

***The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas A. Kempis**

The Imitation of Christ, which first appeared in the late fifteenth century, has without exaggeration been called the most widely read work of devotion ever written. It encourages us to live a life devoid of worldly vanities and, in the words of St. Paul, to “put on Christ”—that is, to imitate Christ, in order to find peace and fulfillment. Written by a German monk for his fellow clergy, *The Imitation of Christ* has appeared in nearly two thousand editions and translations since it was first set in then-newly-invented movable type. Making its message out of hundreds of passages from Scripture, it succeeds in creating a powerful and attractive picture of the spiritual life for readers of any age or era. Still, consideration should be given to the fact that Thomas Kempis wrote for fellow men of the cloth. Adaptation is needed sometimes to apply his insights to the life of the laity, man or woman. Hopefully this brief historical context will help the reader make allowance for certain differences in thought between the 1400s and today.

Now, you are welcome to just read the book straight through. But after hundreds of years, the Catholic faithful have found dozens of ways of approaching this spiritual resource. For those of you who enjoy a little strategy or planning in your spiritual reading, or those of you who may be involved in small groups, I want to share several of these reading plans. One is purely topical; another is a catalogue of specific prayers; the third and largest is for meditating on *The Imitation of Christ* over the course of an entire year. This third reading plan helps you read the chapters of *The Imitation of Christ* in the order best calculated to lead to a life of perfection. I pray that these reading plans will not only encourage you to get your book off of the shelf and read it, but also help you truly mine the riches of the spiritual treasure. May Christ truly be before you as you follow Him through the pages of this book.

~ The Reverend Father Nicholas E. C. Rottman, 2017

Nota bene: Below “Chap.” is used as an abbreviation for “Chapter,” and “Par.” as an abbreviation for “Paragraph.” The word “verse” is used to refer to a sentence.

Topical Passages of *The Imitation of Christ*

For those discouraged at making slow progress in their studies: Book 3, Chap. 29, 30, 41, 47.

For those seeking greater piety and devotion: Book 1, Chap. 15, 18-22, 25. Book 2, Chap. 1, 4, 7-9, 11-12. Book 3, Chap. 5-7, 11, 27, 31-33, 53-56.

For those in affliction and humiliation: Book 1, Chap. 12. Book 2, Chap. 11-12. Book 3, Chap. 12, 15-21, 29-30, 35, 41, 47-50, 52, 55-56.

For those who are too sensitive to suffering: Book 1, Chap. 12. Book 2, Chap. 12.

For those who labor under temptations: Book 1, Chap. 13. Book 2, Chap. 9. Book 3, Chap. 6, 16-21, 23, 30, 35, 37, 47-50, 52, 55.

For those who suffer interior trials: Book 2, Chap. 3, 9, 11-12. Book 3, Chap. 7, 12, 16-21, 30, 35, 47-52, 55-56.

For those who are worried about the future, their health, their fortune, or the success of their undertakings: Book 3, Chap. 39.

For people living in the world or distracted with their employment: Book 3, Chap. 38, 53.

For those who are faced with lies or calumnies: Book 2, Chap. 2. Book 3, Chap. 6, 11, 28, 36, 46.

For those who are beginning their conversion: Book 1, Chap. 18, 15. Book 2, Chap. 1. Book 3, Chap. 6-7, 23, 25-27, 33, 37, 52, 54.

For timid, weak, or negligent persons: Book 1, Chap. 18, 21-22, 25. Book 2, Chap. 10-12. Book 3, Chap. 3, 6,

27, 30, 35, 37, 54-55, 57.

For a retreat—**1.)** Preparation: Book 3, Chap. 53. Book 1, Chap. 20-21. **2.)** Miseries of Man: Book 1, Chap. 22. **3.)** Death: Book 1, Chap. 23. **4.)** Judgment and Hell: Book 1, Chap. 24. Book 3, Chap. 14. **5.)** Heaven: Book 3, Chap. 48. **6.)** Conclusion: Book 3, Chap. 59.

To obtain interior peace: Book 1, Chap. 6, 11. Book 2, Chap. 3, 6. Book 3, Chap. 7, 23, 25, 38.

For hardened sinners: Book 1, Chap. 23-24. Book 3, Chap. 14, 55.

For indolent persons: Book 3, Chap. 24, 27.

For those who hear lies: Book 1, Chap. 4.

For those who are inclined to pride: Book 1, Chap. 7, 14. Book 2, Chap. 11. Book 3, Chap. 7-9, 11, 13-14, 40, 52.

For quarrelsome and obstinate persons: Book 1, Chap. 9. Book 3, Chap. 13, 32, 44.

For impatient persons: Book 3, Chap. 15-19.

For the disobedient: Book 1, Chap. 9. Book 3, Chap. 13, 32.

For those who are given to much talking: Book 1, Chap. 10. Book 3, Chap. 13, 32.

For those who busy themselves about the faults of others and neglect their own: Book 1, Chap. 11, 14, 16. Book 2, Chap. 5.

For those whose devotion is false or badly directed: Book 3, Chap. 4, 6-7.

To direct the intention: Book 3, Chap. 9.

For those who are too susceptible: Book 3, Chap. 44.

For those who are too much attached to the delights of human friendship: Book 1, Chap. 8, 10. Book 2, Chap. 7-8. Book 3, Chap. 32, 42, 45.

For those who take offence at the simplicity or the obscurity of the Holy Scriptures: Book 1, Chap. 5.

For those who are inclined to jealousy: Book 3, Chap. 22, 41.

A Retreat of Three Days to Increase Devotion to Holy Communion:

Day 1

Morning, Book 3, Chap. 53—Spirit of retirement.

Noon, Book 1, Chap. 20—Spirit of retirement.

Evening, Book 1, Chap. 21—Spirit of retirement.

Day 2

Morning, Book 1, Chap. 22-23—Miseries of man *and* Death.

Noon, Book 1, Chap. 24 and Book 3, Chap. 14—Judgment and Hell.

Evening, Book 3, Chap. 48, 59—Heaven *and* Conclusion.

Day 3

Morning:

Book 4, Chap. 6—Prayer to obtain the grace of approaching the Sacraments worthily.

Book 4, Chap. 7—Examination of conscience, contrition, resolution of amendment, confession, and satisfaction.

(Read also on your knees Book 3, Chap. 8.)

Noon:

Book 4, Chap. 18—Faith obedient to the mystery of the Eucharist.

Book 4, Chap. 10—Advantages of frequent Communion

(Read also on your knees Book 3, Chap. 52.)

Evening:

Book 4, Chap. 12—Preparation for the Holy Communion.

Book 4, Chap. 15—Devotion founded on humility and self-renunciation.

Book 4, Chap. 9—Offering of one's self to God in the Holy Communion.

(Read also on your knees Book 3, Chap. 40.)

For the Day Communion Is to Be Received

Morning: Book 4, Chap. 1-4.

Before Mass: Book 4, Chap. 9, 16-17.

After Mass: Book 4, Chap. 11(beginning to par. 6, i.e., "...with more happiness and sweetness."), 13-14.

During the day and evening: Book 3, Chap. 21, 34, 48. (Repeat Book 4, Chap. 9 and choose one of the prayers already read, for example, Book 4, Chap. 6.)

As a Resource after Holy Communion:

Book 3, Chap. 5, 7-8, 10—Return thanks to Jesus Christ and excite yourself to His love.

Book 2, Chap. 1; Book 3, Chap. 1-3—Listen to the voice of Jesus Christ speaking to the soul after it has received Him.

Book 3, Chap. 26, 31, 42, 45—Detach the soul from creatures.

Book 3, Chap. 15, 17, 27, 37—Renounce thyself, and give thyself entirely to God.

