psalm 128:
The Happy Home of the Just**

Happy are all who fear the Lord,
Who walk in the ways of God.
What your hands provide you will enjoy;
You will be happy and prosper:
Like a fruitful vine your wife within your home,
Like olive plants your children around your table.
Just so will they be blessed who fear the Lord.
May the Lord bless you from Zion, all the days of your life
That you may share Jerusalem's joy and live to see your
children's children.
Peace upon Israel!

DISTRACTIONS

(14) Anne talks about other ways in which we dull our senses, often through excess consumption of food and drink. Many of us, particularly in the West, have become slaves to our bodies. We will not deny ourselves anything that we want, no matter what the impact is on our health and well-being. Anne says, *"Food items once considered treats have become staples."* As a result, we have become slaves to our cravings. Anne tells us that we keep so busy responding to the needs of our out-of-control bodies, that we neglect our spiritual life and our soul:

(14) "The devil encourages us to deny our bodies nothing and we are exhausted from responding to every craving and impulse. Note the shrewdness of this distraction. If we are kept busy by our bodies, dear friends, we forget to nourish our souls and we do not thrive spiritually or physically. We must bring our bodies into submission by telling our bodies 'NO.' Free of bodily slavery, we will see our souls gain strength and courage."

8. Ask God to show you an example of where you need His grace in this matter. Can you think of a Scripture verse that reminds you of God’s power working through you?

9. If you trusted God with all bodily concerns (food, appearance, suffering), how might He be able to better use you?

OUR RESPONSE – FASTING

One way that we can practice self-control over our bodily impulses, while we offer sacrifice to God and enter more deeply into prayer, is by fasting. Jesus Himself fasted forty days and forty nights in the desert in order to prepare Himself for His earthly mission. At the end of this time, satan came to tempt Him and was unsuccessful, for Jesus had prepared Himself, through both prayer and fasting, to meet all that the devil could hurl at Him.

10. Read Matthew 4:1-11 about Jesus’ temptations by satan. What does this passage say about Jesus’ preparation?

When we fast, we become freed from the bonds of food and concern about food, and we are better able to open our hearts and minds to our Lord, as well as listen to Him when He speaks to us.

As Jesus once told Anne, *“My apostles and saints throughout the ages always tried to live moderately in all things. In this way their bodies were treated with respect and could serve.”* (Volume Ten, Anne, a lay apostle, Justice, IL: Direction for Our Times, 2007, 23)

“Fasting creates a vacuum that liberates a space in our souls, in our bodies and in our hearts. When we are not worried about eating, there is a free space where God comes to dwell as never before. This is new tangible territory within ourselves that God can invest in. This is why those who fast have a special spiritual sensitivity and sharpness.” (Freed and Healed through Fasting, Sister Emmanuel, USA: Pax Publishing LLC, 2004, 20)

St. Philomena told Anne, *“Be in the habit of denying your body a little every day. Again, this is practice. When you deny yourself, perhaps in fasting, you have not said, I will never eat again. You have said, I will not eat for now. I will eat later.”* (Volume Seven, Anne, a lay apostle, Justice, IL: Direction for Our Times, 2004, 12)

Later, in the same Volume, St. Christopher told Anne to *“Practice disciplining your body. Say no to your body on occasion so that your body will understand that your soul is in charge . . . Fasting is a good way to let your body understand that it is not in charge. When you fast you deny your body and nourish your soul. Your soul grows strong and confident during these periods. The enemy becomes weak and ineffectual in your life if you are fasting.”* (Ibid, 55)

Mary, in her messages from Medjugorje, implores us continually to pray and fast for the conversion of the world; for the souls of our families; for an end to abortion, war and strife; for healing of both body and soul; and for a deeper union in prayer with her Son. She warned us in 1983 to:

“Be prudent because the devil tempts all those who have made a resolution to consecrate themselves to God . . . He will suggest to them that they are praying too much, they are fasting too much, that they must be like other . . . people and go in search of pleasures . . . It is to the voice of the Blessed Mother that they should pay attention. When they will be strengthened in their faith, the devil will no longer be able to seduce them.” (Freed and Healed through Fasting, Sister Emmanuel, USA: Pax Publishing LLC, 2004, 37)

11. Have you ever fasted? Share with your group your experience of fasting.

Our Blessed Mother, in many appearances, advises us to fast on bread and water two days a week, Wednesdays and Fridays. This is because our prayer and fasting should be directed to Jesus in the Eucharist who is the Bread of Life. Our fasting and prayer should reflect our devotion to Him who came to earth to save us from our sins.

If we are just beginning to fast or have a specific reason not to do so such as our health, we certainly can begin by fasting from things other than food. We can fast from television, alcohol, cigarettes, coffee, gossip, impatience or any other vice we choose. By beginning in this way, we can learn to prepare our hearts and minds for a more difficult fast in the future if we feel that this is where our Lord is leading us.

One area of life that is very important to many of us today is our material possessions. God the Father told Anne, when discussing earthly possessions, that He “...saw a world that was unbalanced. Some of My children had every possible earthly possession. Because of the abundance of such possessions, My children in some parts of the world began to think in a distorted way. They thought then that they were entitled to such riches. When they could not secure the riches they admired, they began to think they were deprived. They became unhappy . . .” (Volume Four, January 12, 2004, Anne, a lay apostle, Justice, IL: Direction for Our Times, 2004, 11)

Perhaps by reflecting on these words of Jesus, we can examine our own lives to see if we are indeed some of those children He is talking about. In this modern world, it is very easy for us to take many of our gifts and possessions for granted and to become too attached to material possessions. Detaching ourselves from our “stuff” could be an excellent way to begin to fast and for some of us, may indeed be the most difficult.

God the Father told His priests that in order “*To grasp this possession of holiness, you must relinquish your grasp on the world. You must give your attachments to the world to Me . . . Lay these attachments at My feet and I will eradicate their hold on you.*” (Ibid, February 6, 2004, 87) This is not only an excellent reminder for the clergy, it is also an excellent reminder for all apostles and those who hope and desire to serve God more closely.

12. Read the following Scripture passages and discuss with your group: Isaiah 58:1-9; Joel 2:12-18; Matt 6:16-18. Which one speaks to you the most about the need for fasting?

Finally, God the Father tells us, *“Truly, if you are detached from the world and from worldly things, you can experience a foretaste of heaven on earth and then you will have less desire for earthly things. You will have a clearer, more defined focus. You will have less difficulty with the idea of leaving the earth and making the journey to your home in heaven.”* (Ibid, January 14, 2004, 20) After all, isn’t that the ultimate goal for each of us, as we practice the virtue of every kind of self-denial?

**St. Francis de Sales
Doctor of the Church
Patron of Journalists, Writers
Feast Day: January 24th**

“Do not look forward to the changes of this life with fear. Rather, look to them with full confidence that, as they arise, God to whom you belong will in His love enable you to profit by them. He has guided you thus far in life. Do you but hold fast to His dear hand, and He will lead you safely through all trials. Whenever you cannot stand, He will carry you lovingly in His arms. Do not look forward to what may happen tomorrow. The same Eternal Father who takes care of you today will take care of you tomorrow, and every day of your life. Either He will shield you from suffering or He will give you unfailing strength to bear it. Be at peace then, and put aside all useless thoughts, all vain dreads and all anxious imaginations.”

Prayer of St. Francis De Sales (*The Essential Catholic Prayer Book*, Judith A. Bauer, Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 1999, 61)

Francis Bonaventura de Sales was born on August 21st, 1567 in France. He was the eldest of thirteen children. His parents were considered French nobility. Francis was sent off to school at the age of thirteen, first to Paris and then to Padua. He excelled in his studies, earning a doctorate in law.

While in Paris, Francis’ *“heart became more and more fixed on giving himself to God,”* but he also developed a great fear of having lost God’s favor through sinfulness. He was delivered of

St. Francis de Sales (cont.)

this trial while praying in church. *“This experience of his youth taught him to deal understandingly with the spiritual crises of those who, at a later period, looked to him for guidance.”*

Nonetheless, for thirteen years Francis discerned his calling to be a priest. *“God finally made God’s will clear to Francis while he was riding. Francis fell from his horse three times. Every time he fell the sword came out of the scabbard. Every time it came out the sword and the scabbard came to rest on the ground in the shape of the cross. And then, Francis, without knowing about it, was appointed provost of his diocese, second in rank to the bishop.”* By accepting the position, Francis obtained his father’s consent to enter the priesthood. Francis had been preparing through his long years of discernment by his theological studies at university and his pious practices in life. He was able to take minor orders within three weeks and six months later was ordained, at the age of twenty-six.

About a year later Francis volunteered to lead an expedition into Switzerland to convert Calvinists back to Catholicism. This mission was very dangerous. There had been several military battles involving Protestants and Catholics in this area over several years. The villagers were violent and hostile. Francis set out by foot with very little money and accompanied only by his cousin, Canon Louis de Sales. He would labor in this region for three long years. He had doors slammed in his face, rocks thrown at him, and was beset by wolves and angry mobs. He suffered terribly from exposure to the cold and snow.

Since Francis was shunned by most, he started to write his sermons down in leaflet form. He would slip them under the villagers’ doors. Little by little, the people began to listen to his teaching concerning the Catholic Church’s opposition to the tenets of Calvinism. Francis also talked to the children. Once the parents saw his gentleness with the children they were drawn to him as well. He was always very tender with those returning to the faith. *“Come, my dear children, come, let me put my arms around you. Ah, let me hide you in the bottom of my heart! God and I will help you, all I ask of you is not to despair; I will take on myself the rest of the burden.”* By the time Francis left the area, in 1598, most had returned to the Catholic Church.

In 1602, Francis was made Bishop of Geneva. *“He fulfilled his Episcopal duties with devotion and along with administrative work continued to preach and serve in the confessional. He instituted the teaching of the Catechism throughout his diocese.”* Through letters he gave instruction and spiritual guidance to many. *“At that time, the way of holiness was only for monks and nuns—not for ordinary people. Francis changed all that by giving spiritual direction to lay people living ordinary lives in the world. But he had proven with his own life that people could grow in holiness while involved in a very active occupation.”*

In 1604, Francis met Jane de Chantal. It was through their association that the Order of the Visitation was founded in 1610. This order was *“to meet the needs of widows and lonely women in poor health, ‘strong souls with weak bodies,’ who were deterred from joining other orders because of their physical condition.”*

St. Francis de Sales (cont.)

By 1621, Francis' health was failing under his many duties. He traveled to Avignon in that year to meet with King Louis XIII. Francis tried to avoid the pomp of the court but was much sought after by those who wanted to hear him preach. He stopped in Lyons on his return at the Convent of the Visitation. He suffered a seizure there and died. Francis de Sales was beatified by Alexander VII in 1661, canonized in 1665, and proclaimed a Doctor of the Church in 1877.

Document Information: Excerpts from www.ewtn.com and www.catholic.org

OUR RESPONSE - PRAYER

(17) Here Anne takes us from a generalized discussion of spiritual warfare to a very personal level. She discusses prayer, how and why we should pray, and the peace available to us if we utilize the gifts that God has given us as armor in the spiritual battle. The contrast between the noise and confusion of the devil and the peace and tranquility of God is palpable. If we can just quiet our noisy and stressful lives, take time to spend moments with God and ignore the promptings of the evil one, we will be well on our way to spiritual victory in even our small daily struggles. When we all do this together as part of the Mystical Body of Christ in His Church, major, even global, victories are possible as we march behind Him who leads us. As Anne says so well, *“Prayer brings Christ into the world and sits Him at every table.”* (18) What a wonderful picture that brings to our minds—if we could live our lives as though Christ is always at our side, watching, encouraging and loving us with His unconditional love—how right the world would be, not only for us, but for all those whom we encounter. Brother Lawrence, in *The Practice of the Presence of God*, tells us, *“The best method of going to God is that of simply doing our everyday work without any view of pleasing men. Rather, as far as we are capable, we should do even our daily tasks purely for the love of God.”* (*The Practice of the Presence of God*, Brother Lawrence, Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc. 1999, 9)

13. Read the last paragraph on page 17, and describe which, if any, of these four scenarios you struggle with. Discuss with your group how this calls you to prayer:

1. *“I am a failure”*
2. *“I want to quit this mission”*
3. *“God does not care about my pain”*
4. *“The world is a disaster”*

14. (17) What does Anne say God tells her about her pain? Does this help you bear pain more readily?

15. Cite some other examples in your life that contrast what you understand God to say with what the enemy wants you to believe.

It is easy to forget, in the midst of the noise and confusion of battle, that it is in the quiet that we find our Lord, who waits patiently for us to come to Him. Elijah found Him in the quiet also, and this should be our goal:

*“Then the Lord said, „Go outside and stand on the mountain before the Lord; the Lord will be passing by.’ A strong and heavy wind was rending the mountains and crushing rocks before the Lord—but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake—but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake there was fire—but the Lord was not in the fire. After the fire there was **a tiny whispering sound**. When he heard this, Elijah hid his face in his cloak and went and stood at the entrance of the cave. A voice said to him, „Elijah, why are you here?” (1 Kings 19:11-13) (Emphasis added)*

Praying the Psalms creates a tranquil haven if we can quiet ourselves before God for even a short time.

“Happy the man who . . . delights in the law of the Lord and meditates on his law day and night. He is like a tree planted near running water.” (Psalm 1:1-3)

“Only in God be at rest, my soul, for from him comes my hope . . . I shall not be disturbed.” (Psalm 62:6-7)

“Nay rather, I have stilled and quieted my soul like a weaned child . . . on its mother’s lap.” (Psalm 131:2)

God loves us so much that He wants us to come to Him as a child would to his mother, lovingly climbing into her lap to talk about his day, his problems and his concerns. We know that in God’s lap, we are safe, protected and sheltered from the raging storm of the world around us. Here, with our Creator, we can find the peace that only He can give and the shelter that we need from all of life’s storms.

(17) Anne says, *“Just as God wishes us to proceed calmly and methodically through our daily lives, the enemy whips us into a frenzy of activity. There is constant distraction through music, noise, talking, bickering, and endless discussion.”*

16. Reflect on Anne’s words and examine how they could help you to make changes in your life.

17. (17) According to Anne, what are some reasons the devil wants us to remain distracted, worried and busy all the time?

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* discusses prayer in great detail. In fact, one of the four main sections of the Catechism is devoted entirely to prayer.

“Prayer is the raising of one’s mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God . . . humility is the foundation of prayer. Only when we humbly

*acknowledge that ‘we do not know how to pray as we ought,’ are we ready to receive freely the **gift of prayer.**” (CCC 2559) (Emphasis added) The Catechism continues: “It is (Christ) who first seeks us and asks us for a drink. Jesus thirsts;*

his asking arises from the depths of God’s desire for us. Whether we realize it or not, prayer is the encounter of God’s thirst with ours. God thirsts that we may thirst for him.” (CCC 2560) “. . . In naming the source of prayer, Scripture speaks sometimes of the soul or the spirit, but most often of the heart (more than a thousand times). According to Scripture, it is the heart that prays. If our heart is far from God, the words of prayer are in vain.” (CCC 2562)

It is here, in these words, that we receive the key to our tranquility and to our relationship with God and the world. Our hearts must yearn for Him who created us and who constantly calls us to Himself.

18. Discuss the concept of our Lord thirsting for us (John 19:28). Scripture often speaks of our thirsting for God (Psalm 63:2, John 7:37-38 and John 4:7-15). What do these quotes mean to you?

19. Reflect on how long you spend in prayer each day and what keeps you from it. Consider a prayer routine that is manageable for you.

One very helpful aid to daily prayer can be found in a monthly prayer book called the “Magnificat.” It is based on the Divine Office, which are the daily prayers of the Church that priests, deacons, religious and many lay people pray at varying times during the day. In the “Magnificat” are not only the daily Mass readings, but also morning, evening and night prayers for each day of the month. It also contains a number of articles of interest, information on the various feast days throughout the liturgical year and stories of the saints, many of whom are unfamiliar to us. Each day also includes a meditation on the day’s readings from either the writings of a saint or another spiritual writer. (See

magnificat.com.) (There is also “MagnifiKid” which is a highly recommended guide to the Sunday Mass for children.)

***“The fruit of silence is prayer;
the fruit of prayer is faith;
the fruit of faith is love;
the fruit of love is service;
the fruit of service is peace.”***

Mother Teresa
Mother Teresa’s Prescription, Paul A. Wright, M.D.,
Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, Inc, 2006, 69

SLOTH – One of the Seven Deadly Sins

“Sloth is spiritual laziness, although it includes laziness of the body too. It is an aversion to spiritual effort, which leads to the neglect of grace. Sloth resides in our mind and will and is the most dangerous of all vices because it makes us refuse to cooperate with grace. It may thus lead us to final impenitence and the loss of our soul.” (The Seven Capital Sins, Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, Rockford, IL: TAN Books, 2000, 39)
Sloth can be the major cause of our many sins of omission. When we look at ourselves clearly and see all those things we should have done and didn’t, we are seeing sloth at work.

20. Discuss how spiritual laziness has affected your life at times. What have you done to remedy that problem?

Third Commandment

“Thou shalt keep holy the Sabbath.”

The Catechism of the Catholic Church divides the Third Commandment into two parts. The first part recognizes the holiness of the Sabbath Day. During creation, God Himself rested on the seventh day; therefore, He blessed the Sabbath Day and made it holy. Like God, we too should rest and be refreshed on the Sabbath. *“It is a day of protest against the servitude of work and the worship of money.”*

The second part emphasizes an understanding of the Lord’s Day. *“The Sabbath, which represented the completion of the first creation, has been replaced by Sunday, which recalls the new creation inaugurated by the Resurrection of Christ.”* On Sundays and other Holy Days of Obligation the faithful are bound to participate in the Mass.

According to the Catechism, *“You cannot pray at home as at church, where there is a great multitude, where exclamations are cried out to God as from one great heart, and where there is something more: the union of minds, the accord of souls, the bond of charity, the prayers of the priests.”*

During Mass we come together to pray, worship and thank God for our many blessings during the Liturgy of the Word and to receive Jesus Himself and His holy grace in the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. *“The faithful give witness by this to their communion in faith and charity.” “Those who deliberately fail in this obligation commit a grave sin.”*

(CCC 2168-2195)

Examination of Conscience

Third Commandment

- Did I miss Mass on Sunday or a Holy Day of Obligation through my own fault?
- Am I always reverent in the presence of Jesus in the Most Blessed Sacrament?
- Was I inattentive at Mass? Did I come to Mass late? How late? Did I leave Mass early?
- Did I do unnecessary physical work on Sunday?
- Do I do unnecessary shopping or other business on Sunday?
- Do I devote sufficient time to prayer?
- Have I fulfilled the precept of the Church that relates to annual Confession and reception of Holy Communion during the Easter season?

SNAPSHOT OF REALITY: A Bad Week (123)

In this Snapshot we see how priests and their vocations are essential to the Sabbath. We need to pray regularly for our priests and their holy vocations so that they will have the strength to minister to their flock.

Examination of conscience: feelings of inadequacy, poor guidance from other priest friends, being overworked and overwhelmed

Antidotes to sin: holy companions, seek God's will, frequent spiritual nourishment through prayer, retreats and adoration

21. Read and consider this Snapshot. Discuss with your group.

Monthly Messages:

December 1, 2004, page 187 and October 1, 2005, page 198

Suggestions for further reading:

Humane Vitae, Pope Paul VI, 1968

The Practice of the Presence of God, Brother Lawrence, Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1999

The Mystical City of God, Venerable Mary of Agreda, Rockford, IL: TAN Books, 1978

Freed and Healed through Fasting, Sister Emmanuel, USA: Pax Publishing LLC, 2004

The Spirituality of Fasting, Charles M. Murphy, 2010

Mother Teresa's Prescription, Paul A. Wright, M.D., Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, Inc, 2006

For a Catholic resource for achieving peace with food, developed by Suzanne Fowler, visit www.lightweigh.com

Chapter 4 - Spiritual Warfare – The Reality (18-38; 109-116)

OUR RESPONSE – BE ALERT

(18) Anne talks about remaining alert to the power of the devil. She says:

*“... to pretend that the enemy does not exist is to disarm a population of Christians who are under **relentless assault** but who think they are doing just fine. We need to increase the awareness that a battle is being waged. People should be warned that if they are not willing to fight, they will have to be willing to accept defeat because the spiritual walk is not one where it is possible to stand still. One way or the other, we are moving. **If we are not moving closer to Christ, the chances are excellent that we are moving away from Him.**” (Emphasis added)*

The people set before us by the world as role models for our children, through their presence on television, in the movies, in academia or in sports, encourage us and our loved ones to emulate their behavior and their beliefs. Often these same “role models” are contemptuous of people of strong faith and morals who act in awareness of the spiritual battle. The world is filled today with those who seem bent on their own spiritual destruction and who, as they leap off the spiritual cliff, are laughing at God’s people. Our task, in addition to praying that God will open their eyes and reach their hardened hearts, is to protect ourselves and our loved ones from their influence. Our eyes should be open, and we should see clearly that spiritual warfare is underway. We must steer clear of the assault and move towards God’s love and protection. As Anne tells us, *“We will sometimes appear foolish if we work for heaven, particularly in the eyes of those who work for heaven but do so safely within the limits of worldly acceptance.”*(20)

1. Discuss with your group an example of a person who is working for heaven in the midst of the taunts and jeers of the world. It can be a well-known person or simply someone you know personally.

