

Meditations on
Spiritual Theology
(for Kids)

Volume I:
Starting the Spiritual Journey

Declaration of Submission to the Church's Teaching

This book intends to adhere to the teachings of the Catholic Church as revealed through Sacred Scripture and Tradition, and as interpreted by the Church's authentic Magisterium. All that the Church definitively proposes regarding faith and morals is accepted and held. The work is intended to be in full communion with the Catholic faith and not to contradict its teachings.

Any errors contained in this work are the fault of the author and should be readily submitted to the correction of the Church's magisterium.



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Feast of Sts. Mary, Martha, and Lazarus

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A Method of Meditation

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A Flexible Method of Meditation:

INTRODUCTION:

Step One: Be still and remember that God is with you. Either...

- ***Think*** about God's presence
 - Think about how God is everywhere
 - Think about how His power continues to hold you in existence
 - Think about how He lives in your soul
- ***Imagine*** God's presence
 - Imagine a monstrance with the Eucharist
 - Imagine Jesus standing by you or gazing at you
 - Imagine Jesus as the glorious king in the center of the interior castle of your soul

Step Two: Ask God for the grace to have a fruitful meditation

LECTIO DIVINA:

Step Three: Switch between *lectio*, *meditatio*, *imaginatio*, and *oratio* naturally and in no particular order until something is stirred in you. At that point switch to *contemplatio* while it lasts peacefully. When it fades, resume *lectio*, *meditatio*, *imaginatio*, and *oratio* as before.

- ***Lectio:*** read with attention and love
- ***Meditatio/Imaginatio:*** Either...
 - Think about what you are reading (*Meditatio*)
 - Form a picture in your mind and spend time gazing at it (*Imaginatio*)
- ***Oratio:*** Pray by...
 - Talking to the Lord about what you are imagining or thinking
 - Asking God for help during the prayer
 - Declaring your belief, trust, or love to God
- ***Contemplatio:***
 - Rest...
 - Whenever you have an insight
 - Whenever your heart is stirred (joy, desire, sorrow, fear, anger, etc.)
 - Whenever you can sit peacefully in God's Presence with love
 - Sometimes hard things are stirred up in prayer such as sorrow, fear, and anger. Try to sit with these as peacefully as possible (*contemplatio*), or you can consider why you feel that way (*meditatio*), or speak to the Lord about them/ask for His help (*oratio*).

Step Four: At the end of your time make your meditation fruitful with *resolutio*.

- ***Resolutio:***
 - As you finish your time of prayer, choose one thing inspired by your prayer that you will do to grow closer to God

CONCLUSION:

Step Five: Ask God for the grace to carry out your resolution

Step Six: Thank God for His help

Step Seven: End with the Our Father said with attention and devotion

Summary of the Flexible Method of Meditation

1. Get ready for prayer by remembering God and asking for the grace to pray well
2. Read, think, imagine, and pray in no particular order
3. Rest peacefully in any insights or stirrings of your heart whenever you can
4. At the end, choose to do something for God
5. To finish: ask for help to do God's Will, thank Him, and pray an Our Father

TIPS:

- Schedule a time to do your meditation
- Create a good place set apart for prayer (consider making it special with items such as holy images, blessed candles, holy water, a crucifix)
- The most important way to prepare for prayer is by living a holy life. To pray is to seek out God with all of your heart. If we aren't seeking God in the way we live we won't be able to seek Him well during our prayer time.
- There are three essential parts to meditation: considerations, affections, and resolutions.
- Meditation transforms us by
 - filling our mind with God to make us wise (by considerations)
 - filling our hearts with God to make us joyful (through affections)
 - directing our choices towards God to make us holy (with resolutions)
- The three main types of considerations in meditation are
 - to see God more clearly (that He is loving, mighty, wise, infinite, etc.)
 - to see ourselves more clearly (that we are poor, chosen, beloved, created, etc.)
 - to know His Will for us more clearly (discernment about how to please Him in choosing our vocation, apostolate, rule of life, actions, etc.).

Lectio Divina as a Campfire

Wood burns,

The flame puts off smoke, light, and heat.

Some potatoes cook in the coals to strengthen and nourish the body.

A man sits down with a book to meditate.

His thoughts and imagination lead to prayers, insights, and emotions.

These new thoughts and feelings strengthen him to make firm resolutions to grow.

The **wood** is like the *words* of the book that we meditate on.

The **flame** is like the process of meditating with *imagination and thoughts*

The **smoke** represents the *prayers* that rise up to God from the meditation

The **light and heat** are the *insights and affections* that are stirred up by the meditation

The **potatoes** are the *resolutions* we make in prayer that strengthen our will to live for God

The Campfire helps us understand and remember the different steps of *lectio divina*

1. Wood => *lectio (reading)*
2. Flame => *meditatio/imaginatio (meditation/imagination)*
3. Smoke => *oratio (prayer)*
4. Light and Heat => *contemplatio (contemplating/resting)*
5. Potatoes => *resolutio (resolution)*

In Ecclesiastical (Church) Latin...

lectio is pronounced (LECK-tsee-oh)

meditatio is pronounced (Meh-dih-TAH-tsee-oh)

imaginatio is pronounced (Ih-mah-gih-NAH-tsee-oh)

oratio is pronounced (Oh-RAH-tsee-oh)

contemplatio is pronounced (Koh-n-tem-PLAH-tsee-oh)

resolutio is pronounced (reh-soh-LOO-tsee-oh)



Feedback Form Explanation:

Please fill out the feedback form for each meditation that you pray through. This has two purposes:

The first purpose is to help me see problems in what I have written. What I wrote might be hard for people to understand, difficult to pray with, or be mistaken in some way. If I know where you are having trouble, I will also know what to improve.

The second purpose is to teach you the art of gathering up the fruit of your meditation and writing down a record of what God is doing in your prayer. This will help the meditation be more fruitful in your life and prepare you well for spiritual direction.

***Email me your feedback forms at: jesse@zeteoculture.org
Or mail them to: 13431 56th Dr. NE, Marysville, WA 98271***

Feedback Form:

1. Which meditation did you do?
2. How many minutes did you meditate?
3. What were some things you liked about this meditation?
4. Did you pause to think, imagine, talk to God, and ask for His help while you read?
5. Did you do more thinking or imagining?
6. Did you do any *contemplatio* (resting with your insights or affections)?
7. Were there any parts of the meditation that didn't make sense?

Journaling after Prayer:

8. How distracted were you during prayer today?
9. How much desolation (feeling heavy with doubts, discouragement, or selfishness) did you experience during prayer today?
10. How much consolation (being strengthened in faith, hope, and love) did you experience during prayer today?
11. What insights did you have?
12. What emotions did you experience?
13. What desires did you have?
14. What did you choose?
15. What actions did you decide to take?

Is there anything from this prayer time that you think the Lord might want you to pray more about?

Preparation: Invitation to the Journey

1. Meditation on the Two Paths (part one)

- *Be still. Remember that God is with you. He has called you here. He will be at work as you pray.*
- *Ask for God's grace to have a fruitful meditation.*
- *Do lectio divina on the following meditation... (read slowly with pauses, think, imagine, pray ⇔ rest)*

You must choose. Will you walk the path of holiness or will you walk the path of wickedness? There is no third path.

Imagine you are standing at a fork in the road. In one direction is a beautiful brick path through the forest. Along this path are wildflowers, clear springs, bushes full of berries, colorful birds, beautiful views, rich aromas of cedar trees, and even occasional tables with free pizza on them. At the end of this beautiful path is a group of robbers and murderers who are waiting for their next victim. In the other direction is a second path which is grey and bleak. Parts of it are rocky and overgrown with thorns. It has steep inclines and narrow passages. At the end of this second path is someone you love. They have been poisoned, but you carry the antidote.

Which path will you take? Do you choose hardship and heroism or pleasure and destruction?

The wicked choose the easy way. They choose it even though their conscience whispers warnings to them as they walk. Something in them already knows that there are robbers and murderers at the end. They do not walk this path with real delight, but with uneasiness and growing discomfort.

The righteous choose the difficult path. Even though it is grey and bleak, their hearts are made lighter by their love and desire to help. What they are doing is important and it is worth it.

God is calling you to walk the difficult and joyful path of prayer and sacrifice. Will you answer His call or will you walk down another path?

Meditation increases knowledge: *Do you understand the lightness of heart, the joy, the peace, and the satisfaction of walking the path of righteousness? Do you understand the uneasiness, fear, and growing despair of walking the path of wickedness?*

Meditation increases desire: *Do you desire to live a meaningful life as a strong and holy person capable of overcoming hardships out of love?*

Meditation strengthens choice: *Will you choose again in this moment to follow the Lord Jesus, whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light, on the way of the cross?*

Meditation leads to action: *What is one small way this prayer time can help you change your life?*

- *Make a resolution.*
- *Petition for the graces you need to understand, desire, decide, and act with the Mind and Heart of Christ.*
- *Thank the Lord for the graces He poured into your heart during this prayer time.*
- *Our Father...*

Spiritual Practice 1: Journaling after Prayer

It becomes very helpful to make a few notes in a journal after your prayer time is over. There are many ways to go about this, but some things you may want to take note of are the following. How distracted were you? Were you in desolation (feeling heavy with doubts, discouragement, or selfishness) or were you in consolation (being strengthened in faith, hope, and love)? Is there something you think the Lord might be leading you to meditate more upon? What sorts of insights, affections, choices, or resolutions did you have or make during prayer? These questions happen to be on the feedback form.

Psalm 1

Blessed is the man
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
but his delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law he meditates day and night.
He is like a tree
planted by streams of water,
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.

The wicked are not so,
but are like chaff which the wind drives away.
Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;
for the Lord knows the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.

Week 1: Spiritual Practices to Get Started

2. Meditation on the Prayer of Petition

- *Be still. Remember that God is with you. He has called you here. He will be at work as you pray.*
- *Ask for God's grace to have a fruitful meditation.*
- *Do lectio divina on the following meditation... (read slowly with pauses, think, imagine, pray ⇔ rest)*

Jesus says that if you ask, you will receive.
Do not doubt this!

If you pray...

"Lord, You are my Savior! I thank you for your love! Please make me a saint so I can be close to You. I ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, Your Son, who won these graces for me on the cross! Amen"

It is as if the Spirit replies (imagine it in a robot voice)...

Mind Transformation: Initiated
Heart Transformation: Initiated
Strength of Will: Increasing
Growth in Necessary Virtues: Initiated
Life Course: Rerouting
Ongoing Sources of Grace: Available
Backup Plans: Confirmed
Initiating Motion

Your prayer has already been answered and you are now on a certain course for sainthood. If you add other destinations on the way, like pursuing other goals in life, your route will change and there will be a delay, but you can still get there. If you cancel your route, it will stop unless you re-initiate it. The more you want what you ask for, the more powerful your prayer, and, each time you ask, more graces are added to better ensure you reach your destination.

Meditation increases knowledge: *Do you understand how very willing the Father is to give you what you ask for?*

Meditation increases desire: *Do you desire His help?*

Meditation strengthens choice: *Will you make a firm decision to pray for the things you need each day?*

Meditation leads to action: *Will you make a list of special petitions to ask God for each day?*

- *Make a resolution.*
- *Petition for the graces you need to understand, desire, decide, and act with the Mind and Heart of Christ.*
- *Thank the Lord for the graces He poured into your heart during this prayer time.*
- *Our Father...*

Spiritual Practice 2: The Prayer of Petition

Choose a few simple petitions that matter to you and ask the Lord for them every morning as you get out of bed. Here are a few of the things you might want to ask for: to live for God's glory, to make it to heaven, to become a great man or woman of God, for peace, to know the depths of God's love, for protection from falling into sin, to become truly wise, for unquenchable hope, to have true humility, to be filled with God's love for others.

3. Meditation on Vocal Prayer with Others

- *Be still. Remember that God is with you. He has called you here. He will be at work as you pray.*
- *Ask for God's grace to have a fruitful meditation.*
- *Do lectio divina on the following meditation... (read slowly with pauses, think, imagine, pray ⇔ rest)*

Jesus is the Word of God. He existed forever in the mind of the Father (so to speak). When He took on flesh, the Word of God went out into the world. We have words too. They begin as a thought, then we send them into the world by wiggling our vocal cords, which wiggles the air, which wiggles the ear drums of others, which allows them to hear and understand. Wiggly air is amazing because it takes the hidden things in our souls and sends them into the world. When we pray with others we let them share in the things God has put in our hearts. We even let them share in our very own, unique relationship with God.