Book 2, Chap. 12; Book 3, Chap. 16, 18-19—Suffer with patience and in union with the suffering of Jesus Christ.

Book 1, Chap. 19, 25; Book 3, Chap. 23, 25—Persevere in fervor, and be constant in your good resolutions.

Prayers of *The Imitation of Christ*

The following prayers are listed in the order in which they appear in The Imitation of Christ; depending on the edition of the book, the paragraph numbers may or may not correspond:

Prayer before spiritual reading: Book 3, Chap. 2.

Prayer to obtain the grace of devotion: Book 3, Chap. 3, Par. 6-7.

Prayer for the help of divine consolation (especially before or after Communion): Book 3, Chap. 5, Par. 1-2.

Prayer to obtain an increase of the love of God: Book 3, Chap. 5, Par. 6 ("My God, my love...").

Acts of abasement in the presence of God (especially before Communion): Book 3, Chap. 8.

Prayers for one who lives in retirement and piety: Book 3, Chap. 10.

Acts of profound humility (especially before or after Communion): Book 3, Chap. 14.

Prayer for resignation to the will of God: Book 3, Chap. 15, Par. 1, Par. 2 verses 3 to the end ("Lord, You know what is better...").

Acts of resignation: Book 3, Chap. 16 (whole); Chap. 17, Par. 2 and 4 (the Disciple); Chap. 18, Par. 2 (the Disciple).

Prayer for patience: Book 3, Chap. 19, Par. 5 (the Disciple).

Prayers for one in affliction or temptation: Book 3, Chap. 20-21.

An act of thanksgiving (especially after Communion): Book 3, Chap. 21, Par. 7 ("Lord, I have called You...").

Prayer for those who think they have received less from God than others, either for body or for soul: Book 3, Chap. 22.

Prayer for purity of mind and detachment from creatures: Book 3, Chap. 23, Par. 5 to the end.

Prayer for one who is beginning his conversion (or for one desirous of advancing in virtue): Book 3, Chap. 26.

Prayer to obtain the spirit of strength and wisdom: Book 3, Chap. 27, Par. 4-5.

Prayer for a person in great affliction: Book 3, Chap. 29.

Prayer after Communion (or to excite one's self to the love of God): Book 3, Chap. 34.

Acts of resignation and reliance on Divine Providence: Book 3, Chap. 39, Par. 2 (the Disciple).

An act of humility (especially before or after Communion): Book 3, Chap. 40.
An act of resignation: Book 3, Chap. 41, Par. 2 (the Disciple).
Pious sentiments: Book 3, Chap. 44, Par. 2 (the Disciple).
Prayer when attacked with calumny: Book 3, Chap. 46, Par. 5 (the Disciple).
Prayer on the happiness of Heaven (which may be said particularly on the feasts of Easter, the Ascension, and All Saints): Book 3, Chap. 48.
Acts of humility and contrition (especially before Communion): Book 3, Chap. 52.
Prayer to obtain grace: Book 3, Chap. 55.
Prayer to obtain perseverance in one's vocation: Book 3, Chap. 56, Par. 3, 5-6 (the Disciple).
An act of confidence in God: Book 3, Chap. 57, Par. 4 (the Disciple).
Prayer for all Christians who aspire to piety (especially after Communion): Book 3, Chap. 59.
Prayers in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament: Book 4, Chap. 1-4, 9, 11 (beginning to par. 6, i.e., "...with more happiness and sweetness."), 13-14, 16-17.

The Life of Perfection in *The Imitation of Christ*¹

Christian perfection (which should be the goal of each one of us) is the aim of *The Imitation of Christ*. This book includes everything necessary for reaching Christian perfection, namely: 1.) The method of reaching perfection and the degrees of perfection; 2.) The means of attaining perfection; 3.) The duties which perfection imposes. We begin with:

Chapter 1

THE METHOD OF REACHING PERFECTION AND ITS DIFFERENT DEGREES

It has long been taught by many spiritual writers that it is necessary to pass through three states to reach Christian perfection. These are: 1.) The purgative state, where we are purged of our sins and bad habits; 2.) The illuminative state, where our minds and souls are illuminated by a deeper understanding of Christ; 3.) The unitive state, i.e., union with God, which is the final goal of all life.

First Article—The Purgative State

We will begin with the purgative state, which has five degrees. The *first* degree in being purged of sin, which is also the most important, is to receive forgiveness for sins we have already committed. We do this through contrition, confession, and satisfaction, and above all by conceiving a thorough hatred for our sins. For two weeks, we will consider our motivation for hating sin.

Day 1: Book 1, Chap. 21—Compunction of heart.

Day 2: Book 2, Chap. 6—Joy of a good conscience.

Day 3: Book 3, Chap. 4—Detestation of sin.

Day 4: Book 3, Chap. 53—Detestation of sin.

Day 5: Book 1, Chap. 1—Vanity of the world.

Day 6: Book 1, Chap. 22—Human misery.

¹ This "Methodical and Explanatory Table" which arranges the chapters of *The Imitation of Christ* in the best order "calculated to lead to perfection" is found in the appendix of an old, undated book entitled *The Catholic Educator*. Whoever authored this table has provided us with a wonderful tool, for which we should show our gratitude (perhaps with a prayer for his soul). I have taken the liberty of slightly rewriting those passages which may be difficult for the modern reader and giving explanations of obscure terminology. The author was also very loose in his way of quoting spiritual authors. Wherever possible, I have taken the same quotations from other, more reliable works, and have added a citation. This table was originally designed to correspond with the 365 days of the calendar year. I have abstracted this table from its connection to specific months, and have arranged it in such a way that it breaks into weeks, that is to say, groupings divisible by seven. This has made the table somewhat longer than its original 365-day division. May this tool allow many more to read the great spiritual classic, *The Imitation of Christ*, in a fruitful manner.

Day 7: Book 1, Chap. 23—Death.

Day 8: Book 1, Chap. 24—Trial of sinners.

Day 9: Book 3, Chap. 20—Admission of our infirmity and of the miseries of life.

Day 10: Book 3, Chap. 47—Desire of eternal life.

Day 11: Book 3, Chap. 48—Desire of eternal life.

Day 12: Book 3, Chap. 49—Desire of eternal life.

Day 13: Book 3, Chap. 3—Diligence of worldly people.

Day 14: Book 4, Chap. 9—Deplore our sins.

The *second* of the five degrees of the purgative state is to fight against temptations so that we do not commit sins. We must fight against them with strength and courage. St. John Chrysostom says, "...fight until death for justice sake, and God will fight for you" (Homily on Statues, 32). Further, St. James says, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (Jas. 4:7b).

Day 1: Book 1, Chap. 13 and 2—Resisting temptation *and* Being humble.

Day 2: Book 1, Chap. 7 and 11—Avoiding pride *and* Zeal for perfection.

Day 3: Book 3, Chap. 6—Proving love truer.

Day 4: Book 3, Chap. 12—Patience against concupiscence.

Day 5: Book 3, Chap. 23—Four things which bring peace.

Day 6: Book 3, Chap. 35—No security from temptation.

Day 7: Book 4, Chap. 10—Do not lightly forego Holy Communion.

Day 8: Book 4, Chap. 18—Submit reason to faith in the Sacrament.

Part of fighting against sins is to learn to avoid them when possible. When they cannot be avoided, then we must strengthen ourselves with prayer, mortification, and vigilance. These considerations are found in the following chapters.

Day 9: Book 1, Chap. 8—Shunning over-familiarity.

Day 10: Book 1, Chap. 10—Avoiding idle talk.

Day 11: Book 1, Chap. 20—Love of solitude and silence.

Day 12: Book 2, Chap. 7—Loving Jesus above all things.