(19) Anne writes:

“To be alert in spiritual warfare means to be constantly examining the source of our thoughts. For example, does Jesus tell us that our cross is too heavy and we should drop it on someone else or abandon it? Does Jesus tell us that life is unfair to us and we should blame others? Does Jesus continually remind us how badly we have been treated, inspiring us to bitterness?”

2. Discuss one spiritual battle you experienced this week. Did you overcome it or did it overcome you? Resolve to remind yourself how to grow in holiness while in the midst of a spiritual battle.

(21-22) Anne lists her own personal experiences with spiritual attacks and the thoughts that prevail when she is in the middle of the battle. (Our favorite one is, “*Jesus can’t stand me. He’s just too nice to say so.*”) As we read through the list, we nod our heads in agreement with Anne as we have probably all experienced at least a few of these on more than one occasion. As Anne points out, once we are aware of the thoughts and their source, they become much easier to deal with than when we are simply whining and feeling outraged about our unfair lot in life. In these instances, it is important to recognize the source of the irritation and go directly to Jesus in peace and tranquility. We can ask Him to take care of our needs. After all, He is certainly more equipped to deal with the evil one than we are—why should we go it alone?

3. (21-22) Which one or two of the thoughts on these pages are you most familiar with? Discuss.

4. (22) Honestly list what your needs are versus your wants. After reflection, are you now more comfortable with your needs being met? Are you able to see that if your needs are met, perhaps your wants are not nearly as important as you thought?

5. (23-24) Anne describes in detail a usual day of attack and how she responded. We all behave differently, depending on our personality and the nature of the attack. Describe how you responded to an attack. How does Anne tell us to respond?

6. Reflect on Ephesians 6:12: *“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”* Do you understand this to be true now, having participated in these readings and discussions?

7. (24) According to Anne, what are some of the goals of the enemy when he attacks us?

8. (25) How does Anne say we should prepare for battle against the enemy?

(26) Anne tells us, *“Those with real power speak softly. They do not need to yell.”* Nor, as Anne tells us, do we need to complain about others who are not acting as we think they should. Pointing fingers, assessing blame, gossiping and faultfinding are not part of the agenda of our Lord’s workers. The enemy takes great delight in these distractions that he places in our path. For if we are focused on the distractions two things will happen: God’s work will not get done, and we will stray from His commandments. But Anne also tells us that we will fall short at times and that this should not discourage us. We should be gentle with ourselves if we fail. The evil one enjoys helping us berate and chastise ourselves. After all, no one can do a better job of beating us up than we ourselves can—we know each and every fault intimately. It is at those times that we need to stop and consider Anne’s words: *“Jesus has no need of perfect apostles or He would have created some.”* (27)

9. (27) According to Anne, why does Jesus allow us to experience spiritual warfare? What does Anne’s spiritual director say about spiritual warfare?

10. (27) Anne’s family jokes that “a request to heaven for humility is usually answered within minutes.” Has this happened to you? Discuss.

RECOGNIZING THE TYPES OF ATTACK

(27) Anne tells us “*Jesus allows us to experience spiritual warfare so that we can grow in holiness and trust.*” For our benefit, she details multiple descriptions from people who have actually experienced warfare.

11. Read on pages 28-34 the descriptions of spiritual warfare experienced by various people. Which of these can you most relate to? Does it help you to realize that many others experience the same trials and temptations as you do? Discuss with your group.

(34) Anne writes of a priest who is very seasoned in battle and he relates three types of spiritual attacks:

- 1.) **Annoying** – these work on our emotional wounds and can lead to anger and/or distraction
- 2.) **Challenging and Difficult** – these attacks can be extremely intense: fear, hatred, lust, racing mind, discouragement and hopelessness
- 3.) **Frightening** – so intense that we want to quit our duty and/or we can actually feel the demon’s hatred and presence

ANNOYING

The first type of attack discussed is the annoying kind, which comes from fear of or the memory of rejection. Just when we think we are in pretty good shape spiritually, everything starts to go wrong. First, the minor annoying things start to happen. These are the disturbances that, when they happen frequently, can turn us into irritable and impatient followers of Christ who are convinced that God has it out for us and that He is “piling it on.” These things can range from lost keys, the car that won’t start, the kids who are continually battling with each other, the intolerable coworker, the nasty store clerk or the nosy neighbor. Anne’s priest friend tells us that these things can often trigger a bad memory or experience for us and can cause us to react in an unkind or angry manner, often without even thinking about it.

12. (34) What does the priest suggest or urge us to do to avoid or avert this?

13. What are some short prayers that you can share with your group to help in these situations?

14. Describe an annoying attack that you have experienced.

(34) Related to the above discussion, the priest also classifies as annoying, an attack in prayer, where we are discouraged, distracted or distant. He references the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius as a guide for developing better prayer practices.

15. Have you ever done the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius? If so, share the experience with your group.

St. Ignatius of Loyola is best known for his Spiritual Exercises and for founding the Jesuit order. He understood that each of us struggles daily with those inner voices, both of God and of the devil. Part of his Spiritual Exercises concern the discernment of spirits in which he tries to aid people in discerning the difference between God's call and the call of the devil. (A good summary of his work is *Discernment of Spirits* by Fr. Timothy Gallagher, which Anne references on page 35.)

16. Have you heard the terms spiritual desolation or spiritual consolation? If so, what do they mean to you?

Some days we are greatly consoled in believing that we hear God. He defines this spiritual consolation as “every increase in faith, hope 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.” (*The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, David L. Fleming S.J., St. Louis, MO: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1978, 206)

At other times, we feel that, in spite of our best efforts, we cannot pray as we know we should. We are distracted, lazy, focused on earthly things, restless and/or sad. We have a sense that nothing really matters. God is not listening anyway or we just aren't in the mood. At these times, often we can feel overcome by our own guilt, since we know what we should be doing, but cannot do it. We also feel a certain lethargy that we cannot seem to shake. St. Ignatius calls this spiritual desolation and says that it is all that is contrary to spiritual consolation, and it is “as if (one) is separated from his Creator and Lord.” (*Ibid*, 206)

17. Give an example of when you experienced spiritual desolation in your life and when you experienced spiritual consolation in your life.

Often we think that if we just change something, pray at a different time of day, in a different location, with a different book or Bible translation, that all will be better. St. Ignatius warns against this however, by saying that we must never make a change while in spiritual desolation, “*but to be firm and constant in the resolutions and determination in which one was the day preceding such desolation.*” (*Ibid*, 208) If the cause of our problem is spiritual, then it is important to defy the devil and not allow him to change our focus in any way. St. Ignatius says that the only way to defy the bad spirit is to redouble our efforts in keeping our spiritual resolutions. (Excerpts from “The Coming Home Network Newsletter” by Marcus Grodi, July 2007)

18. Is spiritual desolation ever beneficial?

St. Ignatius of Loyola
Patron of Retreats, Soldiers and the Jesuit Order
Feast Day, July 31

*“Lord, grant that I may see thee more clearly,
love thee more dearly, follow thee more nearly.”*

*(Hearts on Fire Praying with the Jesuits, Michael
Hartner, S.J., Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, 1992, 37)*

Inigo or Ignatius, as he was known later, was born in 1491 in the Basque region of Spain. He was the youngest of twelve children. As a youth, Ignatius was sent to live in Castile with a provincial governor of King Ferdinand. There he was taught the soldierly arts, including mastery of weapons, horsemanship, and the manners of the court. At twenty-five, he joined the camp of his relative, the Duke of Najera, and battled the French in Castile and Navarre, attaining a captaincy.

During the defense of the capital of Navarre, Ignatius was wounded when a cannon ball shattered his right shin. He and his soldiers had no choice but to surrender to the French. He was given immediate medical attention and then sent by litter to his father’s castle, fifty miles away. Ignatius endured the pain of having his leg broken and reset, as well as an operation to saw off a part of the bone which had been protruding from his leg, as a result of the first attempt to set it during the battle. No anesthesia was available at this time. He was able to withstand the procedures without being bound or held down. However, his right leg was permanently shortened.

During his convalescence, he was confined to his bed. To amuse himself, he asked to be given books about knights and courtly romance, but none were available. Instead he was given a collection of stories about the saints and the life of Christ. Gradually he became so immersed in the stories that he started to reevaluate his life. He noticed that *“the thoughts which came from God filled him with peace and tranquility, while the others, though they might delight him briefly, left his heart heavy.”* As soon as his health returned, Ignatius went on pilgrimage to Our Lady of Montserrat, a shrine in the mountains above Barcelona. Once there, he left his sword at the altar, removed his expensive clothes, and donned sackcloth. He confessed his sins and took a vow to lead a life of penance and devotion to God.

For most of 1522, Ignatius lived in a cave in the small town of Manresa, deep in prayer and living off alms. It was during this time that he was plagued by deep depression and remorse for past sins. Through this trial, he began to take notes of his contemplations and inner struggles. The notes eventually became his famous book of Spiritual Exercises. *“Years later, he told his successor in the Society of Jesus, Father Laynez, that he learned more of divine mysteries in one hour of prayer at Manresa than all the doctors of the schools could ever have taught him.”*

St. Ignatius of Loyola (cont.)

A failed attempt to preach in the Holy Land brought Ignatius back to Barcelona by way of Venice. There at thirty-three, he started Latin classes which he found difficult. Ignatius' soldierly training had not prepared him for more academic studies. But after two years, he had progressed sufficiently to go to the University of Alcalá, near Madrid. There he studied logic, physics, and theology but continued to struggle with the classes. He was begging for alms and living in a hospice for poor students. Ignatius was drawn to preaching and teaching children the catechism. However, this was considered presumptuous because of his lack of training, and as a result, the vicar-general imprisoned him for six weeks. After serving his sentence, he was declared innocent, but was not allowed to give religious instruction for three years.

Ignatius then traveled to the University of Salamanca to study. Again his fervor caused problems with the vicar-general there and he was briefly imprisoned, only to be declared innocent after serving his time. At this point, Ignatius felt it best to leave Spain. He went to France and studied at several universities, finally receiving a Masters of Arts in philosophy in 1535. While completing his studies, Ignatius had organized a group of fellow students to join him in prayer on Sundays and to do good works on behalf of others. This group eventually became the inner core of the Society of Jesus.

All the members in this group were ordained to the priesthood. They took vows of poverty, chastity, and to preach in Palestine. If that was not possible, they offered themselves to the Pope to use as he saw fit. *"If anyone asked what their association was, they would reply, 'the Company of Jesus,' for their purpose was to fight against heresy and vice, apathy and decadence, under the standard of Christ."* By 1541, the Jesuits had been accepted as a religious order.

Ignatius' chief work, the Spiritual Exercises, which he had begun in 1522, was finally published in Rome in 1548. To follow the Exercises, one must take a week to consider sin and its consequences, another week to consider our Lord's earthly life, a third week to consider His Passion, and a fourth week to consider His Resurrection. By following this guided course of meditations, a fervent prayer life and inner calm is developed.

Ignatius spent the rest of his life in Rome. He directed the Society of Jesus and other foundations, setting up houses for instruction of converted Jews, orphans, and the poor, as well as centers of learning throughout Europe and into Africa. At the time of his death in 1556, the Society of Jesus had 13,000 members. In 1622, Ignatius was canonized by Pope Gregory XV.

Document Information: Excerpts from www.ewtn.com

CHALLENGING AND DIFFICULT

(35-36) The priest talks about challenging and difficult spiritual attacks, which sound like the annoying attacks, but only darker and more intense, i.e., we experience fear, hatred, lust, or a racing mind that we cannot shut off. These attacks are “stepped up a notch or two” from the merely annoying, and can become great occasions of sin for us if we are not careful to recognize them and deal with them. Challenging and difficult attacks can ruin relationships, turn people away from God, divide the Church and cause all manner of ill will and divisiveness within groups. Often, even those who are working together on a holy objective can fall prey to this type of attack. Discussion and compromise can easily turn into vicious disagreement and hostility if emotions and existing prejudices are not kept in check. These types of attack have the potential to destroy good work and good intentions, and we must be ever vigilant against them.

19. Can you give an example of this from your own experience in working for good? What are some of your prejudices that tempt you to discord?

Another area that is related to this one is negative self-talk. This happens when we are upset about something, angry with someone or just plain mad at the world. We can find ourselves replaying scenes of real or perceived slight, words from others that are hurtful, saying things to ourselves like “Why is _____ the way they are?” or “I can’t believe _____ believes this terrible thing!” While often our concerns are legitimate, if we continually replay the tape in our head, we can nearly drive ourselves mad. This is the temptation of the evil one and is to be avoided. We should examine our thoughts all the time and see if they are directed to the love of God.

20. Why is it cunning of the evil one to encourage our negative thoughts? What negative self-talk do you struggle with?

If we find that we are obsessing about things or holding on to hurts, even if unspoken to others, we can be sinning against God. The devil wants us to do this; he celebrates it and urges us on in our indignation and our judgment of others. He wants us to dwell on all

the wrongs that have been committed against us. Satan loves this and takes great delight in cheering us on from the sidelines. For as long as we are focused on these things, we cannot and will not redirect ourselves to God and His will. Thus, there is a reason for our prayer at the beginning of Mass, when we ask God to forgive us for our thoughts, words and deeds. Sins of thought can be just as deadly as sins of word and deed. Often these are the most difficult to root out since it is easy to justify our negative thoughts by believing that we aren't hurting anyone else with them as long as we keep our thoughts to ourselves.

21. Why is it necessary to confess sins of thought?

FRIGHTENING

(36-37) The priest discusses his personal experience with the frightening type of attack, and we feel as though we are watching a scary film as we read his description. These attacks are literal, personal experiences with evil spirits, which would inspire us to run away as quickly as possible. Low-grade attacks make us want to quit whatever we're doing, while high-grade attacks can drive us to exhaustion. Many of the saints had these personal physical struggles with the devil and were tormented terribly by them.

22. From your reading can you recount some saints who actually struggled with the devil in a physical way?

(38) Other frightening spiritual attacks are those on a global scale where nations and cultures can come under lengthy and horrific attack. This list is far too long, but includes wars, famines, genocide, communism, dictatorship and persecution on a national level. On a cultural level, it includes war on the family, the Church and on life itself. This same priest tells us that the “*darkness facing the Church now began to be formed by Satan in the 14th century.*” This occurred when people began to question the authority of the Church and set out on their own, no longer tethered to the barque of Peter. Each heretical group went their own way, and over time, the Christian Church split into more than 30,000 factions or sects. It is impossible to believe that this could be the unity of which Jesus spoke in John 17 where He said, “*I pray . . . that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you . . .*” (John 17:20-21)

Fourth Commandment:
“Honor thy father and thy mother.”

The Fourth Commandment is the first of the seven commandments regarding love of neighbor. The Catechism states, *“According to the fourth commandment, God has willed that, after him, we should honor our parents and those whom he has vested with authority for our good.”*

The Catechism divides the fourth commandment into five parts. The first part is, *“The Family in God’s Plan.”* Marriage is between one man and one woman. Marriage and family are ordered to the good of the spouses, to the procreation and the education of children.

The second part is *“The Family and Society.”* *“The well-being of the individual person and of both human and Christian society is closely bound up with the healthy state of conjugal and family life.”*

The third part outlines *“The Duties of Family Members.”* *“Children owe their parents respect, gratitude, just obedience, and assistance.”* *“Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children in the faith, prayer, and all the virtues. They have the duty to provide as far as possible for the physical and spiritual needs of their children.”*

Part four discusses *“The Family and the Kingdom.”* *“Parents should respect and encourage their children’s vocations. They should remember and teach that the first calling of the Christian is to follow Jesus.”* Jesus said, *“He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”*

Lastly, part five outlines the duties of authorities and citizens in civil society. *“Public authority is obliged to respect the fundamental rights of the human person and the conditions for the exercise of his freedom.”* *“It is the duty of citizens to work with civil authority for building up society in a spirit of truth, justice, solidarity, and freedom.”* *“Citizens are obliged in conscience not to follow the directives of civil authorities when they are contrary to the demands of the moral order. „We must obey God rather than men.”* (CCC 2197-2257)

Examination of
Conscience
Fourth Commandment

- Did I disobey or disrespect my parents or legitimate superior?
- Did I neglect my duties to my husband, wife, children or parents?
- Did I fail to actively take an interest in the religious education and formation of my children and their sanctification?
- Have I failed to educate myself on the true teachings of the Church?
- Did I give a full day’s work in return for my full day’s pay? Did I give a fair wage to my employees?
- Did I give scandal by what I said or did, especially to the young?
- Do I defend and support the Holy Father and the Church wholeheartedly?
- Do I pray for those in authority? Am I obedient to all traffic laws and tax laws?

SNAPSHOT OF REALITY: The Report Card (109)

In this Snapshot we see parents in a loving family watching their troubled child deteriorate before their eyes. We sense their helplessness, but we also see their faith in action.

Examination of conscience: lying, bad companions, despair, addiction, unwillingness to change

Antidotes to sin: being truthful, having hope in the Lord, strong conviction to seek help

23. Read and consider this Snapshot. Discuss with your group.

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Suggestions for further reading:

The Discernment of Spirits, Fr. Timothy M. Gallagher, OMV, New York:
Crossroads, 2005

The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius, David L. Fleming S.J., St. Louis, MO:
The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1978

Chapter 5 – Spiritual Warfare (38-47; 93-99)

OUR RESPONSE – PEACE, COURAGE AND HUMILITY

(37-38) Our first response to any and all attacks must be humility, according to Anne. Fr. John Corapi, a well-known EWTN speaker who talks often about spiritual warfare, said, “*Humility leads to Holiness which leads to Heaven.*” Humility is the opposite of the sin of pride, and as Father Corapi said, it leaves the evil one just defenseless when we are humble; he has no way to fight back over our souls when we practice humility. In fact, humility is so important that Anne repeats it three times. She also says, “*Then, a genuine effort toward love and reconciliation . . . mutual prayer and cleansing of the environment with prayer and the sacramentals . . . Never wait for the other person to begin. Accept the suffering of risking the first step. Count on the Lord and pray.*”

1. (41) What do you think about Anne’s statement – “Jesus allows struggle and difficulty in our lives and in our service to Him because He knows we can take it”?

2. (43-44) List the nine things to remember when encountering spiritual warfare, as described by Anne, and reflect on them. Which one or two speaks to you most clearly?

Read Ephesians 6:10-18. St. Paul states that our response to the enemy should be:

“Finally, draw your strength from the Lord and from his mighty power. Put on the armor of God so that you may be able to stand firm against the tactics of the devil. For our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits in the heavens. Therefore, put on the armor of God, that you may be able to resist on the evil day and, having done everything, to hold your ground. So stand fast with your loins girded in truth, clothed with righteousness as a breastplate, and

your feet shod in readiness for the gospel of peace. In all circumstances, hold faith as a shield, to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. With all prayer and supplication, pray at every opportunity in the Spirit. To that end, be watchful with all perseverance and supplication for all the holy ones . . .”

(Ephesians 6:10-18)

It is very important that we heed St. Paul’s warnings and conduct ourselves according to his guidance. Our weapons in this battle are:

1. Faith
2. Holy Catholic Church
3. Word of God in Scripture
4. Sacraments

When we wrap ourselves in these, cling to them in stressful times, keep our Lord’s name on our very lips and fight the good fight, we cannot lose. We all know how the story ends: God wins. Our job is to be faithful warriors, following behind the battle flag of the Catholic Church *“with our loins girded in truth.”* With the Church founded by Jesus Christ leading the way, we march forward with the battle cry from Pope John Paul II, *“Be not afraid.”*

CRIMINAL PROFILING OF THE DEVIL

(45-46) Anne gives us an exhaustive list of the characteristics of the devil. While we could study each one in depth, we have chosen to focus on two. The discussions of the seven capital sins cover many of the characteristics of the devil as well.