Imagine a red backpack with a pencil pouch, notebook, and a lunch box inside. Now imagine another empty blue backpack across the room with only a stapler and a sock inside. Suddenly, the red backpack starts vibrating and creating noises. As the blue backpack feels the vibrations, a notebook and a pencil pouch appear inside of it! Now both backpacks have these items! Next, the blue backpack starts to vibrate and create noises. This time a stapler appears in the red backpack! Now both backpacks have a stapler! The backpacks are sharing their precious contents (without losing anything) just by making sounds at each other!

Backpacks can't actually work this way, but souls can! May God give us the grace to wiggle air at others in the sort of way that will fill them with love, hope, wisdom, peace, courage, and joy!

When you pray out loud, say it slowly so your mind has time to understand what you are saying. Focus on the words of the prayer, or on the meaning of the prayer, or on God. Say it with as much love and sincerity as you can.

Meditation increases knowledge: *Do you see how vocal prayer includes our body and even the air itself in honoring God? Do you realize that only prayers said with focus and love are real prayers?*

Meditation increases desire: *Do you desire to fill others with the riches God has given you by praying out loud with them?*

Meditation strengthens choice: *Will you choose to grow in the practice of vocal prayer? Will you pour your thoughts and your love into the air you wiggle during prayer?*

Meditation leads to action: *What is one way you can include vocal prayer into your life?*

- *Make a resolution.*
- *Petition for the graces you need to understand, desire, decide, and act with the Mind and Heart of Christ.*
- *Thank the Lord for the graces He poured into your heart during this prayer time.*
- *Our Father...*

Spiritual Practice 3: Vocal Prayer with Others

Take a moment each day to stop and pray with another person. For example, each person could say one thing to God that they are thankful for, make one request from God, and finish by saying an Our Father together. Another way to pray with others is to pray the rosary or the liturgy of the hours together.

4. Meditation on Meditation

- *Be still. Remember that God is with you. He has called you here. He will be at work as you pray.*
- *Ask for God's grace to have a fruitful meditation.*
- *Do lectio divina on the following meditation... (read slowly with pauses, think, imagine, pray ⇔ rest)*

Imagine a vast snowy field on a mountain top. As the sun starts to thaw the field of snow, a stream forms. The stream runs into a little valley on the mountainside and forms a small, cold lake. As the sun intensifies, the water melts faster and the stream grows stronger. The little lake continues to fill until it fills the valley and spills over. Then a little river starts running down the mountainside. The water from the melting snow field eventually reaches all the way to the ocean.

It is like this in our souls. Our *knowledge* spills over into our *desires* which spill over into our *choices* which spill over into our *actions*.

When you see that meditation will make you happy, you will desire it. When you desire meditation enough, you will choose to meditate. When your choice to do meditation is strong enough you will make it a part of your life.

We cannot become saints without meditation. In meditation we gaze upon Truth Himself Who enlightens us to see Him, Goodness Himself Who draws our hearts to desire Him, the Almighty God who strengthens our wills to choose Him, and the Living God Who sets us into motion to live for Him. Meditation will transform your mind, heart, will, life, and destiny. It will make you wise, passionate, determined, holy, and joyful.

Meditation increases knowledge: *Do you understand why knowledge gives rise to desire, desire to choice, and choice to action?*

Meditation increases desire: *Do you want to experience the wisdom, passion, determination, good works, and joy that flow from this practice of meditation?*

Meditation strengthens choice: *Will you choose to make meditation a part of your life every day?*

Meditation leads to action: *Where will you meditate? When will you meditate? What will you use to meditate (Scripture, spiritual writings, a book of meditations, a crucifix, an icon)?*

- *Make a resolution.*
- *Petition for the graces you need to understand, desire, decide, and act with the Mind and Heart of Christ.*
- *Thank the Lord for the graces He poured into your heart during this prayer time.*
- *Our Father...*

Spiritual Practice 4: Meditation

Spend at least 5 minutes a day doing meditation. If you can meditate for longer do so, but don't make it a chore. Over time you will be able to meditate for longer and longer. In order to use this book of meditations you already are familiar with a method of meditation (see the Flexible Method of Meditation), but you can also meditate in other ways like meditating on the mysteries of the Rosary or meditating on a vocal prayer such as the Our Father or meditating.

5. Meditation on Acts of Penance

- *Be still. Remember that God is with you. He has called you here. He will be at work as you pray.*
- *Ask for God's grace to have a fruitful meditation.*
- *Do lectio divina on the following meditation... (read slowly with pauses, think, imagine, pray ⇔ rest)*

Imagine a great war hero who is humble, prudent, just, and courageous. He has suffered greatly, but has grown wise and kind through it. He lives a life of love, virtue, and merciful acts. One evening he goes to a community event and a young, arrogant man who feels overshadowed by him, stands up before the crowd and, in an attempt to look good, criticizes the war hero and dishonors him greatly. Afterward, many members of the community rebuke the young man for his words and he realizes his error. He is truly sorry and wants to do something to repair the damage he has done. First, he stands up in front of everyone the next time the community is gathered and admits his own pride, the damage he has done, and gives public tribute to the hero's deeds and nobility of soul. Second, the young man goes to the hero's house every morning for a week, kneels down on the cold, rocky ground and prays a rosary so that many blessings and graces would come upon the good man.

Why would it feel inappropriate if the young man said, "Oh well! The war hero is merciful, I'll try not to do that again!" and took no action to repair the damage? When we show our repentance through an action, why is it important that it is something difficult? What if the young man had shown his public repentance by eating an ice cream cone everyday for a week?. Every sin dishonors God far more than the young man dishonored the war hero, so what steps should we take to repair the damage that our sins cause?

Meditation increases knowledge: *Do you understand the importance of doing difficult things to destroy the power and effects of sin?*

Meditation increases desire: *Do you want to make up for the dishonor God has suffered through your sins?*

Meditation strengthens choice: *Will you decide to live a life of penance and begin to introduce simple penitential practices into your life?*

Meditation leads to action: *What are some difficulties in your life you could be more patient with as a way of showing God extra honor?*

- *Make a resolution.*
- *Petition for the graces you need to understand, desire, decide, and act with the Mind and Heart of Christ.*
- *Thank the Lord for the graces He poured into your heart during this prayer time.*
- *Our Father...*

Spiritual Practice 5: Doing Acts of Penance

Kneeling during prayer is a simple penitential practice. Anything difficult can be offered to God as an act of reparation. The Morning Offering would be a good prayer to kneel for because in it we offer the prayers, works, joys, and sufferings of the day for the reparation of sins:

O Jesus, through the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I offer you my prayers, works, joys, and sufferings of this day for all the intentions of your Sacred Heart in union with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass throughout the world, for the salvation of souls, the reparation of sins, the reunion of all Christians, and in particular for the intentions of the Holy Father this month. Amen.

6. Meditation on Mortification

- *Be still. Remember that God is with you. He has called you here. He will be at work as you pray.*
- *Ask for God's grace to have a fruitful meditation.*
- *Do lectio divina on the following meditation... (read slowly with pauses, think, imagine, pray ⇔ rest)*

Imagine a great captain of a mighty ship sailing across the waters. This captain has a sharp mind and a strong will. He has the ability to read the wind and the waves. He has great experience and perfect command of his crew. Under his watchful eye the ship maneuvers well in any difficult situation. This amazing captain is in perfect command of his ship with only one exception: he obeys his toddler whenever he cries. He tries to keep his toddler happy to avoid danger to his ship and crew, but when the toddler shows even the slightest sign of unhappiness, no matter how dangerous it is for the ship and crew, the captain does whatever the child demands.

Do you ever hear the demands of the many upset toddlers we all have inside? They sometimes sound like this: Now! I'm hungry! I'm thirsty! Grrrrr! I want that! Ouch! Brrrr! No! Yuck! Mine!

Children do not become mature and virtuous without being trained. It is the same with the many powers God gave us. We must put to death the disorder in our powers if we want them to become part of the solution and not part of the problem. Mortification puts disorder to death. It trains toddlers to be dependable crew members instead of ticking time bombs. We must mortify our bodies and the powers of sight, hearing, taste, touch, smell, memory, imagination, the emotions, intellect, and will.

Meditation increases knowledge: *Do you understand why mortification is necessary if we want to walk safely on the road to heaven? Do you understand the difficulties and dangers that come if we fail to train our powers?*

Meditation increases desire: *Do you want your powers to be like toddlers or well trained crew members?*

Meditation strengthens choice: *Will you choose to begin living a life of mortification so your soul can become well ordered and so you can grow in holiness and happiness?*

Meditation leads to action: *What is one practice of mortification that you can adopt in your life? (see below)*

- *Make a resolution.*
- *Petition for the graces you need to understand, desire, decide, and act with the Mind and Heart of Christ.*
- *Thank the Lord for the graces He poured into your heart during this prayer time.*
- *Our Father...*

Spiritual Practice 6: Mortification

There are many small discomforts we can embrace from time to time as simple mortifications: sleeping without a pillow, holding arms outstretched in private prayer, counting to thirty silently before we eat, giving up something we want, making a shower less warm, letting someone else choose.

7. Meditation on Preparing to Receive Communion

- *Be still. Remember that God is with you. He has called you here. He will be at work as you pray.*
- *Ask for God's grace to have a fruitful meditation.*
- *Do lectio divina on the following meditation... (read slowly with pauses, think, imagine, pray ⇔ rest)*

Imagine a poor, sick beggar in tattered clothing standing before a king. He has no money, no food, no medicine, no home, no work, and no friends. The king, in his kindness, has invited the beggar to come and receive help at the palace.

The king says to the man, "I am glad you came! You are most welcome in this palace and I am pleased at the chance to be of service to you."

The beggar replies, "Your words can't be trusted."

The king, excusing this rude remark, asks, "What can I do to help you?"

The poor man replies, "Do I look like I need help?"

The patient king tries again, "Allow me to help you get medicine, food, gold, and find you a place in the palace to live and work!"

The beggar replies, "Your riches are just a show. You can't (or won't) help me."

The King then had a table brought out and filled with the best foods, medicines, treasures and even a key to a room in the palace. "Take whatever you desire!" said the king.

The poor man took a small loaf of bread, ate it, and, without bowing, turned and walked away muttering, "I knew it wouldn't be very satisfying coming here."

Do you have faith in what Jesus and the Church teaches so beautifully about the Eucharist? Do you go before the Lord of Heaven and receive him humbly, acknowledging your spiritual poverty and spiritual sickness? Are you confident that God will pour out his riches upon you because He is powerful and kind? Do you desire to receive the Lord and grow in grace? Do you acknowledge how special it is to be in the presence of the High King of Heaven and show it in how you act, dress, and receive communion?

Meditation increases knowledge: *Do you understand that lack of faith, humility, confidence, desire, and reverence will lessen the graces we receive from the Eucharist?*

Meditation increases desire: *Do you desire to receive the Eucharist with good dispositions?*

Meditation strengthens choice: *Will you choose to work on receiving communion with better dispositions?*

Meditation leads to action: *What is one way you can prepare yourself to receive communion with more faith, humility, confidence, desire, or reverence?*

- *Make a resolution.*
- *Petition for the graces you need to understand, desire, decide, and act with the Mind and Heart of Christ.*
- *Thank the Lord for the graces He poured into your heart during this prayer time.*
- *Our Father...*

Spiritual Practice 7: Cultivating Proper Dispositions to Receive the Eucharist

When we receive communion, the Lord wants to fill us with the treasures of His grace. The amount of grace we receive depends on our dispositions. Prepare your heart to receive communion with faith, humility, confidence, desire, and reverence.

Prayer Before Communion (by St. Thomas Aquinas)

*Almighty and Eternal God,
behold I come to the sacrament of Your only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.
As one sick I come to the Physician of life;
unclean, to the Fountain of mercy;
blind, to the Light of eternal splendor;
poor and needy to the Lord of heaven and earth.*

*Therefore, I beg of You, through Your infinite mercy and generosity,
heal my weakness,
wash my uncleanness,
give light to my blindness,
enrich my poverty,
and clothe my nakedness.*

*May I thus receive the Bread of Angels, the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords,
with such reverence and humility,
contrition and devotion,
purity and faith,
purpose and intention,
as shall aid my soul's salvation.*

*Grant, I beg of You,
that I may receive not only the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of our Lord,
but also its full grace and power.
Give me the grace, most merciful God,
to receive the Body of your only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, born of the Virgin Mary,
in such a manner that I may deserve to be intimately united with His mystical Body
and to be numbered among His members.*

*Most loving Father,
grant that I may behold for all eternity face to face Your beloved Son,
whom now, on my pilgrimage, I am about to receive under the sacramental veil,
who lives and reigns with You, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God,
world without end.*

Amen.