Day 13: Book 3, Chap. 26—Freeing the mind by prayer.

Day 14: Book 3, Chap. 42—Peace comes not from men.

The *third* of the five degrees of the purgative state is to advance daily in the spiritual life. Nothing is more opposed to our progress than our own affection for venial sin. To commit venial sins deliberately and habitually is to live in that state of lukewarmness of which Jesus Christ says, "I wish you were either cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth!" (Rev. 3:15-16).

Day 1: Book 1, Chap. 11—The necessity of overcoming self.

Day 2: Book 1, Chap. 19—To shun idleness.*

Day 3: Book 1, Chap. 22—To renew one's resolutions.

Day 4: Book 1, Chap. 19—To renew one's resolutions.*

Day 5: Book 1, Chap. 6 and 11—To mortify ourselves.

Day 6: Book 1, Chap. 25—To be fervent.

Day 7: Book 1, Chap. 19—To be faithful to our exercises.*

* *Chap. 19 of Book 1 is read three times this week to highlight three different themes within the chapter. Of course, it is never bad to reflect several times on the same passage. However, if it is helpful, you will find the considerations for Day 2 in the 6th-11th paragraphs, for Day 4 in the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 5th paragraphs, and for Day 7 in the 4th paragraph.*

The *fourth* of the five degrees of the purgative state is to exterminate bad habits which result from frequent acts

of sin and which could cause us to relapse in the spiritual journey. We should try to root them out entirely in order to secure our salvation, and even more so, in order to advance in perfection. Obviously, *The Imitation of Christ* does not treat every bad habit, but it does treat the following:

Day 1: Book 1, Chap. 20—Curiosity.

Day 2: Book 1, Chap. 10 and 7—Talking too much *and* Pride and vain expectations.

Day 3: Book 1, Chap. 13—False unconcern.

Day 4: Book 1, Chap. 4—Indiscreet credulousness.

Day 5: Book 3, Chap. 45—Indiscreet credulousness.

Day 6: Book 1, Chap. 8—Familiarity.

Day 7: Book 1, Chap. 9—Attachment to one's opinion.

Day 8: Book 1, Chap. 14—On judging others.

Day 9: Book 3, Chap. 24—On judging others.

Day 10: Book 2, Chap. 5—On forgetting oneself.

Day 11: Book 3, Chap. 43—Vain knowledge.

Day 12: Book 3, Chap. 58—Vain knowledge.

Day 13: Book 3, Chap. 57 and 32—Discouragement.

Day 14: Book 1, Chap. 7 and 22—Attachment to the world.

The *fifth* of the five degrees of the purgative state is to overcome our passions and subject them to reason. The major passions—love, hatred, cupidity (i.e. desire), flight, joy, sadness, hope, despair, fear, intrepidity (i.e. courage), and anger—are good in themselves and have been given to us by God. Sinners lose their souls by making a bad use of them, while the Saints sanctify themselves by making these passions minister to the glory of God. In order to reap the same advantage as the Saints, we must do two things. First, watch over the movements of our passions and direct them towards good. Second, repress quickly inclinations that may cause sin and regulate all the motions of our heart according to the Spirit of God and the example of Jesus Christ.

Day 1: Book 1, Chap. 1—Love of harmful creatures.

Day 2: Book 3, Chap. 54—Self-love vs. love of Christ.

Day 3: Book 3, Chap. 27—Self-love vs. love of Christ.

Day 4: Book 2, Chap. 7—Self-love

Day 5: Book 1, Chap. 2—Desires.

Day 6: Book 1, Chap. 6 and 9—Desires.

Day 7: Book 3, Chap. 15 and 33—Desires.

Day 8: Book 1, Chap. 20—Joy.

Day 9: Book 2, Chap. 6—Joy.

Day 10: Book 2, Chap. 9—Joy.

Day 11: Book 3, Chap. 10 and 16—Joy.

Day 12: Book 1, Chap. 21—Sadness.

Day 13: Book 3, Chap. 50—Sadness.

Day 14: Book 1, Chap. 7 and 25—Hope.

Day 15: Book 3, Chap. 30—Hope.

Day 16: Book 3, Chap. 17—Hope.

Day 17: Book 3, Chap. 59—Hope.

Day 18: Book 1, Chap. 23—Fear.

Day 19: Book 3, Chap. 57—Fear.

Day 20: Book 3, Chap. 6-7—Intrepidity.

Day 21: Book 2, Chap. 3—Anger and patience.

Day 22: Book 3, Chap. 18—Anger and patience.
Day 23: Book 3, Chap. 19—Anger and patience.
Day 24: Book 3, Chap. 35—Anger and patience.
Day 25: Book 1, Chap. 1-2—Flight or disdain.
Day 26: Book 2, Chap. 1—Flight or disdain.
Day 27: Book 3, Chap. 32—Flight or disdain.
Day 28: Book 3, Chap. 10 and 41—Flight or disdain.

Second Article—The Illuminative State

Today we begin to consider the next state in the life of perfection, the illuminative state. In the purgative state we have destroyed sin and its causes. Now, in order to follow all of the Lord's command, we must do good, that is to say, we must practice virtue. St. Augustine says that, "Virtue is but the love of what we ought to love" (cf. *City of God* XIV.7). The practice of virtue therefore equates to the illuminative state. Now, love is the queen of all the virtues, and so the illuminative state can be broken down into three categories following Jesus' teaching. For when asked the greatest commandment of the Law, He replied, "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:37-39). In this, He teaches three loves. First, we must love God above all things. Second, we must love ourselves. Third, we must love our neighbor as ourselves.

- 1.) To love God above all things. He is the Supreme Good. We love Him by a lively faith in His Word, a firm hope in His promises, an ardent charity for His perfections, and a sincere piety by which we devote ourselves entirely to Him. These three Theological Virtues are necessary for us to love God.
- 2.) To love ourselves for God's sake, both body and soul. We love our body for God's sake by practicing the virtues of chastity, temperance, mortification of our passions, and love of useful employment. We love our souls for God's sake by practicing the virtues of prudence of the intellect and rectitude of the will. *Prudence of the intellect*: 1. Seek the truth with sincerity, consulting not the maxims of the world, nor the sentiment of self-love, but consulting the light of faith and the rules of the Gospel. 2. Avoid rash judgment of others and the desire to hear idle news, vain reports, and frivolous rumors. 3. Nourish our souls by meditating on the truths of Christianity, by reading good books, and by applying ourselves to the duties of our state of life. *Rectitude of the will*: 1. To be conformed to the will of God in all things, ready to observe His commandments, to follow His inspirations, and to accept afflictions from His hand. 2. To be wholly submissive to the will of our superiors, and, in indifferent things, even to that of our equals. 3. To be resolved to do everything through a motive of virtue and never through caprice or self-interest.
- 3.) To love our neighbor as ourselves—for the love of God—wishing and doing our neighbor all the good we are able, in both soul and body, in both reputation and material goods.

The following chapters consider various virtues, beginning with a substantial treatment on humility and patience:

Virtue of Humility

Day 1: Book 2, Chap. 2
Day 2: Book 3, Chap. 4
Day 3: Book 3, Chap. 7
Day 4: Book 3, Chap. 8-9
Day 5: Book 3, Chap. 13-14
Day 6: Book 3, Chap. 20
Day 7: Book 3, Chap. 40-41
Day 8: Book 3, Chap. 46

Day 9: Book 3, Chap. 50

Virtue of Patience

Day 10: Book 1, Chap. 22

Day 12: Book 2, Chap. 10

Day 13: Book 2, Chap. 3

Day 14: Book 2, Chap. 11

Day 15: Book 2, Chap. 12

Day 16: Book 3, Chap. 12

Day 17: Book 3, Chap. 18

Day 18: Book 3, Chap. 19

Day 19: Book 3, Chap. 28-29

Day 20: Book 3, Chap. 30

Day 21: Book 3, Chap. 36

Day 22: Book 3, Chap. 46

Day 23: Book 3, Chap. 47

Day 24: Book 3, Chap. 51

Day 25: Book 3, Chap. 56

Day 26: Book 3, Chap. 57

Other Virtues

Day 27: Book 1, Chap. 15-16—Brotherly love.