According to Anne, one of the major characteristics of the devil is **mimicry**. It was briefly mentioned in Chapter Two, but we will elaborate further here. In *The Screwtape Letters*, C. S. Lewis talks in the preface about how he thinks that devils have two motives: 1. Fear of punishment; 2. a "kind of hunger." To expand on the second motive, Lewis writes:

I feign that devils can, in a spiritual sense, eat one another; and us . . . There, I suggest, the stronger spirit...can really and irrevocably suck the weaker into itself and permanently gorge its own being on the weaker's outraged individuality. It is (I feign) for this that devils desire human souls and the souls of one another. It is for this that satan desires all his own followers and all the sons of Eve and all the hosts of Heaven. His dream is of the day when all shall be inside him and all that says ,I' can say it only through him. (8)(Emphasis added)

3. Can you see how this is the devil’s attempt to be the antithesis of God? In what way?

The Screwtape passage reminds us of the Last Supper, when Jesus said, *"Amen, Amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you."* (John 6:53) How wonderful our God is! He offers Himself to us to consume so that we may be transformed in His grace and become all that He means us to be. We are part of His Mystical Body, sharing in Communion with Him, who loves us so much that He wants us to spend eternity with Him. On the other hand, the devil wants us to become food so he may be sated.

(46) Another characteristic of satan is that he ***“uses humanity like playthings.”*** (Emphasis added) In the book *The Spiritual Combat* by Dom Lorenzo Scupoli, the author details the varied ways in which the devil attacks all of humanity, whether they are on a path to holiness or whether they are mired in sin. For those already deeply mired in sin, the devil urges them to continue on that path by suggesting even more vile means of sinning. *“Thus the soul, deprived of heavenly guidance, heaps sin upon sin, and hardens itself in its evil ways.”* (*The Spiritual Combat* by Dom Lorenzo Scupoli; Rockford, IL: TAN Books, 1990, 88) We, who may have been in a state of sin for a long time, could have consciences which are entirely numbed, and are nearly incapable of allowing our conscience to convict us of our errors. We can make all sorts of excuses and justifications for our behavior, often with great contempt for anyone who might attempt to tell us the truth. But even then, God has not left us in total darkness. He continues to call us with His grace, even if the opening for receiving such grace is the tiniest pinprick. God will continue to call His people, even those in a state of great sin, for He loves all with great abandon. Anne says, *“Consider that God has a gift for each of us in the Confessional. This gift has been hand-designed by God who looks deeply into our soul and determines exactly what we need at a particular moment.”*

4. Ponder a time when you were numbed by sin, and discuss the contempt you felt and your acceptance of God’s grace.

For those who, although in a state of sin, wish to change their lives and return to God, Satan often deludes them into thinking that they have plenty of time in which to reform. *“He insinuates the impression that some business affair or difficulty must be cleared up before (the sinner) can devote themselves sufficiently to the spiritual life and fulfill its duties without disturbance. (The) success (of this method) is directly attributable to (the sinner’s) own supine neglect of a matter in which the glory of God and their own salvation should be the only consideration.”* (*The Spiritual Combat*, 90) The second greatest lie of Satan, with the first being that he doesn’t exist, is that there is plenty of time for reform. After all, don’t most people today live a long time? Won’t that give us more time to repent, convert, pray and worship? We can do all those things after the kids are grown, after retirement, etc. Unfortunately, we may not be given the time. We are so conditioned to believe that spiritual growth is unnecessary. Living the spiritual life in union with our Lord must be undertaken on a daily basis, as Anne frequently points out. It is not an “activity” that we squeeze in between all of our other daily activities.

5. Contemplate a time when you worried that “time ran out” on someone you know. Did it prompt you to pray that they accepted God’s grace at the time of death?

Lest we think that those of us who are working on our own holiness and believe we are making progress are safe from the wiles of the devil, we need to reconsider. The devil has a number of methods, which can at the least, greatly impede our progress and at the worst, send us in the wrong direction. Because we can *“rest in exalted notions of our own sanctity . . . He would have (us) unconscious of (our) actual vices and passions, filling (our) imagination with visions of a chimerical perfection which he knows (we) will never attain.”* (*Ibid*, 93) It is also possible for us, while suffering willingly under one of our crosses, to come to the conclusion that if it were not for this cross, we could do even greater things for the glory of God. *“Thus, what once promised to be a source of habitual virtue has become a source of a lamentable vice.”* (*Ibid*, 95-96) The final point on this subject made by Dom Scupoli is that the devil is constantly *“inflating our egos with exaggerated self-esteem and complacency to the point where we succumb to vainglory.”* (*Ibid*, 99)

6. What is vainglory?

The dictionary defines vainglory as “*empty boasting or extreme self-pride.*” Have we not all fallen into this trap at times? We observe others, who may not be living as God wills and, on some level, smirk to ourselves and say, as the Pharisee did, “*O God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of humanity—greedy, dishonest, adulterous—or even like this tax collector.*” (Luke 18:11)

7. Read Luke 18:9-14. Does this parable make you uncomfortable? Why?

8. (46) It is important to know the one thing that Anne says satan despises. Can you recall what it is, and why he despises it?

St. Ambrose
First Doctor of the Church - Pastoral
Patron of Learning and Veneration of Mary
Feast Day: December 7th

*Lord, teach me to seek you, and reveal yourself to me when I seek you.
For I cannot seek you unless you first teach me, nor find you unless you
first reveal yourself to me. Let me see you in longing and long for you
in seeking. Let me find you in love, and love you in finding.*

www.communityofhope.org

Ambrose was born around 340 AD into a Roman family which had embraced Christianity from an early time. He was the youngest of 3, having an older sister and brother. At the time of his birth, Ambrose’s father was Prefect of Gallia, which included the present countries of France, Britain,

St. Ambrose (cont.)

Spain and a portion of Africa. As a child Ambrose received religious training from his mother and through the example of his sister, Marcella. She had taken a vow of holy virginity. He also received a vigorous training in Greek and ancient literature as well as law.

At 33, Ambrose was a successful lawyer and governor of Milan. He was widely respected by the citizens and had a large estate. There was much unrest, however, in the Church. The Bishop had recently died and because of the influences of the Arian heresy, finding a successor was very difficult. Ambrose was expected to keep the peace during the election in Milan. His speech during the assembly at the church urged calm. It was during that speech that a voice rang out from the crowd: "*Ambrose, Bishop*". The chant was immediately taken up by all assembled.

Ambrose felt ill-prepared for the position. He petitioned the Emperor to disavow the election and went into hiding. He was still only a catechumen. How could he possibly lead the people as Bishop? However, Ambrose's arguments went unheeded. He was baptized and several days later was consecrated Bishop.

His first act was to give all his possessions to the poor. He gave his land possessions to the Church. His brother, Satyrus, gave up his work, and moved in with him, in order to take care of all of Ambrose's temporal needs, so Ambrose could devote himself to his spiritual duties. From that moment on Ambrose devoted himself to study of the Scriptures and Church Fathers.

His door was open to all, from the lowliest slave to the Emperor himself. When the Goths invaded the empire and took prisoners, Ambrose melted the church's gold vessels to ransom hostages. He preached Christ-like love to all, even protecting Arian enemies from death. He stood in quiet defiance against the Arian plot to seize Catholics by surrounding the building. Ambrose said, "*When I was told the church was surrounded with soldiers I said I cannot give it up but I must not fight.*" The congregation remained barricaded from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday. The soldiers eventually did enter the basilica but in prayer, not by force. Ambrose was also very influential in the conversion of St. Augustine. His personal habits of piety were very austere. He ate very little, only on Saturdays, Sundays and festivals, and he spent long nights in constant prayer.

Ambrose died in 397 at the age of 57. He was canonized pre-congregation which means before there was an official process. St. Ambrose's life helps us to realize that we never know what God has planned for us. Ambrose the lawyer could have never guessed that he would be Bishop of Milan. Though we are confronted with many obstacles and sudden changes of fortune, if we remain confident in God's loving guidance and use our given talents for His glory, our lives will be filled with beautiful and unexpected gifts.

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www.newadvent.org
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OUR RESPONSE – SACRAMENTALS - THE WEAPONS OF THE CHURCH

In addition to staying close to our Lord in prayer and receiving the sacraments frequently, the Church gives us another weapon in the spiritual battle through sacramentals. These are *“instituted for the sanctification of certain ministries of the Church, certain states of life, a great variety of circumstances in Christian life . . .”* (CCC 1668) Sacramentals can include blessings as well as objects: rosaries, holy water, blessed salt, blessed oil, medals, palms, the sign of the cross, prayer books, scapulars, crucifixes, holy relics, statues, blessed candles, holy pictures and even religious habits. Their purpose is to be a visual reminder of God which *“prepare(s) us to receive grace and dispose(s) us to cooperate with it.”* (CCC 1670) All sacramentals (as well as the sacraments themselves) draw their power from *“the divine grace which flows from the Paschal Mystery of the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Christ.”* (CCC 1670)

Sacramentals should always be blessed by a priest and treated with great respect. While we must be careful not to worship the object itself, sacramentals exist to reflect the popular devotion of the faithful and to remind us not only of our faith but of our praise and worship of the One who created us. Sacramentals have been used throughout the history of the Church in prayer and liturgy, as well as in the sacraments (i.e., candles and holy water in Baptism) and exorcisms. They are very powerful weapons of the Church especially when used in concert with the devoted prayer and faith of the people of the Church. Many Catholics place crucifixes above the doors in their homes; light a blessed candle while in prayer; wear scapulars and medals; bless themselves, their children, and their homes with holy water regularly; and use blessed salt in their food, just to name a few examples. Each of these devotions, when performed with blessed sacramentals, can open us more fully to receive the graces that God wishes to give us. They are also very important to keep the evil one at bay since any object or devotion which is blessed by the Church is an anathema to him.

9. Share your favorite story about a sacramental and how it helped you to increase your faith and devotion.

ANGER – One of the Seven Deadly Sins

“Anger is one of the passions of the soul. It proceeds from a real or imaginary offense which makes us want to ‘get even’ with the offender . . . It is opposed to charity and justice . . . Anger is a destructive and highly injurious vice . . . Anger destroys peace and produces . . . all sorts of evils . . . (anger) kill(s) charity and (is an) obstacle to grace, our greatest gift from God.” (The Seven Capital Sins, Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, Rockford, IL: TAN Books, 2000, 26-27) Although righteous anger, which stems from real injustice or wrong, is not a sin, we must proceed carefully when in that state, so as not to fall into the deadly sin of anger.

10. How can we counteract our anger when we feel it coming on? Why is it important to do this? Discuss.

Fifth Commandment:

“Thou shalt not kill.”

The Fifth Commandment is divided into three parts. The first part outlines a *“Respect for Human Life.” “Every human life, from the moment of conception until death, is sacred...”*

The Catechism states: *“From its conception, the child has the right to life.”* Direct abortion, that is, abortion willed as an end or as a means, is a ‘criminal’ practice (GS 27 § 3), gravely contrary to the moral law. Embryonic stem cell research is prohibited.

Euthanasia, defined as *“putting an end to the lives of handicapped, sick or dying persons,”* is also prohibited. However, *“Discontinuing medical procedures that are burdensome, dangerous, extraordinary, or disproportionate to the expected outcome can be legitimate.”*

“Suicide is...forbidden by the fifth commandment... Grave psychological disturbances, anguish, or grave fear of hardship, suffering, or torture can diminish the responsibility of the one committing suicide.”

The second part of the Fifth Commandment warns us to avoid *“the cult of the body, to sacrifice everything for its sake, to idolize physical perfection and success at sports.”* And to *“avoid every kind of excess: the abuse of food, alcohol, tobacco or medicine.”*

Part three of this commandment emphasizes our requirement to safeguard peace. If anger reaches the point of a deliberate desire to kill or seriously wound a neighbor, it is a mortal sin.

The Catechism says, *“Because of the evils and injustices that all war brings with it, we must do everything reasonably possible to avoid it.”*
(CCC 2258-2330)

Examination of Conscience

Fifth Commandment

- Was I impatient, unkind, proud, jealous, revengeful, rude or hateful toward others?
- Did I give bad example, abuse food, tobacco, drugs, or drink alcohol to excess, fight or quarrel?
- Did I physically injure or kill anyone?
- Have I had or advised or helped someone else to have an abortion?
- Did I participate in or approve of the grave evil known as “mercy killing?”
- Did I attempt suicide?
- Have I been racist in my actions or beliefs that certain races or ethnic groups are superior to others?
- Do I take or sell illegal drugs?
- Did I participate in sterilization?
- Do I drive recklessly or drive under the influence of drugs or alcohol?

Especially in today’s world of isolation and depression, many families have experienced the pain of suicide. The Church teaches, “*We should not despair of the eternal salvation of persons who have taken their own lives. By ways known to him alone, God can provide the opportunity for salutary repentance. The Church prays for persons who have taken their own lives.*” (CCC 2282-83)

11. Does this give you a new understanding of the Church’s teaching on suicide?

SNAPSHOT OF REALITY: The Wedding (93)

In this Snapshot we see the after effects of abortion and how it impacts not only the mother, but all involved and also their relationships with each other.

Examination of conscience: sex before marriage; concern about what the world thinks; inconvenience of pregnancy; pressure from others

Antidotes to sin: moral courage; chastity; purity; Confession; compassion to work for others

12. Read and consider this Snapshot. Discuss with your group.

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Suggestions for further reading:

The Spiritual Combat, Dom Lorenzo Scupoli; Rockford, IL: TAN Books, 1990

Chapter 6 – Beginning Confession (49-51; 215-216; 65-74)

BACKGROUND FOR THE SACRAMENT OF CONFESSION

(215) At the end of the book are printed the guidelines for lay apostles of Jesus Christ the Returning King. While it is not necessary to become a lay apostle in order to be a good Catholic or to be captivated by Anne’s writings, becoming a lay apostle is a “step up” in Catholic spirituality. In addition to performing our basic obligations as practicing Catholics, the guidelines as given by the Lord are as follows:

- 1) Saying the Morning Offering, the Allegiance Prayer, and a brief prayer for the Holy Father, each day
- 2) Attending Eucharistic Adoration one hour each week
- 3) Participating in a monthly prayer group where the Luminous Mysteries of the Rosary are recited and the Monthly Message is read
- 4) Going to Confession once each month
- 5) Following the example of Jesus as set out in Scripture, treating all others with His patience and kindness

These next two chapters will deal with the Sacrament of Penance (also called Confession or Reconciliation).

The Biblical basis for the Sacrament of Confession weaves throughout the New Testament, starting in Matthew 9:2-8 and in Mark 2:1-12, where Jesus not only physically heals the paralytic, but also forgives his sins.

1. Read the two Scripture passages mentioned above. How did society view this action of Jesus? Has society changed that view?

The scribes who witness this miracle are aghast at the audacity of Jesus who, being a mere human in their eyes, claims to be able to forgive sins. In order to prove to them that He can indeed forgive sins, Jesus also heals the man’s physical condition, much to the amazement of the crowd.

2. Why do you think Jesus focused on the forgiveness of sins in His healing of the paralytic?

Jesus' charge to forgive sins becomes clearer after His Resurrection when He appears to the apostles in the Upper Room, where they are hiding in fear from those who had executed Him. In John 20:19-23, He breathes on them and says, "*As the Father has sent Me, so I send you.*" He continues, "*Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.*" In this passage, Jesus confers on the apostles the power to forgive sins, a power given to Him by the Father. This action gives the foundation for the Sacrament of Confession and established the line of apostolic succession, which has remained unbroken for over 2,000 years in the Catholic Church. Jesus, knowing that He would soon ascend to the Father, leaves His Church with the power granted by the Father, through Him, to conduct the spiritual affairs of mankind until the end of the world. This power is further reinforced in Matthew 16:19 where Jesus tells His apostles, "*Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*"

3. Read Matthew 16:15-19 and ponder its significance. Discuss with your group.

4. Do these passages give you sufficient information to speak to our non-Catholic brethren regarding Confession? Why or why not?

Several of the epistle letters further reference the theme of forgiveness of sin and apostolic succession. In 2 Cor 5:17-20, St. Paul writes, “*And all this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation.*” John talks about deadly sin in 1 John 5:16-17 where he discusses that prayer can heal sin that is not deadly, but that it cannot heal deadly sin. Thus, there must be another way to heal the most grievous sin, and that way is the Sacrament of Confession.

5. What is deadly sin?

In the Catholic Church, a distinction is made between mortal or deadly sin and venial or lesser sin. A sin is mortal if it involves serious matter such as murder, adultery, perjury and abortion, to name a few. For a sin to be mortal it also requires that the sinner know that the sin is serious and give full consent to its commission despite that knowledge. A venial sin is either a less serious matter or a sin in which the sinner does not give the full consent of their will.

“God is the one who makes known, through reason and revelation, what constitutes a grave sin . . . He sets down the conditions for (a person’s) estrangement, not they. It is not up to man to decide subjectively whether a deliberate serious sin, like direct abortion, is also a mortal sin which deprives him of God’s friendship . . . God alone has the right to determine what separates a sinner from his Creator; a creature does not have the right to stand in judgment on God and tell him what constitutes a mortal sin.” (The Catholic Catechism, Fr. John A. Hardon, S. J., Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1975, 293-294)

6. What does the Catechism (CCC 1420-1498) tell you happens in Confession?

In the Catechism, the Church offers hope to sinners that by confessing their sins to a priest, they not only become reconciled to God again, but also reconciled to the Body of Christ, the Church.

“Christ has willed that in her prayer and life and action his whole Church should be the sign and instrument of the forgiveness and reconciliation that he acquired for us at the price of his blood. But he entrusted the exercise of the power of absolution to the apostolic ministry which he charged with the „ministry of reconciliation.” (CCC 1442)

The Catechism continues:

“During his public life, Jesus not only forgave sins, but also made plain the effect of this forgiveness: he reintegrated forgiven sinners into the community of the People of God from which sin had alienated or even excluded them... A remarkable sign of this is the fact that Jesus receives sinners at his table, a gesture that expresses in an astonishing way both God’s forgiveness and the return to the bosom of the People of God.” (CCC 1443)

In all the teachings of the Church throughout the ages, we can see that God loves us so much that He cannot allow us to remain in our sins and be separated from Him. Thus, He has initiated the Sacrament of Penance in order for us to be reconciled to Him and to spend eternity with Him in heaven, which is His greatest desire for His people. But since we have free will, we are free to reject this grace and to choose another path. God will never force us to love Him or to obey Him. But if we do make mistakes and are sorrowful, He will welcome us back with open arms. For He is a God of love, and He is *“rich in mercy.”* (Ephesians 2:4) If we reject His invitation to forgiveness then,

“. . . the very mercy of God demands Divine Justice. Repeatedly, Our Lord warned us of this in the Gospel. He admonished that the sheep will be separated from the goats (Matthew 25:32). . . To ignore these warnings, is to run the risk of eternal ruin. The wages of sin is death, St. Paul tells us, eternal death (Romans 6:23; 2 Thess 1:9).” (A Contemporary Adult Guide to Conscience for the Sacrament of Confession, Fr. Richard J. Rego, St. Paul, MN: The Leaflet Missal Company, 1990, 2)

Spiritual Effects of the Sacrament of Penance

“The spiritual effects of the sacrament of Penance are:

- *Reconciliation with God by which the penitent recovers grace;*
- *Reconciliation with the Church;*
- *Remission of the eternal punishment incurred by mortal sins;*
- *Remission, at least in part, of temporal punishments resulting from sin;*
- *Peace and serenity of conscience, and spiritual consolation;*
- *An increase of spiritual strength for the Christian battle.”*

(CCC 1496)

7. Read the other Biblical passages that describe what happens to unrepentant sinners in Matt 13:49-50, Matt 25:12, 25:39-41, Mark 9:45 and Luke 13:22-30. How do these passages tie into the message of God’s love and forgiveness?

