

MEDITATING ON SCRIPTURE WITH THE SAINTS

by Mark Pasko

Mark Pasko's exploration of faith and prayer in Christian doctrine and practice.

11 Chapters

Table of Contents

- 0.** Meditating on Scripture with the Saints
- 1.** Introduction
- 2.** A Trinitarian Trilogy by the Sea (2004)
- 3.** 1. Prayer to the Holy Spirit
- 4.** 51. The Third Point of Preparation: Representing the Mystery to be
- 5.** 101. Humility vs. Vainglory
- 6.** 151. Petitionary Prayer
- 7.** 201. The Way Of Light
- 8.** 251. A Saints Dying Words
- 9.** 301. Flirting
- 10.** 351. An Unholy Alliance

Meditating on Scripture with the Saints

Introduction

What is this book?

Over the last ten years, I have learned to enjoy and rely on daily meditation books, both Christian (Living Faith, The Upper Room, Daily Bread) and general recovery material (such as Melody Beattie's "The Language of Letting Go"). They allow me/teach me to meditate or work on an issue every day, or several times a day, without having to spend a great deal of time in any one session. I've also learned to appreciate and enjoy anthologies, both Christian (such as Benedict Groeschel's "The Journey Toward God") and general (such as Norton's "Anthologies of World Literature" or Stephen Mitchell's "The Enlightened Heart"). These books are a compilation of a variety of information from a large number of sources into handy and easy-to-use formats that are both interesting and entertaining. They are a library at your fingertips.

This book, I hope, combines the best of both of these types of literature into one Christian source of both meditative material and training in the practice of meditation. It combines the writings of many of the great Christian Saints, whose lives have been examples of how to live a holy life in all times and places, along with similar Bible readings, and various types of Christian prayer and meditation practices.

Why is it needed?

My temperament (highly charged and active) and experiences (a non-cleric lacking in meditative and mind training in my religious tradition) make it difficult to live a serene, devout and unchaotic life by learning meditative techniques. I need sources of inspiration that are short and directive but still allow me to experiment with

different types of meditation.

Why am I compiling it?

I searched far and wide for a book of the type I needed. I didn't find one. There are very few Christian anthologies and most are out of print. Most available anthologies are of the world religions variety that lacked in traditional Christian sources. While I've enjoyed and learned much from these sources, they were not what I am looking for in this most recent part of my spiritual journey. Meditative material I've seen was generally non-Christian, were developed for Christian clerics in the Middle Ages or were fairly recent meditations of the Gnostic variety. Again, while all of these sources are useful in my spiritual development, they are not what I need at this moment.

Since I didn't find the book I needed, I was "inspired" to compile it myself. I evidently need to teach others what I, myself, need to learn.

While it is odd, I suspect that there is a real spiritual principal at work here.

Though I've written this book primarily for my own use, I hope that it will be useful for others for their growth and God's glory. I hope that it will meet the needs of Christian from a variety of traditions. I've learned much from non-Christian sources and I suspect that this book will be a useful source of inspiration and Christian knowledge for any "searcher for God."

The layout of Book

The book is developed as 365 daily units. It is not being built on either a Church year or calendar year. Day one is the day you open and use the book. The meditation for each day will include the following:

- a title,(in bold)
- a short meditative phrase in brackets (in bold and underlined),
- a reading from one of the Saints/Fathers of the Church,

- a related Bible reference (in italics),
- a short reflection in commentary form meant to give perspective to the readings and includes relevant questions to get the thoughts flowing, and
- writing space either for reflections or resolutions

To help your practice of prayer and meditation , here are some suggestions that have been part of the tradition of Christian spirituality:

*Create a sacred space: "When you pray, go to your private room, shut yourself in, and so pray to your God who is in the secret place, and your God who sees all that is done in secret will reward you" (Matthew 6:5-6)

*Open yourself to the power of prayer: Remind yourself that God is present and consciously place yourself in His presence. Come to prayer with an open mind, heart and will. Be flexible because God's Spirit goes where God wills it.

*Read meditatively: Read the writings of the Saint and the Bible passage. Take your time reading. If a particular phrase touches you, stay with it for a while. Do not hurry.

*A number of meditative approaches can be used for any of the daily meditations. By using a variety of techniques, this book can be used for years without repeating any meditation in an identical manner.

Meditative approaches include the following:

-Centering Prayer- After reading the writing of the Saint and Bible, use either the short phrase in parentheses after the title or any other that you feel "inspired" to use. It will help you to focus your prayer by repeating it slowly in harmony with your breathing. (See meditation one and 2)

-Lectio Divina- This type of meditation, "divine studying," is a

concentrated reflection on the readings. Read the passages several times and then concentrate on one or two sentences that inspire you, pondering their meaning for you and their effect on you. Let your reading and thinking lead you to prayer on the topic. End by writing a resolution noting how the reading will change your life in the space provided. (See meditation seven and 60)

-Guided Meditation- In this type of meditation, our imagination helps us consider alternative actions and likely consequences. Read the scene or story several times and place yourself in it. What character are you? How do you feel? How do you act? (See meditation five and 47)

-Examen of consciousness- Examine how God has been speaking to you in your past and present experience. Examine your awareness of God's presence in your life. (See meditation 11 and 29)

-Journal writing- Writing is a process of discovery. Reserve a special notebook for your writings. If you like, you can go back to your journal entries at a future time for an examen of consciousness. (See meditation six and 58)

*End with a Prayer of Silence - After completing your meditation, end with silence, simply listening to anything the Holy Spirit wishes to tell you. This is not easy and takes much practice to eliminate unwanted ego thoughts. It is suggested that you start with brief periods of such silence and increase their time and frequency as you become more skilled. The following schedule will help you to slowly build up time in silent prayer:

Day Duration Frequency Total Time (min)

1-5 1 min 2x(on rising/sleeping) 2

6-10 2 min 2 x 4

11-15 3 min 2 x 6

16-20 2 min 4 x 8

21-25 5 min 2 x 10

26-30 3 min 4 x 12

31-35 2 min 7 x 14

36-40 4 min 4 x 16

41-45 2 min 9 x 18

46-50 10 min 2 x 20

51-55 2 min 11 x (every hour) 22

56-60 12 min 2 x 24

A Trinitarian Trilogy by the Sea (2004)

(Inspired by Ephesians 1:3-14 and St. Augustan)

I

The healing and holiness of God are rarely as apparent to me as in the Cathedral of Nature- especially the ocean shore. It is here that I am truly re-created with all of my senses filled completely. Sight is filled with waves and birds. Ears, with the roar of waves, the whispering of winds and the laughter of children. Touch the graininess of sand, the chill of ocean, the refreshing breeze. Taste and smell the tangy saltiness- symbol for preservation and zest. Likewise, God is all filling.

The symbols of the seashore are often used in both Old and New Testament. In the Old, Yahweh is portrayed as the Rock of Faith (Ps 62: 1-7), the Water to quench all thirst (Jer 2: 13), and the Breath that gives Life (Ezek 37: 1-10). Christ describes the Father as building a home on Rock (Matt 7: 21-27). He described Himself as the Water of Life (John 4: 1-14) and He described the working of the Wind of the Spirit (John 3: 1-8).

By bathing myself in the wonders of the shore, I am immersing myself in the mystery that is the Triune God.

II

God is an ocean shore of salt, breeze and sea
all very different
but makes one shore of the three.

The Father, the Solid Rock of Creation, is the Beach of Being,
is the maker of boulder and sand.

The Father is silent, barely a whispering sound

as ocean and wind embrace all around.

The Son, the Water of Life, is the liquid ocean
caressing the Rock and Wind with devotion.

The roaring waves beckon: "Come".

The Spirit is the airy Wind,
tinged with the salty tang of healing and holiness
loving both Beach and Ocean as He blows.

Where? Only God knows!

Without each: beach, wave and sea

Like Father, Son and Spirit,
neither shore nor God would be.

III

Blessed be the Father,
maker of sun, sand and sea

Without whom these would not be.

Bond between the Word of God and the Wind of God.

Honor to the Holy Spirit

The Sustainer and Sanctifier of Life

Without whom neither dolphin nor dove would live

Bridging the breach between God-man and Ground of Being.

Praise to the Son, the Redeemer and Ransomer of existence,
without whom there would be no consciousness of wonder or praise.

Joy and laughter between the Creator of Life and the Breath of Life.

Glory to Father, Son and Spirit,
the All-in-All

Lover of all that is,

that makes all whole and one.

1. Prayer to the Holy Spirit

(Holy Spirit Come)

Holy Spirit, powerful Consoler, sacred bond of the Father and the Son, hope of the afflicted, descend into my heart and establish in it your loving rule. Enkindle in my lukewarm soul the fire of your love so that I may be wholly subject to you.

We believe that not only that you dwell in us, but that you prepare a dwelling for the Father and Son. Come to me Consoler of abandoned souls and protector of the needy. Help the afflicted, strengthen the weak, and support the wavering.

Come and purify me. Let no evil desire take possession of me. You love the humble and resist the proud. Come to me, glory of the living and hope of the dying. Lead me by your grace that I may always be pleasing to you. Amen.

--St. Augustine (Prayers for Urgent Occasions)LF

Wisdom 7:22-30

When I pray, I rarely think of the Third Person of the Trinity: the Holy Spirit. Do I pray to Jesus? -Absolutely. Do I pray to the Father? -Sometimes. Prayer to the Holy Spirit? -Somehow this gets lost even though this is the main contact between God and humanity in this world.

As I listen to the Holy Spirit, I will pick up many of the Holy Spirit's characteristics (also characteristics of Jesus)including holiness, intelligence, subtlety, incisiveness, lucidity, benevolence, friendliness, steadfastness, dependability and peacefulness (Wisdom 7: 22-23).

Am I becoming more "Spirit-like"?

2. Words to Memorize

(Be Not Afraid)

Let nothing disturb you,
Let nothing frighten you,
Though all things pass,
God does not change.
Patience wins all things.
But he lacks nothing
Who possesses God;
For God alone suffices.

--St. Teresa (her bookmark)JTG

Psalm 127:1-2

These few words of this great saint must have been very important to her since she wrote them on the bookmark of her Bible. She wanted to see the words often and remember them and absorb them. This saint died at the age of 22 years, in great pain and with nearly no spiritual light in her last months. How she needed to know of the constancy of God in a changing world in spite of her feelings.

Do I still become frightened (the opposite of love) by daily events?

3. Benefits of Being Part of the "Family"

(Rejoice My Soul)

Mine are the heavens
And mine is the earth
The angles are mine
And the Mother of God;
And God himself is mine and for me,
Because Christ is mine
And all for me.
Yours is all of this,
My soul.

Go forth and exult

In your glory!

Hide yourself in it and rejoice!

--St. John of the Cross (JTG)

Romans 8:14-17, 28-30

When I read these words of St. John, I feel shocked! This sounds like grandiosity and pride--certainly not characteristics that I would strive for. Then I remember the words of St. Paul indicating that I am a child and heir of God and a joint-heir and a younger brother of Jesus. Maybe it is pride and grandiosity, in a sort of negative way, not to accept my status and heritage in Jesus.

Am I afraid to live up to my responsibilities as a younger brother of Jesus?

4. God, a Garden?

(God, My Beloved)

As for that part of the Garden, my beloved,

which is situated so gloriously

at the summit of that height

where dwells the Glory,

not even its symbol

can be depicted in man's thought;

for what mind

has the sensitivity

to gaze upon it,

or the faculties to explore it,

or the capacity to attain to that Garden

whose riches are beyond comprehension.

--St. Ephrem of Syria (Hymns on Paradise)JTG

Song of Songs 4:12-15

As a man, I have a hard time referring to God (a masculine connotation) as my "beloved" (a female connotation). Using the symbol of a "garden" to describe God as rich, fruitful and living is a little easier to accept. According to the Song of Songs, however, God uses the same image of a garden to describe His Beloved (protected, watered, bearing exquisite fruit). Since God's Beloved is His Church of which I am a part, do I feel protected, cared for and, as a result, bear lavish fruit?

Am I being creatively fruitful as a result of my close contact with God's fruitfulness? Am I allowing myself to be a branch since God is the Vine?

5. The Savior's Darkness

(God is Love)

For a huge mass of troubles took possession of the tender and gentle body of our most holy Savior. He knew that His ordeal was imminent and just about to overtake Him; the treacherous betrayer, the bitter enemies, binding ropes, false accusations, slanders, blows, thorns, nails, the cross, and horrible tortures stretched out over many hours. Over and above these, He was tormented by the thought of His disciples' terror, the loss of the Jews, even the destruction of the very man who so disloyally betrayed Him, and finally the ineffable grief of His beloved mother. The gathered storm of all these evils rushed into His most gentle heart and flooded it like the ocean sweeping through broken dikes.

--St. Thomas More (The Sadness of Christ) JTG

Luke 22:39-46

At Gethsemane, and the remainder of the Passion, we see the most human side of Jesus' nature. It is hard to imagine the intensity of his feelings of grief, sadness and anxiety. His feelings were so intense

that He sweated blood. He could have had feelings of fear (the opposite of love) and abandonment (by God, His disciples, His friends). These are the two things that, according to modern thought, create most of this world's psychological "problems." The real issue, though, the one that separates the human side of Jesus from the Godly side, is not that He had these "feelings" but what He did: He did God's will in spite of them.

Am I willing to go beyond my feeling and do what is right instead?

6. Love Letters to God

(I Hunger for You)

At last I love you alone, you alone do I follow, you alone do I seek.