Day 28: Book 1, Chap. 9—Obedience.

Day 29: Book 3, Chap. 13—Obedience.

Day 30: Book 3, Chap. 49—Obedience.

Day 31: Book 1, Chap. 3—Prudence.

Day 32: Book 1, Chap. 4—Prudence.

Day 33: Book 3, Chap. 38—Prudence.

Day 34: Book 1, Chap. 6—Peace of heart.

Day 35: Book 1, Chap. 11—Peace of heart.

Day 36: Book 3, Chap. 23—Peace of heart.

Day 37: Book 3, Chap. 25—Peace of heart.

Day 38: Book 2, Chap. 10—Gratitude.

Day 39: Book 3, Chap. 10—Gratitude.

Day 40: Book 3, Chap. 22—Gratitude.

Day 41: Book 3, Chap. 8—Gratitude.

Day 42: Book 3, Chap. 5—Gratitude.

Day 43: Book 1, Chap. 7—Confidence.

Day 44: Book 2, Chap. 2—Confidence.

Day 45: Book 3, Chap. 30—Confidence.

Day 46: Book 3, Chap. 39—Confidence.

Day 47: Book 3, Chap. 59—Confidence.

Day 48: Book 3, Chap. 26—Temperance.

Day 49: Book 1, Chap. 18—Imitation of the Saints.

Third Article—Union with God

Today we consider the final step in the life of perfection, union with God, or as it is often called, the unitive state. In the purgative state we rid ourselves of sin. In the illuminative state we grew in virtue. In the unitive

state, the soul is united to its Creator by the bonds of perfect charity. It may be either *practical* or *mystical*. There is not as much that can be said about the unitive state as about the purgative and illuminative states. It can be experienced, but words fail to truly describe it. For the practice of this state, which is simply defined as *love of God*, meditate upon its different characteristics in the following chapters:

Day 1: Book 2, Chap. 11—To suffer willingly.

Day 2: Book 3, Chap. 5—To suffer willingly.

Day 3: Book 3, Chap. 6—To suffer willingly.

Day 4: Book 3, Chap. 5 and 6—Thirteen other signs of His love.

Day 5: Book 3, Chap. 48—Union manifests itself in our thoughts and words.

Day 6: Book 3, Chap. 21—Union means longing for God.

Day 7: Book 2, Chap. 4—Union means a pure intention.

Day 8: Book 3, Chap. 31—Union means a pure intention.

Day 9: Book 2, Chap. 7—Union is for God alone.

Day 10: Book 2, Chap. 8—Union is for God alone.

Day 11: Book 3, Chap. 12—Union seeks consolation in God.

Day 12: Book 3, Chap. 16—Union seeks consolation in God.

Day 13: Book 3, Chap. 15—Union desires nothing but what pleases God.

Day 14: Book 3, Chap. 9—Union refers *all* to God.

(*The Imitation of Christ* does not treat of the mystical state of union with God, which consists in contemplation, ecstasies, etc. However, it does mention this mystical state of union in Book 1, Chap. 11 and Book 3, Chap. 31.)

Chapter 2

MEANS OF REACHING CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

These means for reaching Christian perfection are divided into two kinds: interior and exterior.

Article 1

First we consider the interior means of reaching Christian perfection. These are considered in five points: 1.) the grace of God, 2.) meditation, 3.) examination of conscience, 4.) discernment of the emotions of the soul, and 5.) making choices ordered to our final end (i.e., good election).

Point 1—The Grace of God

Grace is a supernatural light and strength, which God gives us out of pure love, through the merits of Jesus Christ. By grace, we are enabled to work out our salvation. Nothing is more necessary than grace. It is an article of faith that without it we can do nothing to save our souls. Therefore, it is refused to no one, and God has promised with an oath to grant it to us (see Heb. 6:13-20). But we must ask God for His grace and, above all, cooperate with it exactly—even though we should always attribute the good we do more to grace than to ourselves.

Efficacy of grace.

Day 1: Book 3, Chap. 54.

Day 2: Book 3, Chap. 55.

To implore the assistance of grace.

Day 3: Book 3, Chap. 3.

Day 4: Book 3, Chap. 15 and 23.

Day 5: Book 3, Chap. 27.

Day 6: Book 4, Chap. 40.

To admit the necessity of grace.

Day 7: Book 2, Chap. 8.

Day 8: Book 2, Chap. 12.

Day 9: Book 3, Chap. 8 and 15.

Day 10: Book 3, Chap. 14 and 26.

Point 2—Meditation

In mental prayer or meditation, three things must be considered: its necessity, its matter, and its form.

Necessity of Meditation: Everyone acknowledges that prayer is necessary, and many say a number of vocal prayers every day. But the necessity of *mental* prayer is not sufficiently understood. Yet the doctrine of the Saints is very explicit on this point. St. John Chrysostom says that a soul that does not meditate is dead. St. Alphonsus Liguori says, with Gerson, “that he who does not meditate cannot, without a miracle, live as a Christian” (*The Dignity and Duties of a Priest*, Part V: Mental Prayer). “How many do we not see,” says the same Saint, “who recite many vocal prayers, such as the Office and the Rosary, and yet fall into sin and live in that state. On the contrary, it is rare that a soul which practices meditation falls into sin, or if it does, it does not remain long in this deplorable state. It will either renounce sin or discontinue meditation” (*Ibid.*). St. Teresa of Avila says, “He who does not meditate needs not the devil to take him to hell. He is precipitating himself into its depths.” While on the contrary, “no matter how remiss a soul may be, if meditation be persevered in, God will soon lead it back to the path of salvation” (Cf. Alphonsus Liguori, *Prayer: The Great Means of Perfection and of Salvation*, Part II, Chap. I, par. 2 and 3). Therefore, the Holy Spirit exclaims, “With desolation is all the land made desolate; because there is none that considereth in the heart” (Jer. 12:11).

Day 11: Book 1, Chap. 20.

Day 12: Book 2, Chap. 1.

Day 13: Book 3, Chap. 43.

Matter of Meditation: The matter or subjects for meditation are infinite. They comprise everything divine and human, created and uncreated. But the principal subjects for our meditation should be the perfections of God and His goodness to us; sin and its punishments, and virtue and its rewards; and above all, the life of our Savior Jesus Christ. Every chapter, every verse of *The Imitation of Christ* may furnish a subject for meditation, which we should include in the spiritual reading appointed for the day.

Day 14: Book 1, Chap. 1—Jesus Christ.

Book 3, Chap. 56—Jesus Christ.

Day 15: Book 4, Chap. 1—Jesus Christ.

Day 16: Book 1, Chap. 18—The life of the Saints.

Day 17: Book 1, Chap. 22—Human miseries.

Day 18: Book 1, Chap. 23—Our Last End.

Day 19: Book 1, Chap. 24—Our Last End.

Day 20: Book 3, Chap. 48—Our Last End.

Day 21: Book 3, Chap. 3—Blindness of men.

The Form of Meditation: The form of meditation includes three parts. 1.) The prelude to meditation; 2.) the meditation; and 3.) the conclusion. Let the Christian be warned, it is especially necessary to observe this method of meditation in times of spiritual dryness.