Fr. Rego writes,

“The existence of hell and its eternal duration is a part of the deposit of faith. The Church cannot fail to transmit this as an essential part of the Gospel message. This concrete reality has been infallibly defined by the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) and has been reconfirmed in modern times by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Pope John Paul II, drawing from St. Thomas and other Doctors of the Church, teaches that, ‘mortal sin is the sin which, if unforgiven, leads to eternal punishment.’ The presumption of modern man that punishment for sin can be ignored is a direct consequence, it would seem, of the loss of the sense of sin. Pope Pius XII warned that, ‘the sin of the century is the

loss of the sense of sin.’ Pope John Paul II confirmed this observation of his renowned predecessor and said that when man loses the sense of sin, he loses the sense of God.” (Ibid, 2-3)

8. Do you believe we have lost the sense of sin? Discuss concrete examples of this.

Fr. Rego also says,

“With the loss of the sense of sin, conscience dims and is so weakened that one becomes a slave of sin (Rom 6:17). Is it not true that modern man hardly speaks of sin at all, except in terms of those things that offend social niceties or etiquette. . . is not modern man more inclined to speak of ‘sick behavior’ rather than sinful behavior . . .all failings are blamed upon society, and the individual is declared innocent of them.” (Ibid, 3)

Fr. Rego has a great point in the quote above. In the modern world, popular culture would have us believe that the greatest of all sins is intolerance, by which it is meant that Christians are to tolerate just about anything and everything. While tolerance is good up to a point, Jesus, speaking through His Church, does not want us to remain in our sins which is what much of tolerance is about these days. He clearly spoke to the woman caught in adultery after He saved her from her captors, *“Go and sin no more.” (John 8:11)* Jesus loved her too much to allow her to remain in her sin; this is where our Lord’s ways differ from the ways of today’s modern world. We realize that, as usual, God’s ways are far superior to our own, and we can see the necessity of knowing and conforming to His laws, despite our own desires and the tremendous pull of the world around us.

9. Have you heard sin mentioned in homilies, lectures or teachings? Has it caused you discomfort?

10. Have you ever loved someone enough to speak to them clearly about their sin?

11. What can we, as Catholics, do to convince others that God’s word about sin is true and that the world must resurrect a sense of sin and repentance?

FORMING OUR CONSCIENCE

Fr. John Hardon has much to say about forming our conscience. In the EWTN library, we find this discussion on conscience and its proper formation:

“If there is one part of the spiritual life that St. Ignatius stressed, it was the daily--and even twice daily--examination of conscience. As we read „The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius,’ we may be overwhelmed by the minute detail of St. Ignatius’ treatment of what he calls the particular examination of conscience. At the same time, he is careful to provide, ‘Some Notes on Scruples.’ It is very important, therefore, that we form a clear and correct conscience. This means that we cultivate a sensitive judgment which is alert to the least offense against the Divine Will and, at the same time, protect ourselves against the wiles of the evil spirit.”

“St. Ignatius says, „The enemy considers carefully whether one has a lax or a delicate conscience. If one has a delicate conscience, the evil one seeks to make it excessively sensitive in order to disturb and upset it more easily. Thus, if he sees that one will not consent to mortal sin or venial sin, or even to the appearance of deliberate sin, since he cannot cause him to fall in a matter that appears sinful, he strives to make the soul judge that there is a sin, for example in a word or passing thought, where there is no sin.” (The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius, David L. Fleming S.J., St. Louis, MO: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1978, 349)

“It is valuable to reflect on this tactic of the evil spirit before we offer some practical norms for making our daily examination of conscience. Why? Because otherwise, we are liable to overlook the importance of a daily inventory of our moral conduct for fear of becoming scrupulous. There is such a thing as growing in prudent sensitivity of conscience, without becoming a victim of the ‘enemy’ as St. Ignatius calls him.”

“We may set this down as a general principle, for those who are sincerely striving to do the will of God: It is characteristic of God and His angels, when they act upon the soul, to give true happiness and spiritual joy and to banish all the sadness and disturbances which are caused by the enemy. It is characteristic of the evil one to fight against such happiness and consolation by proposing fallacious reasonings, subtleties, and continual deceptions (Rules for Discernment of Spirits, II, 1).”

“What are we to conclude from this? That the more zealous we are in trying to please God, the more He will give us a deep interior peace of soul. We should suspect as a temptation from the evil one, when we find ourselves worried or anxious or disturbed, no matter how pious the source of the worry or anxiety may be. The key to applying this principle is that, before God, I honestly want to do His will even though through weakness, I may fail to live up to my resolutions. One basic virtue on which we should daily examine ourselves is peace of soul.”

“We should ask ourselves, ‘Have I given in to worry or anxiety?’ ‘Have I allowed myself to get discouraged?’ A good practice is to pronounce the name, ‘Jesus’, when we find ourselves getting despondent, or say some short aspiration like, ‘My Jesus, I trust in you,’ whenever we become dejected over something.”
<http://www.ewtn.com/library/SPIRIT/EXAMCONS.TXT>)

12. Have you given in to worry or anxiety? Have you allowed yourself to get discouraged? Did you think it needed to be confessed?

St. Augustine
Doctor of the Church - Grace
Patron of Brewers and Theologians
Feast Day: August 28

*Our hearts were made for you, O Lord,
And they are restless until they rest in you.*
St. Augustine

God of life, there are days when the burdens we carry chafe our shoulders and wear us down; when the road seems dreary and endless, the skies gray and threatening; when our lives have no music in them and our hearts are lonely, and our souls have lost their courage. Flood the path with light, we beseech you; turn our eyes to where the skies are full of promise.

(Prayers of the Saints: An Inspired Collection of Holy Wisdom, Woodeene Koenig-Bricker, San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1996)

Augustine was born in Tagastet, Africa, which is now Souk Ahras, Algeria, on November 13, 354. His mother, St. Monica, was devout, and his father, Patricius, was a pagan. Augustine was very intelligent and excelled in his studies. At the age of seventeen, he went to Carthage to continue his education in rhetoric. Although raised as a Catholic, Augustine left the Church. His sins of impurity and pride darkened his mind, and he began to follow the Manichaean religion, much to the despair of his mother. He lived a hedonistic lifestyle in Carthage, developing a relationship with a woman, who gave birth to his son, Adeodatus. They remained together, unmarried, for over thirteen years.

In 384, he accepted a position as professor of rhetoric for the imperial court at Milan. Fearing Augustine would be lost completely once he left Africa, St. Monica attempted to prevent him from leaving. But once she got to the port, his ship had already left. Feeling compelled out of her concern, she followed him to Milan. Through the prayers and entreaties of his holy mother and the marvelous preaching of St. Ambrose, Augustine finally became convinced that Christianity was the one true religion. Full of sorrow for his sins, he cried out to God, “*How long more, O Lord? Why does not this hour put an end to my sins?*” Just then he heard a child singing “*Take up and read!*” Thinking that God intended him to hear those words, he picked up the nearest text to him, which was Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, and read the first passage his gaze fell on. It was just what Augustine needed, for in it St. Paul says to put away all impurity and to live in imitation of Jesus. That did it! From then on, Augustine began a new life.

St. Augustine (cont.)

Ambrose baptized Augustine, along with his son, Adeodatus, during Easter vigil in 387 in Milan, and soon thereafter in 388 he returned to Africa. On his way back to Africa Augustine's mother died, followed soon after by his son, leaving him alone in the world without family.

Upon his return to North Africa, Augustine sold his inheritance and gave the money to the poor. The only thing he kept was the family house, which he converted into a monastic foundation for himself and a group of friends. In 391 he was ordained a priest in Hippo. He became a famous preacher and was noted for combating the Manichaean religion, to which he had formerly adhered.

In 396 he was made Bishop of Hippo. Augustine worked tirelessly in trying to convince the people to convert to the Catholic faith. Because of his powerful intellect, he was known as a stirring orator who took every opportunity to defend the Catholic faith against all detractors. He was portrayed as a man who ate sparingly, worked tirelessly, despised gossip, shunned the temptations of the flesh, and exercised prudence in the financial stewardship of his See.

Augustine is probably best known for his "Confessions" which is a personal account of his earlier life, and for "City of God," consisting of 22 books, which he wrote to restore the confidence of his fellow Christians, which was badly shaken by the sack of Rome by the Visigoths in 410.

Augustine died on August 28, 430. He was canonized by popular acclaim, and later recognized as a Doctor of the Church in 1298 by Pope Boniface VIII.

Augustine of Hippo is the patron of brewers because of his conversion from a former life of loose living, which included parties, entertainment, and worldly ambitions. His complete turnaround and conversion has been an inspiration to many who struggle with a particular vice or habit they long to break.

Document Information: Excerpts from:

<http://www.catholic.org/saints>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augustine_of_Hippo

HOW TO GO TO CONFESSION

In order for us to avail ourselves of the Sacrament of Confession, it is necessary to know how to utilize this sacrament. Even if we go on a regular basis, perhaps a refresher course is in order so that we can take full advantage of all of the graces that the sacrament has to offer. Jesus asks that we go monthly in order to get into the habit of examining our conscience and delving more deeply into ourselves and our failings.

A good way to look at the sacrament is that it is a method of purging and cleansing ourselves of all that would spiritually harm us. Just as we go to a spa for our bodies to be cleansed and refreshed, so Confession performs this function for our souls. Today, many people are consumed with thoughts of health, exercise and nutrition for their physical selves. How many are equally consumed by these same thoughts for their souls which, in the end, are the part of us that lasts for eternity? By putting as much care into our spiritual life as we do into our physical, we will be well ahead in our quest for eternal life.

13. How often do you focus on your body and its material needs versus your soul and its spiritual needs? Discuss with your group.

The first criterion for a good Confession is a detailed examination of conscience. This is where we judge our own thoughts and actions in light of God's laws. One good way to do this is to examine ourselves with regard to each of the Ten Commandments. In this study guide we examine one of the commandments at the end of each week and list a thorough examination of conscience relating to that commandment. By reviewing these each time we go to Confession, we can feel reasonably assured that we have "covered all the bases" with regard to examining our lives with the intent to make a good Confession and to gather all the graces available from that action. There are many books and booklets available on examination of conscience. We recommend the use of one of these each time a person goes to Confession.

Sacrament of Penance

The following is a step-by-step guide to receiving the Sacrament of Penance:

1. The penitent enters the confessional and is normally greeted by the priest.
2. The penitent makes the Sign of the Cross and says: “Bless me, Father, for I have sinned, it has been (say the amount of time in weeks, months or years) since my last Confession.”
3. Then the penitent lists their sins, making their best effort to enumerate all of their sins as well as the number of times they committed them since their last Confession.
4. At the end of the list of sins, the penitent says, “That’s all, Father, and I am sorry for these and any other sins that I may have committed.”
5. At this point, the priest may discuss some aspect of the Confession with the penitent in order to give them some aid in avoiding a particular sin in the future.
6. After the sins are recited, the priest will give the penitent a penance, which often consists of prayers or works, depending on both the priest and the content of the Confession.
7. He will then ask the penitent to say the Act of Contrition, a variation of which is listed below.
8. After the Act of Contrition, the priest will say the beautiful words of absolution, which are directly from Jesus through the priest. At the end of the absolution, the penitent makes the Sign of the Cross, thanks the priest and leaves.

ACT OF CONTRITION

O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee.
And I detest all my sins because I dread the loss of heaven and the pains of hell.
But most of all, because they offend Thee my God who are all good and
deserving of all my love.
I firmly resolve, with the help of Thy grace, to confess my sins, to do penance
and to amend my life. Amen.

Often after receiving the sacrament, we are overcome with the mercy and forgiveness of God. There is joy in our step and lightness in our hearts that comes from admitting our sinfulness and seeking the mercy of the Divine Physician who is the only One who can quiet and calm our restless, weary and sinful souls. The graces available through the Sacrament of Penance are boundless. If we only knew how immense and abundant these graces are, we would want to receive this sacrament on a daily basis!

GLUTTONY – One of the Seven Deadly Sins

“Gluttony is an unregulated love for food or drink. It is appetite out of order, by which we abuse the legitimate pleasure God has attached to eating and drinking . . . gluttony dulls the mind, that is, the intellect and reason, which is the faculty that lifts us above animals . . . Gluttony weakens the will and fosters a spirit of laziness, sensuality and impurity. It often results in silliness and vulgar or obscene talk.” (*The Seven Capital Sins*, Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, Rockford, IL: TAN Books, 2000, 34)
We should look to our Lord for help in achieving the virtue of temperance in all things. We can also guard against gluttony by fasting and prayer.

14. Have you, or someone you know, struggled with an excess dependence on food, alcohol or drugs? How did you/they overcome the struggle? Discuss.

Sixth Commandment:

“Thou shalt not commit adultery.”

The Catechism divides the Sixth Commandment into four parts. The first part explores the meaning and importance of human sexuality and sexual identity.

The second part of this commandment examines our Christian vocation to chastity. *“Christ is the model of chastity. Every baptized person is called to lead a chaste life, each according to his particular state of life.”*

Lastly, this part describes and defines several offenses to the virtue of chastity. *“Lust is disordered desire for or inordinate enjoyment of sexual pleasure. Sexual pleasure is morally disordered when sought for itself, isolated from its procreative and unitive purposes.”*
“Among the sins gravely contrary to chastity are masturbation, fornication, pornography, and homosexual practices.”

The third part of this commandment discusses *“The Love of Husband and Wife.”* *“The covenant which spouses have freely entered into entails faithful love. It imposes on them the obligation to keep their marriage indissoluble.”* *“Fecundity is a good, a gift and an end of marriage. By giving life, spouses participate in God's fatherhood.”*

The fourth part of this commandment discusses several offenses against the dignity of marriage: *“Adultery, divorce, polygamy, and free union are grave offenses against the dignity of marriage.”* Additional offenses against the dignity of marriage are incest and a *“right to a trial marriage.”*

(CCC 2331-2400)

Examination of

Conscience

Sixth Commandment

- Did I willfully entertain impure thoughts and desires?
- Did I dress immodestly?
- Did I use impure or suggestive words, tell or listen to impure stories?
- Did I deliberately look at impure things, TV, videos, plays, pictures, books or movies?
- Did I practice artificial birth control or have I or my spouse been sterilized?
- Do I engage in adultery, fornication/pre-marital sex, masturbation, homosexual acts, or bestiality?
- Did I engage in prostitution, rape, in vitro fertilization or artificial insemination, surrogate motherhood, incest or cohabitation before marriage?

SNAPSHOT OF REALITY: The Three Friends (65)

In this Snapshot we see a woman who doesn't fit in with the friends she has chosen. She believes that she is out of step with them and cannot seem to defend her position against their arguments.

Examination of conscience: illicit sex; abortion; defensiveness towards Church; illegitimacy; disregard for life

Antidotes to sin: be knowledgeable; seek collateral material; be willing to stand out vs. fit in; pray

15. Read and consider this Snapshot. Discuss with your group.

Monthly Message:

March 1, 2006, page 207

Suggestions for further reading:

Confessions, St. Augustine

A Contemporary Adult Guide to Conscience for the Sacrament of Confession, Fr. Richard J. Rego, St. Paul, MN: The Leaflet Missal Company, 1990

The Catholic Catechism, Fr. John A. Hardon, S. J., Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1975

CCC 1420-1498 on Confession

Chapter 7 – Advanced Confession (49-51; 55-63)

JESUS WANTS YOU BACK

This week we continue our discussion of the Sacrament of Penance, delving into greater detail and deeper teachings on the sacrament. For those who have not received the Sacrament of Penance in a very long time, we want you to know that Jesus wants you to return to His Church where He is waiting for you. Jesus tells His lay apostles on December 9, 2006 that He wishes for all of His children to return to the safety and protection of His Church:

“I call out to those who have left My Church. Come back, I say. Return to the safety of the sacramental walk. It will be best for you and I want only what is best for you. Be assured of My welcome. Be assured that I want your return . . . My Church on earth represents Me. It is My Church and belongs to Me. When the people of My Church accurately represent Me, you feel cherished. I want to restore you to your Church and I want to restore your Church to you . . . I have so many ways to help you if you are following your faith within the protection of My Church. My Church has suffered, it is true. My Church continues to suffer. Part of the reason My Church is suffering is because you are away from it. My Church needs you.” (Heaven Speaks to Those Away from the Church, Anne, a lay apostle, Justice, IL: Direction for Our Times, 2008, 1)

1. Can you name some ways in which the Church has suffered throughout her history? Is the suffering different in different periods of time?

Jesus continues:

“If there are reasons that inhibit a full return to the sacraments for you, I ask that you discuss these reasons with one of My priests. I will protect your desire to return to the sacraments. I will not reduce the standards of My Church for your circumstances but I will help you to adapt your circumstances to those standards. ‘What is Jesus saying?’ you ask yourself. Let Me be more clear. This time on earth is a time when so many have compromised with standards of behavior that the compromised standards have become the norm. I cannot and will not accept

*this. I do not accept this. If I were to accept this, I would have to change all of heaven and all of those who have served in times before you. Also, I would have to jeopardize the future of all those who come after you. My friend, listen to Me. Hear My words because My words are truth. Reject the rebelliousness of My enemy. Accept that you are called to follow Me and raise your behavior to My standards. **I will help you.** You will be welcome in heaven if you accept that I am God.” (Heaven Speaks to Those Away from the Church, Anne, a lay apostle, Justice, IL: Direction for Our Times, 2008, 2) (Emphasis added)*

2. Jesus said, “I will not reduce the standards of My Church for your circumstances.” What specifically do you think He is referring to?

3. Give some examples of the compromised standards of behavior that have become the norm.

4. Why does Jesus say that He would have to change the past and the future if He changed His Church today?

ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA
Doctor of the Church - Unity
Patroness of Illness, Nurses and Firefighters
Feast Day: April 29

“Omnipotent Father, God of truth, God of love, permit me to enter into the cell of self-knowledge. I admit that of myself I am nothing, but that all being and goodness in me comes solely from You. Show me my faults, that I may detest my malice, and thus I shall flee from self-love and find myself clothed again in [the nuptial robe of] divine charity, which I must have in order to be admitted to [the nuptials of] life eternal.”

www.treasuresofgrace.com

St. Catherine was born in Siena on March 25, 1347. She had a twin sister who lived only for a short time. The Benincasa family was large; Catherine was one of twenty-five children. Her father was a prosperous wool dyer.

At the age of six, Catherine had a mystical vision while walking home with her brother. She saw “Christ seated in glory with the apostles Peter, Paul and John.” She was deeply affected by this experience. A year later, she made a secret vow to give her whole life to God. Even at this young age, she was increasingly drawn to solitude and intense prayer.

At the age of twelve, her parents were looking for a suitable husband for her. She tried to tell them she had given her life to God but they would not listen. In an effort to make herself less attractive to suitors, she cut off her hair. As a punishment, her parents gave her menial work to do around the house and never let her be alone. This was a great trial for her since it was solitude that she craved most of all.

However, eventually her parents relented. She was given a nine foot by three foot cell to inhabit. Her ascetical practices became more and more austere. She kept long fasts. She scourged herself three times a day with an iron chain and slept on a board. She first wore a hair shirt but later replaced it with an iron spiked girdle. Eventually she was given permission to wear the black habit of the Dominican third order tertiary. This was unusual for someone her age. The habit was customary for matrons and widows. For years she remained in this cell only speaking to her confessor and leaving briefly to go to Mass.

At the same time, her prayer life became more intense. She was both enraptured by spiritual visions as well as tested by severe trials and distractions. There were times she felt abandoned by God. In 1366, in a vision, she underwent a spiritual marriage to Christ, bringing to an end her time of solitude and purification.

ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA (cont.)

She rejoined her family and started working tirelessly for the poor and the sick, as well as those in prison. She often tended to those afflicted with the most repulsive diseases. She was always filled with joy and peace no matter the task before her. She remained firm in her resolve to do what God was asking of her even while subjected to persecutions by the friars of her own order.

She had great personal charm and because of this, people were drawn to her. Included in her “*spiritual family*” were two Dominican confessors, hermits, artists, and poets. A warm affection bound her to these followers. She often seemed to know their temptations and frequently gave them advice to help them on their “*way of perfection.*”

In 1370, St. Catherine entered a long trance, receiving visions of hell, purgatory, and heaven. During this trance she heard a command to leave her cell and enter public life. At this point, she began to write letters to people of all stations from the common laborer to statesmen, as well as to Pope Gregory XI. She was trying to bring unity, to end the civil wars in Italy, as well as heal the wounds of The Great Schism in the Catholic Church. Through her efforts the papacy returned to Rome from France. Her total surrender to God through virtue and penances was instrumental in the Church’s dramatic change.