8. Meditation on Preparing to Go to Confession

- *Be still. Remember that God is with you. He has called you here. He will be at work as you pray.*
- *Ask for God's grace to have a fruitful meditation.*
- *Do lectio divina on the following meditation... (read slowly with pauses, think, imagine, pray ⇔ rest)*

Imagine an unhappy man with a broken down house. One day he gets a surprise visit from a company that repairs houses. They make him a surprising offer, "go through your house and carefully write down everything you would like us to fix and we will repair it for free. We will be back next month. Oh, and a word of advice, keep a notebook and pencil handy to write down whatever you notice each day!" The homeowner was very excited, but he thought, "I have a good memory, I probably don't need to tire my hand by writing." Time and time again throughout the month he would notice something important, but he never wrote it down. One month later, the repair crew came back. The director of the crew got out a sheet of paper and said, "I'm ready, let me know what needs to be fixed." The man scratched his head.

Do you realize what an amazing free gift the Lord is offering you in confession? Do you remember every sin you did in the last month? Do you always realize when you are being careless, selfish, unpleasant, or unfair? It is hard to battle something that you cannot see. It is hard to realize how much we need God's mercy if we don't take time noticing how we offend God, hurt others, or hurt ourselves.

Meditation increases knowledge: *Do you understand the benefit of looking at your sins daily?*

Meditation increases desire: *Do you want to overcome your sins and be transformed by God's mercy through the sacrament of confession?*

Meditation strengthens choice: *Will you choose to face your sins daily so you can overcome them?*

Meditation leads to action: *How can you make a daily examen a part of your bedtime routine?*

- *Make a resolution.*
- *Petition for the graces you need to understand, desire, decide, and act with the Mind and Heart of Christ.*
- *Thank the Lord for the graces He poured into your heart during this prayer time.*
- *Our Father...*

Spiritual Practice 8: The Examen

Before bed take a few minutes to do an examen:

(1) ***Gratitude:*** *throughout the day how did God bless you or speak to you? Give thanks!*

(2) ***Petition:*** *ask God to give you the grace to see your sins.*

(3) ***Review:*** *throughout the day how did you sin?*

(4) ***Forgiveness:*** *ask God to forgive you and say the act of contrition.*

(5) ***Renewal:*** *make a choice to not give up and to live for God the next day!*

Traditional 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.

Act of Contrition (from the Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church)

O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee, and I detest
all my sins because of Thy just punishments, but most of all because
they offend Thee, my God, who art all good and deserving of all my love.
I firmly resolve with the help of Thy grace to sin no more and to avoid
the near occasion of sin. Amen

Modern Act of Contrition

My God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart. In choosing to do
wrong and failing to do good, I have sinned against You whom I should
love above all things. I firmly intend, with Your help, to do penance, to
sin no more, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin. Our Savior Jesus
Christ suffered and died for us. In His name, my God, have mercy

Shorter Act of Contrition: The Jesus Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
Son of the Living God,
Have mercy on me, a sinner!

Spiritual Practices from Week 1

Spiritual Practice 2: Prayer of Petition - ask and you shall receive

Spiritual Practice 3: Vocal Prayer - praying with the community

Spiritual Practice 4: Meditation - prayer that transforms your mind, heart, will, and actions

Spiritual Practice 5: Acts of Penance - repairing the damage of sin

Spiritual Practice 6: Mortification - training our powers to serve God

Spiritual Practice 7: Preparation for Communion - faith, humility, confidence, desire, and reverence

Spiritual Practice 8: Examen - thanks, light, examination, forgiveness, and resolution

Possible Schedule of Spiritual Practices

Every Morning:

- **The Morning Offering** - offering the day to God for the reparation of sins
- **Prayers of Petition** - short list of daily petitions ending with the Our Father
- **Meditation** - at least five minutes doing *lectio divina*

Every Day:

- **Vocal Prayer (Prayer before Meals)** - Bless us, O Lord...
- **Acts of Penance:**
 - (1) doing our duty well in reparation for sin (e.g. chores with cheer)
 - (2) bearing our trials well in reparation for sin (e.g. patience when insulted)
 - (3) choosing some sacrifices in reparation for sins (e.g. no pillow)
- **Mortification:**
 - (1) not indulging ourselves (e.g. counting before we eat)
 - (2) choosing harder things (e.g. kneeling)
 - (3) directing our powers toward good things (e.g. studying the faith)

Every Night:

- **Vocal Prayer (Family Prayer)** - maybe just thanksgivings, petitions, and set prayers
- **Daily Examen** - five minutes to review the day at bedtime

Fridays:

- **Weekly Penance** - fasting from meat or doing some other penance as a substitute

Sunday Mornings:

- **Preparation for Communion** - reminding ourselves of reasons to have faith, humility, desire, confidence, and reverence while receiving Holy Communion
- **Vocal Prayer (Mass)** - the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is itself a community prayer

Week 2: Loving Good and Hating Evil

9. Meditation on God

- *Be still. Remember that God is with you. He has called you here. He will be at work as you pray.*
- *Ask for God's grace to have a fruitful meditation.*
- *Do lectio divina on the following meditation... (read slowly with pauses, think, imagine, pray ⇔ rest)*

Imagine going out to a movie at a theater with a friend. The movie you watch is entertaining and you talk to your friend about it on the way home with pleasure. After you get home you mostly forget about the movie. A few months later you watch the movie again. You already know what is going to happen and this time the movie doesn't hold your attention in the same way. Now, imagine going to another movie. This time the movie hits you hard. You have never seen such creativity, depth, and beauty. Its message resonates with you and you can't stop thinking about the movie for weeks. It has transformed the way you see yourself and the world. It has created a deeper desire to live life to the fullest. It has helped you dream of new ways to live your life. Whenever you think about the movie you are filled with delight. Several months later, you watch it again and it is even better than it was the first time! In fact, every time you watch it, you notice new details and the overall story becomes more interesting, deep, and enjoyable. Every time you get a chance to speak about this movie you light up with excitement! Sit for a minute and try to remember a time you felt this kind of delight in something. Once you have remembered, take some time to just think about it and how much you love it.

If it were possible to have an infinitely awesome movie then it would be able to fill you with infinite delight, for an infinite amount of time, and never get old. It would be an experience of infinite creativity, depth, and beauty. It would transform you in an infinite way. It would be infinitely meaningful and have an infinitely positive effect on your life. Would you want to see a movie like that?

Movies cannot be infinitely good, but God is. Whenever we think He is less awesome than that, it is because we are still confused about Who God Is. It is a lifelong process to come to know the infinitely good God, but it is worth every effort! What are you willing to do to find this infinite treasure?

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it. - Matthew 13:44-46

Meditation increases knowledge: *Do you understand that seeing the infinitely good God will make us infinitely happy forever?*

Meditation increases desire: *Do you want to see Him? Do you want to have perfect happiness that can never be taken away again?*

Meditation strengthens choice: *Will you choose to spend your life wisely by seeking God?*

Meditation leads to action: *What is one thing that you can do each day to remind yourself of this goal?*

- *Make a resolution.*
- *Petition for the graces you need to understand, desire, decide, and act with the Mind and Heart of Christ.*
- *Thank the Lord for the graces He poured into your heart during this prayer time.*
- *Our Father...*

Spiritual Practice 9: The Act of Love

Make an act of love: tell the Lord that you choose to live for Him, that He is worth it, that He is more delightful than everything else in the world, that you love Him and want to know Him more.

Act of Love

**O Lord God, I love you above all things
and I love my neighbor for your sake
because you are the highest, infinite and perfect good,
worthy of all my love.
In this love I intend to live and die.
Amen.**

10. Meditation on Jesus Christ

- *Be still. Remember that God is with you. He has called you here. He will be at work as you pray.*
- *Ask for God's grace to have a fruitful meditation.*
- *Do lectio divina on the following meditation... (read slowly with pauses, think, imagine, pray ⇔ rest)*

Imagine the Lord Jesus hanging on the cross. See Him lifted up above the earth. See the wounds from the crown of thorns and the scourging and the nails. What holds Him on the cross? Is it just the nails? He is God. He is all powerful. He could come down from the cross at any second He chooses. It would be so easy for Him to come down. It takes even more effort to *stay* on the cross than it would to *come down*. He is only there because He chooses to be. So what really holds Him there? The only thing that really keeps Jesus up on the cross is Love. It is His tremendous love for us. He *wants* to be on the cross, because He *wants* to free us from hell and Satan and sin and death. Jesus passionately desires to suffer the cross for our good. Even on the cross, in the midst of greater suffering than any other human could ever experience, Jesus is at peace. Jesus has joy because He longs to free us. In fact, Jesus is brimming with the fruits of the Spirit while on the cross. Jesus also has every virtue. Jesus suffers the cross with perfect courage and patience. Even on the cross, Jesus is in perfect control of Himself and the situation.

Jesus is the perfect image of the invisible God. If we gaze upon Jesus, we get a profound encounter with God. Everything Jesus says and does is a secret picture of how God really is in His Divine Nature. When we meditate on Jesus, we don't just meditate on the Son in His humanity, we begin to see the Father in His shared divinity. What does the cross show us about God the Father? He is Almighty. He is in control. He has a plan. He passionately loves us. He is joyful, peaceful, and patient. He gives Himself away freely.

Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority; but the Father who dwells in me does his works.

-John 14:8-10

Meditation increases knowledge: *Do you understand that by meditating on Jesus we see the Father?*

Meditation increases desire: *Do you want to know what God is really like?*

Meditation strengthens choice: *Will you choose to follow Jesus as the only path to God?*

Meditation leads to action: *What is one way you can show Jesus special honor each day?*

- *Make a resolution.*
- *Petition for the graces you need to understand, desire, decide, and act with the Mind and Heart of Christ.*
- *Thank the Lord for the graces He poured into your heart during this prayer time.*
- *Our Father...*

Spiritual Practice 10: The Act of Faith

Jesus is the Truth and He teaches us all truth. There are many things we could never know unless God revealed them to us through the Church. It is good to say the Act of Faith to stay grounded in the Truth.

Act of Faith

**O my God, I firmly believe
that you are one God in three divine Persons,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.**

**I believe that your divine Son became man
and died for our sins and that he will come
to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe these and all the truths
which the Holy Catholic Church teaches
because you have revealed them
who are eternal truth and wisdom,
who can neither deceive nor be deceived.**

In this faith I intend to live and die.

Amen.

11. Meditation on Heaven

- *Be still. Remember that God is with you. He has called you here. He will be at work as you pray.*
- *Ask for God's grace to have a fruitful meditation.*
- *Do lectio divina on the following meditation... (read slowly with pauses, think, imagine, pray ⇔ rest)*

Imagine being in a vast, beautiful garden with countless types of flowers, all richly colorful, each one unique, and each one shimmering with the beauty and glory of God. Imagine smells and feelings so heavenly and so sweet that they fill you with countless delights. Imagine hearing music fill the entire sky, so beautiful and so melodious that it would be impossible to create on earth. Imagine every delightful thing about each season all merging together so you can enjoy the flowers of spring, the fruits of summer, the colors of fall, and the dancing snowflakes of winter all at the same time. Imagine the sky filled with beautiful stars and all the lights of night while enjoying the warmth and brightness of day! Imagine experiencing delight flowing down from God, up from creation, outward from within ourselves, and all around from the entire host of heaven all at the same time. St. John Bosco experienced a vision of a place like this. When he asked if it was heaven, he was told that it wasn't even close to the glory of heaven. Even the smallest ray of heavenly light was so amazing that it would kill us in our current state of weakness. We must be fully transformed before we can handle the delights of heaven.

We cannot imagine what heaven will truly be like, but we know our bodies will rise from the dead and be glorified like Jesus' body which rose on Easter morning. St. Thomas Aquinas teaches that our bodies will gain four special powers in heaven: impassibility, subtlety, agility, and clarity.

- **Impassibility** makes all injury impossible like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace.
- **Subtlety** makes our bodies more spiritual and takes away some of their limitations. Perhaps we see this when Jesus passed through the locked doors on Easter Sunday.
- **Agility** allows our bodies to perfectly obey us without effort or mistakes; perhaps this is seen when Christ walks on the water, in the Ascension, or in the flights of St. Joseph of Cupertino.
- **Clarity** is a holy radiance that shines forth from our glorified bodies similar to the holy light that came from the saints at times, or from Christ during the transfiguration.