1st Part—Preparation: We must prepare our souls before meditation in order to pray well. “Before prayer prepare thy soul, and be not like a man that tempteth God” (Sir. 18:23). There are two kinds of preparation:

remote preparation and immediate preparation. Remote preparation predisposes the soul for meditation by averting obstacles. Some such obstacles that commonly occur are: **1.)** Pride and selfishness; “For thus saith the High and the Eminent [...] who dwelleth in the high and holy place, and with a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite” (Isa. 57:15). **2.)** Hypocrisy; “For the Holy Spirit of discipline will flee from the deceitful” (Wis. 1:5a). **3.)** Attachment to sin; “For wisdom will not enter into a malicious soul, nor dwell in a body subject to sins” (Wis. 1:4). **4.)** Dissipation and negligence in guarding the senses. A dissipated and sensual soul cannot apply itself to meditation. We should endeavor to feel the necessity and to appreciate the advantages of mental prayer so that we may devote ourselves to it with ardor and never yield to temptations to omit mental prayer.

Day 22: Book 3, Chap. 1.

Day 23: Book 3, Chap. 6 and 38.

Day 24: Book 3, Chap. 48.

Day 25: Book 3, Chap. 53.

Having prepared remotely, we must also prepare immediately. For the immediate preparation we should: **1.)** Place vividly before our minds the truth, virtue, or vice which we have chosen for our meditation. **2.)** Recollect ourselves and banish useless thoughts and distractions. **3.)** Make an act of faith in the presence of God. Adore Him. Humble ourselves before Him. Consider His greatness and majesty, and our nothingness. **4.)** Unite our prayer with that of Jesus Christ and beg the assistance of the Holy Spirit, as well as the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, the Angels, and the Saints.

Day 26: Book 3, Chap. 28.

Day 27: Book 3, Chap. 23.

Day 28: Book 3, Chap. 40.

2nd Part—The Meditation: The meditation itself includes three points. In the *1st Point*, we consider how our Savior appeared in the scene which we have chosen for our meditation, and we pay Him our humble homage.

1.) We consider what Jesus Christ, our master and model, teaches us by His doctrine and example in the mystery which we are contemplating. What do the Saints, His imitators, have to say about this mystery? How do they reflect upon and profit by it? We should try to recall to our minds all that we have learned, seen, or heard regarding the subject which we are meditating upon. We should also beg God to speak to our hearts Himself. **2.)** When the mind is thus filled with the sentiments of Christ, we should stir up our affections, and, turning towards Him with love, we should adore His majesty, admire His perfections, praise His grandeur, be moved by His goodness, and thank Him for His mercies. We should rouse ourselves to believe and hope in Him, to fear His judgments, to offer our hearts to Him, to implore His grace, and so on. The following chapters focus on different holy sentiments:

Admiration and astonishment

Day 1: Book 1, Chap. 18.

Day 2: Book 1, Chap. 22

Day 3: Book 3, Chap. 5.

Day 4: Book 3, Chap. 10 and 44.

Day 5: Book 4, Chap. 1.

Day 6: Book 4, Chap. 3.

Day 7: Book 4, Chap. 11 and 13.

Sorrow and compunction

Day 8: Book 1, Chap. 12 and 18.

Day 9: Book 1, Chap. 23-24.

Day 10: Book 3, Chap. 3.

Day 11: Book 3, Chap. 13 and 20.

Day 12: Book 3, Chap. 46.

Day 13: Book 3, Chap. 52.

Day 14: Book 4, Chap. 1 and 7.

Day 15: Book 4, Chap. 9 and 14.

Fear

Day 16: Book 1, Chap. 23.

Day 17: Book 1, Chap. 24.

Day 18: Book 3, Chap. 4 and 14.

Hope

Day 19: Book 3, Chap. 17-18.

Day 20: Book 3, Chap. 19.

Day 21: Book 3, Chap. 30.

Day 22: Book 3, Chap. 46.

Day 23: Book 3, Chap. 57 and 59.

Ardent desires

Day 24: Book 4, Chap. 13.

Day 25: Book 4, Chap. 17.

Day 26: Book 3, Chap. 20.

Day 27: Book 3, Chap. 21.

Day 28: Book 3, Chap. 34 and 48.

Divine love

Day 29: Book 2, Chap. 7.

Day 30: Book 2, Chap. 8.

Day 31: Book 3, Chap. 5.

Day 32: Book 3, Chap. 10.

Day 33: Book 3, Chap. 21.

Day 34: Book 3, Chap. 36.

Day 35: Book 3, Chap. 48.

Praise and thanks

Day 36: Book 3, Chap. 5 and 8.

Day 37: Book 3, Chap. 10.

Day 38: Book 3, Chap. 22 and 29.

Day 39: Book 3, Chap. 40 and 50.

Day 40: Book 3, Chap. 49.

Offering of self

Day 41: Book 3, Chap. 15 and 37.

Day 42: Book 3, Chap. 50.

Day 43: Book 4, Chap. 9.

Petitions

Day 44: Book 3, Chap. 3 and 5.

Day 45: Book 3, Chap. 15 and 23.

Day 46: Book 3, Chap. 26-27.

Day 47: Book 3, Chap. 29 and 34.

Day 48: Book 3, Chap. 55.

Day 49: Book 4, Chap. 9 and 16.

The above are the principal acts in the first part of our meditation. We should have in all of them the intention of receiving Divine inspiration with humility, devotion, and respect. This is recommended in the following chapters:

Day 50: Book 1, Chap. 2-3.

Day 51: Book 2, Chap. 1-2.

Day 52: Book 2, Chap. 3.

We now come to the 2nd *Point* of meditation. Having considered the sentiments of Jesus Christ and the Saints on the subject on which we are meditating, we should, in this second point, endeavor to convince ourselves of the importance of being animated with the same sentiments. Besides the reasons that particular individuals might have for conforming their sentiments to those of Christ and the Saints, here are some which are appropriate for all: **1.)** Motives of Propriety—What am I? A rational being, created in the image and likeness of God. A Christian disciple of Jesus Christ, the model of all virtues. Part of Jesus Christ, holiness itself. What qualities! what titles!—but to correspond with them I must aspire to resemble my divine model. “Be perfect even as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). **2.)** Advantage—How beneficial it will be for me if I endeavor to form my conduct upon that of Jesus Christ! I shall escape an infinite number of sins, spare myself the sting of remorse, abridge my sufferings in purgatory, enjoy the peace of a quiet conscience, multiply my acts of virtue, and increase my future glory. **3.)** Consolation—What happiness is in this conformity to Jesus Christ by the practice of His doctrine! Can life be sad when it is such as God wishes? If there be any *true joy* in this valley of tears, is it not for the soul that really tries to serve God? “O Israel!” says He Himself, “if thou hadst hearkened to my commandments: thy peace had been as a river, and thy joy as deep of the sea” (cf. Isa. 48:18). **4.)** Facility—Conformity to Jesus Christ is, in itself, extremely easy. He Himself assures us, “My yoke is sweet and my burden light” (Matt. 11:30). It is easy in consideration of the reward which awaits us, which is nothing less than eternal life. “All crosses become light,” exclaimed the seraphic St. Francis, “when I consider the reward that I expect” (see Edward A. Armstrong, *Saint Francis: Nature Mystic* [Univ. of California Press, 1973] p. 22). **5.)** Necessity—Even if this conformity were difficult, I am obliged to practice it, under pain of being unhappy. Otherwise, I run a great risk in neglecting it. “For if I preach the Gospel,” says St. Paul, “it is no glory to me, for a necessity lieth upon me: for woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel!” (1 Cor. 9:16). Woe also to me if I neglect to imitate Jesus Christ, if I endeavor not to act, think, and speak like Him! “Whosoever doth not carry his cross and come after me,” says Jesus Christ, “cannot be my disciple” (Lk. 14:27); and also, “He that is not with me, is against me; and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth” (Lk. 11:23).