God called Catherine to pray. Prayer was her passion and her lifetime pursuit. Prayer nourished her, and she nourished prayer. In 1375, she was gifted with the Stigmata; however, the marks did not appear outwardly on her body while she was alive. By 1378, St. Catherine’s health was failing. “*She [asked] her Divine Bridegroom to let her bear the punishment for all the sins of the world, and to receive the sacrifice of her body for the unity and renovation of the Church...*” After enduring a mysterious agony for three months, the life of St. Catherine, who had been glorified by God with wondrous gifts and miracles, was brought to a close on April 29, 1380, at the age of thirty-three. She was canonized in 1461 by Pope Pius II. In 1970 Pope Paul VI declared her a Doctor of the Church.

St. Catherine was not a nun, but a laywoman. She is a model for all Third Order members and individuals who are single by choice or the Providence of God. This extraordinary, holy lady is also an example for those who want to dedicate themselves to God and others for any just cause, regardless of their married or unmarried status. She is a role model for charity. She was a great unifier and sought to unite disparities, differences, diverse opinions and divergent feelings.

Document Information: Excerpted from:

www.ewtn.com/library/MARY/CATSIENA.HTM

www.catholic-forum.com?churches/1019stcatherine/catherine.html

www.doctorsofthecatholicchurch.com/C.html

BRINGING CATHOLICS HOME

At this point, we must address a critical issue. Often, as Catholics, we encounter people who have not availed themselves of the sacrament in a very long time due to a bad experience in Confession. We hear stories of those who have been severely chastised or made uncomfortable in the confessional. Often these incidents occurred in their youth, and they have never gotten over the experience. While we sympathize and understand that these incidents can be extremely painful and fill a penitent with resentment toward the Church and the sacrament, we urge anyone who has had these experiences to find forgiveness in their hearts for the priest who has mistreated them and go back to Confession and try again. The sacrament is far too important to allow a negative experience to come between our Savior and us. Jesus stands ready and waiting for us to ask Him for forgiveness. He alone is the Divine Physician, but He must work through human beings who are sinful themselves. He does not force His forgiveness on us if we do not ask for it, because He will never override our free will. Thus, it is up to us to make the first move, and we should begin again, without delay, to get into the habit of receiving the Sacrament of Penance on a regular basis. Jesus tells His lay apostles on December 9, 2006:

“If you have been hurt by those who claimed to represent My Church but who failed, I will heal you. Do not use this hurt as a reason why you step away from all that I offer for you through My Church. This has taken you in the wrong direction and others walk behind you.” (Heaven Speaks to Those Away from the Church, Anne, a lay apostle, Justice, IL: Direction for Our Times, 2008, 3)

We must remember, however, that often Jesus allows these experiences so that a soul may grow in holiness as a result. He may allow this experience to test how willing we are to strive for this sacrament.

5. Do you know someone who has had a bad experience and reacted this way? Now that you have read the above passages, are you willing to give Jesus’ message to them?

6. Discuss in your group, ways to help those who are suffering as described in the paragraph above. Give specific things that they can do to overcome their reluctance to receive the Sacrament of Penance.

7. (51) Who does Anne say she encountered in both heaven and purgatory?

8. (51) What does she say about God's memory?

Finally, let us leave this section with this beautiful quotation that speaks of our responsibility as Catholics to aid others in their quest for heaven:

“The apostolate of Confession, which moves us to **bring our friends to this Sacrament**, must deserve a special reward in heaven, for it is surely the best source of peace and joy there is in the world. *‘Those confessionals scattered about the world where men declare their sins don't speak of the severity of God. Rather do they speak of his mercy. And all those who approach the confessional, sometimes after many years weighted down with mortal sins, in the moment of getting rid of this intolerable burden, find at last a longed-for relief. They find joy and tranquility of conscience which, outside Confession, they will never be able to find anywhere.’*” (John Paul II, Homily, March 16, 1980) (Emphasis added)

9. Can you give your group an example of a time when you brought someone back to the Sacrament of Penance?

GENERAL CONFESSION

If a person has been away from the Church for a great length of time, one very good method of returning to the sacraments is to have a priest help with a General Confession. In a General Confession, the penitent reviews their entire life of sin with the priest, remembering all the sins that they can think of, even as far back as childhood, and discussing them with the priest, who is “in the person of Christ.” This intense and cathartic review of one’s sins is especially helpful for those who have been away from the Church for a very long time, but not necessarily only for those people. Anyone can avail themselves of this tremendous opportunity for grace and sorrow for sin.

To prepare for a General Confession, a penitent should spend much time examining their conscience and reviewing their life. The examination of conscience in this study can certainly be useful. A person should make their best effort to remember all sins, particularly mortal sins. A journal can assist in this process. When the penitent is ready, they should make an appointment with a priest, asking for a General Confession. Often, priests in abbeys or monasteries or on retreats are more likely to be able to spend the time it takes for a General Confession. For example, a good place to obtain this grace is at an Ignatian retreat in which a General Confession is part of the retreat program.

Often, a General Confession becomes a conversation with the priest asking questions or commenting on details of the penitent’s Confession. Once the process is finished, and the beautiful words of absolution are pronounced, the weight of many years of unconfessed sin is lifted and great joy and peace is experienced.

10. Discuss the idea of a General Confession with your group. Does this appeal to you? Why or why not?

11. If you have ever participated in a General Confession, can you discuss with your group what you experienced?

It is important to know and understand that our sins are completely forgiven once the Confession is completed. We must not continue to beat ourselves up about past sins that have been confessed. This prevents our moving forward in our spiritual lives. The spiritual term for this is “scrupulosity,” where a person worries that they didn’t confess their sins properly or in enough detail or that God could not possibly forgive them for all those many, horrible sins. Scrupulosity can be just as harmful as laxity. Laxity is the belief that nothing is sinful, that “after all I’m a good person, how can I have sinned?” attitude. Both ends of the spectrum, from scrupulosity to laxity, can be detrimental. We should strive for a balance which results in having a clear and unimpeded conscience.

12. Have you ever experienced scrupulosity or laxity? How did you combat it?

13. Have you ever felt that God has not forgiven you in spite of your Confession?

Many obstacles may be in our path once we make the decision to go forward with a General Confession. As we previously discussed, anything that we do to bring ourselves closer to Christ may cause spiritual warfare to thwart our forward progress. St. Augustine asked God, as he was in the process of returning to the Church, to “*Make me chaste and continent, but not yet.*” (*The Confessions of St. Augustine*, Book 8, Chapter 7)

Being aware of this is the first step toward overcoming it. Enlisting those around us to pray and offer sacrifice is a great help. To “cover yourself in prayer” is the most effective safeguard.

14. Have you experienced this attitude in your own life or seen it in the lives of others?

A General Confession is not to be confused with the communal Sacrament of Penance which is celebrated in many Catholic churches today. Often these are termed “General Confessions” as well. Fr. John Hardon lists three ways in which the Sacrament of Penance can be administered. The first involves an individual Confession with a priest. The second *“is a combination of common celebration and individual confession of sins with absolution. In the first part is a liturgy of the word and prayer, in common. There follows Confession and absolution. Lastly, again together, there is a thanksgiving and expression of joy at being reconciled with God.”* (*The Catholic Catechism*, Fr. John A. Hardon, S.J., Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1975, 498) The important thing to remember about the second method is the absolute necessity for the communal celebration to include individual confession of sins and absolution by a priest. Often parishes will bring in many priests to help with this process during their communal celebrations. It is never, under ordinary circumstances, valid to perform a general absolution to the community as a whole without their confessing their sins individually to a priest. (CCC 1482-84)

15. Read in the Catechism section 1482-1484. Is there any time that general absolution can be given?

This brings us to the third way of receiving the sacrament, which includes *“collective absolution. However, this way of administering the sacrament of penance is limited to exceptional circumstances, since „individual and integral confession and absolution remains the only ordinary way by which the faithful may be reconciled with God and with the Church, except when this is physically or morally impossible.”* (*The Catholic*

Catechism, Fr. John A. Hardon, S.J., Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1975, 499) Several examples of collective or general absolution are soldiers going off into battle or an imminent disaster, such as an airliner crashing. In other words, under normal circumstances, collective or general absolution should never be necessary. If a person has received general/collective absolution for some reason, it is imperative for them to make an individual Confession and receive absolution as soon as possible afterwards. (CCC 1483-84)

16. Have you participated in a communal Penance service, and if so, what was it like?

PRECEPTS OF THE CHURCH

The Precepts of the Church are laws that guide us to a moral life bound to and fed by the liturgical life of the Church. The obligatory character of these positive laws decreed by the Church is meant to guarantee to us the very necessary minimum to help us grow in love of God and neighbor:

1. *You shall attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation and rest from servile labor.*
2. *You shall confess your sins at least once a year.*
3. *You shall receive the Sacrament of the Eucharist at least during the Easter season.*
4. *You shall observe the days of fasting and abstinence established by the Church.*
5. *You shall help to provide for the needs of the Church.*

(CCC 2041-2043)

WHAT THE “EXPERTS” HAVE TO SAY

Finally, we close the discussion of the Sacrament of Penance with words on the subject from the experts—the saints and theologians.

St. Monica:

“Think about your brothers and sisters in the world who have lived in the pain of isolation from heaven. Many have left this life unprepared for heaven because of the constant noise and distraction in their life . . . This is not a time to be superior to Jesus Christ and His Church. This superiority will end abruptly when you die and face Him. End it now . . . If you return to the Church, God can fill you until His graces overflow. This overflow pushes out into the world, spreading light in place of darkness and truth in place of error.” (Heaven Speaks to Those Away from the Church, Anne, a lay apostle, Justice, IL: Direction for Our Times, 2008, 10-11)

St. Augustine:

“In failing to confess, Lord, I would only hide You from myself, not myself from You.”
(www.catholicoutpost.com/quotes.php?tf=all&content=387)

St. Faustina

“A soul does not benefit from the sacrament of confession if it is not humble. Pride keeps it in darkness. The soul neither knows how, nor is it willing, to probe with precision the depths of its own misery. It puts on a mask and avoids everything that might bring it recovery.”

(Diary of Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska, Congregation of Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy, Stockbridge, MA: Marian Press, 2006, 63)

Prayer of St. Catherine of Siena

Merciful Lord, it does not surprise me that you forget completely the sins of those who repent. I am not surprised that you remain faithful to those who revile you. The mercy which pours forth from you fills the whole world. It was by your mercy that we were created, and by your mercy that you redeemed us by sending your Son. Your mercy is the light in which sinners find you, and good people come back to you. Your mercy is everywhere. Your justice is constantly tempered with mercy, so you refuse to punish us as we deserve. O my Lover! It was not enough that you took on our humanity; you had to die for us as well. Amen.

(www.catholicity.com/prayer/gods-mercy.html)

Prayer of Abbot William of St-Thierry:

Pardon us, O Lord, pardon us. We beg to shift the blame for our sins; we make excuses. But no one can hide from the light of your truth, which both enlightens those who turn to it, and exposes those who turn away. Even our blood and our bones are visible to you, who created us out of dust. How foolish we are to think that we can rule our own lives, satisfying our own desires, without thought of you. How stupid we are to imagine that we can keep our sins hidden. But although we may deceive other people, we cannot deceive you. And since you see into our hearts, we cannot deceive ourselves, for your light

reveals to us our own spiritual corruption. Let us, therefore, fall down before you, weeping with tears of shame. May your judgment give new shape to our souls. May your power mold our hearts to reflect your love. May your grace infuse our minds, so that our thoughts reflect your will. Amen.

www.catholicity.com/prayer/we-cannot-deceive-you.html

17. Share your thoughts on the quotes from the previous page and above.

Lastly, some of the most beautiful penitential words ever recorded were by King David when the prophet Nathan came to him after David's sin with Bathsheba. Although these words were written well before the institution of the Sacrament of Penance, they burn with humility and the repentant spirit that is proper to everyone who walks sincerely in their faith:

Psalm 51

"Have mercy on me, O God, in your goodness; in the greatness of your compassion wipe out my offense. Thoroughly wash me from my guilt and of my sin cleanse me.

For I acknowledge my offense, and my sin is before me always: Against you only have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight. That you may be justified in your sentence, vindicated when you condemn. Indeed, in guilt was I born, and in sin my mother conceived me; Behold, you are pleased with sincerity of heart, and in my inmost being you teach me wisdom.

Cleanse me of sin with hyssop, that I may be purified; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Let me hear the sounds of joy and gladness; the bones you have crushed shall rejoice. Turn away your face from my sins, and blot out all my guilt.

A clean heart create for me, O God, and a steadfast spirit renew within me. Cast me not out from your presence, and your holy spirit take not from me. Give me back the joy of your salvation, and a willing spirit sustain in me.

I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners shall return to you. Free me from blood guilt, O God, my saving God; then my tongue shall revel in your justice. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall proclaim your praise. For you are not pleased with sacrifices; should I offer a holocaust, you would not accept it. My sacrifice, O God, is a contrite spirit; a heart contrite and humbled, O God, you will not spurn.

Be bountiful, O Lord, to Zion in your kindness by rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem; then you shall be pleased with due sacrifices, burnt offerings and holocausts; then shall they offer up bullocks on your altar.”

GREED – One of the Seven Deadly Sins

Greed, also known as avarice or covetousness, “*is an inordinate love of worldly goods. It is a desire to accumulate and possess material things.*” If we love material things inordinately, then it is not possible for us to love God as we should since “*we cannot serve two masters.*” (Matthew 6:24) Greed involves not only a great love for things, but also a willingness on our part to “*carry out any kind of injustice*” in order to acquire what we desire. Thus greed can destroy our love of our neighbor as well as our own soul. (*The Seven Capital Sins*, Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, Rockford, IL: TAN Books, 2000, 15)

18. Greed appears to be disguised in the world today. Discuss its various forms with your group.

Seventh Commandment:

“Thou shalt not steal.”

“The seventh commandment enjoins the practice of justice and charity in the administration of earthly goods and the fruits of men's labor.” The Catechism divides the Seventh Commandment into six parts. The first part discusses *“The Universal Destination and the Private Ownership of Goods.”* *“The goods of creation are destined for the entire human race.”*

The second part mandates respect for persons and their goods. Theft is a sin and is defined as *“the usurpation of another's goods against the reasonable will of the owner.”*

The third part outlines certain social doctrines and teachings of the Church: *“The Church makes a judgment about economic and social matters when the fundamental rights of the person or the salvation of souls requires it.”* The Church has rejected communism and socialism.

The fourth part explains the value of human work: *“The primordial value of labor stems from man himself, its author and beneficiary. By means of his labor man participates in the work of creation.”*

The fifth part states that *“true development concerns the whole man. It is concerned with increasing each person's ability to respond to his vocation and hence to God's call.”*

The last part discusses our mandate to love the poor, including those with cultural or religious poverty.

(CCC 2401-2463)

Examination of Conscience

Seventh Commandment

- Did I steal, cheat, help or encourage others to steal or keep stolen goods?
- Have I made restitution for stolen goods?
- Did I fulfill my contracts, give or accept bribes, pay my bills, rashly gamble or speculate, deprive my family of necessities of life?
- Do I give to the Church and the poor from my substance rather than my surplus?
- Do I spend more than what is necessary on food, drink, hobbies, recreation, sports or entertainment?
- Did I gamble excessively?
- Did I fail to fulfill work assignments or defraud workers of their wages?
- Did I engage in fraud, embezzlement, price fixing, tax evasion, forgery, violating copyrights, pirating software or padding expense accounts?

SNAPSHOT OF REALITY: The Bid (55)

In this Snapshot, we see what, unfortunately, is a common occurrence in modern business. An entrepreneur is faced with either agreeing to a bribe or losing an important business deal. We can appreciate his struggle as he balances what is right with the need to take care of his family.

Examination of conscience: insider information, flattery, bribery, money vs. integrity

Antidotes to sin: honesty, humility, intercessory prayer, loyalty, morality vs. power

19. Read and consider this Snapshot. Discuss with your group.

Monthly Message:

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Suggestions for further reading:

The Essential Catholic Prayer Book, Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 1999

The Awesome Mercy of God, by John H. Hampsch, Cincinnati, OH: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2006

Catherine of Siena, The Dialogue, Paulist Press, New York, 1980

www.catholicscomehome.org

Chapter 8 – God’s Greatest Mercy (147-151; 101-108)

(147) According to Anne, Jesus says, “*Spend time in silence, considering the remainder of your days on earth and how you would like to conduct yourself.*”

PURGATORY PERFECTS US

“*So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.*” (Matt 5:48)

The Scripture passage above, as well as others, states that if we are to be joined with God in heaven, there can be no stain of imperfection in us. The Book of Revelation tells us that “*nothing unclean will enter [heaven].*” (Rev 21:27) Thus, if we die with even the slightest imperfection of sin within us, we will be unable to enter into the Kingdom of heaven until that blemish has been wiped away through **God’s great mercy**.

The Catechism tells us, “*All who die in God’s grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven.*” (CCC 1030) According to Anne, Jesus says:

In order to assist souls in learning to trust Me and rely on My goodness, I have allowed this little glimpse into the process of purification...Your God cherishes you and will care for you tenderly and mercifully when you arrive home from your time of exile. Proceed in joyful trust and you will be making the choice of the very wise ones. I give this information freely today because so many misjudge God or do not know God. I understand how this has happened, and yet I cannot allow it to continue. (148)

It is a basic truth of the Catholic faith that there are not two, but three places where one can go after the individual judgment which takes place when one dies.

1. Read CCC 1020-1029. What if a person has led an exemplary, holy life, made penance on earth for his sins and died in the state of grace, having received the Sacrament of the Sick on his deathbed. Is it possible for him to enter heaven directly upon his death?

2. Read CCC 1033-1037. What if a person who led a very sinful life of selfish pleasures has by his own free choice no remorse even on his deathbed? Where does he spend eternity?

But what of those people in the middle, who are the vast majority of the deceased? If we cannot enter heaven unless perfect, and if we die with imperfections on our souls as most do, could hell possibly be the only place for us?

3. In God's great mercy, what does the Catechism teach (CCC 1030-32) about another place for our souls after death?

The Catholic Church teaches there is a third place, a place of great grace and mercy. Difficult to dwell in, yes, but at the end of the trial is the certainty of heaven for eternity. That place is called purgatory, for there souls will be purged of their sin and imperfections. At the general judgment at the end of time, purgatory will cease to exist, and there will only be heaven and hell for the rest of eternity.

4. Read the following Scripture passages and discuss with your group how they strengthen the Church's doctrine of purgatory: Job 1:5, 1 Cor 3:13-15, 1 Pet 1:7 and Matt 12:31-32.

One of the main reasons for the Church's doctrine on purgatory is that it is also based on the practice of prayer for the dead, already mentioned in Sacred Scripture:

„Therefore [Judas Maccabeus] made atonement for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin.’ [2 Macc 12:46] From the beginning the Church has honored the memory of the dead and offered prayers in suffrage for them, above all the Eucharistic sacrifice, so that, thus purified, they may attain the beatific vision of God. (CCC 1032)

DIFFERENCES WITH OTHER CHRISTIANS

The Roman Catholic Church has a rich history which includes purgatory as a doctrine of faith.

5. What do some other Christian denominations believe about purgatory?

Most other Christian denominations believe in only heaven and hell and eliminate the idea of purgatory because they are unable to reconcile suffering with the great mercy of God. Many of our separated Christian brethren believe that once they have accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior, their salvation is assured, and they will immediately enter heaven when they die.

6. At what point in Christian history did these differences in belief come about?

One of the reasons for this difference in belief with non-Catholic Christians is that portions of the Scriptural basis for purgatory are not included in the Protestant Bible. There are seven books in the Catholic Bible, called the Apocrypha, which are not included in the Protestant Bible.

7. Were you aware that the Catholic and Protestant Bibles differ?

All of the seven books in the Catholic Bible are in the Old Testament canon, and they are as follows: Tobit, Judith, 1 & 2 Maccabees, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus (or Sirach) and Baruch. There are also some additional passages in the books of Daniel and Esther that are not included in the Protestant Bible.

“The reason for this divergence is that earliest Christianity used an ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament as its Bible. This Greek version of the Bible included 46 books. Since most of the early Christians were Greek-speaking, this is the Bible they preferred. But when Judaism officially set out to determine its canon at the end of the first century, it drew up a shorter list of 39 books: those written in Hebrew. In the Reformation period, Protestants went back to this shorter, Hebrew canon, considering it more authentic.” (New American Bible, Catholic Study Bible, RG 3)

The prayers for the dead, offered in 2 Maccabees, which is part of the Apocrypha, is the primary Old Testament Scriptural basis for the doctrine of purgatory. The remainder of the passage is as follows: *“for if he were not expecting the fallen to rise again, it would have been useless and foolish to pray for them in death. But if he did this with a view to the splendid reward that awaits those who had gone to rest in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought.”* (2 Macc 12:44-45) Since 2 Maccabees was probably written around 160 B.C., the practice of prayer for the dead had most likely existed for several centuries before Christ.