It is healthy to long for heaven. It is good to desire the final, unbreakable victory of love over all death, pain, sorrow, and injustice. It is good to find ways to look forward to it without getting too stuck trying to understand exactly what it will be like before we are able to know.

Meditation increases knowledge: *Do you understand that heaven fulfills us totally?*

Meditation increases desire: *Do you desire to taste heavenly bliss?*

Meditation strengthens choice: *Will you choose to set your heart on heaven instead of this earth?*

Meditation leads to action: *What is one thing you can do to help yourself stay on the path to heaven?*

- *Make a resolution.*
- *Petition for the graces you need to understand, desire, decide, and act with the Mind and Heart of Christ.*
- *Thank the Lord for the graces He poured into your heart during this prayer time.*
- *Our Father...*

Spiritual Practice 11: Holy Recreation

Heaven is seen as the true Promised Land where God gives his people rest from their enemies. During this life we must rest and pursue things we delight in. Spend time everyday doing something refreshing and fun to restore your energy to fight.

Prayer for the Attainment of Heaven (St. Thomas Aquinas)

O God of all consolation,

 You Who see in us nothing but Your own glorious gifts,

I ask You to give me, at the close of my life,

 knowledge of You, the First Truth, and

 enjoyment of Your Divine Majesty.

Most generous Rewarder, give my body

 the beauty of Your radiance (clarity),

 the perfect dominion of my spirit (subtlety),

 a quick readiness (agility), and

 the gift of unconquerable strength (impassability).

And add to these

 an abundance of Your riches,

 a river of delights,

 and a flood of all good things,

So that I may rejoice

 in Your comfort above me,

 in a delightful garden below me,

 in glorification of body and soul within me,

 in the sweet friendship of saints and angels all around me.

Most merciful Father, being with You may

 my mind gain the enlightenment of wisdom,

 my desire gain the fulfillment of its longing,

 my courage gain the praise of triumph.

For where You are is

 safety from all danger,

 places to live and be truly at home, and

 the perfect harmony of all wills.

Where You are is

 the cheerfulness of spring,

 the brilliance of summer,

 the fruitfulness of autumn, and

 the gentle peacefulness of winter.

Give, Lord God,

 life without death,

 joy without sorrow, and

 that place where there is the perfect reign of

 total freedom,

 free security,

 secure tranquility,

 tranquil happiness,

 happy eternity,

 eternal blessedness,

 the vision of truth,

 and perfect praise, O God. Amen.

St. John Bosco's Vision of the Abode of Happiness

I was standing on a small mound or hillock, on the rim of a broad plain ... All was blue, blue as the calmest sea, though what I saw was not water. It resembled a highly polished, sparkling sea of glass. Broad, imposing avenues divided the plain into grand gardens of indescribable beauty, each broken up by thickets, lawns, and flower beds of varied shapes and colors. None of the plants we know could ever give you an idea of those flowers, although there was a resemblance of sorts. The very grass, the flowers, the trees, and the fruit – all were of singular and magnificent beauty. Leaves were of gold, trunks and boughs were of diamonds, and every tiny detail was in keeping with this wealth. The various kinds of plants were beyond counting. Each species and each single plant sparkled with a brilliance of its own. Scattered throughout those gardens ... I could see countless buildings whose architecture, magnificence, harmony, grandeur and size were so unique that one could say all the treasures of earth could not suffice to build a single one ... I gazed upon the exterior of those buildings, but how much greater must their inner splendor have been!

As I stood there basking in the splendor of those gardens, I suddenly heard music most sweet – so delightful and enchanting a melody that I could never adequately describe it. ... A hundred thousand instruments played, each with its own sound, uniquely different from all others, and every possible sound set the air alive with its resonant waves. Blended with them were the songs of choristers. In those gardens I looked upon a multitude of people enjoying themselves happily, some singing, others playing, but every note had the effect of a thousand different instruments playing together. At one and the same time, if you can imagine such a thing, one could hear all the notes of the chromatic scale, from the deepest to the highest, yet all in perfect harmony. Ah yes, we have nothing on earth to compare with that symphony. One could tell from the expression of those happy faces that the singers not only took the deepest pleasure in singing, but also received vast joy in listening to the others ...

As I listened enthralled to that heavenly choir I saw an endless multitude of boys approaching me ... Their endless ranks drew closer, headed by Dominic Savio ... Once that host of boys got some eight or ten paces from me, they halted. There was a flash of light far brighter than before, the music stopped, and a hushed silence fell over all. A most radiant joy encompassed all the boys and sparkled in their eyes, their countenances aglow with happiness. They looked and smiled at me very pleasantly, as though to speak, but no one said a word. Dominic Savio stepped forward a pace or two, standing so close to me that, had I stretched out my hand, I would surely have touched him. He too was silent and gazed upon me with a smile...

At last Dominic Savio spoke. "Why do you stand there silent, as though you were almost devitalized?" he asked. "Aren't you the one who once feared nothing, holding your ground against slander, persecution, hostility, hardships and dangers of all sorts? Where is courage? Say something!"

...

Summoning my courage, I replied, "I am shaking because I don't know where I am."

"You are in the abode of happiness," Savio answered, "where one experiences every joy, every delight."

"Is this the reward of the just?"

"Not at all! Here we do not enjoy supernatural happiness but only a natural one, though greatly magnified."

"Might I be allowed to see a little supernatural light?"

"No one can see it until he has come to see God as He is. The faintest ray of that light would instantly strike one dead, because the human senses are not sturdy enough to endure it."

12. Meditation on Virtue

- *Be still. Remember that God is with you. He has called you here. He will be at work as you pray.*
- *Ask for God's grace to have a fruitful meditation.*
- *Do lectio divina on the following meditation... (read slowly with pauses, think, imagine, pray ⇔ rest)*

Imagine two men enter a competition with four challenges. The first challenge is to choose a good path through a maze. The first man spends hours going back and forth without a plan being stumped by every little trick. The second man keeps his wits, makes a plan, and gets through the maze quickly. The second challenge is to race a group of people across the room by walking slowly. The first man can't bear to lose so he starts to run when he thinks nobody else is looking. The second man chooses to follow the rules and to do his best even if he loses. The third challenge is a fight against an opponent. The first man walks up to his opponent confidently, but after feeling the first bit of discomfort, he runs for the door screaming. The second man, no matter how many times he gets knocked down, gets back up until he is victorious. The fourth challenge is to make it through a room of cookies and insults without getting distracted. The first man caves at the first sight of a cookie and loses his temper at the first insult. The second man with peace and higher purpose walks straight through the room without turning to the left or to the right.

Would you like to be the sort of person who chooses things that don't work or who chooses things that accomplish the goals you are pursuing? Would you like to be the sort of person who does what is right and fair, or who cheats others and tramples over what is right? Do you want to be strong or cowardly? Do you want to be in control of yourself or ruled by every emotion and temptation that comes your way? Unless you want to be a foolish, crooked, and weak slave, you must choose to grow in virtue. You must become sensible (with the virtue of prudence), righteous (with the virtue of justice), strong (with the virtue of fortitude), and self-controlled (with the virtue of temperance).

Virtues make us happy. They make doing the right thing natural, easy, and delightful. As we grow in virtue the weight of our disorder falls away and we feel lighter, more peaceful, more joyful, and more free.

Meditation increases knowledge: *Do you understand that virtue is an excellent thing to have?*

Meditation increases desire: *Do you want to grow in virtue?*

Meditation strengthens choice: *Will you choose to walk in God's ways and grow in virtue?*

Meditation leads to action: *What is one way you can make wiser choices, be more fair, be more patient, or be more self-controlled?*

- *Make a resolution.*
- *Petition for the graces you need to understand, desire, decide, and act with the Mind and Heart of Christ.*
- *Thank the Lord for the graces He poured into your heart during this prayer time.*
- *Our Father...*

Spiritual Practice 12: Saint Stories

Reading about the saints gives us an example of what virtues can look like and how delightful they can be. Set apart some time to get to know the saints through books, podcasts, shows, movies, talks, discussions, etc.

13. Meditation on Grace

- *Be still. Remember that God is with you. He has called you here. He will be at work as you pray.*
- *Ask for God's grace to have a fruitful meditation.*
- *Do lectio divina on the following meditation... (read slowly with pauses, think, imagine, pray ⇔ rest)*

Imagine an ignorant, unfeeling, unskilled, and lazy knight who wants to escape from a dungeon. There are two problems. He is in a prison cell and there is a fierce dragon standing at the exit of the dungeon. One day a mighty warrior courageously fights his way into the dungeon and unlocks the prison cell of the pathetic knight. The knight is thankful for being saved and asks the mighty warrior if he is going to kill the dragon next so they can make a safe getaway. The mighty warrior looks at him with a gentle smile and says, "I could, very easily, but I am going to have you do it." The pathetic knight feels betrayed. How can he possibly overcome the dragon? Why won't the mighty warrior do it for him? The knight then says, "You came to save me and now you are just going to leave me doomed by my own weakness?" The warrior looks at him kindly and says, "I will not leave you and I will guarantee your victory. I will help you get anything you need to defeat the dragon. Simply ask and it is yours." The knight feels a little better, but he is still unsure. He then says, "Will you teach me? (the warrior responds, "yes!") encourage me? ("yes!") inspire me? ("yes!") equip me? ("yes!") motivate me ("yes!") train me? ("yes!") strengthen me? ("yes!") send me? ("yes!") heal me? ("yes!")" Then, the mighty warrior says, "if you just trust me, I will transform you from the inside out into a warrior that can defeat that dragon. Even if you get scared and reject me, I will call you back so you can win. If the dragon harms you, I will heal you. If the dragon has you cornered, I will intervene, but I will leave it for you to defeat. If you will let me, I will make sure you win no matter what."

God is the Almighty! He has enough power to transform our minds, our hearts, our wills, and our lives. He can heal us by the medicine of grace. If you are scared to follow Him because you think you aren't strong enough to defeat the dragon or walk the way of the cross, DO NOT FEAR!!! God's grace will make up for your every defect! Call on the Name of the Lord and you will be saved! Ask and you shall receive! His power is made perfect in your weakness. His grace is sufficient!

Meditation increases knowledge: *Do you understand the power of grace to transform your weakness?*

Meditation increases desire: *Do you want to become capable of conquering sin through grace?*

Meditation strengthens choice: *Will you choose to trust God's grace and call on His help even when you are afraid of your own weakness?*

Meditation leads to action: *When you are feeling too weak to follow Christ, what is one way you could remind yourself of God's ability to transform us from the inside out?*

- *Make a resolution.*
- *Petition for the graces you need to understand, desire, decide, and act with the Mind and Heart of Christ.*
- *Thank the Lord for the graces He poured into your heart during this prayer time.*
- *Our Father...*

Spiritual Practice 13: Act of Hope

We must live our lives with hope in God's power to save us. We can only get to heaven with God's help. It is good to say an act of hope as a way to point our hearts in the right direction.

Act of Hope

O Lord God,
I hope by your grace for the pardon of all my sins
and after life here to gain eternal happiness
because you have promised it
who are infinitely powerful, faithful, kind, and merciful.
In this hope I intend to live and die.
Amen.

14. Meditation on Discouragement

- *Be still. Remember that God is with you. He has called you here. He will be at work as you pray.*
- *Ask for God's grace to have a fruitful meditation.*
- *Do lectio divina on the following meditation... (read slowly with pauses, think, imagine, pray ⇔ rest)*

Imagine a wise kung fu master with two students. One student trusts his master and delights in obeying his every wish, the other student suspects his master of being an incapable fool and often takes his training into his own hands. When the master asks his students to rest, the first rests, but the second often scoffs and pushes himself harder. When the master asks his students to do difficult training exercises, the first gives it his all, but the second questions the benefit of the exercise and does it with more or less effort depending on how he is feeling. During training, when the students see their weaknesses and become really discouraged, the first student remembers, "My master believes I can succeed, he knows how to teach me, I can trust in his expertise and guidance!" but the second student feels the weight of finding his own way forward and wonders, "What if I'm not good enough? What if I have deceived myself into thinking I can do this when I can't?"

Are you ever discouraged by your sins? Are you ever discouraged by your weaknesses, anger, laziness, ignorance, lack of control, or selfishness? The Lord knows all of your weaknesses, but He is not worried. He is wise enough and powerful enough to transform you. He is not in a hurry. It is not on your shoulders to make yourself holy, God will do that Himself. Your job is to be a humble student and trust your Master. He will give you rest, He will teach you, inspire you, strengthen you, and move you to overcome every obstacle. Nothing can stop His work in your life if you just continue calling upon His Name. Moment by moment He will send you the graces you need as you need them. Do not carry the weight of becoming holy on your own!