You alone am I ready to serve, for you alone, by right, are ruler.

Under your rule do I wish to be. Command me, I pray you, and order what you will, but first heal and open my ears that I may hear your

commands, heal and open my eyes that I may see your every movement.

Remove all unsoundness from me so that I may recognize you. Tell me where to look so that I may look upon you, and I shall hope to do all the things you command!

Too late have I loved you, O beauty so ancient and yet so new! Too late have I loved you. And behold, you were within me and I was away outside, and there I searched for you, deformed, plunging, absorbed in those beautiful things which you had made. You were with me, but I was not with you. Things held me far from you, things which would not have existed at all except for you. You called, you shouted, and burst in on my deafness. You shone and gleamed brightly at me and dispersed my blindness. You breathed forth fragrances, and I drew in my breath, and still I pain for you. I tasted much, and I hunger and thirst for more.

You touched me, and I burned for your peace.

--St. Augustine (Soliloquies and Confessions, Book 10)JTG

John 3:16, Song of Songs 8:6-7

What love poetry! St. Augustine almost makes me blush. He searches for his love everywhere, in all created things, not realizing that God was with him all along; calling him, shouting to him, bursting in on his deafness, dispersing his blindness, perfuming his spiritual breath with His fragrance. Augustine still hungers, thirsts and burns for the love of God. God responds because He so loved the world that He gave His only Son.

Do I know how much God loves me? In what ways do I love God? Is there any balance between the two?

7. The A-B-C's of Spiritual Growth

(Faith is Love in Action)

There are means in which a contemplative apprentice should be occupied...reading, thinking and praying. These three are so coupled together, that unto them that be beginners...thinking may not goodly be gotten, without reading or hearing coming before. Without reading or hearing of God's word, it is impossible to man's understanding that a soul that is blinded in custom of sin should see the foul spot in his conscious. If this spot be any special sin, then is this well (to clean the soul) Holy Church, and this water confession... If it be but a blind root and a stirring of sin, then is this well merciful God, and this water, prayer... And thus may you see that no thinking may goodly be gotten in beginners without reading or hearing coming before: nor praying without thinking.

-Anonymous, Cloud of Unknowing (14th century), CCEL

James 2:14-17, 24-26

As a body without breath is dead, so is faith without good deeds. One must study the spiritual life and pray in order to grow in faith. To study the spiritual life, one must have and think about living and

written examples of how to live the faith. Prayer requires practice.

Am I willing to face the discipline of growing in faith and of living the holy life?

8. Love Silence

(Light Will Dawn)

Love silence above everything else, for it brings you near to fruit which the tongue is too feeble to expound. First of all we force ourselves to be silent, but then from out of our silence something else is born that draws us into silence itself. May God grant you to perceive that which is born of silence! If you begin in this discipline I do not doubt how much light will dawn in you from it.

After a time a certain delight is born in the heart as a result of the practice of this labor, and it forcibly draws the body on to persevere in stillness. A multitude of tears is born in us by this discipline, at the wondrous vision of certain things which the heart perceives distinctly, sometimes with pain, and sometimes with wonder. For the heart becomes small and becomes like a tiny babe: as soon as it clings to prayer, tears burst forth.

--St. Isaac of Syria (The Heart of Compassion: Daily Readings with St. Isaac of Syria)JTG

Mark 1:35-39

Evidently, Jesus began every day in prayer and silence; especially on those days when big decisions needed to be made (picking the apostles for instance) or when strength was needed (performing miracles in places He was inspired to visit). According to St. Isaac, this silent time is a creative time when "light will dawn". This is evidently a reference to an intuition of God's plan and will. I find that while I have every reason to pursue this "silence," it is often difficult. I find it humbling that I, an engineer, one who was trained to think with

discipline, lacks the discipline to do the most important thing in life!

Am I willing to practice the discipline of silence every day, whether or not it is easy or convenient?

9. The Voice of Jesus: the Still, Small Voice

(God is Within)

I have often reminded you, my dear sister, about the remembrance of God, and now I tell you again: unless you work and sweat to impress on your heart and mind this awe-inspiring Name, you keep silence in vain, you sing in vain, you fast in vain, you watch in vain. In short, all a nun's work will be useless without this activity, without recollection of God. This is the beginning of silence for the Lord's sake, and it is also the end.. This most desirable Name is the soul of stillness and silence. By calling it to mind we gain joy and gladness, forgiveness of sins, and a wealth of virtues. Few have been able to find this most glorious Name, save only in stillness and silence. Man can attain it in no other way, even with great effort. Therefore, knowing the power of this advice, I entreat you for the love of Christ always to be still and silent, since these virtues enrich remembrance of God within us.

-Theophan the Recluse (Quoted in the Art of Prayer) JTG

1 Kings 19:9-16

It is hard to imagine how to be still, silent and still live an active life. When I think of Elijah the prophet listening to the "still, small voice" at the Mountain of God, I see a man of major action and power: walking (or running!) for forty days, anointing kings, fighting single handedly against the evil ambition of King Ahab to wipe out the worship of the Lord. I suspect that to reconcile these readings is what Brother Lawrence calls the Practice of the Presence of God: being in constant conversation with Him and living in His Peace while living an active

life doing God's Will.

How often do I "talk" with God during the day?

10. Trust and Zeal-A Martyr's Encouragements

(I Trust God)

All brothers must pray very much and well. Work with fervor and don't worry too much about us, because nothing can happen to us without the permission of God and the Immaculata.(1)

Let us promise to let ourselves be led more and more completely how and when the Mother of God wishes, so that, fulfilling our duty to the utmost, we may through love save all souls. (2)

--St. Maximilian Kolbee (1-postcard 3/13/41, 2-postcard 5/12/41)JTG

Matthew 6:25-34

Wow! What faith it must take to be able to trust Providence, fulfill one's duty and, through love, to save souls while in a German concentration camp! St. Kolbee did his duty and save souls; he gave his life, through starvation, to save the life of a fellow prisoner. When Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, says to "set your heart on the Kingdom first and on God's saving justice and all these other things will be given you as well" and "will not God look much more after you of little faith?", he evidently doesn't mean that one will necessarily live a long life or die a pleasant death. He means that God will take care of me in all the ways that are truly important for all eternity.

To what extent do I trust God?

11. Forgiveness and the Interior Life

(Forgive Me Lord)

Without an interior life, we will never have strength to persevere in sustaining all the difficulties inseparable from any apostolate, the coldness and lack of cooperation even on the part of virtuous men, the calumnies of our adversaries, and at times even the jealousy of friends

and comrades in arms...Only a patient virtue, unshakably based upon the good, and at the same time smooth and tactful, is able to move these difficulties to one side and diminish their power.

--St. Pious X (Encyclical *Manete in Me* (Remain in Me), 1905)JTG

Matthew 6:5-15

Motives have always been a problem for me, especially ulterior motives.

Why do I do "good deeds?" In addition to wanting to do God's will and to be a "healing vessel," I also want to be loved, appreciated and esteemed. When I have these other motivations, these "ego add-ons," they often come to light in some public way and I am mortified and embarrassed. The most important thing I need do is to be aware of these ulterior motivations. This requires an interior life of reflection.

Secondly, I need to accept these motivations as a part of my personality/character that I really want to change. Thirdly, I must cooperate with God's grace to change. A part of the change process is forgiveness: "if you forgive others their failings, your heavenly Father will forgive you yours."

What ulterior motivations of the Ego do I have when I do good works?

12. A Great Act of Forgiveness

(I Love My Enemies)

The dreaded words having been uttered, More was given one final opportunity to speak- a chance to plead for mercy customarily given to convicts after sentencing. But More did not ask for mercy, instead he offered forgiveness:

More have I not to say, my lords, but that like as the blessed Apostle St. Paul, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles, was present, and consented to the death of St. Stephen, and kept their clothes that stoned him to death, and yet be they now both twain holy Saints in heaven, and shall continue their friends forever, so I verily trust,

and shall therefore right heartily pray, that through your lordships have now here in earth been judges to my condemnation, we may yet hereafter in heaven merrily all meet together, to our everlasting salvation.

--St. Thomas More (Quoted in The King's Good Servant But God's First)JTG

Acts 7:55-60

I am struck by the similarity in attitude between St. Thomas More and St. Stephen. Neither were afraid of death and both were truly forgiving of their executioners"just as Jesus was. Both believed that truth was more important than this life and both had a powerful hope in the life to come.

Would I be willing to die for the truth? Is my faith in the words of Jesus stronger than this life? Would I be able to forgive my "executioners?"

13. Complete Charity

(Jesus Doesn't Judge)

All our religion is but a false religion, and all our virtues are mere illusions and we ourselves are only hypocrites in the sight of God, if we have not that universal charity for everyone-for the good and for the bad, for the poor and for the rich, and for all those who do us harm as much as for those who do us good.

--St. John Vianney, the Cure of Ars (Quoted in Voice of the Saints)JTG
Matthew 5:43-48

I must always be careful of projection. Whenever I find myself judging someone, unless they are standing on my feet and punching me in the face, they are doing nothing to me! Most often, I am trying to disown a piece of myself that I am not proud to take ownership of. Often when I do take ownership of the characteristic, I find my judgment about the

person disappears! Coincidence? I don't think so.

Do I know how to love? Can I do good to my enemies? Can I pray for those who persecute me? Can I "rain" blessings on the "bad" and the "wicked?" Who are "bad" and "wicked" anyway? When I judge someone as "bad" or "wicked," am I sure I am not projecting some of my own imperfections onto others? Am I "perfect" like my heavenly Father?

14. The Source of Humility

(Jesus Learned Humility)

Now humility of heart comes about in a person for two causes: either from precise knowledge of his sins, or from recollection of the greatness of God. I mean, how exceedingly the greatness of the Lord of all lowered itself, so that in such ways as these he might converse with and admonish men. He humbled himself so far as to assume a human body; he endured men and associated with them, and showed himself so despised in the world, he who possesses ineffable glory above with God the Father, and at whose sight the angels are struck with awe, and the glory of whose countenance shines throughout their orders.

--St. Isaac of Syria (The Heart of Compassion: Daily Readings With St. Isaac of Syria)JTG

Hebrews 4:14-16, 5:7-9

Jesus was humble through choice. His persecutors tried to humiliate him but were unable to do so. Jesus already learned humility: He considered Himself a brother and a servant of all; especially the poor, the rejected, and the despised. He was "every man"; one of us by His own choice! He never exalted Himself. By the power of His love for Himself and His Father, He never forgot who He was in spite of what was happening to Him. Because of this love for Himself and His Father, He never lost His dignity and His love for others was unbounded.

How do I build myself up by not being who and what I really am? Is

being humiliated the only way for me to stop this game of the Ego?

15. Great Love

(Ask...Knock...Seek...Find)

No good is possible except by an exceedingly great love. This we can see from the story of the woman in the Gospel, who was a sinner: God in his great mercy granted her the forgiveness of her sins and a firm union with Him, "for she loved much" (Lk. 7:47) . He loves those who love Him, He cleaves to those who cleave to Him, gives Himself to those who seek Him, and abundantly grants fullness of joy to those who desire to enjoy his love.

To kindle in his heart such a divine love, to unite with God in an inseparable union of love, it is necessary for a man to pray often, raising the mind to Him. For as a flame increases when it is constantly fed, so prayer, made often, with the mind dwelling ever more deeply in God, arouses divine love in the heart. And the heart, set on fire, will warm all the inner man, will enlighten and teach him, revealing to him all its unknown and hidden wisdom, and making him like a flaming seraph, always standing before God within his spirit, always looking at Him within his mind and drawing from this vision the sweetness of spiritual joy.

--St. Dmitri of Rostov (Quoted in The Art of Prayer)JTW

Matthew 7:7-13

Since 1991, the year I got sober, I've spent an hour each morning in prayer and spiritual reading. On most nights, I try to do the same. In the interim years, I've experienced divorce and depression at various times. During that time, I've become, amazingly, kinder and more loving. If I didn't keep "asking, knocking and seeking," I suspect I would have become bitter and less loving. The "flame" that St. Dimitri mentions felt like a fire burning away some of my ego and purifying me.

Am I willing to be purified through legitimate suffering if that is required for my spiritual growth?

16. The Foundation of Our Life

(The Lord Is My Shepherd)

Our good Lord protects us with the greatest of loving care when it seems to us that we are almost forsaken and abandoned because of our sins and because we see that we have deserved it. And because of the meekness that we obtain from this, we are raised very high in God's sight by his grace. And also God in his special grace visits whom he will with such great contrition, and also with compassion and true longing for him, that they are suddenly delivered from sin and from pain, and taken up into bliss and made equal with the saints. By contrition we are made clean, by compassion we are made ready, and by true longing for God we are made worthy...

Peace and love are always in us, living and working, but we are not always in peace and in love; but God wants us to take heed that he is the foundation of our whole life in love, and furthermore that he is our everlasting protector, and mightily defends us against all our enemies.

--Julian of Norwich (Showings) LF

Matthew 7:24-27

"Peace and love are always in us, living and working, but we are not always at peace and in love." These words of St. Julian of the 14th century sound almost revolutionary to me in the 21st century. I do not have to feel love in order to be loving! I do not need to feel peaceful in order to exude peace! Feelings are not facts, as recovery people are apt to say. It is only important that my foundations in faith are strong and secure.

Are my feelings more important than doing what is right?