8. Have you ever had a discussion with a non-Catholic Christian about purgatory? Describe the experience for your group.

TYPICAL CATHOLIC UNDERSTANDING OF PURGATORY

Before we visit purgatory with Anne in *The Mist of Mercy* we would like to spend some time discussing the history of the Catholic understanding of purgatory. For many of us, when reading *The Mist of Mercy*, purgatory seems to be very different from that described in our grade school or high school teachings and from many saints' accounts as well. Many of us grew up with the idea of purgatory as a sort of "mini-hell" that was just as terrible and painful as the real thing but with the hope of release after a certain period of time.

9. Discuss your idea of purgatory prior to reading *The Mist of Mercy*.

TEACHING FROM THE SAINTS

Many saints believed in the purifying fire of purgatory and that the pain of the suffering in purgatory is much more intense than any pain on earth, even that of the martyrs.

St. Augustine said, *“Though this fire is destined to cleanse and purify the soul, still it is more acute than anything we could possibly endure on Earth.”* (*Read Me or Rue It*, Fr. Paul O’Sullivan O.P., Rockford, IL: TAN Books, 1936, 1)

St. Cyril of Alexandria said, *“...it would be preferable to suffer all the possible torments of earth until the Judgment day than to pass one day in Purgatory.”* (*Ibid*, 2)

Several Fathers of the Church—**St. Gregory the Great, St. Augustine, St. Cyprian, St. Basil, St. Caesarius, St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Bonaventure**—believed that purgatory included fire. Whether this is the case or not, the holy souls do suffer intense pain of some sort, but also experience the greatest peace and joy in that pain—more than we can imagine here on earth. Their peace and joy in suffering comes from their knowledge that they are in complete union and communication with God, and are completely obedient to His will, and that someday they will be in His presence for all eternity. (<http://opusangelorum.org/Formation/Purgatory.html>)

St. Catherine of Genoa tells us, *“...there is no joy comparable to that of the souls in Purgatory . . . For an incessant communication with God renders their happiness daily more intense. And this union with God grows more and more intimate the more they are purified.”* (www.opusangelorum.org/Formation/Purgatory.html)

St. Gregory of Nyssa teaches, *“...after his [man’s] departure out of the body, he gains knowledge of the difference between virtue and vice and finds that he is not able to partake of divinity until he has been purged of the filthy contagion in his soul by the purifying fire.”* (*Sermon on the Dead* [A.D. 382])

St. John Chrysostom references how Job helped his family through his sacrifice (Job 1:5) encouraging us, *“Let us not hesitate to help those who have died and to offer our prayers for them.”* (*Homilies on First Corinthians* 41:5 [A.D. 392])

St. Augustine of Hippo writes, *“Temporal punishments are suffered by some in this life only, by some after death, by some both here and hereafter, but all of them before that last and strictest judgment.”* (*The City of God* 21:13 [A.D. 419])

Purgatory has often been described as a purifying fire, where the tarnish of our sins is refined and our soul is purified into a precious gold, worthy of standing before the throne of God in heaven. The Catechism explains that the idea of fire comes from St. Paul, when he writes in 1 Corinthians 3:13-15, that our work will be “*revealed with fire*” and a “*person will be saved, but only as through fire.*” (CCC 1031, see also 1Pet 1:7)

The Catechism also states,

“...every sin, even venial, entails an unhealthy attachment to creatures, which must be purified either here on earth, or after death in the state called purgatory. This purification frees one from what is called the ‘temporal punishment’ of sin...The forgiveness of sin and restoration of communion with God entail the remission of the eternal punishment of sin, but temporal punishment of sin remains. While patiently bearing sufferings and trials of all kinds, and, when the day comes, serenely facing death, the Christian must strive to accept this temporal punishment of sin as a grace.” (CCC 1472-1473)

10. What do you think some of the pain of purgatory might be?

PURGATORY IS GOD’S GREATEST MERCY

Purgatory is, in reality, God’s greatest mercy. It is a place of great self-awareness, where we can see all the ways in which we have offended God and have either, in the case of venial sin, not received absolution or have not paid the perfect penance due to confessed mortal sin. It is also a place where we can expiate all of our hidden faults and bad habits which have been built up over a lifetime on earth. It is entirely reasonable for purgatory to exist, for it is the perfect alternative between God’s Great Mercy and His Divine Justice. Since “*nothing unclean will enter [heaven]*” (Rev 21:27), God has provided purgatory for us to satisfy His justice but also to offer His infinite mercy and charity to those souls who die as His friends, but who still have work to do. When a soul dies and stands before God, the illumination of his soul is so total and so profound that the soul himself will request purgatory, rather than enter heaven with any uncleanness or stain of sin.

“Purgatory is also a consoling doctrine. It consoles the living as they watch their dear ones part from them in death. If Purgatory did not exist, if there were only Heaven and Hell, relations and friends could have no illusions about the eternal lot of those whom they have loved on earth. It would be impossible for them to know that hope where there is no hope: they must remain in tears for the eternal loss of those whom they know to be manifestly unworthy of Heaven, both by reason of the tenor of their lives and of the sentiments of their last moments. But let Purgatory exist. Immediately, hope springs eternal, for . . . [the mourners] are consoled with thoughts of the mercy of God.” (Purgatory and the Means to Avoid It, Martin Jugie, Fort Colins, CO: Roman Catholic Books, 1949, 24-25)

11. Have you ever thought of purgatory as a gift from God? Discuss.

(147) Now we come to the portion of *The Mist of Mercy* where Jesus explains purgatory to Anne and shows her parts of purgatory. After our lengthy discussion of spiritual warfare, we hear Jesus say to Anne, *“The enemy cannot promise you that you will live forever. Only I can make that promise and only through Me will you find the Father, the One who loves you.”* We simply need to focus on Him who loves us, and ignore the world and the evil one. God will ensure our salvation. Jesus says, *“If you repent, you will be saved. **IT IS THAT SIMPLE.**” (Emphasis added)* We need to strive to continually remember those few words of Jesus. If we can live our lives on that premise, God will welcome us into His Kingdom.

12. (147) What do lay apostles understand about the earthly body?

(148) Jesus tells Anne why He is granting this gift to us. He wants us to know about His mercy and to trust Him in all things. We are to be confident, but not presumptuous, in approaching Him to learn of His goodness and compassion. He is allowing a glimpse of His purification process so that we can see how God's mercy and God's divine justice are intertwined in the doctrine of purgatory.

13. (148) Why does Jesus ask Anne to write about purgatory?

14. Why do you think Jesus is allowing this glimpse into His purification process at this point in history?

15. Does this glimpse give you hope or make you fearful for the future? Discuss.

St. Gertrude the Great
Patron of Nuns
Feast Day: November 16

“Eternal Father, I offer Thee the Most Precious Blood of Thy Divine Son, Jesus, in union with the masses said throughout the world today, for all the holy souls in Purgatory, for sinners everywhere, for sinners in the universal church, those in my own home and within my family. Amen.”

(Our Lord dictated the prayer above to St. Gertrude with the promise that each time it was said many souls would be released from purgatory. The prayer was extended to include living sinners by adding “...For sinners everywhere, for sinners in the universal church, those in my own home and within my family. Amen.”)

Saint Gertrude was born in Germany on January 6th, 1256. No record of her last name or history of her family can be found. She was raised by the Benedictine nuns of Helfta in Saxony.

Gertrude excelled in her studies of grammar, rhetoric, logic, and Latin at the abbey. At the age of fifteen, she entered the Benedictine community. After making her monastic profession, she studied literature and wrote fluently in Latin and German. She became a teacher for the abbey.

Gertrude’s early years of monastic life were difficult. She applied herself more to her studies of literature than to spiritual matters. By the end of her twenty-fourth year, she was suffering from a depression caused by “a severe emotional storm and spiritual distress”.

However, shortly after her twenty-fifth birthday, she had what she would call her “conversion” moment. She had a locution of Christ saying to her, “Do not fear, I will save you and set you free.” She would receive several visions which led her to a mystical union with Christ. She abandoned her literature studies and devoted herself to prayer and the study of Scripture. She wrote short reflections on Scripture which she then shared with others.

Eventually, Gertrude heard Christ ask her to write an account of the many graces she had received. She was reluctant at first, but was encouraged to share her story as a guide for others. Gertrude’s spiritual autobiography was included in *The Herald of God’s Loving Kindness* as well as additional information about her compiled by her community. Gertrude would later write her Spiritual Exercises in Latin.

”In her mystical prayer, Gertrude experiences in the Church an intense love of the Eucharist, a loving embrace of the sinner, friendship for the outcast, and an enduring trust in God’s mercy.” Gertrude died in 1301 or 1302. She was never formally canonized. But “a liturgical office of prayer, readings, and hymns in her honor was approved by Rome in 1606.”

Document Information: Excerpts from www.federationofstgertrude.org
www.olrl.org/pray/stgertrude.shtml
<http://saints.sqpn.com/saint-gertrude-the-great/>

HAPPINESS AND REMORSE

(149) On Easter Sunday, Jesus took Anne to purgatory for the first time. Her first glimpse was of people talking and laughing with a “*great lightness of spirit.*” After observing this for a time, Jesus moved Anne further into purgatory where it became misty and more and more foggy as they went on. Here, Anne could feel many souls around her and could hear their various prayers as they begged God for mercy and told Him of their sorrow for their sins. Anne knew that there were many levels in purgatory and that the point where she started was the highest level, which is where the souls are the closest to heaven.

16. Anne was permitted to see souls at the highest level of purgatory first. Why? Why are those souls newly arrived to that area laughing and talking?

17. (150) Anne tells us “*that souls taken now are granted the most extreme mercy imaginable because of the darkness of this time.*” What do you think this statement means? Discuss with your group.

In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus tells us, “...*you will not be released until you have paid the last penny.*” (Matt 5:26) St. Paul tells us in his writings to “*Strive for peace with everyone, and for that holiness without which no one will see the Lord.*” (Heb 12:14) These quotes tell us that we must be perfect in order to get to heaven, but we know that there are varying degrees of sinfulness that must be purged in order to do that. There are saints in heaven who probably passed through purgatory in an instant after their death, and there are also those souls who will stay in purgatory until the general judgment at the end of the world.

The moment after death the soul sees itself even as it is. Interests which seemed overpowering during our mortal life dwindle into insignificance, and so-called trifles stand out in immense importance . . . for some no doubt it will be as if they were members of a theatre troupe, who in their tinsel and tawdry finery suddenly stepped from the artificial footlights into the blazing light of a summer's day . . . [while those] who in fear and trembling worked out their salvation and who with anxious scrutiny examined and weighed their deeds, despairing of themselves and only trusting in the mercy of God, for them it will be like passing from the twilight of a winter's day into the clarity of a morning in spring. The searchlight of God shall illumine the deepest depths of the human soul, and nothing shall be hidden that shall not be made manifest to it. (Purgatory and Heaven, Fr. J. P. Arendzen, D.D., Rockford, IL: TAN Books, 1972, 11-12)

At the point of death, souls will know immediately where they belong and will actually send themselves to their fate. Jesus said *“I tell you, on the day of judgment people will render an account for every careless word they speak. By your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.”* (Matt 12:36-37) Fr. Arendzen tells us that the damned will know that hell is the only place for them, the saints will fly to God like metal to a magnet and the holy souls will descend willingly into their purifying fate, eager to do the work that must be done in order to see God.

The holy souls are inexpressibly happy and inexpressibly sad. They are happy because by God's grace and their own free will they have secured the certainty of seeing and enjoying Him, whom they supremely love. They are sad because through their own fault they are deprived of the blissful vision of His glory.” (Purgatory and Heaven, Fr. J. P. Arendzen, D.D., Rockford, IL: TAN Books, 1972, 19)

18. Do the quotes in the above paragraphs give you a sense of both the joy and the sorrow that Anne sees in purgatory? Discuss.

(150) Anne tells us that the remorse for sin in purgatory is dreadful. This could explain why there are various quotes from the saints and Mary herself who tell us that it is much better to do our purifying work on earth than to do it in purgatory. Anne says that *“souls*

did not see Jesus or experience Him as He went through there so they must be denied any awareness of God's presence, much as we are here on earth." To know that they will see God, but also to know that they are currently deprived of His presence due to their own fault, must be excruciating to the holy souls. Compounding that pain for the poor souls is their reflection on how their sins on earth impacted others—their family members, friends, co-workers or even strangers. Here on earth, we know the mental pain and anguish of the death or loss of a loved one or the rejection by another. How much more then would be the pain in purgatory of our own sins and mistakes as we realize that these are keeping us from the beatific vision that is to come?

[I]t will be like a sword going right through the heart. Were death still possible we would die for sorrow, but death is over and we have to bear it, till God relieves us . . . [This is] a picture indeed of our sorrows in purgatory, when our souls shall be sorrowful unto death, when mere bodily death would be a welcome respite, when we would be willing to die a thousand times if thereby we could reach God one instant sooner. (Purgatory and Heaven, Fr. J. P. Arendzen, D.D., Rockford, IL: TAN Books, 1972, 23)

19. (150-151) What are some of the differences experienced by souls in purgatory and those in heaven? What are the similarities?

Eighth Commandment:

“Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.”

This commandment is divided into six parts. The first part discusses *“Living in the Truth...showing oneself true in deeds and truthful in words, and guarding against duplicity, dissimulation, and hypocrisy.”*

The second part proclaims our responsibility to, like Jesus, *“Bear Witness to the Truth.” “The Christian is not to „be ashamed of testifying to our Lord’ in deed and word.”*

The third part includes false witness and perjury, boasting or bragging and *“irony aimed at disparaging someone by maliciously caricaturing some aspect of his behavior.” “He becomes guilty:*

- *of rash judgment who, even tacitly, assumes as true, without sufficient foundation, the moral fault of a neighbor;*
- *of detraction who, without objectively valid reason, discloses another's faults and failings to persons who did not know them;*
- *of calumny who, by remarks contrary to the truth, harms the reputation of others and gives occasion for false judgments concerning them.”*

“Lying consists in saying what is false with the intention of deceiving one's neighbor.” Depending on the gravity, lying can be a venial sin or a mortal sin.

The fourth part examines *“Respect for the Truth.”* The Catechism states, *“The golden rule helps one discern, in concrete situations, whether or not it would be appropriate to reveal the truth to someone who asks for it.”*

The fifth part states *“Society has a right to information based on truth, freedom, and justice.”*

The sixth part explains that *“the fine arts, but above all sacred art, „of their nature are directed toward expressing in some way the infinite beauty of God in works made by human hands.”* (CCC 2464-2513)

Examination of Conscience

Eighth Commandment

- Did I tell lies deliberately to deceive or to injure others?
- Did I commit perjury?
- Was I uncharitable in word or deed?
- Did I fail to keep secrets that I should have?
- Have I avoided rash judgment, detraction, gossip, calumny or slander?
- Do I build up others as much as possible with words of sincere kindness, praise and encouragement?
- Have I been completely thorough, open and honest in Confession?
- Do I exaggerate my own accomplishments?
- Have I spoken when I should have been silent?
- Have I been silent when I should have spoken?

SNAPSHOT OF REALITY: The Conversation (101)

In this Snapshot we listen in on two good Catholic women who are gossiping about others. They have fallen into the trap of self-righteousness and judging others by outward appearance. They almost seem to be encouraging each other in their sinful gossip, but in the end, one of them feels the light of God and repents.

Examination of conscience: gossip, negativism, self-righteousness

Antidotes to sin: remove ourselves from conversations; find good things to say, humility, and courage to defend others

20. Read and consider this Snapshot. Discuss with your group.

Monthly Messages:

April 1, 2005 page 190 and June 1, 2005 page 192

Suggestions for further reading:

The Pieta Prayer Booklet, Hickory Corners, MI: MLOR Corporation, 1998

Purgatory and Heaven, Fr. J. P. Arendzen, D.D., Rockford, IL: TAN Books, 1972

Read Me or Rue It, O'Sullivan O.P., Fr. Paul, Rockford, IL: TAN Books, 1936

The Life and Revelations of St. Gertrude the Great, St. Gertrude and the religious of her monastery translated by the Poor Clares of Kenmare, Rockford, IL: TAN Books, 2002

Chapter 9 – Purgatory – (151-163; 117-121)

VISION OF HELL

(153-154) Jesus allows Anne to see a glimpse of a small area of hell where she witnesses evil face to face. While she is repelled and disgusted by the sight, she is not fearful or shocked. She can see that those who are in hell have freely chosen their fate by a prideful rejection of God's graces over and over throughout their life on earth.

Scripture tells us that hell is “*eternal fire*” (Matt 25:41); “*eternal punishment*” (Matt 25:46); “*unquenchable fire*” (Luke 3:17); “*eternal ruin*” (2Thess 1:9); and “*consuming fire . . . everlasting flames.*” (Is 33:14) Hell is real and frightening. There are many today who refuse to believe in hell, perhaps because on some level they cannot bear to think that hell may be their fate. It almost seems as though the more sinful the world becomes, the fewer people believe in eternal punishment. Perhaps this denial is self-protection. Unfortunately for all of us, hell exists and can be our fate if we refuse to utilize the graces that God makes available to us throughout our lives. Stubbornly refusing to believe in hell's existence is not the ideal way to work out one's salvation.

1. What are some reasons people give for not believing in hell?

2. What can you say to change their minds?

The children of Fatima in 1917 were given a vision of hell in one of their apparitions of Mary. She showed them the fate of many as a warning to the world of how things would be if people did not change their sinful ways.

“They observe an immense sea of fire which appears to be under the earth. Immersed in the fire are the devils or fallen angels and the souls of damned human beings . . . the two categories of individuals are easily distinguishable.”

The souls have a human form whereas the demons appear in the terrifying and loathsome forms of horrible, unknown animals. But both the devils and the souls are transparent and black or bronze-colored, like live embers. Floating and tossed about in the conflagration by the flames which issue from them with clouds of smoke, they fall about on all sides without weight or balance, as sparks do in a great fire. All the while they emit shrieks and groans of pain and despair which horrify the children and cause them to tremble with fear.” (The Sun Danced at Fatima, Joseph A. Pelletier, A.A, Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1951, 61)

3. (153) Anne describes the souls in hell, by saying, “They are _____, devoid of all _____. They are _____.”

In speaking of hell, Fr. Arendzen says that “none of the damned have ever asked for mercy, nor will they for all eternity. **One moment’s repentance would empty hell.** (Emphasis added) *The damned know it, but nothing alters their grim determination to abide by their choice and do without God. Hell is the outcome of the rejection of divine Power, Wisdom and Love, by created wills fixed in evil.” (Purgatory and Heaven, Fr. J. P. Arendzen, D.D., Rockford, IL: TAN Books, 1972, 12)* The souls in hell hate God; they want absolutely nothing to do with Him. They have rejected Him time and time again and that constant rejection throughout their lifetime in a sense, prepares them for their final judgment and final fate. This is not to say that a soul cannot choose Jesus at the moment of death. But it is in that persistent turning away from their Creator that souls have difficulty finding Him at the hour of their death. Souls who do reach out at the moment of death probably do so because of the many prayers of the faithful throughout the world. They get one final glimpse of the grace of God and through that grace, implore Him to be saved.

4. Have you ever witnessed or read about a deathbed conversion? Discuss with your group. Are you aware of any spiritual practices that focus on this?

5. (153-154) How does hell differ from purgatory?

The Catechism discusses hell briefly, perhaps not wanting to dwell on such an ignominious place for long. It states, “*God predestines no one to go to hell, for this, a willful turning away from God (a mortal sin) is necessary, and persistence in it until the end. In the Eucharistic liturgy and in the daily prayers of her faithful, the Church implores the mercy of God, who does not want „any to perish, but all to come to repentance.*” The Catechism then quotes from Eucharistic Prayer I, “***Father, accept this offering from your whole family. Grant us your peace in this life, save us from final damnation, and count us among those you have chosen.***” (Emphasis added. CCC 1037) This prayer saves countless souls from the snatches of the evil one. We will only find out in the next life just how many souls are aided, not only by our prayers, but by our actions and sufferings as well.

6. (154) Anne tells us that there is one thing that can make a soul impenetrable by the demons of hell. It is _____.