Meditation increases knowledge: *Do you understand the importance of trusting God to avoid discouragement?*

Meditation increases desire: *Do you want to work hard to grow in holiness by His grace or do you want to work hard to grow in holiness by your own power (because you don't trust Him)?*

Meditation strengthens choice: *Will you choose to cry out to the God who can transform you whenever you get discouraged?*

Meditation leads to action: *What is one way to fight discouragement when it comes?*

- *Make a resolution.*
- *Petition for the graces you need to understand, desire, decide, and act with the Mind and Heart of Christ.*
- *Thank the Lord for the graces He poured into your heart during this prayer time.*
- *Our Father...*

Spiritual Practice 14: Discernment of Spirits

St. Ignatius teaches 14 rules for the discernment of spirits that help to fight off desolation (e.g. discouragement, doubt, selfishness, etc.). Realize you are in desolation, think about the truth, and act appropriately to resist the desolation. Learning and practicing these 14 rules can be a very powerful way to continue moving forward when things get difficult in your spiritual life (see next page).

Poem Summarizing the 14 Rules for the Discernment of Spirits

When I go from bad to worse, God pricks as Satan lulls	(Rule 1)
When I rise to greater good, hell storms as God consoles	(Rule 2)
Consolation boosts my faith, and hope and charity	(Rule 3)
<i>Desolation sews despair, doubt, self, and earthly things</i>	(Rule 4)
<i>It's merely desolation, this urgency's a lie</i>	(Rule 5)
<i>I'll pray and sacrifice and check for logs within my eye</i>	(Rule 6)
<i>The grace for victory is sure, this storm it cannot last</i>	(Rules 7-8)
<i>God has a perfect reason and good will come to pass</i>	(Rule 9)
<i>I'll draw upon the strength I gained in sweeter times than this</i>	(Rule 10)
<i>Take courage! Go the extra mile, when tempted to do less</i>	(Rules 11-12)
<i>I'm not alone, I'll make this known, and bring it to the light</i>	(Rule 13)
<i>I'll fix the weak points in my wall where Satan chose to fight</i>	(Rule 14)

Short summaries of each rule

- Rule 1: If you are living in sin God will try to wake you up and Satan will try to keep you asleep.
- Rule 2: If you are living a holy life Satan will try to stop you and God will encourage you
- Rule 3: Consolation is anything that lifts your spirit and strengthens your faith, hope, and love
- Rule 4: Desolation pulls your spirit down and brings discouragement, doubt, and selfishness
- Rule 5: When in desolation don't change your spiritual plans (stick to your commitments)
- Rule 6: When in desolation increase your prayer, meditation, sacrifices, and examination
- Rule 7: God will always give you the grace to win every battle
- Rule 8: Desolation makes us feel like it will never end, but its time is limited
- Rule 9: God allowed the desolation out of love either to correct, strengthen, or humble you
- Rule 10: When in consolation, store up treasures for the next fight
- Rule 11: When in consolation: be humble; when in desolation: be strong!
- Rule 12: Do the opposite of what Satan tempts you towards
- Rule 13: Tell a spiritually mature person about your desolation
- Rule 14: Take note of how you are attacked because that is an area to work on

15. Meditation on Sin

- *Be still. Remember that God is with you. He has called you here. He will be at work as you pray.*
- *Ask for God's grace to have a fruitful meditation.*
- *Do lectio divina on the following meditation... (read slowly with pauses, think, imagine, pray ⇔ rest)*

Imagine a salesman comes to your house and tries to make a deal: He will give you a cookie as long as you let him sneak a few freshly caught fish behind the walls, clip some wires, cut some pipes, and take a sledge hammer to the foundation of your house somewhere out of the way where no one will see it. You happily eat the cookie and let the man do his work, and, after he leaves, your house seems normal. What a good deal!

We often take the cookie of sin without realizing how much it damages us: sin will change...

- how we think: we learn to twist the truth to justify our behavior
- how we feel: we learn to love the twisted delights of doing evil
- what we choose: we become willing slaves of the things we think brings happiness
- what we do: we form habits of choosing sin that become very hard to break

Sin will weaken our relationships...

- with God: He becomes an obstacle to our evil desires
- with others: our power to be a blessing to those around us weakens
- with ourselves: we become the biggest block to our own eternal happiness

Sin leads to...

- Shame: because the devil encourages us to sin and then turns around to accuse and mock us
- Fear: because sin has consequences
- Immaturity: because sin disorders our thoughts, decisions, feelings, and actions
- Misery: because sin strips away the peace and joy of living a holy life
- Numbness: because sin runs from pain without ever overcoming it

Over time, the damage that sin does to us piles up. Praise God for His power to protect us from sin, temptation, and evil if we ask. Praise God for His ability to inspire in us true contrition, works of penance, and mortification so we can be forgiven, undo the damage of sin, and prevent it in the future!

Meditation increases knowledge: *Do you understand that sin is unimaginably ugly and poisonous?*

Meditation increases desire: *Do you hate sin as if it were a foul stream of destruction?*

Meditation strengthens choice: *Will you choose to fight for God and against the powers of darkness?*

Meditation leads to action: *How could you begin overcoming one of your vices?*

- *Make a resolution.*
- *Petition for the graces you need to understand, desire, decide, and act with the Mind and Heart of Christ.*
- *Thank the Lord for the graces He poured into your heart during this prayer time.*
- *Our Father...*

Spiritual Practice 15: The Particular Examen

Choose one sin to focus on fighting. Pray for God's help and make a plan for how to avoid that sin or how to fight it during the day. Halfway through the day, do a check to see how things are going. Thank God for any victories, ask for forgiveness for any defeats, and ask for grace to keep fighting. At the end of the day do another check.

Spiritual Practices from Week 2

Spiritual Practice 9: The Act of Love - God is most lovable

Spiritual Practice 10: The Act of Faith - God is most trustworthy

Spiritual Practice 11: Holy Recreation - restoring our energy to fight

Spiritual Practice 12: Saint Stories - holy examples of virtue

Spiritual Practice 13: The Act of Hope - God is most powerful to save

Spiritual Practice 14: Discernment of Spirits - fight against doubt, discouragement, and selfishness

Spiritual Practice 15: The Particular Examen - protection against the forces of evil

Possible Schedule of Spiritual Practices

Every Morning:

- **The Morning Offering** - offering the day to God for the reparation of sins
- **Prayers of Petition** - short list of daily petitions ending with the Our Father
- **Meditation** - at least five minutes doing *lectio divina*

Every Day:

- **Vocal Prayer (Prayer before Meals)** - Bless us, O Lord...
- **Acts of Penance:**
 - (1) doing our duty well in reparation for sin (e.g. chores with cheer)
 - (2) bearing our trials well in reparation for sin (e.g. patience when insulted)
 - (3) choosing some sacrifices in reparation for sins (e.g. no pillow)
- **Mortification:**
 - (1) not indulging ourselves (e.g. counting before we eat)
 - (2) choosing harder things (e.g. kneeling)
 - (3) directing our powers toward good things (e.g. studying the faith)
- **Holy Recreation** - spend time doing something refreshing and fun

Every Night:

- **Vocal Prayer (Family Prayer)** - e.g. thanksgivings, petitions, and set prayers
- **Daily Examen** - five minutes to review the day at bedtime

Fridays:

- **Weekly Penance** - fasting from meat or doing some other penance as a substitute

Sunday Mornings:

- **Preparation for Communion** - reminding ourselves of reasons to have faith, humility, desire, confidence, and reverence while receiving Holy Communion
- **Vocal Prayer (Mass)** - the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is itself a community vocal prayer

Occasionally:

- **Saint Stories** - learn about the lives of the saints
- **Set Prayers** - say the Acts of Faith, Hope, and Love
- **Discernment of Spirits** - fight against desolation
- **Particular Examen** - focus on overcoming one sin

Week 3: Overview of the Journey

16. Meditation on the Goal of the Spiritual Life

- *Be still. Remember that God is with you. He has called you here. He will be at work as you pray.*
- *Ask for God's grace to have a fruitful meditation.*
- *Do lectio divina on the following meditation... (read slowly with pauses, think, imagine, pray ⇔ rest)*

Imagine you have found the most talented and amazing musician in all of world history. You know this person is the real deal. After hearing this musician play, you are stunned at their incredible technique and the powerful effect of their music. Their talent is too amazing not to share with the world. You want everyone to delight in this rare gift. They are worthy of fame and you want to see their fame spread across the world.

God created the world for His own glory and we were created to glorify Him. That is our purpose, our mission, our goal. Is God being selfish? No! God does not need our praise or gain anything from us. God lacks nothing! To glorify and delight in what is most glorious and delightful is to be most happy. When we glorify God it is not for His benefit, it is for ours. But, what exactly does it mean to glorify God? First, it means to acknowledge His greatness, which brings great delight, and, second, it means to proclaim it to others so they can delight in Him too. Notice that, either way, glorifying God leads to delight! We want to honor God because He is the real deal! He is the greatest of all time. We delight in His awesomeness and we want others to share in this delight with us. It would be a shame for His greatness to not be known throughout the world.

Unlike the musician's performance, enjoying God's full awesomeness is beyond our natural powers. It is only through God's grace that we can taste and see the goodness of God or communicate it to others. Because of this, the only way to glorify God as He deserves is to pursue two other goals. The first goal is called salvation, which is entering into God's grace, and the second goal is called sanctification, which is growing in God's grace. Let us guard the grace the Lord has given us and pursue holiness with all our strength! Let us ask the Lord for the ability to glorify Him in all that we do by the power of His grace!

Meditation increases knowledge: *Do you understand why glorifying God makes us happy?*

Meditation increases desire: *Do you want to glorify Him as He deserves and be happy forever?*

Meditation strengthens choice: *Will you guard the grace you have and pursue holiness?*

Meditation leads to action: *How can you do daily tasks (like brushing your teeth) for God's glory?*

- *Make a resolution.*
- *Petition for the graces you need to understand, desire, decide, and act with the Mind and Heart of Christ.*
- *Thank the Lord for the graces He poured into your heart during this prayer time.*
- *Our Father...*

Spiritual Practice 16: Night Prayer

The Liturgy of the Hours is a special prayer of the Church that is prayed throughout each day by priests and religious. For many people the easiest of the daily prayers to pray and to incorporate into their life is Night Prayer. Versions of it are available online, in the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary, in Shorter Christian Prayer, Christian Prayer, and the four volume set The Liturgy of the Hours. Turning our hearts and minds to God at the end of the day using these prayers has a way of helping us think about the goal of our day and the goal of our lives.

Sunday Night Prayer

God, come to my assistance.

— Lord, make haste to help me.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:

— as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen. Alleluia.

(Do a brief examination of conscience)

HYMN

*Christ, thou who art the light and day,
who chasest nightly shades away,
thyself the Light of Light confessed,
and promiser of radiance blest.*

*O holy Lord, we pray to thee,
throughout the night our guardian be;
in thee vouchsafe us to repose,
all peaceful till the night shall close.*

*O let our eyes due slumber take,
our hearts to thee forever wake:
and let thy right hand from above
shield us who turn to thee in love.*

*O strong defender, hear our prayers,
repel our foes and break their snares,
and govern thou thy servants here,
those ransomed with thy life-blood dear.*

*Almighty Father, this accord
through Jesus Christ, thy Son our Lord,
Who with the Holy Ghost and thee
doth reign through all eternity.*

PSALMODY

Antiphon:

Night holds no terrors for me sleeping under God's wings.

Psalm 91

*He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High
and abides in the shade of the Almighty
says to the Lord: "My refuge,
my stronghold, my God in whom I trust!"*

*It is he who will free you from the snare
of the fowler who seeks to destroy you;
he will conceal you with his pinions
and under his wings you will find refuge.*

*You will not fear the terror of the night
nor the arrow that flies by day,
nor the plague that prowls in the darkness
nor the scourge that lays waste at noon.*

*A thousand may fall at your side,
ten thousand fall at your right,
you, it will never approach;
his faithfulness is buckler and shield.*

*Your eyes have only to look
to see how the wicked are repaid,
you who have said: "Lord, my refuge!"
and have made the Most High your dwelling.*

*Upon you no evil shall fall,
no plague approach where you dwell.
For you has he commanded his angels,
to keep you in all your ways.*

*They shall bear you upon their hands
lest you strike your foot against a stone.
On the lion and the viper you will tread
and trample the young lion and the dragon.*

*Since he clings to me in love, I will free him;
protect him for he knows my name.
When he calls I shall answer: "I am with you,"
I will save him in distress and give him glory.*

*With length of life I will content him;
I shall let him see my saving power.*

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.*

Antiphon:

Night holds no terrors for me sleeping under God's wings.