Day 53: Book 1, Chap. 20—Advantage.

Day 54: Book 1, Chap. 25—Advantage.

Day 55: Book 2, Chap. 6—Joy and propriety.

Book 3, Chap. 9—Joy and propriety.

Day 56: Book 3, Chap. 10 and 13—Joy and propriety.

Day 57: Book 3, Chap. 47—Necessity.

Day 58: Book 3, Chap. 49—Necessity.

We now come to the 3rd *Point* of meditation. The third point should be devoted to making the meditation applicable to ourselves, and to a detailed and exact examination of what our sentiments have been in regard to the subject of our meditations. What have been my thoughts, my desires, my words? What has been my conduct? What are my present disposition? Are they or are they not conformable to those of Jesus Christ and His Saints? If we find, upon examination, that our conduct has been all that it should have been, let us thank God. If, on the contrary, we feel convinced that we are guilty, let us humble ourselves profoundly, urge

ourselves to repentance, and promise God that, by the aid of His grace, we will be more faithful for the future. We should also beg the Blessed Virgin, our guardian angel, and our patron Saint, to intercede for us. Lastly, to come to a practical application of the whole, we should take *humble, firm, and special resolutions*. *Humble*—that is to say, accompanied with mistrust in ourselves and confidence in God. *Firm*—that is to say, we should be determined to keep them, no matter what it may cost us, and desire to put them in practice. *Special*—that is to say, we should specify the time, manner, and place of their execution and put them into practice as soon as possible. Without such resolutions mental prayer is fruitless, and we resemble him of whom St. James speaks, who, “seeing in a glass spots on his face takes no pains to remove them” (cf. Jas. 1:23-24).

Day 59: Book 3, Chap. 3—Motives and models of resolutions.

Book 1, Chap. 18—Motives and models of resolutions.

Day 60: Book 1, Chap. 22—Motives and models of resolutions.

Day 61: Book 1, Chap. 23—Motives and models of resolutions.

Day 62: Book 1, Chap. 24—Motives and models of resolutions.

Day 63: Book 1, Chap. 25—Motives and models of resolutions.

Day 64: Book 3, Chap. 13 and 15—Humble and firm resolutions.

Day 65: Book 3, Chap. 9 and 14—Humble resolutions.

Day 66: Book 3, Chap. 39—Humble resolutions.

Book 4, Chap. 12—Humble resolutions.

Day 67: Book 2, Chap. 12—Firm resolutions.

Day 68: Book 3, Chap. 11 and 27—Firm resolutions.

Book 4, Chap. 13—Firm resolutions.

Day 69: Book 3, Chap. 54—Special resolutions.

Day 70: Book 3, Chap. 23 and 26—Special resolutions.

3rd Part—The Conclusion: “Better is the end [of prayer] than the beginning” (cf. Eccl. 7:8). These words of the Holy Spirit prove how important this part of the meditation is. In fact, the success of this exercise depends upon the manner in which we finish it. The conclusion consists: **1.)** In thanking God for the good thoughts and other graces which He has granted us. If we have experienced only disgust and aridity, we must be thankful, even if it be but for the favor of having been allowed to remain in His adorable presence. **2.)** In bewailing before God the little attention with which we have received and co-operated with His inspirations. Also in begging pardon for our distractions and our faults of levity and sluggishness. **3.)** In placing all the fruit that we may have gained from our meditation in the hands of the Blessed Virgin, or in those of either our guardian angel or our patron Saint, begging them to aid us in making a good use of it. **4.)** In forming a spiritual bouquet of the thoughts and sentiments which have touched us most during our meditation. The presence of this bouquet, and its odor, may renew those holy sentiments in our souls and strengthen us to bear any affliction that may befall us during the course of the day.

Point 3—Examination of Conscience

We should examine our consciences often, at least twice a day—once on the sins to which we are subject, and again on the virtues which we are endeavoring to acquire, regarding which we should examine the purity of our intentions.

Day 1: Book 4, Chap. 7—On our faults.

Day 2: Book 1, Chap. 19—On our virtues.

Day 3: Book 3, Chap. 11—On our virtues.

Point 4—The Discernment of Spirits

This discernment is an interior light, necessary in order to know the different motions of the soul. We can class them under the eight following headings to distinguish whether they are good or bad, natural or supernatural:

1.) To examine if the emotions of the soul come from God. When in doubt, we should refer all to God without too exact an examination.

Day 4: Book 3, Chap. 15.

Day 5: Book 3, Chap. 11.

2.) To observe carefully the movements of nature and grace, which are opposed to each other. Nature always seeks self and the gratification of the senses, and avoids hardships. Grace, on the contrary, endeavors to despise self, to suffer cheerfully, and to seek God alone.

Day 6: Book 3, Chap. 54.

Day 7: Book 3, Chap. 55.

3.) To discover if our virtues are real and solid, or false and superficial

Day 8: Book 1, Chap. 9 and 15.

Day 9: Book 1, Chap. 11.

Day 10: Book 1, Chap. 17 and 19.

Day 11: Book 3, Chap. 20.

Day 12: Book 3, Chap. 4.

4.) To see also if our consolations and desolations come from God or from our passions. They come from God if they render us more humble and contrite.

Day 13: Book 2, Chap. 10-11.

Day 14: Book 2, Chap. 12.

Day 15: Book 3, Chap. 35.

5.) Our progress in virtue is determined neither by the absence nor the abundance of spiritual consolations. Nevertheless, it is a sign of true virtue to be able to suffer the privation of consolations with cheerfulness.

Day 16: Book 1, Chap. 9.

Day 17: Book 1, Chap. 12.

Day 18: Book 3, Chap. 7.

Day 19: Book 3, Chap. 25.

6.) When we are favored with consolations, we should not seize them with too much eagerness. Rather, without attaching ourselves to the, we should thank God in fear and humility. We should receive them in order to become stronger and more courageous. Nevertheless, we should avoid all indiscretion and think of the time of trial that is to follow. "In the good day enjoy good things, and beware beforehand of the evil day" (Eccl. 7:14).

Day 20: Book 3, Chap. 5.

Day 21: Book 3, Chap. 6.

Day 22: Book 3, Chap. 7.

Day 23: Book 2, Chap. 9.

7.) In times of aridity we must not be discouraged, but thank God, as if it were a great grace. For if He humbles us, it is to teach us to be more submissive to Him and to abandon ourselves entirely to Him, so that we may be ready for any sacrifice. It should never cause us to omit any of our spiritual exercises, for those are just the moments to be faithful. Let us reflect upon the advantages of this desolation: it humbles us and purifies our affections by making us seek consolation in God above, not in creatures.

Day 24: Book 2, Chap. 13.

Day 25: Book 2, Chap. 10.

Day 26: Book 2, Chap. 12.

Day 27: Book 3, Chap. 9.

Day 28: Book 3, Chap. 30.

Day 29: Book 3, Chap. 50.

Day 30: Book 4, Chap. 15.

8.) We should fortify ourselves beforehand against a kind of insensibility in which it seems that our passions have no longer any influence over us. Some think that perfection consists in not being tempted, while really it is not an evil to be tempted.

Day 31: Book 1, Chap. 13.

Day 32: Book 2, Chap. 9.

Day 33: Book 3, Chap. 6.

Day 34: Book 3, Chap. 12.

Day 35: Book 3, Chap. 30.

Day 36: Book 3, Chap. 35.