FINAL PURIFICATION

(154-155) Anne is taken again to purgatory by Jesus and she is shown the final stages of purification for souls. Here she witnesses souls “talking it out” with each other about their faults and failings, at the end of their purification. Anne tells us that this is a beautiful place, filled with souls from all time periods, races and nations. There is complete love and acceptance here for all souls, with each one helping others to come to terms with their rejection of God’s grace.

7. (155) Why is the highest level of purgatory, according to Anne, a group endeavor and not an individual pursuit like the lower levels of purgatory are?

8. (155) In the final areas of purgatory, people sat and talked. What did Anne hear? How does this compare with what you have learned in this study or previous studies you may have taken?

9. (156) In this level, Anne is amazed by “*the total absence of* _____ . *There is no* _____ , *no fake* _____ *or pretending to* _____ .”

(157) In the final area of purgatory, Jesus shows Anne that the souls from heaven are permitted to come down to see their loved ones in purgatory. This is unlike the deeper part of purgatory, where souls could feel the presence and prayers of their loved ones, but were not able to see or interact with them. This reminds us of the “veil” that Anne talks about in *Climbing the Mountain*. Although the veil between this world and the next is thin, it is unapparent to us here on earth. Sometimes we doubt that God exists, and we certainly cannot always hear His voice. If we could see Him, we would know just how close He is, and how much He cares for us in all things.

(160) Anne talks about how the souls in purgatory are perfectly protected and safe. This contrasts greatly with her vision of hell, where souls are preyed upon constantly by the demons and other souls. Purgatory is safe because it is God’s jurisdiction and “*God would never allow a soul to be injured in His care.*” In purgatory, souls are in anguish and torment, but it is due to their reflection on their actions here on earth, and not torment from others. Souls here willingly, despite great grief and pain, examine themselves in order to complete the necessary work so that they can see God face to face.

10. Does the thought of examining your life in purgatory fill you with hope or despair? Discuss with your group.

What is the Communion of Saints?

“„We believe in the communion of all the faithful of Christ, those who are pilgrims on earth, the dead who are being purified, and the blessed in heaven, all together forming one Church; and we believe that in this communion, the merciful love of God and his saints is always [attentive] to our prayers.’ (Paul VI CPG Sec. 30)”

(CCC 962)

St. Thérèse of Lisieux
Doctor of the Church – Merciful Love
Patron of Foreign Missions
Feast Day: October 1

“O my God, O Most Blessed Trinity, I desire to love Thee and to make Thee loved- to labor for the glory of Holy Church by saving souls here upon earth and by delivering those suffering in purgatory. I desire to fulfill perfectly Thy Holy Will, and to reach the degree of glory Thou hast prepared for me in Thy Kingdom. In a word, I wish to be holy, but knowing how helpless I am, I beseech Thee, my God to be Thyself my holiness....”

“This prayer was found after [St. Thérèse’s] death in the copy of the Gospels that she carried nightly close to her heart.”
<http://www.catholicplanet.com/ebooks/Prayers-of-Saint-Therese.pdf>

St. Thérèse was born in Alençon, France in 1873. Her parents were very religious. Thérèse was the youngest of five daughters, all of whom eventually became nuns. When she was only four, her mother died. This was a very difficult time for Thérèse. Her naturally happy disposition deserted her. She became timid and shy, and was only at ease with her family, where she always felt cherished. Her sixteen-year-old sister Pauline became her second mother, but five years after their mother’s death she entered the Carmelite convent. This second loss was exceptionally hard as well.

As a child, she often walked with her father and made a visit to the Blessed Sacrament in one of the local churches. This was when she first saw the chapel at Carmel. Her father said, *“Look, little Queen! Behind that grating are holy nuns who are always praying to Almighty God.”* Nine years later she would be among those nuns in Carmel. But first, her sister Marie left to enter the Carmelites, and then her sister Leonie left to become a Poor Clare. Thérèse was then left alone to await her turn with her last sister Celine and her father.

Thérèse would say she wanted to be good, but she had an odd way of going about it. This spoiled little queen wouldn’t do housework. She thought if she made the beds she was doing a great favor. If she was being criticized or someone did not appreciate her, she burst into tears. She was very precocious by nature. However, as Thérèse grew older, her love for God grew more and more and she frequently offered Him her heart. Slowly she was able to tame her nature, working diligently to please Jesus in all her actions.

St. Thérèse of Lisieux (cont.)

When Thérèse was only fourteen years old, she told her father she wanted to become a Carmelite. He readily consented, but the Carmelite authorities and the bishop refused to consider it at her young age. A few months later her father took Thérèse and her sister Celine on a pilgrimage to Rome for the Jubilee of Pope Leo XIII. During a general audience with the Pope, she asked him to allow her to enter Carmel at fifteen, but the Pope said to her simply, *“If the good God wills, you will enter.”* A short time later, the Bishop of Bayeux authorized the prioress to receive Thérèse as a postulant. Her soul was filled with a deep peace. This peace remained during the following years within the Carmel walls even amid the hardest trials. She said she came to the Carmel convent *“to save souls and pray for priests.”*

However, she never expected the suffering she soon met up with. Her father suffered a series of strokes that affected him physically and mentally. As a cloistered nun she couldn't help take care of her father, not even to visit him. This was a time of horrible suffering. She experienced such dryness in prayer that she said, *“Jesus isn't doing much to keep the conversation going.”* But she still continued to take every chance to sacrifice no matter how small. She smiled at the sisters she didn't like, she ate everything she was given without complaining; every little sacrifice, every glance and word, even the least of actions were done for the love of God.

St. Thérèse's secret was littleness, which means humility. She knew that she had no merits of her own. All merits are of Jesus. Her desire was to do the little things extraordinarily well, united to the love of Jesus, within whose heart, as a little insignificant soul, she placed herself with complete confidence.

St. Thérèse continues today to teach that by offering in sacrificial love to the merciful love of God the ordinary things of everyday life, we can save many souls. These actions please God, and reach heaven. Her words, *“I prefer the monotony of obscure sacrifice to all ecstasies. To pick up a pin for love can convert a soul.”* offer an insight into her life and spirituality.

St. Thérèse died on September 30, 1897 at the age of twenty-three. She was canonized in 1925, and made the third woman Doctor of the Church by Pope John Paul II.

Document Information: Excerpts from www.ewtn.com/therese
www.Catholic.org/saints
www.wikipedia.com
www.catholicplanet.com/ebooks-Prayers-of-Saint-Therese.html
www.therese.kashalinka.com

Saints and Heroes Speak, Fr. Robert J. Fox, Washington, NJ: AMI Press, 1981

INTERCESSION

(152, 156, 158-160) Jesus and Anne talk a great deal about what we on earth can do for the souls in purgatory. At every stop along the way, Anne asks Jesus what she can do for the souls that she hears and sees who are in the mist, filled with remorse. Jesus' answer is always the same, "*She will benefit from your intercession.*" (152)

11. Read CCC 2634-2636. What is intercession?

Jesus tells Anne that we on earth cannot know the value of the things that we do for the souls in purgatory. Our "*prayers are applied with **perfect justice** (Emphasis added) to others*" (156) even if the person we are praying for is in heaven. Our prayers are never wasted; they are always put to good use, perhaps for those in purgatory who have no one to pray for them. As Catholics, we have a solemn duty to tend to the holy souls, particularly in light of the fact that many other Christian faiths do not believe in purgatory. Those of other faiths perhaps believe that their loved ones go straight to heaven when they die; therefore they would not be in need of prayers. In light of this fact, there could be multitudes of souls in purgatory who have no one praying for them or offering works or sacrifices for them.

12. Is praying for the holy souls part of your prayer life as a Catholic? Discuss.

(158) Jesus shows Anne a beautiful vision of souls entering into heaven after they have completed their work in purgatory. Their faces shine with joy as they go off into the light of God, to be with Him for all eternity. Since souls cannot help themselves after death, but all souls in purgatory eventually go to heaven, Jesus tells Anne that her prayers (and ours) can "*help a soul to move through the process more quickly.*" (156)

(159) Jesus then takes her back into the deepest part of purgatory, and when she asks about the difference between that place and hell, Jesus tells Anne, “*the two places (are) separated by eternity but that the choice between hell and purgatory is often a hair’s [breadth] of a difference.*”

13. Do you think in terms of your prayers, offerings, or suffering as being the “hair’s [breadth] of a difference”?

(159-160) Anne talks about some of the things that we can do to intercede for the holy souls: “*prayers . . . offering of our day . . . little teeny sacrifices . . . our greatest pain and sufferings.*” In fact, just about anything that we can think of can be offered up for the souls in purgatory at any time during our day. Simply going through the duties of our state in life can be grace-filled for the souls if we offer these small things on their behalf.

14. Have you ever focused on the needs of those in your family who have died?

15. Read CCC 961 about the Communion of Saints and how each group (the triumphant in heaven, the militant on earth and the suffering in purgatory) interrelates with the others. Discuss.

(161) Jesus takes Anne to see a woman in purgatory who is praying fervently that others will not make the same mistake (abortion) on earth that she made. She suffered terribly in her remorse and grief on earth. While Anne watches, the woman is moved into the final stages of purgatory where she meets with other souls. Jesus tells Anne that the woman's swift progress was made possible by Anne's "*simple acts of obedience during [her] difficult day*" the day before. Jesus tells Anne that she "*will be credited for the merciful speed with which she [the woman] progressed.*" In other words, not only do the holy souls benefit from our offerings on their behalf, but we benefit from our sacrifices as well. Nothing that we do is wasted or unseen by our Lord. Everything, even the smallest offering or suffering, is put to good use for other souls, either here on earth or in purgatory.

16. How does this knowledge strengthen your faith in God's perfect plan for mankind? Does this also increase your resolve to pray for the holy souls?

(162) Jesus tells Anne something that makes our hearts leap for joy when we contemplate His words. He says, "*I will reward every soul so bountifully for their allegiance, Anne. **I will reward their loved ones.** The fruits of their commitment to the cause of the Savior will **astound** them.*" (Emphasis added) These emphatic promises of Jesus fill our hearts and souls with joy because He is so generous with us whenever we do the smallest thing for Him. Jesus' love for mankind and His great mercy shine through in this promise—it is as though He cannot help Himself—He takes such great delight in even the tiniest sacrifice that we make on behalf of others.

The Church also offers us ways in which to help the holy souls speed up their purification in purgatory. From the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

"The Church also commends almsgiving, indulgences, and works of penance undertaken on behalf of the dead: 'Let us help and commemorate them. If Job's sons were purified by their father's sacrifice, why would we doubt that our offerings for the dead bring them some consolation? Let us not hesitate to help those who have died and to offer our prayers for them.'" (CCC 1032)

17. Do you engage in practices to alleviate the sufferings of the holy souls in purgatory? Elaborate.

Perhaps the most important thing we can do for the souls in purgatory is to have a Mass said for them.

The most excellent and most efficacious of all the suffrages for the dead, is the Holy Mass . . . The Mass, indeed, is the common good of the universal Church, because it is the memorial and mystical reproduction of the Sacrifice of the Cross. It brings to every member of the Church, whether of the Church Militant, the Church Suffering, or the Church Triumphant, benefits according to the state and the needs of each . . . In the Mass, the Church, in liturgical prayer, offers sacrifice for all the faithful departed and begs that they may be introduced into the place of refreshment, light and peace. It is certain that every soul in Purgatory receives some diminution of its debt by the celebration of any Mass . . . the Church will never forget us. (Purgatory and the Means to Avoid It, Martin Jugie, Fort Collins, CO: Roman Catholic Books, 1949, 125)

18. (163) What does Anne tell us that Jesus says about Masses said for the holy souls?

There are actually two ways that we can have Mass said for the holy souls: we can either request Masses from a priest for a stipend, or we can attend Mass ourselves and offer it for the holy souls. In either case, our offering is acceptable to God, and in this way we are not constrained by our financial condition in our efforts to aid the souls in purgatory. Another effective way to make restitution for the holy souls is by requesting Gregorian Masses on their behalf.

Gregorian Masses

The history of the “Thirty Mass” practice goes back to the year 590 AD in St. Andrew’s Monastery in Rome, founded by St. Gregory the Great in his own family home around 570.

After his election as Pope in 590, one of the monks, Justus by name, became ill. So he admitted to a lay friend, Copiosus, that he had hidden three gold pieces among his medications years before, when he was professed a monk. Both, in fact, were former physicians. And sure enough, the other monks found the gold when seeking the medication for Justus.

The Founder monk, now Pope Gregory, hearing of this scandalous sin against Holy Poverty, called in the Abbot of his beloved monastery, and ordered the penalty of solitary confinement for Justus, even though he was dying, and ordered his burial not in the cemetery but in the garbage dump. Copiosus told his wretched friend of this decision. Moreover, the community were to recite over his dreadful grave the words of St. Peter to Simon the Magician: “May thy money perish with thee” (Acts 8:20).

The Pope’s desired result was achieved: Justus made a serious repentance, and all the monks a serious examination of conscience. Justus then died, but the matter did not, for thirty days later Pope Gregory returned to the monastery filled with concern for Justus, who would now be suffering the grim temporal punishment of Purgatory’s fire for his sins. “We must,” said Gregory to the Abbot, “come by charity to his aid, and as far as possible help him to escape this chastisement. Go and arrange Thirty Masses for his soul, so that for thirty consecutive days the Saving Victim is immolated for him without fail.” And so it was done.

Some days later, Justus appeared in a vision to his friend Copiosus and said, “I have just received the Communion pardon and release from Purgatory because of the Masses said for me.” The monks did a calculation, and noted that it was exactly thirty days since the Thirty Masses had begun for Justus. They shared this great consolation with each other, with their Abbott and with Pope Gregory, whose personal authority guarantees its truth, for he wrote the full account of it in his Book of Dialogues, which became very popular.”

Document Information:

http://www.traditioninaction.org/religious/d014rp30Gregorian_Somerville.html

The following are accepted regulations concerning Gregorian Masses. They:

1. Can be offered only for one deceased person.
2. Cannot be offered for all the faithful departed.
3. Must be offered one each day for 30 consecutive days. Should the series be interrupted, the series must begin again.

19. Who offers Gregorian Masses?

(Gregorian Masses can be set up through multiple places. Here are a few:
Franciscan Missions: PO Box 130, Waterford, WI 53185 262-534-5470
Seraphic Mass Assoc.: 3600 Butler St., Pittsburg, PA 15201-1893
Catholic Mission Office: 3525 S. Lake Park Ave., Chicago, IL 60653 312-534-3322
Cistercian Monastery: 3550 Cistercian Road, Irving, TX 75039)

The last way to benefit the holy souls that we will discuss here is through indulgences.

20. Read CCC 1471, 1478-79. What are indulgences? How do they relate to the holy souls?

Indulgences can be partial or plenary.

21. Do you know what the difference is between plenary or partial indulgences (CCC 1471)?

Plenary indulgences remove all of the temporal punishment due to our sins, while partial indulgences remove only some. Since we can apply earned indulgences to anyone, it is always important to remember the souls in purgatory when we are performing an indulgenced prayer or action.

“The important thing in gaining indulgences is to fulfill strictly the conditions imposed by the Church. When kneeling is prescribed, we must kneel; . . . or when six (prayers) are prescribed, we must not stop at four or five . . . Let us greatly value indulgences, since they have been bought with the blood of our Savior. Let us not treat them with indifference, on the ground that they are numerous and easy to gain. Let us choose our favorites among (them), and often during the day let us drop them on Purgatory like the petals of a refreshing rose. If ever we find ourselves in Purgatory, we will know the value of that rose.” (Purgatory and the Means to Avoid It, Martin Jugie, Fort Collins, CO: Roman Catholic Books, 1949, 93-94)

LUST – One of the Seven Deadly Sins

“Lust . . . is a shameful vice because it changes a good and beautiful power into sin.” It is seeking illicit pleasures through the senses: eyes, ears, mouth, hands and heart. “It blinds us to spiritual values, darkens our minds, weakens our wills and leads us to place a created good before God . . . Lust or impurity probably causes the loss of more souls than any other sin.” (The Seven Capital Sins, Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, Rockford, IL: TAN Books, 2000, 21-23)

22. What are some of the worldly things that can trigger the sin of lust?

Ninth Commandment:

“Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s wife.”

Jesus said, *“Everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”* (Mt 5:28) The Catechism says, *“The ninth commandment warns against lust or carnal concupiscence.”*

Concupiscence is *“any intense form of human desire.”*

The ninth commandment is divided into two parts. The first part is *“Purification of Heart.”* *“The struggle against carnal lust involves purifying the heart and practicing temperance.”*

The second part is *“The Battle for Purity.”* *“Purification of the heart demands prayer, the practice of chastity, purity of intention and of vision.”* Purity of intention is *“the baptized person seeks to find and to fulfill God’s will in everything.”* The Catechism discusses the importance of modesty: *“Purity of heart requires the modesty which is patience, decency, and discretion.”* *“Moral permissiveness rests on an erroneous conception of human freedom; the necessary precondition for the development of true freedom is to let oneself be educated in the moral law.”* (CCC 2514-2533)

Examination of Conscience

Ninth Commandment

- Did I abuse my marriage rights?
- Was I unfaithful to my marriage vows?
- Have I kept company with someone else’s spouse?
- Did I commit an impure act with another (adultery, fornication or sodomy)?
- Did I marry or advise another to marry outside the Church?
- Did I dress in an immodest fashion?
- Have I been emotionally attached to someone else’s spouse?
- Do I have purity of intention in everything I do?

SNAPSHOT OF REALITY: A Night Out (117)

In this Snapshot a married woman is tempted by her friends to go out and party each week. She senses the danger to her marriage and manages to resist the temptation in order to focus on her husband and children.

Examination of conscience: placing yourself in an occasion of sin, temptations, overindulgence in alcohol

Antidotes to sin: resist temptation, commitment to state in life, following inspirations

23. Read and consider this Snapshot. Discuss with your group.

Monthly Message:

September 1, 2005, page 196

Suggestions for further reading:

Any book by Susan Tassone on the Holy Souls

Purgatory and the Means to Avoid It, Martin Jugie, Fort Collins, CO: Roman Catholic Books, 1949

The Sun Danced at Fatima, Joseph A. Pelletier, A.A., Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1951

Story of a Soul, St. Thérèse of Lisieux

Chapter 10 – The Service of Holy Souls – (163-184; 85-92)

THE ILLUMINATION OF THE SOUL

(163) Jesus spoke to Anne about earthly funerals, and how they can immediately benefit the deceased's soul. He told her about the ancestors of the deceased who will be in attendance, as well as angels from heaven who came into contact with the soul during his life on earth. The souls in purgatory, as well, have knowledge of the death of their friend and loved one and are able to pray for him. Anne tells us how important it is to pray for the deceased at the funeral and to not be distracted by the environment around us. It is also important, during a funeral, to encourage the other attendees to pray for the dead and not to “canonize” them. We have all probably attended funerals where one or another speaker talks about how the deceased is “looking down on us from heaven.” While that can certainly be true in the case of a soul, more often than not, the deceased may need prayers and sacrifices on our part since they could well be in purgatory. It actually does a disservice to the deceased to assume that they are in heaven, just in case they are not. It also discourages others from praying for them and offering Masses for them since, if they are in paradise, there is no need for any sacrificial offerings on their behalf. Jesus has told us not to judge others, and that proscription can be applied here as well. We are not to judge the state of any soul—Jesus is the only One who can do that. Our job is to pray for the holy souls and each other continually. Jesus assures us that none of those prayers will be in vain, even if the subject of our prayers is already in heaven.

1. Have you been to a funeral lately, where prayer was highly encouraged for the departed soul?

2. Describe the most beautiful funeral you have attended. Discuss with your group.

3. Discuss a way you can ensure that at your death, your soul will be provided for.

(163) Anne discusses the illumination of the soul, when a soul “*sees the truth in God’s presence.*” At that moment of death, when a person is face to face with his Creator and Lord, the light of God “*is so revealing, so complete and perfect, that there is no question of if or maybe. It is and that’s it . . . there won’t be a lot of dialogue about why a soul did this or that. It will be there in front of the soul with all mitigation and aggravation factored in for him.*” This is the point at which the souls place themselves exactly where they belong, when they are confronted with the truth of God’s reality and see their lives as God sees them. This is called the Particular Judgment as opposed to the General or Last Judgment that God will make at the end of the world.

“Although everyone is judged immediately after death, it is fitting that there be a general judgment in order that the justice, wisdom, and glory of God may be glorified in the presence of all. The general judgment is not really a new trial, but a judgment that is a public declaration and manifestation of the sentences or reward already given or made in the particular judgment.” (St. Joseph Baltimore Catechism Official Revised Edition 2, explained by Fr. Bennet Kelley, C.P., NY: Catholic Book Publishing Company, 1962-69, 89)

4. Read the following passages from Scripture and the Catechism about the Particular and the General or Last Judgments. Discuss the difference between the two with your group.