17. God Wants Nothing But to Be Loved

(God Is Love)

Love is a great thing; as long as it returns to its beginning, goes back to its origin, turns again to its source, it will always draw afresh from it and flow freely. In love alone, of all the movements of the soul and the senses and affections, can the creature respond to its Creator, if not with an equal, at least with a like return of gift for gift. For example, if God is angry with me, can I return his anger? Not at all; I shall be afraid and tremble and beg for pardon. If he accuses me, I shall not return his accusation, but concede that he is right. If he judges me, I shall not judge him but adore him. And in saving me he does not seek to be saved by me in return, nor does he need to be set free by anyone in return when he frees all....Now you see how different it is with love. For when God loves, he wants nothing but to be loved; he loves for no other purpose than to be loved, knowing that those who love him are blessed by their very love.

--St. Bernard of Clairvaux (Selected Works)LF

Hosea 11:1-4,8-9

The mighty Yahweh of the Old Testament, thank God, has a tender side! While it doesn't often show in the Old Testament, I suspect that this was due more to an inability of the "vessels" transmitting knowledge of the Lord than that the Lord became more tender over time. Evidently tenderness, especially in men, was not very common in ancient times. It is not particularly common even today! As a man, one of the most difficult things for me to ask for was for love! (How unmanly!).

Am I willing to grow in tenderness and admit my needs to others?

18. Avoiding the Dark Path

(The Lord is My Soul's Guide)

How different are your ways, O Lord,

from what our feeble minds imagine!
When a soul is resolved henceforth to love you,
and to deliver itself into your hands,
you want from it nothing more than obedience
and that it should be well informed
as to what it means to really serve you
and to seek only that!
It has no need to seek paths
and choose between them,
since from now on its will is yours.
It is you, my Lord,
who undertake to be its guide
along the path that is to its best advantage.

--St. Teresa of Avila (Praying With St. Teresa) LF

Psalm 1:1-6

Both St. Teresa and the psalmist agree that "the soul has no need to seek paths and choose between them since from now on its will is the Lord's" or "delights in the love of the Lord and murmurs its law day and night." By relying on the Lord's will/Law, many of the forks in the road will disappear and, instead, the clear way will emerge. By practicing the avoidance of the negative, only the positive will remain.

Am I willing to be considered a "Pollyanna" by shaping my perceptions to perceive more of the good in others and events?

19. Healing And Faith

(Heal Me Lord-Within and Without)

Not as an unknowing examiner, but as a questioner who knew everything beforehand, Jesus drew his petitioner into the center of attention. She was silent, making suggestions only by her thoughts, in ready waiting

behind his back for the measures by which he exercised his powers. He made her stand before all so that she who had gained health for herself might also bring faith for all; that she who had his power might acknowledge his majesty; that she who had made him so fully known might not go away again unknown, herself, as she expected.

While she was blushing over her wound and with so much concern fearing him as God, the woman found her faith getting darkened. Clouds of confusion obscured the light in her mind. Therefore, the voice of her questioning Lord, like a salutary wind, drove the clouds away, dispensed the mists, and enlightened her faith. It made her who had recently been in darkness of the night brighter than the very sun. For, she shines throughout the whole world, is resplendent in the whole of the Church, and is glorious among its members. Is she, then, less than a sun? If she had returned unseen-give me leave to say it-she would have escaped her Physician, not tested him. She could have ascribed what she obtained to herself rather than to her Healer. She would have believed that she had drawn her cure from the hem of his garment, not from his penetrating understanding.

--St. Peter Chrysologus (M)

Acts 3:1-10

The purpose of healing, aside from reducing the suffering of a person, is ultimately to bring faith to others and glory to God through Christ. This is a lesson for me. My light (good works) is not to be "hid under a basket" but to be shown openly, "declared from the rooftops," not to win fame for myself but to bring Jesus to others for their growth in faith.

Am I willing to let God have all the credit for any good that I do and be content that I am being used as a channel of God's blessings?

20. Being With Jesus

(Thy Kingdom Come)

Leaving the vanity of many, and their false doctrines, let us return to the word that was delivered to us from the beginning "watching unto prayer," and persevering in fasting; with supplication beseeching the all-seeing God "not to lead us into temptation." As the Lord has said, "The spirit truly is willing but the flesh is weak."

Let us therefore, without ceasing, hold steadfastly to him who is our hope, and the earnest of our righteousness, even Jesus Christ, "who bore our sins in his own body of the tree; who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth," but suffered all for us, that we might live through him. Let us, therefore, imitate his patience, and, if we suffer for his name, let us, glorify him; for this example he has given us by himself, and so have we believed.

--St. Polycarp to the Ephesians (a pupil of St. John) (M)

1 John 2:29-3:2

Like father, like son. Like teacher, like pupil. In this reading from St. Polycarp, I hear an echo of his teacher St. John, the beloved apostle. In the reading of St. John, I hear an echo of Jesus, his teacher and brother.

In this trail of tradition and testimony, will those I meet hear the echo of Polycarpa, John, Jesus, in me? Am I spreading the message of the Gospel?

21. The Power of Prayer

(Lord, Hear My Prayer)

The reason why the priest utters a greeting in church is this: that he may show that he is at peace with the whole assembly of the faithful...And so the priest before he offers sacrifice and prayers to God shows by this mutual greeting that he is bound to the faithful by the bond of brotherly love; he does this so that he may make this

commandment of the Lord clear by his outward actions, as well as keeping it in his heart. Because of this, he sees as present with the eyes of the spirit all those for whom he prays, whether or not they are actually there in the flesh, he knows that all who are praying with him are present in spiritual communion. And so the eye of faith directs the words of his greeting and he realizes the spiritual presence of those whom he knows to be near at hand. Therefore let no brother who lives alone in a cell be afraid to utter the words which are common to the whole Church; for although he is separated in space from the congregation of the faithful yet he is bound together with them all by love in the unity of faith, although they are absent in the flesh, they are near at hand in the mystical unity of the Church.

--St. Peter Damian (M)

Genesis 18:20-33

When Abraham interceded for the Sodomites, he must have "seen as present with the eyes of the spirit all those for whom he prayed..."

Others must have also been "praying with him in spiritual communion."

This is a story of the "mystical unity" of the community of Israel and its power--the actual power of God!

How strong is my experience of the "communion of saints?"

22. Forgiveness

(My Sins Are Forgiven)

If anyone had reason for complaint, it was the invalid. As though cheated he might well have asked: "Have you come to heal something else then? To put right a different malady? How can I be sure that my sins are forgiven?" In fact, however, he said nothing of the sort, but surrendered himself to the healer's power.

The scribes, on the other hand, feeling left out and envious, plotted against the good of others. Jesus therefore rebuked them, but with

forbearance. He said, "If you do not believe the first proof, and regard it as an empty boast, then see, I offer you another by revealing your secret thoughts; and to this I will add a third." What is the third to be? The healing of the paralytic.

Jesus did not give a clear manifestation of his power when he first spoke to the paralytic. He did not say, "I forgive you your sins" but: Your sins are forgiven. When the scribes forced him, however, he showed his power more clearly, that you may know, he said, that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins.

Before doing this Jesus asked the scribes: Which is easier to say, "Your sins are forgiven", or to say, "Pick up your mat and go home?" This was the same as asking: "Which seems easier to you, to heal the body, or to forgive the soul its sins? Obviously, it is easier to heal the body. Indeed, as far as the soul is above the body, so far does the forgiveness of sins surpass physical healing. However, since the one is invisible, but the other visible, I grant you as well this lesser, visible miracle as proof of the one which is treated but invisible". Thus he showed by his deeds the truth of what John had said of him: that he takes away the sins of the world.

--St. John Chrysostom (M)

2 Kings 4:18-37

St. John's comment is interesting: "As far as the soul is above the body, so far does the forgiveness of sins surpass physical healing." Evidently, this is true. Elisha was able to raise to life the dead son of his hostess. Was he able to forgive his sins as well? I don't think so but since physical healing is often a sign of spiritual healing, I would like to believe that God forgave his sins as well. It is just not obvious in the clamor of a raising from the dead!

Do I want to believe that spiritual healing is more important than

physical healing?

23. Healing and Preaching

(Lord, Increase My Faith)

Oh my soul, when our corrupted nature overpowers, when we are sick of ourselves, weakened on all sides, discouraged with repeated relapses, wearied with sin and sorrow, we gently, sweetly, lay the whole account at his feet, reconciled and encouraged by his appointed representative, yet trembling and conscious of our imperfect dispositions, we draw near the sacred fountain-scarcely the expanded heart receives its longing desire than wrapped in his Love, covered with his Righteousness, we are no longer the same- adoration, thanksgiving, love, joy, peace, contentment- unutterable mercy.

Take this from me-though now the happiest of poor and banished sinners- then most, most wretched desolate-what would be my refuge-Jesus is everywhere, in the very air I breath. Yes, everywhere-but in his sacrament of the alter as present actually and really as my soul within my body in this sacrifice daily offered, as really as once offered on the cross- merciful Savior, can there be any comparison to his blessedness-could any other plan satisfy offended Justice- form an acceptable oblation to your eternal Father, or reconcile us to yourself?

Adored Lord, increase my faith-perfect it-crown it your own, your choicest, dearest gift, having drawn me from the pit, and borne me to your fold, keep me in your sweet pastures-and lead me to eternal life.

--St. Elizabeth Ann Seton (M)

John 6:1-14

"Adored Lord, increase my faith-perfect it-crown it your own, your choicest, dearest gift... Jesus is everywhere, in the very air I breathe...but in his sacrament of the altar (the Eucharist) as present

actually and really as my soul within my body..." When I read the story of the foreshadowing of the Eucharist, the feeding of the five thousand, the one in the crowd with the greatest amount of childlike faith and love is the young boy who gave his family's dinner at the request of the Preacher not knowing what He would do but trusting, none-the-less, that all would be well.

If the boy had not the faith to offer his sustenance, would the crowd have been fed with this miraculous bread? Increase my faith, Lord.

Perfect it and crown it your own.

24. The Gospel Sense of Duty

(May I Imitate the Virtue of the Saints)

The Lord puts such great power into operation through his saints. He wants to confound, by the weight of his own condemnation, those acts of diabolical wickedness which are perpetrated through wounding blows and invisible tears. He also wants to disapprove and check the attractions to sin which lie hidden in the authority of some torturers. What wise man, aware that he must face those attractions, would not immediately deplore whatever infidelity he finds in himself? Mindful of his condition, would he not through his unceasing sense of duty very properly honor the memory of the saints? Clearly, he can easily understand what place those men have with the Lord, or in what honor we should hold them, to whom, as he sees, a favorable judgment has been awarded because of consideration of their martyr's palms.

Therefore, dearly beloved, the examples of these saints should be followed, and their faith pursued, and their virtue imitated, it is not difficult for anyone to accomplish all this, if you think about the crown that is promised as a reward, you will find it easy to overcome every injury of the persecution.

--St. Valerian (M)

Revelations 19:1-10

"The example of the saints should be followed, their faith pursued and their virtue imitated" because "the bride of the Lamb has been able to dress herself in dazzling white linen made of the good deeds of the saints." Since the bride of the Lamb is the Church, the saints make the Church more and more beautiful to Jesus, her Husband.

In what ways am I helping to beautify the Body of Christ?

25. Crumbs of Grace

(May I Grow In Holiness)

Make me, in loving contrition and humble repentance always, like a little dog, gnaw on my sins and on the imperfect works caused by my defects so that, after this life, I may receive that most dulcet crumb, the most dulcet fruition of the mellifluous face of my Jesus. And then, through you, let me be satisfied in eternal gladness when the glory of my Jesus appears.

O stable love, strong and insurmountable, may your sagacity teach me to cherish Jesus with unconquerable steadfastness and to serve him with unconquered perseverance. And, aroused by you and agitated by you, may I always be prepared when my Lord comes in the first or second watch so that I may not be listless or sleepy when the cry is made at midnight, but, moving forward with you and under your guidance, may I worthy enter into the nuptials with the Lamb. Ah, and then with you taking care of me, let my lamp be found full of the oil of charity, full of cherishing conflagration, full of the splendid light of the works of living faith that, through you, I may possess the delights of eternal life.

--St. Gertrude the Great (M)

Matthew 18:21-22

This passage from St. Gertrude seems both very old (it is from the

Middle Ages) and odd (bordering on scrupulosity). The idea of "gnawing" on my sins and imperfect works bothers me and seems very pre-Vatican

II. Why do I need to harp on my imperfections and belittle my works?

While it is true that God will forgive me for my imperfections "seven times seventy times," I need to be careful of presumption; taking God's love and mercy for granted. If I don't keep this in mind, I could find myself saying, for example: "Why would God care that I save up so much money for retirement when I do so many other good works "for His glory?" Or: "Why does God care about my "ulterior motives" when I'm trying to be a "healing vessel?". I must not ignore my weaknesses and remember that it is only the grace of God that allows me to accomplish anything of value with my life and His gifts.

What flaws and weaknesses in my character and behavior do I try to make excuses for?

26. The Necessity of Prayer

(Lord, My Time Is Yours)

Prayer opens the understanding to the brightness of Divine Light, and the will to the warmth of Heavenly Love-nothing can so effectually purify the mind from its many ignorance, or the will from its perverse affections. It is as a healing water which causes the roots of our good desires to send forth fresh shoots , which washes away the soul's imperfections, and allays the thirst of passion.