Point 5—A Good Choice

What is called “choice,” or “election,” is but the choosing of the easiest and best means to reach our last end. *The Imitation of Christ* gives us some rules on this subject.

1.) In this choice, we should have in view our last end, that is to say, the glory of God.

Day 37: Book 2, Chap. 9.

2.) We should purify and reform our affections if they tend towards creatures.

Day 38: Book 1, Chap. 7.

3.) When we have thus considered our last end, we should be indifferent as to the means. We should do only whatever seems most conducive to the glory of God and our own salvation. Then we should beg of Divine Mercy to enlighten our minds and render our will conformable to the will of God.

Day 39: Book 3, Chap. 3.

Day 40: Book 3, Chap. 31.

Day 41: Book 3, Chap. 15.

4.) We should also examine what are our feelings towards the object of our choice.

Day 42: Book 3, Chap. 11.

Article 2—Exterior Means of Perfection

Having considered the interior means to perfection, we now turn to the exterior means. The exterior means to reach perfection are 1.) direction, 2.) spiritual reading, 3.) interior and exterior retirement, 4.) religious life, and 5.) frequent Communion.

Point 1—Spiritual Direction

It is necessary to be governed in the path of perfection by the counsels of a prudent director.

Day 1: Book 1, Chap. 4 and 8.

Day 2: Book 1, Chap. 9-10.

Point 2—Spiritual Reading

Day 3: Book 1, Chap. 5.

Day 4: Book 3, Chap. 43.

Day 5: Book 4, Chap. 11.

Point 3—Interior and Exterior Retirement (Retreat)

Day 6: Book 1, Chap. 20.

Day 7: Book 1, Chap. 10 and 19.

Day 8: Book 1, Chap. 21.

Day 9: Book 2, Chap. 1.

Day 10: Book 3, Chap. 31 and 44.

Point 4—Religious Life

The Imitation of Christ sets down sixteen conditions for religious life.² While these conditions apply formally to those who enter consecrated life and are professed “religious,” all Christians can use these conditions in a way appropriate to their state in life to produce spiritual fruit.

Day 11: Book 1, Chap. 17 and 19.

Day 12: Book 1, Chap. 25.

Day 13: Book 3, Chap. 10.

Point 5—Frequent Communion

According to St. Teresa, frequent reception of Holy Communion is the best means of reaching perfection, and experience sufficiently proves it in those who practice it. “But,” says St. Alphonsus Liguori, “the proper preparation is requisite to communicate well. The first preparation, or in other words, the remote preparation, to be able to go to Communion daily, or several times in the week, is: 1. To keep free from all deliberate affection to sin—that is, to sin committed, as we say, with the eyes open. 2. The practice of much mental prayer. 3. The mortification of the senses and of the passions. [...] In the next place, the proximate preparation for Communion is that which is made on the morning itself of Communion, for which there is need of at least half an hour of mental prayer” (*The Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*, Ch. IV, par. 4, “Frequent Communion”).

Day 14: Book 4, Chap. 8 and 10—Read on the days immediately preceding Communion.

Day 15: Book 4, Chap. 6-7—Read on the days immediately preceding Communion.

Day 16: Book 4, Chap. 12 and 15—Read on the days immediately preceding Communion.

Day 17: Book 4, Chap. 1—Read in the morning of the day of Communion.

Day 18: Book 4, Chap. 2 and 9—Read in the morning of the day of Communion.

Day 19: Book 4, Chap. 3—Read before Mass the day of Communion.

Day 20: Book 4, Chap. 4—Read before Mass the day of Communion.

Day 21: Book 4, Chap. 16—Read before Mass the day of Communion.

Day 22: Book 4, Chap. 17—Read before Mass the day of Communion.

St. Alphonsus Liguori writes, “To reap also more abundant fruit from Communion, we must make a long thanksgiving. [St.] John of Avila said that the time after Communion is ‘a time to gain treasures of graces.’ St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi used to say that no time can be more calculated to inflame us with divine love than the time immediately after our Communion. And St. Teresa says: ‘After Communion let us be careful not to lose so good an opportunity of negotiating with God. His Divine Majesty is not accustomed to pay badly for His lodging, if He meets with a good reception’” (*The Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*, Ch. IV, part 4, on

² The author of this guide for reading *The Imitation of Christ* did not elaborate on what these sixteen conditions might be. Although I do not have the knowledge to reconstruct his thought, I here hazard my own, amateur guess. The following points are made in the three chapters from Book 1: 1. Break you will and live without complaint. 2. Consider yourself a pilgrim on earth and a fool for Christ. 3. Seek God alone. 4. Serve, work hard, and be humble. 5. Abound in every virtue. 6. Renew your resolution daily. 7. Depend on the grace of God, not your own wisdom. 8. Recollect yourself continuously or at least once a day. 9. Curb the inclinations of the flesh and withdraw forcibly from vices. 10. Never be completely unoccupied. 11. Be vigilant. 12. Strive for perfection. 13. Guard against those faults in yourself that displease you most in others. 14. Keep in mind the image and example of Christ crucified. 15. Accept all things commanded of you, and do them well. 16. Always remember your final end.

“Frequent Communion”). St. Alphonsus also counsels, “Let us then remain, at least for half an hour, with Jesus Christ after Mass; or at least for a quarter. But, O God! a quarter of an hour is too little” (*Dignity and Duties of the Priest*, Part II, Instruction I, part IV). St. Bernard exclaims, “Alas! how can you so soon grow tired of Jesus Christ!” (see *Some Letters of St. Bernard, Abbot of Clairvaux*, Letter XLV, “To a Youth Named Fulk,” par. 10).

Day 23: Book 4, Chap. 11—Read after Communion or after Mass.

Day 24: Book 4, Chap. 13-14—Read after Communion or after Mass.

Day 25: Book 4, Chap. 8-9—Read during the day and evening following Communion.

Day 26: Book 3, Chap. 21—Read during the day and evening following Communion.

Day 27: Book 3, Chap. 34—Read the next day.

Day 28: Book 3, Chap. 10 and 5—Read the next day.

Chapter III

THE DUTIES WHICH CHRISTIAN PERFECTION IMPOSES UPON US

The duties of Christian perfection, which not only lead us to this state, but allow us to maintain it, can be reduced to four: 1.) sovereign contempt of self; 2.) entire abnegation of self; 3.) indifference for everything; 4.) perfect union of will to the good pleasure of God.

First Article—Sovereign Contempt of Self

Contempt of self, in the spiritual life, does not refer to the unhealthy psychological state of thinking one’s self intrinsically and irremediably bad or worthless. The perfect soul humbly recognizes the good that God made in creating each individual body and soul, and rejoices in the infinite value of each immortal human person.

Nevertheless, the human will is weak and often corrupt because of sin, both personal and the Original. It is from this perspective of sinful pride and self-will that we properly speak of contempt of self. We must come to hate everything in us that shares even the smallest portion of pride and sinful passion. It is certainly impossible to attain perfection without this contempt of self. The following chapters show its admirable effects and peculiar qualities, as well as the different means of acquiring it.

Day 1: Book 1, Chap. 2 and 7.

Day 2: Book 1, Chap. 16.

Day 3: Book 2, Chap. 2.

Day 4: Book 2, Chap. 6.

Day 5: Book 2, Chap. 10.

Day 6: Book 3, Chap. 3-4.

Day 7: Book 3, Chap. 7.

Day 8: Book 3, Chap. 8-9.

Day 9: Book 3, Chap. 31.

Day 10: Book 3, Chap. 40.

Day 11: Book 3, Chap. 41-42.

Day 12: Book 3, Chap. 49.

Day 13: Book 3, Chap. 50.

Day 14: Book 3, Chap. 52.