READING (Revelation 22:4-5):

They shall see the Lord face to face and bear his name on their foreheads. The night shall be no more. They will need no light from lamps or the sun, for the Lord God shall give them light, and they shall reign forever.

Responsory:

*Into your hands, Lord, I commend my spirit.
— Into your hands, Lord, I commend my spirit.
You have redeemed us, Lord God of truth.
— I commend my spirit.
Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit,
— Into your hands, Lord, I commend my spirit.*

Gospel Canticle

Antiphon:

*Protect us, Lord, as we stay awake;
watch over us as we sleep,
that awake, we may keep watch with Christ,
and asleep, rest in his peace.*

CANTICLE OF SIMEON (Luke 2:29-32):

*Lord, now you let your servant go in peace;
your word has been fulfilled:
my own eyes have seen the salvation
which you have prepared in the sight of every people:
a light to reveal you to the nations
and the glory of your people Israel.
Glory to the Father, and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit:
as it was in the beginning, is now,
and will be forever. Amen.*

Antiphon:

*Protect us, Lord, as we stay awake;
watch over us as we sleep,
that awake, we may keep watch with Christ,
and asleep, rest in his peace.*

Concluding Prayer:

*Lord,
we have celebrated today
the mystery of the rising of Christ to new life.
May we now rest in your peace,
safe from all that could harm us,
and rise refreshed and joyful,
to praise you throughout another day.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
— Amen.*

Conclusion:

*May, the all-powerful Lord
grant us a restful night
and a peaceful death.
— Amen.*

17. Meditation on Christian Perfection

- *Be still. Remember that God is with you. He has called you here. He will be at work as you pray.*
- *Ask for God's grace to have a fruitful meditation.*
- *Do lectio divina on the following meditation... (read slowly with pauses, think, imagine, pray ⇔ rest)*

Imagine a boy who notices a girl in his class and secretly decides to marry her one day. He then goes on to almost completely ignore her. He finds out that some of his weaknesses are very displeasing to her. He decides to let them be and makes no effort to work on them. He makes no plans to pursue her heart. He makes only a very weak effort to do anything considerate for her. All the while he imagines how nice it will be when they are married and how glad he is that they are not married yet since he would have to change. One fateful day, after not talking with her for several years, he shows up at her house in a tuxedo and says, "I'm ready!" She looks at him blankly and says, "for what?"

We must be perfect to go to heaven. Nothing impure enters heaven. If we do not desire perfection then we do not desire heaven. We often hear the phrase, "nobody is perfect." This is a helpful phrase for teaching us to be more patient and merciful with ourselves and with others. The problem with the phrase is that it turns God into a liar. Jesus commands us to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect and He wouldn't command us to do something without giving us the grace to achieve it. Jesus tells the Rich Young Ruler that he still lacked one thing, to be perfect he needed to sell all of his possessions and follow after Him. A more accurate phrase would be, "most saints don't start out perfect." We must be patient with the imperfections of ourselves and others, but we cannot let our desire to become perfect lessen. Our desire for God, our desire for heaven, and our desire for perfection should increase day by day!

It is true that if we fail to reach perfection in this life that God, in His great mercy, can still perfect our souls in purgatory. But we must be very careful not to use God's mercy as an excuse not to live for Him! There are many weak and foolish souls who make Purgatory into their Plan A. They have no intention of aiming for perfection in this life because they are unwilling to give up the things that keep them from God, or, even worse, the things that displease God. Remember if we die without desiring perfection, then we die without desiring heaven! We must be very careful! If we make Purgatory our aim we might find that our hearts are not worthy to make it even there. The reasons we choose to aim for Purgatory might turn out to be the very same reasons why we are not counted worthy enough to make it to Purgatory.

Meditation increases knowledge: *Do you understand why we must aim for perfection in this life?*

Meditation increases desire: *Do you want to be perfected in this life?*

Meditation strengthens choice: *Will you choose to aim for perfection in this life?*

Meditation leads to action: *What is one step you can take today along the way of perfection?*

- *Make a resolution.*
- *Petition for the graces you need to understand, desire, decide, and act with the Mind and Heart of Christ.*
- *Thank the Lord for the graces He poured into your heart during this prayer time.*
- *Our Father...*

Spiritual Practice 17: The Rosary

Many saints who were perfected in this life asked our mother Mary for her prayers and meditated on the life of the Lord Jesus by praying the Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Consider starting with one Rosary every Saturday since it is a special day to honor Mary.

How to Pray the Rosary:

Pray the prayers of the Rosary with attention and devotion. While praying, either focus on the words of the prayers, the meanings of the prayers, the mysteries of our Lord's life, the spiritual presence of the Blessed Mother, or to the Presence of Almighty God Himself.

On the Crucifix:

(Say the Apostle's Creed)

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth,
and in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord,
Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, Suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried, He descended into Hell, on the third day He rose again from the dead,
He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty,
from thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead,
I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen

On the First Bead:

(Say an Our Father for the Pope's Intentions)

For the intentions of the Pope, I pray:

Our Father, Who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy Name,

Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

On the next three beads:

Say three Hail Mary's for an increase of faith, hope, and charity

For an increase of faith on the earth, I pray:

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee

Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus,

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

For an increase of hope on the earth, I pray:

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee

Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus,

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

For an increase of charity on the earth, I pray:

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee

Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus,

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

After the three Hail Mary's:

Say the Glory Be

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit,

as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

For each Decade of the Rosary Pray:

One Our Father (on the separate bead)

Our Father, who art...

Ten Hail Mary's (on the group of ten beads)

Hail Mary, full of grace...

One Glory Be (not on a bead)

Glory be to the Father...

and One Fatima Prayer (not on a bead)

O My Jesus, forgive us our sins, save us from the fires of hell,

Lead all souls to heaven, especially those in most of Thy mercy. Amen.

After the Five Decades of the Rosary:

Pray the Hail, Holy Queen and the other ending prayers (on the Medal that joins the Rosary)

Hail Holy Queen, Mother of mercy, Our life, our sweetness, and our hope, to thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve, to thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears, turn then most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy towards us and after this our exile show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb Jesus, O clement, o loving, o sweet Virgin Mary.

Pray for us O Holy Mother of God,
That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ

Let us pray:

O God, Whose only begotten Son,
By his life, death, and resurrection has purchased for us the gift of eternal life,
Grant, we beseech Thee, that by meditating upon these mysteries of the Most Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary
We may imitate what they contain and obtain what they promise through this same Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Joyful Mysteries (usually prayed on Mondays and Saturdays)

1. The Annunciation of Our Lord's Birth
2. The Visitation of Our Lady to Elizabeth
3. The Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ
4. The Presentation of Our Lord in the Temple
5. The Finding of the Child Jesus in the Temple

The Luminous Mysteries (usually prayed on Thursdays)

1. The Baptism of Our Lord in the Jordan:
2. The Wedding Feast of Cana:
3. The Proclamation of the Kingdom of God:
4. The Transfiguration:
5. The Institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper:

The Sorrowful Mysteries (usually prayed on Tuesdays and Fridays):

1. The Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane:
2. The Scourging at the Pillar:
3. The Crowning of Thorns:
4. The Carrying of the Cross:
5. The Crucifixion of Our Lord, Jesus Christ:

The Glorious Mysteries (usually prayed on Wednesdays and Sundays):

1. The Resurrection of Our Lord from the Dead:
2. The Ascension of Our Lord into Heaven:
3. The Descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost:
4. The Assumption of Our Lady into Heaven:
5. The Coronation of Our Lady as Queen of Heaven:

18. Meditation on Growing in Grace

- *Be still. Remember that God is with you. He has called you here. He will be at work as you pray.*
- *Ask for God's grace to have a fruitful meditation.*
- *Do lectio divina on the following meditation... (read slowly with pauses, think, imagine, pray ⇌ rest)*

Imagine a broken, spikey, ugly, rusted tricycle covered in tar and letting off an unbearable odor. It can hardly be touched without slicing your hand and riding it is completely out of the question. This sad vehicle also has strange and evil symbols on it. It has been cursed so that evil spirits are tied to this horrible object. Your mentor walks over to you and says, "this will do," and hands you a bottle of sparkling liquid. You understand what he wants and pour it over the tricycle. You pour a little and hear a shriek as the evil spirits flee and the cursed marks disappear. You pour a little more and the odor loses its strength. As you keep pouring, little by little the tricycle transforms. It is less spiky, less rusted, more beautiful, and less sticky. It even starts to grow and a little engine appears. The bottle runs out and you ask your mentor if you can have more of that liquid. He says, "yes, you can have as much as you like if you know how to get it." You look with wonder at your vehicle and wonder out loud, "what would it turn into if I kept pouring that liquid on it?" Your mentor smiles and says, "you would hardly believe me if I told you."

Without God our hearts are thorny, rocky, putrid, and bound to darkness. Only He can transform our hearts by the Almighty power of His grace! Grace is like the very lifeblood of God filling us and flowing through us to see, feel, choose, and act with the mind and heart of Our Lord Jesus Christ. We experience the saving power of God at work in us each time we are moved with an insight, a conviction, a choice, an action, with sorrow for sin, with penances, mortifications, or prayers. His grace is our salvation. So, how do we grow in grace so that His salvation can sweep us up more and more into its currents?

There are three ways to grow in grace: First, there is a flood of grace available every time you receive a sacrament. Receive communion with faith, humility, desire, confidence, and reverence. Go to Confession with deep contrition and a strong resolution to avoid sin. Next, perform good works because each time you do anything for the love of God He will repay you with an increase in grace. Finally, if even those who are evil know how to give good gifts to their sons, how much more is God willing to send the Holy Spirit to those who ask? Ask and you will receive!

Meditation increases knowledge: *Do you understand that it is not your good insights, holy desires, strong will, or hard work alongside God's grace that saves you? Do you understand that God Himself transforms your darkened mind, heart, will, and actions by His grace and that your goodness itself is a free gift from God as long as you do not harden your hearts against His grace?*

Meditation increases desire: *Do you want to be saved from your own powerlessness and hardheartedness into a saint by His grace?*

Meditation strengthens choice: *Will you choose to pursue the grace of God above the things that this world values, such as comfort, power, riches, pleasure, and honor?*

Meditation leads to action: *How can you draw more grace into your life today?*

- *Make a resolution.*
- *Petition for the graces you need to understand, desire, decide, and act with the Mind and Heart of Christ.*
- *Thank the Lord for the graces He poured into your heart during this prayer time.*
- *Our Father*

Spiritual Practice 18: The Guardian Angel Prayer

Pray this prayer each morning to invite the powerful influence of your guardian angel into your life:

Angel of God, my guardian dear, to whom God's love, entrusts me here,

Ever this day, be at my side, to light, to guard, to rule, and to guide. Amen.

19. Meditation on the Stages of the Spiritual Life and Prayer

- *Be still. Remember that God is with you. He has called you here. He will be at work as you pray.*
- *Ask for God's grace to have a fruitful meditation.*
- *Do lectio divina on the following meditation... (read slowly with pauses, think, imagine, pray ↔ rest)*

Imagine you and your small crew are on a ship. You have two missions. The first mission is to journey over a long distance to a certain place where you need to spend the winter. The second mission is to help those you find along the way to make it there also. Shortly into your journey you realize your boat is sinking. You bail out the water, try to patch up the leaks, get things back on course, then BAM! You hit something and spring another leak. You realize that before you can spend the time properly training in the art of sailing, you will have to work at just not sinking and getting rid of all the leaks. As you get things patched up, you begin to train more earnestly in the art of sailing. Your study and practice start to pay off as your abilities and skills continue to grow. Time passes and you are finally an experienced and well trained sailor. Now, your time at sea has completely changed. You have bonded with the crew and work as one. All of the tasks of sailing have become second nature and a delight to perform. You and the crew endure hardships, bring expertise to those in need, and rejoice in each victory along the way as true friends and crewmembers.

There are three stages of the spiritual life. In the first, called the Purgative Way, you especially focus on purging your soul through penance and mortification. This is like when the crew spent their time patching up the ship so as not to sink. In the second stage, called the Illuminative Way, you especially focus on growing in virtue. This is like when the crew works on becoming skilled in the art of sailing. In the third stage, called the Unitive Way, you become especially close to God and become able to do His will more perfectly while being deeply united to Him. This is like when you bond with the crew and work together to accomplish your missions as one.