But especially I commend earnest mental prayer to you, more particularly such as bears upon the Life and Passion of our Lord. If you contemplate Him frequently in meditation, your whole soul will be filled with Him, you will grow in His Likeness, and your actions will be molded on His.... Children learn to speak by hearing their mother talk, and stammering forth their childish sounds in imitation, and so if we cleave to the Savior in meditation, listening to His words,

watching His actions and intentions, we shall learn in time, through His Grace, to speak, act and will like Himself. Believe me....there is no way to God save through this door.

--St. Francis de Sales, An Introduction to the Devout Life (CCEL)

Acts 2:22-25

Regardless of what I say is important to me, my actions, what I spend my time doing, tells it all. If I have spent so much time listening to and trying to obey my mother even long after she died, should I not spend my time listening to and obeying her Teacher, who lives forever? What in my life deserves more time than developing my relationship with Jesus and learning to imitate Him?

27. "Small Deposits of Faith" for God

(Lord, May You Accept My Offering)

Give an hour every day in meditation before dinner, if you can, let it be early in the morning, when your mind will be less cumbered, and fresh after the nights rest. Begin all prayer, whether mental or vocal, by an act of the Presence of God. If you observe this rule strictly, you will soon see how useful it is. You should ...study them (the Creed, Lord's Prayer, etc.) diligently ...so as thoroughly to gather up the meaning of these holy words, which must be used fixing your thoughts steadily on their purport, not striving to say many words so much as seeking to say a few with your whole heart. If you have a gift for mental prayer, let that always take the chief place, so that if, having made that, you are hindered by business or any other cause from saying your vocal prayers, do not be disturbed, but rest satisfied with saying the Lord's Prayer, the Angelic Salutation, and the Creed after your meditation. If, while saying vocal prayers, your heart feels drawn to mental prayer, do not resist it, but calmly let your mind fall into that channel, without troubling because you have not finished your

appointed vocal prayers. The mental prayer you have substituted for them is more acceptable to God, and more profitable to your soul. If it should happen that your morning goes by without the usual meditation, either owing to a pressure of business, or from any other cause, ... try to repair the loss in the afternoon, but not immediately after a mea, or you will perhaps be drowsy, which is bad both for your meditation and your health.

--St. Francis de Sale, An Introduction to the Devout Life (CCEL)

2 Kings 20:1-11

I've heard it said that as a person deposits small amounts of money regularly into a savings account can make a large withdrawal when needed, so it is with prayer. One who daily deposits prayer and devotion into his spiritual account can summon a great response in time of trouble. This is the case with King Hezekiah. His daily devotion and prayer to the Lord won not only the protection of his country but the adding of fifteen years to his life as well.

Do I pray enough?

28. Blessedness

(Happiness Equals Good Deeds)

We say a goal is within our grasp when it is close enough for us to have sure hope of attaining it. What brings us close to the blessing of eternal happiness is exercise of the virtues and especially the gifts. So the blessings pronounced by Christ in the Gospels and called beatitudes are not dispositions distinct from the virtues and gifts, but actions exercising them. Certain actions are proposed in these blessings as deserving happiness and disposing us to possess it, either inchoately or perfectly, and what is presented as reward for those actions is either the perfect happiness of the life to come, or some inchoate beginning of it found in perfect men here and now. Thus the

kingdom of heaven can be taken to mean the start of the reign of the Spirit in wise men, the possession of the land to mean the heart's repose in desire of a sure and everlasting inheritance, and so on. All of which will be perfectly realized in our heavenly home. A life devoted to pleasure is a false happiness which hinders the true happiness of the life to come, but the happiness of a life active in doing good prepares for true happiness, and the happiness of a contemplative life is already true happiness beginning. The contemplative life does not so much deserve blessing as constitute it.

--St. Thomas Aquinas (M)

Matthew 5:11-12

"The happiness of a life active in doing good does not so much deserve blessing as constitute it." This is essentially the same as the modern aphorism that says that joy is not something that one pursues directly but is the result of "doing the right thing" on a regular basis. Doing the right thing is its own reward!

Do I feel blessed when I am meek, merciful, a peacemaker, a pursuer of justice?

29. Judging By God's Standards

(I Will See the Good In Others)

Only God is good by nature, but with God's help man can become good through careful attention to his way of life. He transforms himself into what he is not when his soul, by devoting its attention to true delight, unites itself to God, in so far as its energized power desires this. For it is written: "Be good and merciful as your father in heaven".

Evil does not exist by nature, nor is any man naturally evil, for God made nothing that was not good. When in the desire of his heart someone conceives and gives form to what in reality has no existence, then what

he desires begins to exist. We should therefore turn our attention away from the inclination to evil and concentrate it on the remembrance of God; for good, which exists by nature, is more powerful than our inclination to evil. The one has existence while the other has not, except when we give it existence through our actions.

All men are made in God's image; but to be in his likeness is granted only to those who through great love have brought their own freedom into subjection to God. For only when we do not belong to ourselves do we become like him who through love has reconciled us to himself. No one achieves this unless he persuades his soul not to be distracted by the false glitter of this life.

--St. Diadochos (M)

Matthew 7:1-15

I've learned from experience about the power of my perceptions and attitudes. I see what I choose to see. If I expect to see evil in someone, I will see it even if it is not really there. If I choose to see the good in someone, the good characteristics will come to my attention. I also have a strong tendency to project my own less than ideal characteristics into others. I tend to judge them even though the actual "problem" may be in me! This is what I believe Jesus means when He says that the standard that I use to judge others will be used to judge me. When I judge someone, I am really saying more about me than the other person. I am judging myself!

How accurate are my attitudes and perceptions? Am I sure?

30. Purifying Our Hearts

(Jesus, Make Me Aware)

Some of the saints have called attentiveness the guarding of the intellect; others have called it custody of the heart of watchfulness, or noetic stillness, and others something else. All these expressions

indicate one and the same thing.

Attentiveness is the sign of true repentance. It is the soul's restoration, hatred of the world, and return to God. It is rejection of sin and recovery of virtue. It is the unreserved assurance that our sins are forgiven. It is the beginning of contemplation or, rather, its presupposition, for through it God, despoiling its presence in us, reveals himself to the intellect. It is serenity of intellect or, rather, the repose bestowed on the soul through God's mercy. It is the subjection of our thoughts; the palace of the mindfulness of God, the stronghold that enables us patiently to accept all that befalls. It is the ground of faith, hope, and love. For if you do not have faith you cannot endure the outward afflictions that assail you, and if you do not bear them gladly you cannot say to the Lord, "Thou art my helper and my refuge." And if the Most High is not your refuge you will not lay up his love in your heart.

-Nikiphoros the Monk (M)

Psalm 90:1-17

To me, attentiveness is awareness in action. I am aware of my frailty and God's strength; my short span of life and God's eternity; my fear and self-centeredness and God's universal love. I actively ask God to let me see the truth about my life so that I can reduce my needless suffering, which results from my false self-image, and increase my joy in life by accepting my status: a beloved child of God!

In what ways do I create my own misery? How can I change my attitude to create more joy in my life?

31. How to Pray: Practice

(Lord, Teach Me To Pray)

It may be...that you do not know how to practice mental prayer, for unfortunately it is a thing much neglected nowadays. I will therefore

give you a short and easy method for using it...And first of all, the Preparation, which consists of two points: first, placing yourself in the Presence of God; and second, asking His Aid. And in order to place yourself in the Presence of God, I will suggest four chief considerations which you can use at first.

First, a lively earnest realization that His Presence is universal; that is to say, that He is everywhere, and in a all, and that there is no place, nothing in the world, devoid of His Most Holy Presence, so that, even as birds on the wing meet the air continually, we, let us go where we will, meet with that Presence always and everywhere.

The second way of placing yourself in this Sacred Presence is to call to mind that God is not only present in the place where your are, but that He is very specially present in your heart and mind, which he kindles and inspires with His Holy Presence, abiding there as Heart of your heart, Spirit of your heart.

The third way is to dwell upon the thought of our Lord, Who in His Ascended Humanity looks down upon all men, but most particularly on all Christians, because they are His children; above all, on those who pray, over whose doings He keeps watch.

The fourth way is simply to exercise your ordinary imagination, picturing the Savior to yourself in His Sacred Humanity as if he were beside you just as we are wont to think of our friends and fancy that we see or hear them at our side.

--St. Francis de Sale (An Introduction to the Holy Life) (CCEL)

Esther 4:17k-17z

The prayer of Queen Esther is similar to the prayers in the Books of Daniel, Tobit and Judith. These deutro-canonical prayers are beautiful and teach me how to pray in the quiet of my own room by placing myself

in the Presence of God. They teach me much about faith, penance, both personal and communal, and how they lead to action bringing salvation to Israel and glory to God.

How can I improve my own prayer life by studying these great Old Testament prayers?

32. Overlooking Faults in Others

(Lord, May I Examine My Own Behavior)

You detect little problems in others, but overlook big problems in yourself. You quickly feel and weigh what you suffer from others, but ignore what others suffer from you. Look at your own behavior carefully; that you keep you from finding so much in others to judge. If you are a Christian in your heart, put the nurture of spirit above everything else. When you look after your heart diligently, you find keeping silence about others easy. The test of genuine religion is this: Overlooking faults in others; Examining faults in yourself.

--Thomas a Kempis (The Imitation of Christ-paraphrased by Donald E. Demaray) (LF)

Matthew 18:23-25

Overlooking faults in myself while judging failings in others is a part of the "projection" problem that I am often chagrined by. I've learned to ask myself automatically, when I find myself judging or criticizing another: "What do I see in this person that I do not want to see in myself?" If I'm willing to accept the painful truth, I've learned, amazingly, that those around me act as "mirrors" to my attitudes and perceptions. If I don't ask myself "The Question," I may well find myself treated like the unforgiving servant in the parable.

What are the characteristics of my darker side?

33. Becoming Children of Mary

(Teach Me Brother Jesus)

He who was born of the Father before all ages was of more noble birth and had no need to be born in time from a mother. And he was not even born for the angels. They had him great among them and had no need of a little child. He was born for us, therefore, and given to us because we need him. Now that he has been born and given to us, let us accomplish the purpose of this birth and this donation. He came for our good, let us use him to our good, let us work out our salvation from the Savior. Look, a little child is put in our midst. O little child so desired by your children! You are indeed a little child, but a child in evil-doing, not a child in wisdom. Let us make every effort to become like this little child. Because he is meek and humble in heart, let us learn from him, lest he who is great, even God, should have been made a little man for nothing, lest he should have died to no purpose, and have been crucified in vain. Let us learn his humility, imitate his gentleness, embrace his love, share his sufferings, be washed in his blood. Let us offer him the propitiation for our sins because for this he was born and given for us.

-St. Bernard of Clairaux (M)

John 13:12-17

We are to become like our older brother and teacher by learning His humility, imitating His gentleness, embracing His love, sharing His suffering and washing each other's feet by becoming a servant. If I don't learn the lessons from my wise older brother, I will have to learn them by trial and error and pain. My elder brother wants me to learn them in the easiest way possible.

Am I humble enough to learn the lessons from the experience of the wise?

34. Total Abandonment to Christ

(I Cannot Be a Saint By Halves)

Sometimes Jesus is pleased to reveal his secrets to the littlest one, and the proof is after reading your first letter of October 15, 1895, I thought the same thing as your director: You cannot be a saint by halves, you will have to be one totally or not at all. I felt that you had to have a courageous soul, and it was for this that I was happy to become your sister.

Do not think you frighten me by speaking "about your beautiful, wasted years". I myself thank Jesus, who has looked at you with a look of love as, in the past, he looked at the young man in the Gospel. More blessed than he, you have answered faithfully the Master's call, you have left all to follow him, and this at the most beautiful age of your life, at eighteen. Ah! Brother, like me you can sing the mercies of the Lord, they sparkle in you in all their splendor. You love St. Augustine, St. Magdalene, these souls to whom "many sins were forgiven because they loved much". I love them too. I love their repentance, and especially their loving audacity! When I see Magdalene walking up before the many guests, washing with her tears the feet of her adored Master, who she is touching for the first time, I feel that her heart has understood the abysses of love and mercy of the Heart of Jesus, and, sinner though she is, this Heart of love was not only disposed to pardon her but to lavish on her the blessings of his divine intimacy, to lift her to the highest summits of contemplation.

--St. Therese of Liseux (M)

1 Kings 19:19-21

I cannot be a saint by halves. I will be one totally or not at all.

This is echoed in the call of Elisha by Elijah. I must immediately give all, renouncing my past to pursue the beckoning voice of God.

What is stopping me from following the Voice right now?

35. Invocation, the Second Point of Preparation

(My Hope Is In You Jesus)

Invocation is made as follows: your soul, having realized God's Presence, will prostrate itself with the utmost reverence, acknowledging its unworthiness to abide before His Sovereign Majesty; and yet knowing that He of His Goodness would have you come to Him, you must ask of Him grace to serve and worship Him in this your meditation. You may use some such brief and earnest words as those of David: "Cast me not away from Thy Presence, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me". ...Dwell too upon the thought of your guardian Angel, and of the Saints connected with the special mystery you are considering, as the Blessed Virgin, St. John, the Magdalene, the good thief, etc. , if you are meditating in the Passion, so that you may share in their devout feelings and intention,-and in the same way with other subjects. --St. Francis de Sale (An Introduction to the Devout Life) (CCEL)

Psalm 39:1-13

Lord, my life is a puff of wind. What am I to hope for? My hope is in You, Jesus. I acknowledge my unworthiness yet knowing that You would have me come to You! May You grant me the grace and strength to serve You in this brief span of life. Amen.