Second Article—Self-Abnegation

If perfection requires contempt of self, that is, to think of ourselves in perfect humility, then it also requires entire abnegation of self. What self-contempt is to thinking, self-abnegation is to willing. It consists in an entire renunciation of self-love so that love of God and love of neighbor can reach perfection. The following

chapters consider 1.) the necessity of self-abnegation, 2.) different characters of self-abnegation, and 3) the two kinds of abnegation.

The Necessity of Abnegation

Day 1: Book 1, Chap. 6 and 9—Neither peace nor joy without self-denial.

Day 2: Book 2, Chap. 1—Neither peace nor joy without self-denial.

Day 3: Book 3, Chap. 27 and 42—Neither peace nor joy without self-denial.

Day 4: Book 2, Chap. 37 and 41—The true liberty of self-denial.

Day 5: Book 2, Chap. 27—The true liberty of self-denial.

Different Characters of Abnegation

Day 6: Book 1, Chap. 17—In general.

Day 7: Book 2, Chap. 8—In general.

Day 8: Book 2, Chap. 11—Self-denial.

Day 9: Book 3, Chap. 32—Self-denial.

Day 10: Book 3, Chap. 37 and 41—Self-denial.

Day 11: Book 3, Chap. 42 and 53—Triumph over self.

Day 12: Book 3, Chap. 15 and 44—Spiritual death.

Day 13: Book 3, Chap. 49—Spiritual death.

Day 14: Book 3, Chap. 12 and 27—Absolute detachment.

Day 15: Book 1, Chap. 6—Absolute detachment.

Day 16: Book 1, Chap. 15—Renunciation of all consolation, even divine.

Day 17: Book 2, Chap. 9—Renunciation of all consolation, even divine.

Day 18: Book 3, Chap. 16-17—Renunciation of all consolation, even divine.

Day 19: Book 3, Chap. 31 and 44—Renunciation of all consolation, even divine.

Day 20: Book 3, Chap. 56—Renunciation of all consolation, even divine.

The First Kind of Abnegation

There are two kinds of abnegation, and it is necessary to practice the first assiduously before being able to acquire the second. The first kind of abnegation consists in restraining and moderating the love of sensible and earthly things, both interior and exterior—such as the love of honor, riches, pleasures, or relations.

Day 21: Book 1, Chap. 6 and 22.

Day 22: Book 3, Chap. 12 and 20.

Day 23: Book 3, Chap. 27 and 37.

Day 24: Book 3, Chap. 41-42.

Day 25: Book 3, Chap. 53.

The Second Kind of Abnegation

The second kind of abnegation is much more sublime, and very few practice it. It consists in purifying from every stain, from every imperfection, the love and the desire of even spiritual things. For example, recognizing when we love spiritual things only for themselves, not for love of God, and correcting our intentions.³

Day 26: Book 2, Chap. 10-11.

Day 27: Book 2, Chap. 12.

Day 28: Book 3, Chap. 11.

Third Article—Entire Indifference

³ The original table began this consideration of the second kind of abnegation with Book 1, Chap. 15 and Book 2, Chap. 9, and also ended with Book 3, Chap. 49. I have eliminated them to make the table fit into my seven-day schema, and also because these three chapters were just read under the section on the different characters of abnegation.

In the spiritual life, the word “indifference” is not used in the sense of uncaring toward others, apathetic, or mediocre. Rather, it means uninterested or unconcerned about the passing things of this world. Again, this does not mean that spiritual indifference allows us to ignore justice or compassion in our everyday dealings, but that we can say with Holy Job, “The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21). This virtue of spiritual indifference tends to prepare the soul for an intimate union with God. The following chapters should be attentively meditated on.

Day 1: Book 2, Chap. 11.

Day 2: Book 3, Chap. 15 and 17.

Day 3: Book 3, Chap. 22 and 25.

Fourth Article—Conformity to the Will of God

The last duty of perfection—which can also be called perfect charity—is the complete conformity of our will to the will of God. It is necessary to meditate on its different conditions and its admirable acts with the greatest attention.

Day 4: Book 2, Chap. 1—To turn towards God.

Day 5: Book 3, Chap. 28—To turn towards God.

Day 6: Book 3, Chap. 27—To seek to find and relish God.

Day 7: Book 3, Chap. 34—To seek to find and relish God.

Day 8: Book 4, Chap. 12—To seek to find and relish God.

Day 9: Book 4, Chap. 15—To seek to find and relish God.

Day 10: Book 4, Chap. 13—To unite ourselves with God.

Day 11: Book 3, Chap. 22—To thank and praise God.

Day 12: Book 1, Chap. 14-15—To have God alone in view.

Day 13: Book 2, Chap. 4—To have God alone in view.

Day 14: Book 3, Chap. 33—To have God alone in view.

Day 15: Book 1, Chap. 17—Pure love, self-denial, and resignation.

Day 16: Book 2, Chap. 11—Pure love, self-denial, and resignation.

Day 17: Book 3, Chap. 6—Pure love, self-denial, and resignation.

Day 18: Book 3, Chap. 32—Pure love, self-denial, and resignation.

Day 19: Book 1, Chap. 16—To abandon and offer ourselves to God without reserve.

Day 20: Book 3, Chap. 39—To abandon and offer ourselves to God without reserve.

Day 21: Book 3, Chap. 27—To abandon and offer ourselves to God without reserve.

Day 22: Book 3, Chap. 50—To abandon and offer ourselves to God without reserve.

Day 23: Book 4, Chap. 7-8—To abandon and offer ourselves to God without reserve.

Day 24: Book 2, Chap. 10—To refer all to God.

Day 25: Book 3, Chap. 9—To refer all to God.

Day 26: Book 3, Chap. 23—To enjoy liberty of spirit.

Day 27: Book 3, Chap. 26 and 28—To enjoy liberty of spirit.

Day 28: Book 3, Chap. 37-38—To enjoy liberty of spirit.

Day 29: Book 3, Chap. 15—To adhere to the will of God.

Day 30: Book 3, Chap. 40—To admire the grandeur of God.

Day 31: Book 3, Chap. 16—To place ourselves in the hands of God.

Day 32: Book 3, Chap. 30—To place ourselves in the hands of God.

Day 33: Book 3, Chap. 4—To walk in truth.

Day 34: Book 1, Chap. 3—To leave ourselves in order to enter into God.

Day 35: Book 3, Chap. 31—To leave ourselves in order to enter into God.
Day 36: Book 3, Chap. 56—To leave ourselves in order to enter into God.
Day 37: Book 3, Chap. 48—To find *all* in God.
Day 38: Book 1, Chap. 7—Not to rely on ourselves.
Day 39: Book 3, Chap. 14—Not to rely on ourselves.
Day 40: Book 2, Chap. 5—Not to rely on ourselves.
Day 41: Book 3, Chap. 42—To advance in God.
Day 42: Book 4, Chap. 6—To advance in God.
Day 43: Book 4, Chap. 13—To advance in God.
Day 44: Book 1, Chap. 12—To strengthen ourselves entirely in God.
Day 45: Book 4, Chap. 1—To strengthen ourselves entirely in God.
Day 46: Book 3, Chap. 59—To strengthen ourselves entirely in God.
Day 47: Book 3, Chap. 50—To subject ourselves to God.
Day 48: Book 3, Chap. 54—To reform our imperfections.
Day 49: Book 3, Chap. 48-49—To fix our hearts upon God alone.
Day 50:⁴ Book 4, Chap. 16—To fix our hearts upon God alone.

The End

⁴ This final and 50th day does not fit into my seven-day schema; however, as the final day of the study of *The Imitation of Christ*, and with such a providential similarity to Pentecost Day concluding the Easter Season, I could not help allowing it to stand.