Meditation increases knowledge: *Do you understand that there are stages in the spiritual life? Do you understand that the stages of the spiritual life have different focuses? Do you see that the higher stages are more desirable than the earlier stages?*

Meditation increases desire: *Do you want to journey through all of the stages of the spiritual life? Do you want to patch up the ship of your soul, become an expert sailor, and perform God's missions in this life with ease and joy no matter what difficulties come?*

Meditation strengthens choice: *Will you commit to this journey fully?*

Meditation leads to action: *What is one more step you could take on this journey today?*

- *Make a resolution.*
- *Petition for the graces you need to understand, desire, decide, and act with the Mind and Heart of Christ.*
- *Thank the Lord for the graces He poured into your heart during this prayer time.*
- *Our Father...*

Spiritual Practice 19: Studying Scripture

The Holy Scriptures burn with a holy fire and lead to personal encounters with God's wisdom and power. Make a commitment to read and study the Bible on a regular basis so you can store up the riches of God's Word in your heart. The whole Bible is important, but it is okay to prioritize certain parts, for instance, it is common to prioritize the Gospels, because they give you access to the life of the Lord Jesus, the Psalms, because they are the prayerbook of the Church, and the New Testament epistles, because they are full of very powerful and convicting teachings on how to live as a Christian. Spending time reading God's Word is one way to make Sunday special and set apart for Him. Or, to make it through the whole Bible each year, you only need to spend about 20-30 minutes reading each day.

Approximate Scripture Reading Plan:

Advent/Christmas:

- Genesis
- Isaiah

Ordinary Time (between Christmas and Lent)

- *New Testament Epistles*
 - Romans
 - 1, 2 Corinthians
 - Galatians
 - Ephesians
 - Philippians
 - Colossians
 - 1, 2 Thessalonians
 - 1, 2 Timothy
 - Titus
 - Philemon
 - Hebrews
 - James
 - 1, 2 Peter
 - 1, 2, 3 John
 - Jude
- *Wisdom Literature*
 - Proverbs
 - Ecclesiastes
 - Wisdom
 - Psalms

Lent:

- Exodus
- Leviticus
- Numbers
- Deuteronomy
- Job

Easter:

- Song of Songs
- John
- Acts
- Sirach

Ordinary Time (after Easter)

- *Historical Books*
 - Joshua
 - Judges
 - Ruth
 - 1, 2 Samuel
 - 1, 2 Kings
 - 1, 2 Chronicles
 - Ezra
 - Nehemiah
 - Tobit
 - Judith
 - Esther
 - 1, 2 Maccabees
- *Synoptic Gospels*
 - Matthew
 - Mark
 - Luke
- *Prophets*
 - *Minor Prophets*
 - Hosea
 - Joel
 - Amos
 - Obadiah
 - Jonah
 - Micah
 - Nahum
 - Habakkuk
 - Zephaniah
 - Haggai
 - Zechariah
 - Malachi
 - *Major Prophets*
 - Isaiah
 - Jeremiah
 - Lamentations
 - Baruch
 - Ezekiel
 - Daniel
- Revelation

20. Meditation on the Stages of Sin

- *Be still. Remember that God is with you. He has called you here. He will be at work as you pray.*
- *Ask for God's grace to have a fruitful meditation.*
- *Do lectio divina on the following meditation... (read slowly with pauses, think, imagine, pray ⇔ rest)*

Imagine having 6 friends. The first, while visiting your house, took careful notes about your security systems and asked you detailed questions about your schedule, then, every time you go away on vacation, steals all of your most valuable possessions. The second, after gaining your confidence and learning some of your secrets, went around town one day on a crusade to ruin your reputation. The third, after coming over to enjoy a movie and some pizza, snuck out of the room and ate up more pizza than was fair and only left you one small slice. The fourth came over after a hard day, and when the conversation got close to one of his insecurities, lashed out with a mean comment, then immediately apologized. The fifth, after being invited to take a world-class vacation with you at no cost, declined to go because there was going to be a buy one get one free deal at Chick-fil-A one of the days you would be gone. The sixth, noticing a way to bless you and having the means to easily afford it, generously gave a sum of money, but because they really longed to be rich they only gave you a fraction of what they initially decided to give.

As we grow in the spiritual life we overcome sins and imperfections at different levels. First we must overcome ongoing habits of mortal sins, which kill all the grace in our souls. Second, we must overcome any other mortal sins that come from time to time. Third, we must stop purposefully committing venial sins since they weaken our relationship with God and cause damage to our souls. Fourth, we must lessen as much as possible the venial sins that we commit when we are taken by surprise or out of weakness. Fifth, we must overcome imperfections that keep us back from loving God and others. Sixth, we must overcome all imperfections which make our loving actions less intense.

Meditation increases knowledge: *Do you understand that when we walk in God's ways we will make true progress in overcoming the levels of sin and imperfection?*

Meditation increases desire: *Do you want to be free of mortal sin and deliberate venial sin? Do you want to decrease the venial sins of weakness and imperfections as much as possible?*

Meditation strengthens choice: *Will you choose to battle against each level of sin to bring greater order, joy, peace, and freedom to your soul?*

Meditation leads to action: *What is one thing you can do to oppose the sins and imperfections in your life today?*

- *Make a resolution.*
- *Petition for the graces you need to understand, desire, decide, and act with the Mind and Heart of Christ.*
- *Thank the Lord for the graces He poured into your heart during this prayer time.*
- *Our Father...*

Spiritual Practice 20: The Divine Mercy Chaplet

Mercy is allowing another person's misery to move your heart and, when appropriate, to do whatever you can do to remove their misery. Sin is the greatest source of human misery so God, in His mercy, wants to remove our sins from us and restore us to His peace, joy, and freedom. The Divine Mercy Chaplet calls upon the power of God's Mercy to transform our lives from the inside out.

How to Pray the Divine Mercy Chaplet:

Pray the prayers of the Chaplet with attention and devotion. While praying, either focus on the words of the prayers, the meanings of the prayers, the intentions you want to intercede for, the flood of mercy that flowed from the Crucifixion, or the Presence of Christ Himself.

On the First Bead:

Optional Beginning Prayer

You expired Jesus,

but the source of life gushed forth for souls and the ocean of Mercy, opened up for the whole world.

O Fount of Life, O unfathomable Divine Mercy, envelop the whole world and empty Yourself out upon us.

O Blood and Water, which gushed from the Heart of Jesus, as a fountain for us, we trust in You.

O Blood and Water, which gushed from the Heart of Jesus, as a fountain for us, we trust in You.

O Blood and Water, which gushed from the Heart of Jesus, as a fountain for us, we trust in You.

On the next three beads:

Pray the Our Father, Hail Mary, and the Apostle's Creed

Our Father, Who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy Name,

Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee

Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus,

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth,

and in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord,

Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, Suffered under Pontius Pilate,

was crucified, died, and was buried, He descended into Hell, on the third day He rose again from the dead,

He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty,

from thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead,

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints,

the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen

For each Decade of the Chaplet Pray:

One Eternal Father Prayers (on the separate bead)

Eternal Father,

I offer you the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Your dearly beloved Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ

in atonement for our sins and those of the whole world.

Ten For the Sake Prayers (on the group of ten beads)

For the sake of His sorrowful Passion,

have Mercy on us and on the whole world.

After the Five Decades of the Chaplet:

Pray the ending prayers (on the Medal that joins the Rosary)

Holy God, Holy Mighty One, Holy Immortal One, have Mercy on us and on the whole world. (Repeat 3 times)

Optional Second Ending Prayer:

Eternal God, in whom Mercy is endless, and the treasury of compassion inexhaustible. Look kindly upon us and increase your Mercy in us, so that in difficult moments, we may not despair nor become despondent but with great confidence, submit ourselves to Your Holy Will, which is Love and Mercy itself. Amen.

21. Meditation on the Gifts Perfecting the Virtues

- *Be still. Remember that God is with you. He has called you here. He will be at work as you pray.*
- *Ask for God's grace to have a fruitful meditation.*
- *Do lectio divina on the following meditation... (read slowly with pauses, think, imagine, pray ⇔ rest)*

Imagine a sailboat with its sails up in the middle of the calm sea. There is no wind and the boat is still. The crew on board this sailboat has oars and they begin to do the hard work of rowing the boat across the sea. They keep the sails ready just in case the wind picks up, but it is slow going. After hours of hard rowing the crewmembers feel a gentle breeze and soon the sail fills with wind and the boat gains great speed with little effort.

God normally gives us the understanding, desire, commitment, and initiative to row our soul over the seas of life. It is a gift from God, but it is hard work. The fact that we are doing the hard work is a gift from God. We can't take any credit for the hard work because the Lord is moving us to work hard, but it feels just the way all hard work feels because He is empowering us to do it the normal way we do everything else. As we work hard, by God's grace, to do good works and to fight against sin in our lives we begin to make progress and become more virtuous. Every once in a while, and more and more as we grow, the Lord will fill our sails with wind and He will act through us in a new way. When this happens we don't need to work hard or make things happen, we are moved by the Spirit in a way that is more Him than us. There are seven main virtues, which are represented by rowing, and there are seven gifts of the spirit, which are represented by the wind and the sails. The saints became so strong in virtue and were so responsive to God that they operated in the gifts of the spirit often.

Meditation increases knowledge: *Do you understand that God can move our soul by special gifts? Do you understand that these moments become more common as we advance in the spiritual life?*

Meditation increases desire: *Do you want to become docile to the Holy Spirit so He can move you to do wonderful things for Him?*

Meditation strengthens choice: *Will you choose to grow in virtue so you can become more capable of being used by Him?*

Meditation leads to action: *What can you do today to practice being more prudent, fair, courageous, or self-controlled?*

- *Make a resolution.*
- *Petition for the graces you need to understand, desire, decide, and act with the Mind and Heart of Christ.*
- *Thank the Lord for the graces He poured into your heart during this prayer time.*
- *Our Father...*

Spiritual Practice 21: Works of Mercy

- First, connect with the people around you enough to know what is going on in their lives.
- Second, have your misery-radar up so when you hear about some suffering you take notice.
- Third, think about whether it would be a good idea to help relieve that suffering. Is it your place? Would it get in the way of your other responsibilities? Would anything you tried be helpful?
- Fourth, help where you can!

22. Meditation on the Fruits and the Beatitudes

- *Be still. Remember that God is with you. He has called you here. He will be at work as you pray.*
- *Ask for God's grace to have a fruitful meditation.*
- *Do lectio divina on the following meditation... (read slowly with pauses, think, imagine, pray ⇔ rest)*

Imagine a large pear tree. You watch this tree from the time it was a seed. You watched it be planted. You watched it sprout and grow year by year. You saw it become strong and noticed when its leaves first sprouted, when its blossoms first bloomed, and when its fruit first began to ripen. This whole time there was growth and there was beauty, but at the very end of the process, something new happens: the first pear ripens and puts forth a sweet fragrance. After all of this time you reach out your hand, take the first fruit, and taste the sweetness of what had been growing from the beginning.

When a saint with great virtue and love does a good deed it is done without hesitation, it is done without difficulty, and it is done with delight. The greater the virtue, the greater the delight in doing virtuous acts. We call these acts that produce great delight *fruits* because they produce sweetness in the soul. Certain fruits are so perfect that they give us a taste of heavenly delight and these are called beatitudes. The saints who lived lives filled with these beatitudes experienced a sort of heaven on earth!

Meditation increases knowledge: *Do you understand that holiness brings delight?*

Meditation increases desire: *Do you want to taste and see the goodness of God?*

Meditation strengthens choice: *Will you choose to work on growing in virtue?*

Meditation leads to action: *How can you help another person see the joy of virtue today?*

- *Make a resolution.*
- *Petition for the graces you need to understand, desire, decide, and act with the Mind and Heart of Christ.*
- *Thank the Lord for the graces He poured into your heart during this prayer time.*
- *Our Father...*

Spiritual Practice 22: Evangelism

- First, love others. Care about what they think. Care about what they are feeling. Think of ways to make their lives better in some way.
- Second, share yourself. What is your story? What has God done for you? If God is an important part of your life, He will come into your conversation naturally. If Catholic truth encourages you, guides you, inspires you, or amazes you then it is natural to share about it.
- Third, invite them to take another step towards God. There are many ways we can invite others to action: invite them to Mass, invite them to go to adoration, invite them to go to a retreat, invite them to pray with you, or invite them to go serve the poor.