Knowing the brevity of my life, how should I use my remaining time?

36. The Vision of the Crucified

(Thank You Jesus For Your Love)

One day there appeared to her (St. Catherine of Genoa) inner vision Jesus Christ incarnate crucified, all bloody from head to foot. It seemed that the body rained blood. From within she heard a voice say, "Do you see this blood? It has been shed for your love, to atone for your sins." With that, she received a wound of love that drew her to Jesus with such trust that it washed away all that previous fright, and she took joy in the Lord.

She was also granted another vision, more striking yet, beyond telling or imagination. God showed her the love with which He had suffered out of love of her. That vision made her turn away from every other love and joy that did not come directly from God.

In that vision, Catherine saw the evil in the soul and the purity of God's love. The two never left her. Had she dwelt on that vision any longer than she did, she would have fainted, become undone.

--St. Catherine of Genoa (The Spiritual Dialogue) JTG

John 19:1-3,16-18,28-30,32-34

St. Catherine saw clearly the evil of the soul and the purity of God's love. The cruelty that man, made in God's image, is capable of vs. the radiant self-giving and forgiveness that God is telling man to imitate.

What does it mean to me to turn from every love and joy that does not come directly from God?

37. A Guide to Meditation

(Worship...Reverence...Adoration to the Lord)

Whenever you call upon God, three ideas should guide your act of worship: first, to humble your heart in reverence and adoration of God; second, to expand your heart with good will and thanksgiving and third, to lift up your heart in delight in that converse between lover and beloved.... If this be done well, such wonderful peace and joy result that they transport the soul from the realm of the senses, causing her to say: "It is good to be here".

To be moved to reverence, look upon the divine immensity-then consider yourself, see your own littleness. To be filled with good will, look upon the benevolence of God and your own unworthiness. To be raised unto the union of love, remember the charity of God and your own lukewarmness. Only by such comparisons will you go beyond the things of the senses.

Once you are moved to the reverence for God, it should be manifested in three ways: first, reverence to the Father-it is He who made you what you are, second, reverence to the Son-it is He who redeemed you from the dungeon of hell's prison, who has journeyed with you to the vineyard of the Father; and third, reverence to the Judge-for you have been accused before Him, you have been convicted before Him, you have confessed your guilt. The first type of reverence mentioned above should be intense, the second yet more so, and the third most intense of all. In the first, we subject ourselves, in the second, we are made humble, but the third is the first two and more-complete submission to the will of God might best explain it.

In order to expand our heart with good will and thanksgiving, in other words, with benevolence to God, three things are necessary: we must consider our unworthiness, we must consider the greatness of His grace, and we must consider the vastness of His mercy. Observe the things which God has given to us; think of the many times He has forgiven our sins; how very much He has promised us...

We must raise our hearts in quietude, we must attain a certain complacency of spirit; and this, too, is done in three steps: first, that our love be so conformed with that of our Creator that we are enraptured by the very fact that only God is pleasing to us; second, that our heart be joyful because we ourselves are pleasing only to God; and lastly, that we be happy to see others sharing and partaking in this same complacency.

Do we not see here a love which is gratuitous; a love which is due in justice; a love which is a combination of both? In the first, the world is crucified to man, in the second, man is crucified to the world, in the third, man is crucified for the world so that he wishes to hang upon the wood of the world, to die for all-But for one reason: that

they, too, may be pleasing to God.

This, my dear soul, is the ascent and the state of purest charity.

Unless you have attained it, never consider yourself perfect! You are closest to the attainment of this perfection when the heart is not only willing but even eager to die for salvation-the salvation of fellow men! But one does not reach this perfect love of neighbor unless he first has attained a perfect love of God: this follows from reason. For who can love the creature without loving the Creator more?

--St. Bonaventure (JTG)

Psalm 139:1-18

As I read the brief guide to meditation of St. Bonaventure, the first thing that comes to my mind is Psalm 139. It is a comparison of the greatness of God and the lowliness of man. Humility in reverence and adoration of God should guide my worship. I should look upon the divine immensity and my own littleness. Reverence should be manifested in complete submission to His will. Why? Because God knows me through and through, my being holds no secrets from Him. He created my inmost self and knit me together in my mother's womb. His eyes could see my embryo. This is especially striking to me today; the day of the birth of my first grand child!

What mighty works does God have planned for this child?...and me?

38. The Physician's Care

(Heal Me Lord)

The tyrant Quintianus ordered Agatha back to prison, and forbade the jailers to allow any physician to care for her or anyone to bring her food or water. But toward the middle of the night an aged man, preceded by a boy carrying a light, came to her. He brought various medications to Agatha . "Though this mad consul has inflicted torments on you, the way you have answered him has tormented him even more, and though he

has caused your breasts to be injured, his exuberance will turn to bitterness. I was there when all this was done to you, and I saw that your breast could be healed". Agatha: "I have never applied any material remedy to my body, and it would be shameful to lose now what I have preserved for so long." The aged man said to her: "I am a Christian, so you need not be ashamed." Agatha: "How could I be ashamed, since you are so old and a grandfather, and I am so cruelly mangled that no one could possibly desire me? But, I thank you, kind sir and father, for deigning to have such solicitude in my regard." "But why", the old man asked, "why do you not allow me to heal you?" "Because I have my Lord Jesus Christ," Agatha replied, "and he by a single word can cure everything and by his word restore all things. If he so wills, he can cure me instantly." The aged man smiled, "I am his apostle," he said, "and he sent me to you. Know that in his name you are healed." And Peter the Apostle vanished. Agatha knelt in thanksgiving, and found that all her hurts were healed and her breast restored to her bosom.

-Blessed Jacobus DeVoragine (M)

Acts 12:1-11

In the reading from Acts, an angelic visitor, ministering in the name of God, rescues St. Peter from prison. In the second reading, St. Peter, ministering in the name of God, heals St. Agatha while in prison.

Who is the angelic visitor being sent into my life to rescue me from my self-made prison? To whom am I to be an angelic visitor to rescue in the name of God?

39. Jesus Wonderful in His Miracles

(May the Lord Heal My Blindness)

"He is the one who alone does marvelous things." He transforms the

elements, multiplies the loaves of bread, walks upon the sea, and calms the waves, he curbs the demons and puts them to light, he cures the sick, cleanses the lepers, and raises the dead, he restores sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, speech to the mute, the power to walk to the crippled, sensation and movement to the paralytic and those withered limbs.

To him our sinning conscience calls out like the faithful leper. Lord, if you wish, you can make me clean. Now like the centurion: Lord, my servant boy is lying at home paralyzed and is suffering intensely. Now like the woman of Canaan: Have mercy on me, Son of David. Now like the woman with the issue of blood: If I touch the hem of his garment, I will be cured. How with Mary and Martha: See, Lord the one you love is ill.

--St. Bonaventure (M)

Matthew 11:2-6

Jesus brings both physical and spiritual sight to the blind. Fifteen years ago, I almost became totally blind for a period of three years. The suffering associated with losing my sight at age 34 opened me up to a spiritual healing through the recovery process several years later. When I was willing to accept my spiritual "blindness", God restored my physical sight as well.

In what ways am I still blind?

40. Trusting in God During Darkness

(I Will Not Fear)

If there is no one to understand these persons, they either turn back and abandon the road or lose courage, or at least they hinder their own progress because of their excessive diligence in treading the path of discursive meditation. They fatigue and overwork themselves, thinking that they are failing because of their negligence or sins. Meditation

if now useless for them, because God is conducting them along another road, which is contemplation and which is very different from the first. For the one road belongs to discursive meditation and the other is beyond the range of the imagination and discursive reflection. Those who are in this situation should feel comforted; they ought to persevere patiently and not be afflicted. Let them trust in God Who does not fail those who seek Him with a simple and righteous heart; nor does He fail to impart what is needful for the way until getting them to the clear and pure light of love. God will give them this light by means of that other night, the night of spirit, if they merit that He place them in it.

--St. John of the Cross (The Dark Night, Book 1, Chapter 10) (JTG)

Matthew 27:45-50

"My God...why have You forgotten me?" Jesus cried from the Cross. St John's insight here, I assume, is a reflection on this as well as on his own life. "Let them trust in God who does not fail those who seek Him with a simple and righteous heart, nor does He fail to impart what is needful for the way until getting them to the clear and pure light of love. God will give them this light by means of the night of the spirit, if they merit it."

How do I feel about this "night of the spirit" being a good thing for my spiritual growth?

41. Christ the Friend in the Darkness

(Be Not Afraid)

Alone I was, without a single friend to give me a word of encouragement. I could neither pray nor read, but there I remained, for hours and hours together, uneasy in mind and afflicted in spirit on account of the weight of my trouble, and of the fear that perhaps after all I was being tricked by the devil, and wondering what in the world I

could do for my relief. Not a gleam of hope seemed to shine upon me from either earth or heaven, except just this: that in the midst of all my fears and dangers I never forgot how Our Lord must be seeing the weight of all I endured.

O my Lord Jesus Christ! What a true friend You are, and how powerful! For when You wish to be with us, you can be, and You always do with it, if only we will receive You. May everything created, O Lord of all the world, praise You and bless You! If only I could tramp the whole world over, proclaiming everywhere with all the strength that is in me what a faithful friend You are to those who will be friends with You! My dear Lord, all else fails and passes away. You, the Lord of them all, never fail, never pass away. What You allow those who love You to suffer is all too little. O my Lord, how kindly, how nobly, how tenderly, how sweetly You succeed in handling and making sure of Your own! Oh, if only one could secure that one would love nothing but just You alone! You seem, my dear Lord, to put to the trial with rods and agonies one who loves You, only that, just when You have brought her to the last extreme of endurance, she may understand all the more the boundless limits of Your love.

--St. Teresa of Avila (Autobiography, Chapter 25) (JTG)

Psalm 22:1-31

The reading from St. Teresa reminds me of how important faith is and how changeable and how unreliable feelings are. If faith followed feelings, there would be no faith! While Jesus began reciting Psalm 22 (1-8) on the Cross, I'm sure He also knew verses 19-34: You who fear the Lord pray to Him for He has not turned away His face but has listened to the cry for help.

How do I bolster my faith when feelings fail?

42. A Saint Approaches Death

(I Choose To Believe)

When I want to rest my heart, wearied by the darkness which surrounds it, by the memory of the luminous country to which I aspire, my torment redouble; it seems to me that the darkness, borrowing the voice of sinners, says mockingly to me, "You are dreaming about the light, about a country fragrant with the sweetest perfumes, you are dreaming about the eternal possession of the Creator of all these things; you believe that one day you will walk out of this fog which surrounds you! Dream on, dream on; rejoice in death which will give you not what you hope for, but even deeper night, the night of nothingness."

I may perhaps appear to you to be exaggerating my trial. In fact, if you go by the sentiments I express in my little poems composed this year, I must appear to you as a soul filled with consolations and one for whom the veil of faith is almost torn aside. It is no longer a veil for me, it is a wall which reaches right up to the heavens and hides the starry firmament. When I sing of the happiness of heaven, of the eternal possession of God, I feel no joy in this, for I sing simply for what I want to believe.

--St. Therese of Lisieux (The Story of a Soul) (JTG)

1 Corinthians 15:1-8

It is encouraging to me that Christ appeared to 500 people at one time and that most were still alive when St. Paul wrote his letter. I suspect that he talked with many of them and learned from their experiences. In the same way, I suspect that St. Teresa gained hope from St. Paul in spite of the fact that she felt nearly no spiritual comfort before her death. She believed because she choose to.

How can I best increase my faith in spite of feelings?

43. All Manner of Things Shall Be Well

(The Lord Will Reconcile)

One time, our good Lord said: "All things shall be well." And another time, He said: "You shall see for yourself that all manners of things shall be well." The soul understood several things from these two sayings.

One was this: that it is his will that we should understand that not only does He take care of great and noble things but also of little and humble things, simple and small...And this is what He means when He says: "All manners of things shall be well." For he wants us to understand that the smallest thing shall not be forgotten.

Something else I understood was this: that we see such evil deeds done, and such great harm caused by them, that it seems to us that it is impossible that any good deed should come out of them. And we look on them, sorrowing and mourning over them, so that we cannot find rest in the joyful sight of God, as we ought to.

The trouble is this: that the range of our thinking is now so blinkered, so little and small, that we cannot see the high, wonderful wisdom and the power and goodness of the blessed Trinity. And this is what He means when He says: "You shall see for yourself that all manners of things shall be well." It is as if He said: "Have faith, and have trust, and at the last day you shall see it all transformed into great joy."

--Julian of Norwich (Revelation of Divine Love) (JTG)

Colossians 1:15-20

St. Paul indicates that God will reconcile all things through Jesus while St. Julian says "Have faith and have trust and at the last day you shall see it (all evil deeds) transformed into great joy." Thank God!

In what ways do I doubt that God cares for the smallest details of life? Do I doubt that God will reconcile all things to Himself so that

"all will be well"?

44. Exhortation to Various Graces

(Lord, May You Transform My Human Anger)

For I trust that you are well versed in the Sacred Scriptures, and that nothing is hid from you; but to me this privilege is not yet grasped.

It is declared then in these Scriptures, "Be angry, and do not sin" and "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath." Happy is he who remembers this, which I believe to be the case with you. But may the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ Himself, who is the Son of God, and our everlasting High Priest, build you up in faith and truth, and in all meekness, gentleness, patience, long-suffering, forbearance, and purity, and may He bestow on you a lot and portion among His saints, and on us with you, and on all that are under heaven, who shall believe in our Lord Jesus Christ, and in His Father, who "raised Him from the dead". Pray for all the saints. Pray also for kings, and potentates, and princes, and for those that persecute and hate you, and for the enemies of the cross, that your fruit may be manifest to all, and that you may be perfect in Him.