***General or Last Judgment - Joel 2:1-3, Isaiah 2:12; Matthew 25:31-34, 41;**

***Particular Judgment - Luke 23:43 and Phil 1:21-23; CCC 1021-22, 1038-1041.**

(164) Anne describes how happy we will be when we enter into the truth of eternity. For if we have worked for God and believed in Him in this life, we will be able to enter into this truth, either in heaven or purgatory. It is at that moment that we will find out what St. Paul meant when he (quoting Isaiah) said: *“what eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart, [is] what God has prepared for those who love him.”* (1 Cor 2:9) Here, we can see clearly that heaven and purgatory are both part of God’s eternal Kingdom. Anne tells us that the souls in purgatory are at peace and are prayerful and humble. She speaks of purgatory as if it is part of heaven, which it actually is, since it is all in God’s Kingdom.

**5. (164) Anne tells us, “This is the Land of _____ ...
_____ is not even an option or a possibility here.”**

(165) Anne ends this portion of her visit to purgatory with these beautiful and encouraging words: *“Our reward for even the smallest act of kindness or allegiance will be magnificent. Our joy in the fellowship and love of our brothers and sisters will be immeasurable. . . Every soul can be assured that he or she will be welcomed and loved.”*

**6. How do these words encourage you to continue to serve on your journey?
Discuss.**

**Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque
Patron of Those Who Have Lost Parents
Feast Day: October 16th**

“Are you making no progress in prayer? Then you need only offer God the prayers which the savior poured out for us in the sacrament of the altar. Offer God his fervent love in reparation for your sluggishness. In the course of every activity pray as follows:

„My God I do this or I endure that in the heart of your Son and according to his holy counsels. I offer it to you in reparation for anything blameworthy or imperfect in my actions.’

Continue to do this in every circumstance of life.”

www.prayersofthesaints.com/368309801/item/

Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque (cont.)

Margaret Alacoque was born in 1647 at L'Autecoeur, Burgundy, France. She was the fifth of seven children. Her father died when she was eight, leaving the family financially challenged. Margaret, however, was sent to school with the Urbanist Sisters at Charolles. Because of her deep devotion she was allowed to make her first communion at nine.

Between the ages of eleven and fifteen, Margaret was afflicted with a rheumatic ailment which kept her bedridden. She was sent home to recover. Her home life was very difficult. Her actions were governed by relatives, who had taken over the farm upon the death of her father. She was treated unkindly and not allowed to attend church. This ended when her eldest brother came of age and assumed responsibility for the family farm.

At the age of twenty, inspired by a vision, Margaret entered the convent of the Visitation at Paray-le-Monial. The nuns of the Order of the Visitation, founded by Saint Francis de Sales, were known for their humility and selflessness. At twenty-two, she made her final profession, adding Mary to her name. She also began a course of mortifications and penances which were to continue more or less intensely for the rest of her life.

Some years passed, and then Saint Margaret Mary was given a series of visions and revelations over the course of eighteen months. Christ told her he was troubled by the coldness and ingratitude of so many of those whom He had lovingly saved by his death. First, He commissioned her to spread devotion to his Sacred Heart, which He ordered to be pictured as a flaming heart, wounded and crowned with thorns. Next, He urged her to promote frequent Holy Communion, especially on the first Friday of each month, and a holy hour of Eucharistic Adoration. Finally, He asked that she work towards the establishment of a liturgical feast day of the Sacred Heart. He also instructed her to become a sacrificial victim for the shortcomings of the nuns of her own community and to tell the nuns she had been assigned such a task.

The Visitation sisters were not accepting of Saint Margaret Mary's mission. She was reprimanded and questioned by several priests. For many years, she suffered from despair, from self-inflicted punishments, and from the slights and contempt of those around her. But eventually, the order became more accepting. The convent became, and still remains, a center for propagating the public and private devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus as we are familiar with it today.

In 1690, Saint Margaret Mary fell ill and quickly passed away. She was forty-three. She was canonized by Pope Benedict XV in 1920. Saint Margaret Mary reminds us, when we are agonizing over the way others refuse to receive and return our love, how Jesus himself longs for us to devote ourselves more regularly to prayer and special communion with Him through the sacraments.

Document Information: Excerpts from: www.ewtn.com
www.catholic-forum.com
stthomasirondequoit.com/saintsalive
<http://saints.sqpn.com/saintm14.html>

Treasury of Women Saints, Rhonda DeSola Chervin, Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Pubs., 1991, 295-297

First Friday Promises

Jesus, in His Most Sacred Heart, has also made graces available to those Catholics who receive Holy Communion for nine consecutive First Fridays of the month, in honor of and in reparation to His Sacred Heart:

1. I will give them all the graces necessary for their state in life.
2. I will establish peace in their families.
3. I will console them in their difficulties.
4. I will be their secure refuge during life, and, more especially, at the hour of death.
5. I will shower down abundant blessings on all their undertakings.
6. Sinners will find in my Heart a source and boundless ocean of mercy.
7. Tepid souls shall become fervent.
8. Fervent souls shall rise speedily to great perfection.
9. I will bless every place in which the picture of my Sacred Heart shall be exposed and honored.
10. I will give to priests the power of touching the most hardened hearts.
11. Persons who propagate this devotion shall have their names written in my Heart, and they shall never be effaced there from.
12. I will grant the grace of final repentance to all those who shall receive Holy Communion on the First Friday, nine months consecutively. They shall not die in mortal sin, nor without having received the Last Sacraments, for my divine Heart will become their secure refuge at that last moment.

These promises were made to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque in a vision during the late 1600's. Our Lord told St. Margaret Mary that these twelve promises would be fulfilled if those who accepted them truly believed. Jesus said to St. Margaret Mary, *"Do you believe I can do this?" "If you believe, you will see the power of my Heart in the magnificence of my love."*

Document Information: Excerpts from: www.jesusiam.com/heart.html

We can see that Jesus stands ready to shower graces and blessings upon us for our generosity to others. Since we are His instruments on earth and His only instruments here, He plans to reward us richly for our humble and faithful service to Him and to our fellow souls on the journey.

7. Have you ever fulfilled the commitment of the nine First Fridays? If not, will these promises prompt you to do this for yourself or your family?

8. Can you relate a story of a soul you know who was a recipient of the First Friday Promises?

IMPORTANCE OF SPECIAL FEAST DAYS

(165) Read what happened in purgatory on Christmas. Anne went back to purgatory with our Lord on Christmas Day. He explained to her that “*all souls advance in purgatory*” on Christmas because it is a day of great grace for the entire world. When Jesus was conceived in Mary’s womb, “*The Word became flesh to make us „partakers of the divine nature... For this is why the Word became man, and the Son of God became the Son of man: so that man, by entering into communion with the Word and thus receiving divine sonship, might become a son of God.’*” (CCC 460) Mary was the instrument that God chose to bring His Son into the world, so how fitting it is that she is also allowed to be the instrument to bring souls from purgatory to heaven on this great feast day. Our salvation was made visible by the birth of Jesus on that first Christmas—it is such a fitting celebration for souls to achieve heaven through the great graces made available to the entire world on that day. As Anne tells us, “*It’s almost as though Christ were born specifically and totally for every one of us...*” (166)

9. Does this give you an added perspective to contemplate the Feast of Christmas?

As we detailed earlier in the promises of Jesus to those who revere His Sacred Heart on nine consecutive First Fridays, there is also a promise from our Blessed Mother to those who revere her Immaculate Heart on five consecutive First Saturdays of the month.

**The Five First Saturdays
Reparation to the Immaculate Heart of Mary**

In 1925, the Blessed Virgin appeared and gave to Sister Lucia of Fatima the following promise: The Most Holy Virgin said, *“...I promise to assist at the hour of death, with the graces necessary for salvation, all those who, on the first Saturday of five consecutive months, shall confess, receive Holy Communion, recite five decades of the Rosary, and keep me company for fifteen minutes while meditating on the fifteen Mysteries of the Rosary, with the intention of making reparation to me”*.

Note: Our Lord told Sister Lucia that the Confession may be made at any time during the eight days after (or before) the First Saturday. Moreover, He said, *“It could be longer still, provided that, when they receive Me, they are in a state of grace and have the intention of making reparation to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.”*

Document Information: Excerpts from
www.entronement.org/index_files/history.html

The Church has dedicated an entire month to the holy souls, the month of November each year. It is during this month that we are asked to pay particular attention to the needs of the poor souls and to pray for them even more fervently. The Church, in the liturgy, prays with special intensity for the souls in purgatory during this month.

10. Do you do any special things on November 2nd, All Souls Day? What suggestions can you share with others?

A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF PURGATORY

(166-167) Anne understands from Jesus that each bit of truth in heaven “*belongs very personally to each one of us in a separate and complete way.*” As Jesus tells her, “*This is all for you,*” and He means that for each and every one of us. He explains to Anne that there are varying degrees of acceptance on the part of souls:

1. Some know and understand that God exists, but do not live their belief.
2. Some know and understand that God exists, and live their belief in a good way, but only partially.
3. Some know and understand that God exists, and make all of their decisions based on this belief. Jesus tells Anne that these souls are saints.

Although it is difficult to live a life based on beliefs that are unseen, Anne tells us that this is where the merits of the Christian life lie. It is difficult to live out these beliefs in a world that does not encourage them and often actively works against them. It is hard for any of us to stand firm sometimes. The description of the sorrowful woman on page 168 fills us with dismay as we examine our own lives in light of God’s truth.

11. (166-168) Jesus said, “...that purgatory prompts and completes the process of self-acceptance.” Explain what He means by this.

12. Holy souls cannot pray for themselves but can pray for others. Have you ever asked a deceased member of your family to intercede for you?

13. (170) Jesus makes the statement that “*the greater the suffering on earth, the greater the glory for heaven.*” What is your reaction to this?

14. (171) Jesus showed Anne the mist in purgatory. What does the mist ensure? What does this say to you about Jesus’ mercy?

15. (171) How does Anne now understand purgatory?

16. (172) What does she learn about self-scrutiny?

(173) Jesus said that souls will not suffer from their past sins if they confess them and are sorry for them. Sins confessed and answered for will not be held against us, but we will have to come to terms with those experiences in order to be at peace. Christ will forgive us, but we may have a little acceptance work to do. Grief over our sins is an indication that we are doing the work here on earth, which will free us from doing the work after death. Penance, as we hold ourselves accountable for our failings, is a good thing. We can offer up little sacrifices in the spirit of reparation for ourselves or others. It is good to offer up our suffering, but Anne says to remember that it is acceptable to rely on the support of other souls. In helping us, others can advance themselves. This reminds us of our journey towards Christ up the mountain of holiness that Anne discusses in her earlier book, *Climbing the Mountain*.

(175-176) Jesus and Anne have a lengthy discussion about souls who are in proximity to Jesus in the Eucharist, but who have become distracted by the world. By their actions, these souls draw others away from Jesus when they should be drawing other souls toward Him. Sometimes souls who are drawn away from Jesus in this way never come back. But He tells Anne, “*Keep your eyes fixed on Me at all times and you will not be as personally disturbed,*” for even if souls are looking at those false ones, their eyes should still be able to find God since He will not hide from them.

(177) Jesus and Anne encounter a priest in purgatory who lived in this way and was terribly sorry for leading others astray. Although, as Jesus said, many of the others should have known better, He is allowing the priest to work out his remorse in solitude and repentance, perhaps even in the place where he committed his sins. In this way, the priest may be better positioned to help others who are in the same struggle, by beseeching heaven on their behalf.

17. (180-181) Read the story of the man on the boat. What was the purpose of this experience for the man and for Anne?

(182-184) Jesus and Anne see a woman in the mist who is so sweet and lovable as she continually praises God and thanks Him for all that He has done for her. She also insistently prays for all of those people that she knows and for each one of their specific needs. She is confident of God's mercy and requests it very boldly, although not presumptuously, on behalf of those in need. Jesus takes great delight in this soul and says to Anne, *"This soul and all like her disarm Me with their trust. My heart has no protection, no armor against souls such as this."* Oh, that we would all become *"souls such as this,"* where Jesus is literally powerless against our complete and total trust in Him!

ENVY – One of the Seven Deadly Sins

"Envy proceeds from pride." We are so concerned with looking better than our neighbor that "we are grieved over any good qualities he has and belittle them and we rejoice when some misfortune befalls him." It is the "root from which spring hatred, calumny & detraction . . . Envy gnaws at the heart like a worm." (The Seven Capital Sins, Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, Rockford, IL: TAN Books, 2000, 31-32)

18. Have you ever felt eaten away by envy? Discuss.

Tenth Commandment:

“Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s goods.”

The Catechism divides the Tenth Commandment into four parts. *“The tenth commandment forbids greed and the desire to amass earthly goods without limit. It forbids avarice arising from a passion for riches and their attendant power.”* Jesus said, *“Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”* (Mt 6:21; CCC 2551) The Catechism warns against envy: *“Envy is sadness at the sight of another’s goods and the immoderate desire to have them for oneself. It is a capital sin.”*

The second part examines *“The Desires of the Spirit.”* The Catechism states that *“Christ’s faithful „have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”*

The third part discusses *“Poverty of Heart.”* *“Detachment from riches is necessary for entering the Kingdom of heaven. „Blessed are the poor in spirit.”* Also, *“Abandonment to the providence of the Father in heaven frees us from anxiety about tomorrow.”*

The fourth part of this commandment is entitled, *“I Want to See God.”* The Catechism explains, *“I want to see God’ expresses the true desire of man.”*

(CCC 2534-2557)

Examination of Conscience

Tenth Commandment

- Do I borrow other’s things without permission and keep them longer than I should or not return them at all?
- Am I envious of other’s possessions or success?
- Do I wish others harm or misfortune if they have more than I?
- Have I damaged the property of others?
- Have I failed to help my relatives, friends or neighbors in their material or spiritual needs to the best of my ability?
- Do I have an inordinate desire for earthly goods?

SNAPSHOT OF REALITY: The Fundraiser (85)

In this Snapshot we see a troubled marriage with a social-climbing wife and a concerned husband. Through a chance encounter with old friends at a party, they both sense that their life will change for the better.

Examination of conscience: bickering, coldness, lack of communication, self-indulgence, upward mobility

Antidotes to sin: hope, kindness in relationships, obtain spiritual friends, ask Mary's intercession

19. Read and consider this Snapshot. Discuss with your group.

Monthly Message:

April 1, 2006, page 208

CONCLUSION

In this study of *The Mist of Mercy* we have learned a great deal from Jesus, through Anne, about spiritual warfare, the Sacrament of Confession and purgatory. We have learned that all souls, those in heaven, on earth and in purgatory, are joined together in the Mystical Body of Christ. We are all entwined through prayers, sacrifices, repentance and holiness. The Catechism tells us, *“The Christian who seeks to purify himself of his sin and to become holy with the help of God's grace is not alone. „The life of each of God's children is joined in Christ and through Christ in a wonderful way to the life of all the other Christian brethren in the supernatural unity of the Mystical Body of Christ, as in a single mystical person.”* (CCC 1474)

If we take only one thought from this study, it should be this: our Catholic Church holds an inestimable amount of graces and benefits for her members which generously flow to all who wish to receive them. There is a constant pulse of grace and merit available through the prayers and works of those in the Communion of Saints. These benefits are always and abundantly available to us if we choose to utilize them. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says it best, and we end with this quotation:

“In the communion of saints, „a perennial link of charity exists between the faithful who have already reached their heavenly home, those who are expiating their sins in purgatory and those who are still pilgrims on earth. Between them there is, too, an abundant exchange of all good things.” (CCC 1475)

*“We also call these spiritual goods of the communion of saints the Church's treasury, which is ,not the sum total of the material goods which have accumulated during the course of the centuries. **On the contrary the „treasury of the Church' is the infinite value, which can never be exhausted, which Christ's merits have before God.*** (Emphasis added) *They were offered so that the whole of mankind could be set free from sin and attain communion with the Father. In Christ, the Redeemer himself, the satisfactions and merits of his Redemption exist and find their efficacy.”* (CCC 1476)
Emphasis added.

“This treasury includes as well the prayers and good works of the Blessed Virgin Mary. They are truly immense, unfathomable, and even pristine in their value before God. In the treasury, too, are the prayers and good works of all the saints, all those who have followed in the footsteps of Christ the Lord and by his grace have made their lives holy and carried out the mission the Father entrusted to them. In this way they attained their own salvation and at the same time cooperated in saving their brothers in the unity of the Mystical Body.” (CCC 1477)

APPENDIX A

MYSTICAL PHENOMENA: LOCUTIONS AND APPARITIONS

(Reprinted from the *Climbing the Mountain Study Guide*, pages 10-13)

In *Climbing the Mountain*, Jesus says that He will communicate with souls through this work so that they will have greater **mystical** capacity than before. We want to begin our study by looking at mysticism and related phenomena so that we can better understand Anne's writings.

Mysticism. A special, deep experience of union with and knowledge of the divine reality, freely granted by God. Mystical experiences, which may be accompanied by ecstasy, visions and other such phenomena, are usually preceded by the serious practice of contemplation and asceticism. While found in all the great world religions, mysticism in Christian experience has a highly personal quality, enhancing rather than suppressing the sense of distinction between the mystic and God. Genuine mysticism always produces more generous love toward others, and seems to be found frequently among Christians who are dedicated to prayer and sensitive to God's presence in their lives.

Taken from *A Concise Dictionary of Theology*, O'Collins and Farrugia, 152

The form of mysticism chosen by heaven for Anne is locutions. The **Direction for Our Times** website (FAQ) discusses this mystical phenomenon. (Taken from the 15 Edition of the Marian Movement of Priests, page XXXV. Used with permission.):

*“What is an interior locution? First of all, it is necessary to make clear that it is not something strange or sensational, but a mystical phenomenon present in the life of the Church and described in manuals of spiritual theology. It is not a sensorial communication with Jesus, Our Lady or the saints such as takes place in authentic apparitions. Here one does not see with the eyes, hear with the ears, nor does one touch anything. Nor is it simply a good inspiration, that light which the Holy Spirit normally causes to pour down into the minds and hearts of those who pray and live by faith. In the case of an authentic phenomenon, the interior locution is that gift by which God wishes to make something known and to help someone carry something out, as well as, **the outward clothing of this gift**, in terms of human thoughts and words, according to the style and the way of writing of the person who receives the message.”*

Additional Sources to learn more:

The Catholic Encyclopedia (www.newadvent.org)

The Catholic Catechism, Fr. John Hardon (186)

Continuing from the **Direction for Our Times** website (FAQ):

The person becomes an instrument of communication, while still maintaining his full freedom, which is expressed in an act of assent of the Holy Spirit. While receiving the word from the Lord, the person's intellect remains, as it were, inactive: that is to say, it does not search for thoughts or for a way to express them as, for example, would be the case when one is writing a letter or preparing a demanding discourse.

ITEM OF CLARIFICATION

Often, Catholics are confused about mystical phenomena, not able to understand the difference between locutions and apparitions. The following information may be helpful in clearing up this confusion:

An apparition is the appearance of a being normally invisible to human sight. Angels who have not bodies, Christ and Mary whose bodies are glorified, and saints who have "spiritual bodies" cannot be seen with the human eye apart from some supernatural intervention caused or allowed by God. . . An experience where supernaturally caused words are heard but nothing is seen is called a 'voice,' or 'locution.' It may be external, internal, imaginative (dreams) or intellectual (flashes of insight or intuition). (Christ's Mother and Ours, Fr. Oscar Lukefahr, C.M., Liguori, 1998)

FURTHER CLARIFICATION

The Catechism of the Catholic Church contains the Church's teaching on Private Revelation (which would include both locutions and apparitions) in paragraph 67:

“Throughout the ages, there have been so-called "private" revelations, some of which have been recognized by the authority of the Church. They do not belong, however, to the deposit of faith. It is not their role to improve or complete Christ's definitive Revelation, but to help live more fully by it in a certain period of history. Guided by the Magisterium of the Church, the sensus fidelium knows how to discern and welcome in these revelations whatever constitutes an authentic call of Christ or his saints to the Church. Christian faith cannot accept "revelations" that claim to surpass or correct the Revelation of which Christ is the fulfillment, as is the case in certain non-Christian religions and also in certain recent sects which base themselves on such "revelations".”