Spiritual Practices from Week 3

Spiritual Practice 16: Night Prayer - a short and powerful part of the Liturgy of the Hours to say each night

Spiritual Practice 17: The Rosary - Mary, grace, and meditation on Christ

Spiritual Practice 18: Guardian Angel Prayer - a relationship with one of the best friends you will ever have

Spiritual Practice 19: Studying Scripture - letting God's word transform us

Spiritual Practice 20: Divine Mercy Chaplet - asking God's mercy upon the world

Spiritual Practice 21: Works of Mercy - meeting the needs of others when it is prudent to do so

Spiritual Practice 22: Evangelism - caring for others and being open about God's work in your life

Possible Schedule of Spiritual Practices

Every Morning:

- **The Morning Offering** - offering the day to God for the reparation of sins
- **Prayers of Petition** - short list of daily petitions ending with the Our Father
- **Guardian Angel Prayer** - strengthening the influence of the angelic companion in your life
- **Meditation** - at least five minutes doing *lectio divina*

Every Day:

- **Vocal Prayer (Prayer before Meals)** - Bless us, O Lord...
- **Acts of Penance:**
 - (1) doing our duty well in reparation for sin (e.g. chores with cheer)
 - (2) bearing our trials well in reparation for sin (e.g. patience when insulted)
 - (3) choosing some sacrifices in reparation for sins (e.g. no pillow)
- **Mortification:**
 - (1) not indulging ourselves (e.g. counting before we eat)
 - (2) choosing harder things (e.g. kneeling)
 - (3) directing our powers toward good things (e.g. studying the faith)
- **Holy Recreation** - spend time doing something refreshing and fun

Every Night:

- **Vocal Prayer (Family Prayer)** - e.g. thanksgivings, petitions, and set prayers
- **Night Prayer** - a beautiful way to end every day with the Divine Office (the Liturgy of the Hours)
- **Daily Examen** - five minutes to review the day at bedtime

Fridays:

- **Weekly Penance** - fasting from meat or doing some other penance as a substitute
- **Divine Mercy Chaplet** - especially at 3:00pm on Fridays when the Fount of Mercy opened up

Saturdays:

- **The Rosary** - honoring Mary, a flood of graces, and meditation on the mysteries of Jesus' life

Sundays:

- **Preparation for Communion** - reminding ourselves of reasons to have faith, humility, desire, confidence, and reverence while receiving Holy Communion
- **Vocal Prayer (Mass)** - the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is itself a community vocal prayer
- **Studying Scripture** - hiding God's word in our hearts (especially Psalms, Gospels, and epistles)

Occasionally:

- **Saint Stories** - learn about the lives of the saints
- **Set Prayers** - say the Acts of Faith, Hope, and Love
- **Discernment of Spirits** - fight against desolation
- **Particular Examen** - focus on overcoming one sin
- **Works of Mercy** - being ready to relieve the suffering of others whenever it is prudent to do so
- **Evangelism** - genuinely caring for others and being open and honest about your life of faith

Conclusion: Invitation to the Journey

23. Meditation on the Two Paths (part two)

- *Be still. Remember that God is with you. He has called you here. He will be at work as you pray.*
- *Ask for God's grace to have a fruitful meditation.*
- *Do lectio divina on the following meditation... (read slowly with pauses, think, imagine, pray ⇔ rest)*

Imagine two roads. One road, with a great treasure at the end, is blocked by a thousand monsters, each one stronger than the last, and the other road, which has a cardboard box at the end with the word "surprise" on it, is wide open and clear except for a bunch of cute, fuzzy animals along the way, each one cuter than the last. At the crossroads is a wise and kind man who will give you advice about what to expect on each road. You sit and watch as two travelers stop to consider which path to take and then speed along. One took his words to heart and took the hard road with a smile. The other, in disbelief and a mocking look, decided to take the easy road. The person who took the easy road found that the fuzzy creatures would playfully jump on him and not let go. As he walked he became more and more bogged down until he could barely move forward. He finally made it to the end and there was nothing but a foul stench and a poisonous fume that came from the cardboard box. The other person, on the other hand, found with each new monster greater and greater power was given to him to fight and overcome each obstacle. It was hard but satisfying to grow stronger and more capable. When he reached the treasure it was of otherworldly value and beauty and well worth the adventure.

There is a path of life and there is a path of death. You can seek your happiness in the Infinite Good and trust in His power to transform you into a saint or you can seek your happiness without Him and trust in your own smarts, passion, strength of will, and initiative to chart a course through life. If you choose the second path, what will happen when you die? Can you give yourself eternal life? Can you make yourself happy forever? Can you take away your own sins? Can you give the supernatural life of God to yourself or fill your own soul with His Spirit? There are only two paths. The hard path that becomes easy by the grace of God and the easy path which becomes difficult by misery of sin, the emptiness of the world, and the torments of the devil.

Meditation increases knowledge: *Do you understand that we must choose life or death?*

Meditation increases desire: *Do you want to live for God or for this world?*

Meditation strengthens choice: *Will you choose to walk in God's ways?*

Meditation leads to action: *How can you stay on the path of righteousness?*

- *Make a resolution.*
- *Petition for the graces you need to understand, desire, decide, and act with the Mind and Heart of Christ.*
- *Thank the Lord for the graces He poured into your heart during this prayer time.*
- *Our Father...*

Spiritual Practice 23: Rule of Life

When we don't have any commitments we can't ever succeed in meeting our commitments and we can't ever fail at meeting our commitments. This is not good. We want to be able to succeed so we can be thankful and we want to be able to fail so we can be humbled. As a simple beginning to making a rule of life. Write down what your spiritual gameplan is for the week. Ask the Lord to help you stick to it and adjust it week by week until you find something that stretches you but doesn't discourage you. As time goes, see if you can add to it without overloading yourself.

Psalm 1

Blessed is the man
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
but his delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law he meditates day and night.
He is like a tree
planted by streams of water,
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.

The wicked are not so,
but are like chaff which the wind drives away.
Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;
for the Lord knows the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.

Appendix A: List of Meditations in Volume I

Introduction:

Meditation 1: Rocky Path to Save vs. Flowery Pizza Path (Two Paths - part 1)

Week 1:

Meditation 2: Lifecourse GPS Rerouting (Petition)
Meditation 3: Vibrating Backpacks (Vocal Prayer)
Meditation 4: Snow Field River (Meditation)
Meditation 5: Shaming the War Hero (Penance)
Meditation 6: Able Captain with a Toddler Weakness (Mortification)
Meditation 7: Beggar Before the King (Dispositions for Communion)
Meditation 8: Repair House Offer (Preparing for Confession)

Week 2:

Meditation 9: The Effect of Good Movies (God)
Meditation 10: Christ's Desire for Crucifixion (Jesus)
Meditation 11: Heavenly Scene (Heaven)
Meditation 12: Four Part Challenge (Virtue)
Meditation 13: Incapable, Trapped Knight (Grace)
Meditation 14: Trusting the Kung Fu Master (Discouragement)
Meditation 15: Harmful Salesman (Sin)

Week 3:

Meditation 16: Fame of the Musician (Goal)
Meditation 17: A Marriage that Wasn't To Be (Perfection)
Meditation 18: Spikey, Ugly Tricycle (Growth in Grace)
Meditation 19: Leaky Boat Mission (Stages of the Spiritual Life)
Meditation 20: Six Imperfect Friends (Levels of Sin)
Meditation 21: Sailboat with Oars (Virtues and Gifts)
Meditation 22: Pear Tree (Fruits and Beatitudes)

Conclusion:

Meditation 23: Robot Road vs Furry Creature Road (Two Paths - part 2)

Appendix B: List of Spiritual Practices in Volume I

- Spiritual Practice 1:*** Journaling after Prayer- keeping a record of your prayer life
- Spiritual Practice 2:*** Prayer of Petition - ask and you shall receive
- Spiritual Practice 3:*** Vocal Prayer - praying with the community
- Spiritual Practice 4:*** Meditation - prayer that transforms your mind, heart, will, and actions
- Spiritual Practice 5:*** Acts of Penance - repairing the damage of sin
- Spiritual Practice 6:*** Mortification - training our powers to serve God
- Spiritual Practice 7:*** Preparation for Communion - faith, humility, confidence, desire, and reverence
- Spiritual Practice 8:*** Examen - thanks, light, examination, forgiveness, and resolution
- Spiritual Practice 9:*** The Act of Love - God is most lovable
- Spiritual Practice 10:*** The Act of Faith - God is most trustworthy
- Spiritual Practice 11:*** Holy Recreation - restoring our energy to fight
- Spiritual Practice 12:*** Saint Stories - holy examples of virtue
- Spiritual Practice 13:*** The Act of Hope - God is most powerful to save
- Spiritual Practice 14:*** Discernment of Spirits - fight against doubt, discouragement, and selfishness
- Spiritual Practice 15:*** The Particular Examen - protection against the forces of evil
- Spiritual Practice 16:*** Night Prayer - a short and powerful part of the Liturgy of the Hours to say each night
- Spiritual Practice 17:*** The Rosary - Mary, grace, and meditation on Christ
- Spiritual Practice 18:*** Guardian Angel Prayer - a relationship with one of the best friends you will ever have
- Spiritual Practice 19:*** Studying Scripture - letting God's word transform us
- Spiritual Practice 20:*** Divine Mercy Chaplet - asking God's mercy upon the world
- Spiritual Practice 21:*** Works of Mercy - meeting the needs of others when it is prudent to do so
- Spiritual Practice 22:*** Evangelism - caring for others and being open about God's work in your life
- Spiritual Practice 23:*** Rule of Life - making a plan of spiritual commitments and guidelines

Appendix C: Sample Rule of Life from Volume I

Sample Rule of Life

Every Morning:

- **The Morning Offering** - offering the day to God for the reparation of sins
- **Prayers of Petition** - short list of daily petitions ending with the Our Father
- **Guardian Angel Prayer** - strengthening the influence of the angelic companion in your life
- **Meditation** - at least five minutes doing *lectio divina*
- **Journaling after Prayer** - spend a few minutes recording a basic record of your prayer time

Every Day:

- **Vocal Prayer (Prayer before Meals)** - Bless us, O Lord...
- **Acts of Penance:**
 - (1) doing our duty well in reparation for sin (e.g. chores with cheer)
 - (2) bearing our trials well in reparation for sin (e.g. patience when insulted)
 - (3) choosing some sacrifices in reparation for sins (e.g. no pillow)
- **Mortification:**
 - (1) not indulging ourselves (e.g. counting before we eat)
 - (2) choosing harder things (e.g. kneeling)
 - (3) directing our powers toward good things (e.g. studying the faith)
- **Holy Recreation** - spend at least 30 minutes per day doing something refreshing and fun

Every Night:

- **Vocal Prayer (Family Prayer)** - e.g. thanksgivings, petitions, and set prayers
- **Night Prayer** - a beautiful way to end every day with the Divine Office/Liturgy of the Hours
- **Daily Examen** - spend five minutes to review the day at bedtime

Fridays:

- **Weekly Penance** - fasting from meat or doing some other penance as a substitute
- **Divine Mercy Chaplet** - especially at 3:00pm on Fridays when the Fount of Mercy opened up

Saturdays:

- **The Rosary** - honoring Mary, a flood of graces, and meditation on the mysteries of Jesus' life

Sundays:

- **Preparation for Communion** - reminding ourselves of reasons to have faith, humility, desire, confidence, and reverence while receiving Holy Communion
- **Vocal Prayer (Mass)** - the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is itself a community vocal prayer
- **Studying Scripture** - hiding God's word in our hearts (especially Psalms, Gospels, and epistles)
- **Rule of Life** - make a new commitment to live by these practices for the week to come

When in Desolation::

- **Discernment of Spirits** - practice St. Ignatius of Loyola's 14 Rules

When Interacting with Others:

- **Works of Mercy** - be ready to relieve the suffering of others whenever it is prudent to do so
- **Evangelism** - be ready to genuinely care for others and to be open and honest about your life of faith

Occasionally:

- **Saint Stories** - learn about the lives of the saints
- **Set Prayers** - take time to pray prayers such as the Acts of Faith, Hope, and Love
- **Particular Examen** - focus on overcoming one sin

Conclusion to Volume I:

I pray that God has given you the grace to...

- ...See the beauty of holiness and the ugliness of sin
- ...Feel a desire for the true and lasting happiness of the saints
- ...Choose a life of petition, meditation, good works, penance, mortification, and growth in grace
- ...Begin to use the spiritual practices introduced in this volume.

It is likely that you now have a steady habit of meditation. If you run out of material to meditate on, consider meditating on different Scripture passages, writings of the saints, or spiritual works! Don't let your habit of meditation stop because you are waiting for other volumes of this work!

God bless!