--St. Polycarp to the Philippines (a pupil of St. John) (EECL)

Colossians 3:3-17

According to both of these readings anger, in its unpurified forms, must be relinquished. St. Paul indicates that "human anger, hot temper and malice" must be given up. St. Polycarp notes two scriptural readings that imply the same thing: "be angry but do not sin" and "let not the sun go down on your wrath." What does this leave? Godly anger doesn't last long, doesn't lead to sin, and is not of human origin.

Perhaps Jesus felt and acted on such anger when he cleared the Temple and denounced the scribes and Pharisees.

Do I feel capable of Godly anger? Under what circumstances would such

anger be warranted?

45. Prayer After Communion

(Maranatha, Come Lord Jesus)

We offer thanks, Holy Father,

For your holy name which fills our hearts

And for the knowledge, faith, and eternal life,

You made known to us through your servant Jesus;

Yours is the glory forever.

Almighty Master, You created all things for Your own purpose;

You gave men food and drink to enjoy,

That they might give You thanks;

But to us You freely give spiritual food and drink,

And eternal life through Your Servant.

Foremost, we thank you because You are mighty;

Yours is the glory forever.

Lord, remember Your church,

To deliver it from everything evil

And perfect it according to Your love,

And gather it from the four winds,

Sanctified for Your Kingdom which You have prepared for it;

For the power and glory are Yours forever.

Let Your grace come,

And let this world pass away.

Hosanna to the God of David!

May all who are holy come;

Let those who are not, repent.

Maranatha, Amen.

-Didache (The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, first century) (Ivan Lewis, 1998)

Matthew 18:19-20

This non-canonical relic from the first century notes the importance of the Church and communal prayer. An echo of Jesus can be heard: Wherever two or three of you are gathered in My name, there am I with them.

How important is the Body of Christ to my religious experience?

46. The Wonderful Constancy of the Martyrs

(May I Serve Night and Day)

All the martyrdoms, then, were blessed and noble which took place according to the will of God. For it becomes us who profess greater piety than others, to ascribe the authority over all things to God. And truly, who can fail to admire their nobleness of mind, and their patience, with that love towards their Lord which they displayed? -who, when they were so torn with scourges, that the frame of their bodies, even to the very inward veins and arteries, was laid open, still patiently endured, while even those that stood by pitied and bewailed them. But they reached such a pitch of magnanimity, that not one of them let a sigh or a groan escape them, thus proving to us all that those holy martyrs of Christ, at the very time when they suffered such torments, were absent from the body, or rather, that the Lord then stood by them, and communed with them. And, looking to the grace of Christ, they despised all the torments of this world, redeeming themselves from eternal punishment by the suffering of a single hour. For this reason the fire of their savage executioners appeared cool to them. For they kept before their view escape from that fire which is eternal and never will be quenched, and looked forward with the eyes of their heart to those good things which are laid up for such as enduring, things "which ear hath not heard, nor eye seen, neither have entered into the heart of man,"- but were revealed by the Lord to them, inasmuch as they were no longer men, but had already become angels.

And, in like manners, those who were condemned to the wild beasts endured dreadful tortures, being stretched out upon beds full of spikes, and subjected to various other kinds of torments, in order that, if it were possible, the tyrant might, by their lingering tortures, lead them to a denial of Christ.

--The Encyclical Epistle of the Church at Smyrnum (second century)
(CCL)

Revelations 7:9-17

The passage from Revelations indicates that the saints are serving God night and day. The non-canonical epistle indicates that the saints are no longer men but angels; messengers of God. In either case, I find the idea of working for the salvation of others, even after my physical death, a very comforting one. In my current life, I pray that God will use me as a healing vessel for His glory and my joy. May this service continue in the next life as well.

How do I see myself being used in the life to come?

47. Meditation on Death

(Death, Where Is Thy Sting?)

A).Preparation

- 1.Place yourself in the Presence of God
2. Ask His Grace.
3. Suppose yourself to be on your deathbed, in the last extremity, without the smallest hope of recovery.

B)Considerations

1. Consider the uncertainty as to the day of your death. One day your soul will quit this body-will it be in summer or winter? In town or country? By day or by night? Will it be suddenly or with warning? Will it be owing to sickness or an accident? Will you have time to make your last confession or not? Will your confessor or spiritual father be at

hand or will he not? Alas, of all these things we know absolutely nothing: all that we do know is that die we shall, and for the most part sooner than we expect.

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

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

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

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

C) Affections and Resolutions

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

2. Despise the world. Forasmuch as I know not the hour in which I must quit the world, I will not grow fond of it. O dear friends, beloved ones of my heart, be content that I cleave to you only with a holy friendship which may last for ever, why should I cling to you with a tie which must needs be broken? I will prepare for the hour of death and take every precaution for its peaceful arrival, I will thoroughly examine into the state of my conscience, and put in order whatever is wanting.

D) Conclusion

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

Gather a bouquet of myrrh.

--St. Francis de Sales (Introduction to the Devout Life) (CCEL)

Wisdom 1:12-16, 2:21-24

The last hospice patient I ever saw at the hospital was waiting for me even though she didn't know me or know when I was going to see her.

When I entered her room, she said that she was waiting for me to pray with her and that I would be the last person she would ever see. I held her hand and prayed with her. After a short while she closed her eyes as I continued to pray. There was no movement or sound from her. I removed my hand from hers, touched her cheek and left.

Am I prepared to meet my Lord?

48. Christ Among the Poor

(Lord, May I Be Willing To Give Up All To Follow You)

The poor have no need of our pity. The poor need our help and assistance. What they give us is more than we give them. Christ said: "I was hungry, and you gave me to eat." He hungered not only for bread but for love that makes one understand that one is loved, is known, is somebody for someone. He was naked not only in reference to clothing but also in reference to human dignity, because of the injustice that is done to the poor, who are disdained simply because they are poor. Christ knew the abandonment of those in prison, those who are rejected, those who are not wanted, those who walk through the world devoid of all help.

--Mother Teresa of Calcutta (Quoted in Teresa of Calcutta: A Pencil in God's Hand)(JTG)

Luke 18:18-23

This gospel reading makes me nervous. While I am not rich, I have more than enough to live on. If Jesus came to me and said "Sell your retirement savings, give it to the poor and follow me," I would flinch and I am not totally sure that I could do it. It's not that I expect to live like a king when I retire. I expect I will volunteer a great deal of time to charity. It's just that I want some control over the situation. I do not want to be on the "needy" side of the ledger. I want to be a giver. But, as Mother Teresa says: What we get from the poor is more than we give them. I know that giving feeds my ego life in some ways.

How can I learn to be a gracious receiver as well as a giver?

49. Trust in the Darkness

(With God, All Things Are Possible)

The times of desolation and dryness is the best for gaining merit. A soul that seeks God easily bears this state and rises above all that passes before the imagination and in the interior part of the soul

where consolation is mostly to be found. It does not cease to love God, to humble itself, and to accept this state even forever. There is nothing so dangerous and so much to be suspected as sweetness. Sometimes we attach ourselves to it, and when it is past we find we have less instead of more fervor in doing good. It is a real consolation for me to think that in the midst of aridity and temptation my heart is free and that it is only by my heart (that is, my will) that I can merit or demerit, that I can neither please nor displease God by things which are beyond my control, such as sensible sweetness and importunate thoughts which come into my mind in spite of myself. Therefore during this time of suffering and desolation I say to God: My Lord, let the world and even the devil take for themselves what I cannot prevent them having, but they shall never have anything to do with my heart, my will that thou hast left in my possession-this belongs to thee: take it, it is thine, and do what thou wilt with it. A man to whom God has given a real desire to please him need never trouble about anything. "Peace to men of good will".

--St. Claude de la Colombiere, Retreat Notes, 1674 (JTG)

Luke 18:24-27

I am currently recovering from a 1½ year bout with depression. Why am I depressed? I have received many consolations in recent years regarding the use of my talents for the glory of God (as I see it). I went to college for a degree in Social Work to do God's work (as I see it) and burned out in the process. I feel I have nothing left to give. What I thought I had, I'm no longer sure that I have. St. Claude notes that there is nothing so dangerous and to be suspected as "sweetness" (spiritual consolations, feelings). If one attaches himself to them (the consolations), when they pass one may end up with less instead of more fervor to do good. This is evidently what happened to me. When

Jesus says "How difficult it is for the rich to enter the Kingdom of Heaven," He may not just be talking about money. He may also be talking about those that are rich in spiritual consolations. St. Claude indicates that it is only by the will that one can merit or demerit. I must continue to will to do God's will in spite of spiritual dryness and desolation.

In what ways does my ego get involved with and dependent upon spiritual consolations? In what ways can I still grow in holiness even when the joy is gone?

50. God Leads the Soul

(The Lord is My Shepherd...I Shall Not Want)

If God intends to lead the soul on, He does not put it in this dark night of spirit immediately after its going out from the aridities and trials of the first purgation and night of sense. Instead, after having emerged from the state of beginners, it usually spends many years exercising itself in the state of proficients. In this new state, as one liberated from a cramped prison cell, the soul goes about the things of God with much more freedom and satisfaction of spirit and with more abundant interior delight than it did in the beginning before entering the night of sense. Its imagination and faculties are no longer bound to discursive meditation and spiritual solicitude, as was their custom. The soul readily finds in its spirit, without the work of meditation, a very serene, loving contemplation and spiritual delight. Nonetheless, since the purgation of the soul is not complete (the purgation of the principal part, that of the spirit, is lacking, and without it the sensory purgation, however strong it may have been, is incomplete because of a communication existing between the two parts of the soul which form only one suppositum), certain needs, aridities, darkness, and conflicts are felt. These are sometimes far more intense

than those of the past and are like omens or messengers of the coming night of the spirit.

--St. John of the Cross (The Dark Night, Book 2, Chapter 1) (JTG)

Luke 4:1-13

I am mystified and filled with wonder and fear when I read St. John of the Cross. His lucid first hand descriptions of the spiritual journey through the dark nights of the senses and soul are far beyond anything I can comprehend as are the experiences of Jesus in the desert. My only literal wilderness experiences of this type are from long periods of hiking and camping in the barren areas of the national parks. I have had pieces of songs or pieces of conversations torture me for days at a time. I know that it is because my mind craves distractions which it so readily finds in civilization. Not finding it, it repeats things over and over. Many times I felt I was losing my sanity and had to sing the Lord's Prayer to break the pattern. I've learned from these experiences and I am sure that God leads me through these as he led St. John and Jesus. The important point is that God is leading the soul to growth. In what ways have I had miniature "dark nights" of various kinds?

51. The Third Point of Preparation: Representing the Mystery to be

Meditated to Your Imagination

(Lord, May I Only Experience According To Your Will)

Following upon these two ordinary points, there is a third, which is not necessary to all meditation, called by some the local representation, and by others the interior picture. It is simply kindling a vivid picture of the mystery to be meditated within your imagination, even as though you were actually beholding it. For instance, if you wish to meditate upon our Lord on His Cross, you will place yourself in imagination on Mt. Calvary, as though you saw and heard all that occurred there during the Passion; or you can imagine to yourself all that the Evangelists describe as taking place where you are.

When it is a question of such mysteries as God's Greatness, His Attributes, the end of our creation, or other invisible things, you cannot make this use of your imagination. At most you may employ certain comparisons and similitudes, but these are not always opportune, and I would have you follow a very simple method, and not weary your mind with striving after new inventions. Still, often this use of the imagination tends to concentrate the mind on the mystery we wish to meditate, and to prevent our thoughts from wandering hither and thither.....

-St. Francis de Sale (Introduction to the Devout Life) (CCEL)

Matthew 17:1-8

What would it have been like to be at the Transfiguration? (My God!!)

Was it "visionary" or was it "in this world?" (I think in this world since Jesus said one of His most frequently mentioned commands: Do not

be afraid.) Would I have been less stunned than Peter, James and John? (I'm sure I'd be more stunned; especially if I had to talk to Moses and Elijah. What would I say? How do you like the weather?) What would I have felt if I were there? (awe, humility, fear for my sanity!)

52. Being Perfected in Martyrdom

(May I Learn To Die To Myself)

Perfection of some kind is to be found in this life, and the martyrs achieved it. That's why, as the faithful know, Church custom has it that at the place where the names of the martyrs are recited at God's altar, we don't pray for them, while we do pray for the other departed brothers and sisters who are remembered there. It is insulting, I mean, to pray for martyrs, to whose prayers we ought rather to commend ourselves. They have tackled sin, after all, to the point of shedding their blood. To people on the other hand, who were still imperfect and yet partly justified, the apostle says in his letter to the Hebrews: "For you have not yet fought to the point of shedding blood, as you struggle against sin." So if they hadn't yet shed their blood, there can be no doubt that others had. Who had got to the point of shedding their blood? The holy martyrs, of course.

--St. Augustine, Sermon 159 (JTG)

I hate to say it, but I feel very uncomfortable about the "martyr experience" of the Church. In part, this is due to the way I was brought up in the 1950's believing that suffering was somehow a good thing. To this day, my siblings and I still get angry when we talk at our mother who, in spite of all her wonderful qualities, considered herself martyred. It has taken me many years to get over this thing about the "glory of suffering." Even when I think about St. Peter, I think about the fact that he seems to have almost insisted on being crucified upside down because he didn't deserve to die like his Lord.

He needed to add to his suffering to amend for his betrayal of Jesus. Now that I've said this, I can also say that I know that Jesus didn't just suffer for the sake of suffering but to prove the love of God for man. I also had to learn to embrace necessary suffering in order to grow out of various ego traits such as codependency and chemical addiction. It's not that I love pain. It's that I evidently needed the "refining fire" of suffering to grow out of deeply entrenched behavior. I am growing healthier as I learn the difference between "martyrdom" and "legitimate suffering."

In what ways is suffering necessary for my growth as a human being? In what way is suffering in my life a pathological problem?

53. On Conversion

(Lord, May You Search For and Find Me)

Conversion is love in action between God and the soul. The principle obstacle to conversion is sin. That is why the tenderness of God's love is so great that he gave us Jesus to wash away all of our sins. He does this in confession through the merits of his Precious Blood. For that reason we go to confession and we become sinners without sin. This is true conversion: the love of God in the vivifying action of tender and merciful love. The pure of heart can see God in every person. Then naturally such a person will want to share the joy of love with one's own family and neighbors, especially those who have done us harm or those whom we have harmed. This is truly the fruit of authentic conversion, because where there is love, there is God.

--Mother Teresa, Letter to the Eucharistic Congress at Seoul, S. Korea, 10/89 (JTG)

Luke 15:4-10

These sayings of Jesus have always taken me aback. If I had 100 sheep and lost one or had 100 coins and lost one, I would not think it

practical or reasonable to search for the one lost sheep at the expense of the other 99 (not worth the money) or spend a large amount of time searching for one coin (not worth the time). Jesus, however, said these things as if it were completely understood by his audience and very reasonable. Either people have changed radically or Jesus was trying to jolt his listeners out of complacency. Mother Teresa says that the pure of heart can see God in every person and that they naturally want to share the joy of love with those who have done us harm or those whom we have harmed. Mother Teresa's thought is like Jesus'. In no way would I find it comfortable to search out the person who has hurt me or who I have hurt and to reconcile with them. I would much rather hold a grudge or retain my guilt even if I were mostly hurting myself!

Am I grateful that God is willing to search for me even if I believe that I am not worth the effort? Who are the lost sheep in my life that I should pursue?

54. Every Virtuous Life Leads to God

(Lord, I Offer You All That I Am and Do)

When God the Creator made all things, he commanded the plants to bring forth fruit each according to its own kind, he has likewise commanded Christians, who are the living plants of his Church, to bring forth the fruits of devotion, each one in accord with his character, his station, and his calling.

I say that devotion must be practiced in different ways by the nobleman and by the working man, by the servant and by the prince, by the widow, by the unmarried girl, and by the married woman. But even this distinction is not sufficient; for the practice of devotion must be adapted to the strength, to the occupation, and to the duties of each one in particular.

Moreover, just as every sort of gem, cast in honey, becomes brighter

and more sparkling, each according to its color, so each person becomes more acceptable and fitting in his own vocation when he sets his vocation in the context of devotion. Through devotion, your family cares become more peaceful, mutual love between husband and wife becomes more sincere, the service we owe to the prince becomes more faithful, and our work, no matter what it is, becomes more pleasant and agreeable.

It is therefore an error and even a heresy to wish to exclude the exercise of devotion from military divisions, from the artisan's shops, from the courts of princes, from family households. I acknowledge ...that the type of devotion which is purely contemplative, monastic and religion can certainly not be exercised in these sorts of stations and occupations, but besides this threefold type of devotion, there are many others fit for perfecting those who live in a secular state.

Therefore, in whatever situations we happen to be, we can and we must aspire to the life of perfection.

--St. Francis de Sales, *The Introduction to the Devout Life* (JTG)

Luke 3:10-14

The more I read about St. Francis de Salle and his "Introduction to the Devout Life," the more I am impressed by his relevance and timeliness.

He is one of the very few 16th century saints that speak most clearly to me in the early 21st century on how to live a holy life in a secular society. His writing in this selection reminds me of St. John the Baptist and his advice to soldiers, tax collectors and other "nonreligious" types on how to welcome the Kingdom of God.

How can I add devotion and holiness to my life as an engineer, a husband, a grandfather, etc.?

55. Why Do We Fritter Away Our Lives?

(Lord, May I Bare Fruit For Your Kingdom)

Let us attend to ourselves, brothers, let us learn self-control while we have time. Why do we neglect ourselves? Let us be doing something good all the time so that we may find help in the time of trial. Why do we fritter away our lives? We are always hearing a great deal about the spiritual life and we don't care about it; we even despise it. We see our brothers snatched away from our midst and we don't abstain (from passion and excess) even when we know that in a little while we too shall be near death. Look!! Since the time we sat down at this conference, we have used up two or three hours of our time and got that much nearer to death. Yet we take care to exclude time from our thoughts and we have no fear. Why do we not remember that saying of the Senior that, "If a man lose gold and silver, he can always find more to replace it. Time once lost cannot be found again by living in idleness and negligence. No matter how hard we try to regain one hour of this time, we shall never find it." How many desire to hear the word of God and find no one to expound it, while we hear and despise it and are not stirred up by it. God knows, I am frightened by our imperviousness. We who can be saved, and do not even desire it. For we can cut off our unruly desires when they are newly born and we don't think about it, we allow them to grow up and harden against us, so that we make the last evil greater than the first. For, as I often tell you, it is one thing to uproot a blade of grass and another to uproot a great tree....If we neglect them as mere trifles they harden, and the more they harden, the more labor is needed to get rid of them. But if they grow to any degree of maturity inside us, we shall no longer be able to remove them from ourselves no matter how we labor unless we have the help of the saints interceding for us with God.

--St. Dorotheos of Gaza (4th cent. desert father, Discourses and Sayings) (JTG)

2 Thessalonians 3:6-15

I can cut off my unruly desires when they are newly born, but if I neglect them, they harden. The more they harden, the more labor will be required to uproot them. If I let them mature, no amount of labor will uproot them. St. Paul says that being busy tending my own garden (working on my own spiritual growth), and not being a busybody, is the best way to avoid disorderly behavior and will insure that my well-disciplined life will be an example to others.

In what ways is my life undisciplined and disorganized? How can I uproot this chaotic behavior?

56. The Bond of Charity

(Lord, May I Love As You Do)

Do not think of the poor as only those with no money. Look at each person's needs. Perhaps you are well off in something when someone else is in need of just that. Perhaps you give someone a helping hand -and that is far more important than money. You may give advice without toil or loss, but you have given an alms.

Friends, since we are teaching, it is as if you, the congregation, are the poor, because God has given us what we can bestow on you. But we all receive everything from Him who alone is rich. This is how the Church, the Body of Christ, maintains itself. We the members are held together and are made one in charity and in the bond of peace when each one gives what he has to the one who lacks it. It is what you have that makes you rich: it is what you lack that makes you poor. In this way we can all be truly affectionate to one another and to all around us who are in need.

--St. Augustine, Sermon on Psalm 125,(JTG)

James 2:1-13

St. James said it quite succinctly: Mercy triumphs over judgment.

According to St. Augustine, mercifully supplying someone's needs (it need not be money), is how the Church, the Body of Christ, maintains itself. By meeting the needs of those around me and allowing others to help me meet my own needs, I am reducing my tendencies toward being judgmental. This means that I, myself, will be judged less severely by God.

How am I reducing my tendency toward being judgmental of others by learning to receive graciously the gifts that others have to offer?

57. Prayer of Someone Fallen Into Sin

(Lord, May I Forgive As You Do)

O my Jesus! What a sight it is when You through Your mercy return to offer Your hand and raise up a soul that has fallen in sin after having reached this stage! How such a soul knows the multitude of Your grandeurs and mercies and its own misery! In this state it is in truth consumed and knows Your splendors. Here it doesn't dare raise its eyes, and here it raises them up so as to know what it owes You. Here it becomes a devotee of the Queen of heaven so that she might appease You; here it invokes the help of the saints that fell after having been called by You. Here it seems that everything You give it is undeserved because it sees that it doesn't merit the ground on which it treads.

Here, in approaching the sacraments, it has the living faith to see the power that God has placed in them/ it praises You because You have let such a medicine and ointment for our wounds and because this medicine not only covers these wounds but also takes them away completely. It is amazed by all of this. And who, Lord of my soul, wouldn't be amazed by so much mercy and a favor so large for a betrayal so ugly and abominable? I don't know why my heart doesn't break as I write this!

For I am a wretched person!

--St. Teresa of Avila (Life, Chapter 19) (JTG)

Matthew 16:24-26

Whenever I feel uncomfortable about a reading from the saints, I better examine myself and understand why I feel this discomfort. Although there is no indication of what the nature of St. Teresa's sin was, this is one of those readings where it sounds like she is being over scrupulous (like St. Augustine and his stealing of pears). I almost want to turn up my nose and scoff at such self flagellation!

Then I remember what Jesus said: If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and follow Me. Whoever will save his life will lose it but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. What gain is there if a man gains the whole world and loses his soul in the process. What can a man give in exchange for his life?

The deeper lesson is that as the grace of Christ encourages changes in my life, if I am to cooperate with that grace, I must examine my behavior. While I may not have stolen the life savings of some poor, elderly person, are my mind set and behavior free from the tendency towards robbery; or am I still stealing pears?

When some saints' writings seem ludicrous to me, am I sure that my feelings are not self-serving? Am I willing to examine my life to understand these feelings?

58. Spiritual Principle

(Jesus, Teach Me To Give Up What Is Not For My Growth In Your Kingdom)

Man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save his soul. And the other things on the face of the earth are created for man and that they may help him in prosecuting the end for which he was created. From this it follows that man is to use them as much as they help him on to his end, and ought to rid himself of them so far as they hinder him as to it.

For this it is necessary to make ourselves indifferent to all created

things in all that is allowed to the choice of our free will and is not prohibited to it, so that, on our part, we want not health rather than sickness, riches rather than poverty, honor rather than dishonor, long rather than short life, and so in all the rest; desiring and choosing only what is most conducive for us to the end for which we are created.

--St. Ignatius of Loyola, The Spiritual Exercises (CCEL)

Romans 8:1-13

These writings of St. Paul and St. Ignatius of Loyola hit me with the power of a left hook. It appears that everything that I want from a human (bodily) perspective (health, riches, honor, long life) are anathemas to the real reason for which I was created: to praise, reverence and serve God ,and by this means, to save my soul. St. Paul says: If I live according to the flesh, I will die, but if by the spirit I put to death the deeds (desires?) of the body, I will live.

How can I change my thinking about why I am here and learn to live accordingly?

59. Unity

(May We Be One)

Ignatius, who is also called Theophorus, to the Church which is at Ephesus, in Asia, deservedly most happy, being blessed in the greatness and fullness of God the Father, and predestined before the beginning of time, that it should be always for an enduring and unchangeable glory, being united and elected through the true passion by the will of the Father, and Jesus Christ, our Goal; Abundant happiness through Jesus Christ, and his undefiled grace.

I do not issue orders to you , as if I were some great person. For though I am bound for the name (of Christ), I am not yet perfect in Jesus Christ. For now I begin to be a disciple, and I speak to you as fellow-disciples with me. For it was needful of me to have been stirred

up by you in faith, exhortation, patience, and long-suffering. But inasmuch as love suffers me not to be silent in regard to you, I have therefore taken upon me first to exhort you that ye would all run together in accordance with the will of God. For even Jesus Christ, our inseparable life, is the (manifest) will of the Father, as also bishops, settled everywhere to the utmost bounds (of the earth), are so by the will of Jesus Christ.

Take heed, then, often to come together to give thanks to God, and show forth His praise. For when ye come frequently together in the same place, the powers of Satan are destroyed, and the destruction at which he aims is prevented by the unity of your faith. Nothing is more precious than peace, by which all war, both in heaven and earth, is brought to an end. My soul be for yours and theirs whom, for the honor of God, ye have sent to Smyrna; whence also I write to you, giving thanks unto the Lord, and loving Polycarp even as I do you. Remember me, as Jesus Christ also remembered you. Pray ye for the Church which is in Syria, whence I am led bound to Rome, being the last of the faithful who are there, even as I have been thought worthy to be chosen to show forth the honor of God. Farewell in God the Father, and in Jesus Christ, our common hope, and in the Holy Ghost. Fare ye well. Amen. Grace (be with you).

-Ignatius of Antioch, (pupil of St. John) Epistle to the Ephesians
(CCEL)

1 Timothy 3:14-16

Ignatius talks much about unity, unity in the Church hierarchy through its bishops and priests; and unity of the faith through the frequent coming together in the Eucharist. Behind these unities are the unity with Jesus Christ with God which is learned, in addition to the above, through the Scriptures. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God

and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction and for instruction in righteousness."

Do I build my faith on Scripture or do I try to "go beyond" scripture?

60. Lectio Divina

(Lord, Make Me Holy)

Our father, St. Dominic, had yet another manner of praying at once beautiful, devout, and pleasing, which he practiced after the canonical hours and the thanksgiving following meals. He was then zealous and filled with the spirit of devotion which he drew from the divine words which had been sung in the choir or refectory. Our father quickly withdrew to some solitary place, to his cell or elsewhere, and recollected himself in the presence of God. He would sit quietly, and after the sign of the cross, began to read from a book opened before him. His spirit would then be sweetly aroused as if he heard Our Lord speaking.....As if disputing with a companion he would at first appear somewhat impatient in his thought and words. At the next moment he would become a quiet listener, then again seem to discuss and contend. He seemed almost to laugh and weep at the same time, and then, attentively and submissively, would murmur to himself and strike his breast.

Should some curious person have desired to watch our holy father Dominic, he would have appeared to him like Moses....who there beheld the burning bush and heard the Lord speaking to him as he was bowed down in the divine presence. This holy custom of our father seems, as it were, to resemble the prophetic mountain of the Lord inasmuch as he quickly passed upwards from reading to prayer, from prayer to meditation, and from meditation to contemplation.

-- St. Dominic (The Nine Ways of Prayer of St. Dominic) (CCEL)

Philippines 4:4-9

As I picture St. Dominic passing from spiritual reading, to thoughtful reflection on the readings, to prayer to contemplation on the Lord, I think of the words of St. Paul: Be careful for nothing, but by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. Whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report; think on these things.

Are my times with God joyful and full of growth? What can I do to improve my contacts with God?

61. All for God

(May I Have Ears to Hear, Eyes to See)

Vouchsafe, O gracious and holy Father, to bestow upon me intellect to understand Thee, perception to perceive Thee, reason to discern Thee, diligence to seek Thee, wisdom to find Thee, a spirit to know Thee, a heart to meditate upon Thee, ears to hear Thee, eyes to behold Thee, a tongue to proclaim Thee, a conversation pleasing to Thee, patience to wait for Thee, and perseverance to look for Thee. Grant me a perfect end, Thy holy presence, a blessed resurrection, and Thy recompense, everlasting life.

--St. Benedict (P&M)

Matthew 6:22-23, 13:9

As a person who has partial eyesight and hearing, passages like this one can make me feel like I'm behind the "eight ball" when it comes to receiving and passing messages from God. But then I realize that sometimes having eyesight that is too sensitive or hearing that is too acute can make it difficult to sort out important information from background "noise." In addition, I recognize that many of the qualities described by St. Benedict are interior qualities: understanding, perception, discernment, diligence, wisdom, knowledge, a willing spirit, a gentle heart, an ability to meditate, ears to hear

spiritually, eyes to behold spiritually, a tongue to proclaim truth, soothing conversation, patience, and perseverance.

Are any "disabilities" that I have been spiritually incapacitating? Can some of these disabilities have a positive spiritual effect?

62. God's Will and Faith

(Thank you for faith)

O God, if only our wills be right toward Thine, do to us whatever it may please Thee. If it be Thy will that we should be in light, be Thou blessed; if it be Thy will that we should be in darkness, be Thou also blessed; if Thou vouchsafe to comfort us, be Thou blessed; if Thou afflict us, be Thou also blessed. We cheerfully receive whatsoever Thou dost appoint, and for all that befalls us, we give thanks.

--Thomas a Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* (P&M)

Denial 3:13-18

The readings indicate that while God's will may not seem like light/comfort, they may even seem like darkness/affliction (to the point of being thrown into a fiery furnace!), obeying Him will result in our highest good. The ultimate faith in God's goodness and love is a great gift to be thankful for.

When and how have I been tested? Can I be thankful, even when God's will is painful?

63. Pleasing God Through Service

(Make Me An Instrument of Your Peace)

Teach us, good Lord, to serve Thee as Thou deserved; to give and not to count the cost; to fight and not to heed the wounds; to toil and not to seek for rest; to labor and not to ask for any reward, save that of knowing that we do Thy will.

--St. Ignatius of Loyola (T&M)

O Lord, Grant me prudently to study, rightly to understand, and

perfectly to fulfill that which is pleasing to You, to the praise and glory of Your name. Amen

--St. Thomas Achaean, God At Every Turn, LF

1 Corinthians 12:4-11

Serving and pleasing God by serving others with our gifts is at the heart of the Christian message. But what are our gifts? I'm sure that while Paul talked about specific spiritual gifts (tongues, interpretation, discernment, etc.) , this was not all that he was referring to. Paul was a tent maker-not very prestigious or exciting-but it allowed him to pursue his real spiritual mission without burdening others since a laborer is worth his wage. In the last several years, I've recognized that God is allowing me to use my technical skills to earn resources to pursue my more relevant spiritual work, whether that is social work, volunteer work, writing or a combination of these.

Is God calling me to use my more technical gifts to pursue a more spiritual course of action?

64. Branches and Vessels

(You Are the Vine, I-the Branch)

Make me, O Lord, an instrument of thy peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is sadness, joy; where there is darkness, light.

O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; not so much to be understood as to understand; not so much to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; it is in dying that we are born again into eternal life.

--St. Francis of Assisi (T&M)

John 15:4-5

This is my favorite prayer. At this stage in my life, I recognize that being God's "vessel" or "branch" is the greatest of blessings. To experience God using me to heal others is worth more than money, power, or prestige. Every day I ask God not to let me build my life on false Gods (jobs, relationships, skills/talents, security) because these are all gifts from God to me. I do not want to build my life on my insatiable ego fears or desires either. I ask that I may only build my life on my relationship with God and His will for me.

Do I recognize that being God's "vessel" or "branch" is among the greatest of blessings?

65. Searching Without End

(Lord, Where Do You Live)

It is a great good to seek God; the soul knows no greater blessing. It is the first gift of the soul as well as the final stage in its progress. This gift is inferior to none, and yields place to none. What could be superior to it, when nothing has a higher place?

What virtue can be attributed to anyone who does not seek God? What boundary can be set for anyone who does seek Him? The psalmist says: "Seek his face always". This seeking is never fulfilled, for even when it has found God, it will not cease to seek.

Not with steps of the feet is God sought but with the desire of the heart. When the soul happily finds Him, its desire is not quenched but kindled...there will be a fullness of joy, but there will be no end to desire, and therefore no end to the search.

Think of this eagerness to see God as not caused by His absence, for God is always present, and think of the desire for God as without fear of failure, for grace is abundantly present.

--St. Barnard of Clairvaux, Love Without Measure, (LF)

John 1:35-39

My eagerness to seek God is not caused by His absence from my life but by His nearness to and love for my soul. John and Andrew recognized this in Jesus and followed Him, asking where He lived so that they could spend time with Him. The other disciples obviously did the same shortly thereafter. This thirsting for God, this desire of the heart, leads to all good things. I must recognize where this longing comes from and not be distracted by the things of the flesh and the world which will never satisfy this longing.

Do I go to "broken cisterns" to quench my spiritual thirst? Do I recognize where my thirst really comes from?

66. Accepting My Weakness

(Only Say the Word and I Will Be Healed)

If Christ submitted Himself to human misery so that He might not simply know of it, but experience it as well, how much more ought you not (try to deny) your human condition, but pay attention to what you are, because you are truly full of misery. This is the only way to respond, if you are to become merciful. If you have eyes for the shortcomings of your neighbor and not for your own, no feeling of mercy will arise in you but rather indignation.

You will be more ready to judge than to help, to crush in the spirit of anger than to instruct in the spirit of gentleness...You should treat an ailing brother or sister with the same spirit of gentleness with which you would like to be treated yourself in your weakness.

--St. Barnard of Clairvaux, Love Without Measure, (LF)

Matthew 9:9-13

This remarkable reading of St. Barnard sounds like modern psychology. Unless I deal with my own issues/shortcomings, I will externalize them into others and then act harshly toward these other even when they are

mostly mirrors of me. Jesus will then have to respond to me as he responded to the Pharisees when asked why he hung around with "sinners": I have not come to call the (self) righteous but sinners (those who recognize that they need healing.)

Do I understand that unless I treat others with the same gentleness that I would like to be treated, I am judging myself? Do I recognize my need for healing?

67. Names for God

(Yahweh, I Know You Are Near)

Thee, O brightness of the glory of the Eternal Father, who was revealed in the body of our manhood, and dist. enlighten our darkness by Thy light, we confess and bless and glorify at all times. Glory be to the eternal mercy, which sent Thee unto us O Christ, Light of the world.

O Wisdom that calmest out of the mouth of the Most High reaching from one end to another mightily and sweetly ordering all things, come and teach us the way of understanding. O dayspring, splendor of the Eternal Light and Sun of Righteousness, come and enlighten those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death.

--Liturgy of the Nestorians, Roman Breviary (P&M)

John 6:35, 10:11, 1:29, 11:25, 4:42, 10:36, 14:6

These two writings from ancient liturgies and the verses from St. John give many names for Jesus: Bread of Life, Good Shepherd, Son of God, Lamb of God, Resurrection and Life, Savior of the World, the Way, Truth and Life, Glory of the Eternal Father, Christ, Wisdom, Dayspring, Eternal Light, Son of Righteousness, etc.

In addition, there are many more obscure animal metaphoric names for Jesus. For example a plain chant from medieval Germany indicates the following;

The Unicorn is taken captive and brought to the court of kings in the

snare of the hunters A Snake is lifted upon a pole, He who was wounded is healed by the Serpent's presence.

By the Pelican's wounds, life returns to those laid low for their sin in wretched death.

The light of the Phoenix is burnt out and with it, all the wrongs of the whole world.

The water snake enters the Crocodile, tears out his entrails and kills him-He comes back alive.

The Lion slept three days and then the raging serpent restored him.

What metaphoric names do I use for Jesus?

68. Light = Truth

(God Is Light)

Lord Jesus Christ, who for the redemption of the world did ascend the wood of the Cross, that You might enlighten the whole world which lay in darkness; pour that light, we pray You, into our souls and bodies, whereby we may be enabled to attain to the light eternal; who, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, lives and reigns, One God, world without end.

We beseech You, O Lord, let our hearts be graciously enlightened by the holy radiance of Your Son's incarnation, that so we may escape the darkness of this world, and by His guidance, attain to the country of eternal brightness.

--Sarum Missal, Sarum based on Galasian (P&M)

1 John 1:5-10

As an engineer, I often need clear equations to understand reality. It helps to give me light!

Light = Truth,

Truth = Separation from God is sin,

Acceptance of Truth = Cleansing from Sin - Attaining eternal

brightness,

Darkness = Falsehood,

Falsehood = I have not sinned or separated myself from God,

Acceptance of Falsehood = God's word has no place in my heart.

Do I accept the truth about God's Son? Do I accept the truth about myself?

69. Renewing Our Minds

(Renew Me, O Holy Spirit)

O God, who in Thy eternal wisdom, did make man when as yet he was not, and in Thy mercy did restore him when he was lost; grant we beseech Thee, to those souls of ours, so made and so restored, that, by Thine inspiration, we may love Thee with all of our minds , and turn unto Thee with all of Thy hearts.

Grant to us, O Lord, not to mind earthly things, but rather to love heavenly things; and while all things around us pass away, we may ever fast hold on to those things which abide for evermore.

--Gallican Liturgy of Alcuin, Leonine Liturgy (P&M0

Romans 12:1-2

"Do not model your behavior on the contemporary world, but let the renewing of your mind transform you, so that you may discern for yourself what is the will of God..." How? This is done by cooperating with God's inspiration to love heavenly things including God Himself. By modeling my behavior on that of Jesus, I will not be overcome by this world.

What in my life needs transformation? In what ways am I free of the lure of this world?

70. Forgiveness of Sins Brings Love In Action

(Your Sins Are Forgiven)

Those who really love God love all good, seek all good, help forwards

all good, praise all good, and invariably join forces with good men and help and defend them. They love only truth and things worthy of love. Do you think it possible that anyone who really and truly loves God, can love vanities, riches, worldly pleasures or honors? Can he engage in strife or feel envy? No: for his only desire is to please the Beloved. Such persons die with longing for Him to love them and so they will give their lives to learn how to love Him better. Will they hide their love? No: if their love for God is genuine they cannot...There are degrees of love for God which shows itself in proportion to its strength. If there is little of it, it shows itself but little; if there is much, it shows itself a great deal. But it always shows itself, whether little or much, provided it is real love for God.

--St. Teresa of Avila, The Way of Perfection

Luke 7:36-48

To convert theoretical love for God (love on the "inside") into actual love for God (love on the "outside") requires forgiveness. This forgiveness is the result of my willingness to be forgiven by recognizing my need for forgiveness. Jesus says: "Her many sins have been forgiven hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little." St. Teresa says: "There are degrees of love for God...If there is little, it shows itself but little, if there is much it shows itself a great deal."

Do my actions suggest that I love God and that my sins have been forgiven? Do I believe God is withholding this forgiveness, therefore, I cannot act with greater love? What do I need to do on the "inside" to act with greater love on the "outside"?

71. The Love of a Father

(Father, Accept Me Home)

It must be realized...that these two things--surrendering our will to

God and forgiving others--apply to all. True, some practice them more and some less as has been said: those who are perfect will surrender their wills like the perfect souls they are and will forgive others with the perfection that has been described. For our own part, sisters, we will do what we can, and the Lord will accept it all. It is as if He were to make a kind of agreement on our behalf with His Eternal Father, and to say: Do this, Lord, and my brethren will do that." It is certain that He for His own part will not fail us. Oh, how well He pays us and how limitless are His rewards!

--St. Teresa of Avila, The Way of Perfection

Luke 15:11-32

These readings from St. Teresa and the parable of the Prodigal Son bring tears to my eyes this morning. God, my Father, is willing to accept my best even when it is not very good (although He will keep nudging me to the dreaded "P" word: Perfection) and He is always scanning the horizons waiting eagerly for my return home so that He can celebrate His love for me! All I need to do is accept His gift (His will) and act on it through the forgiveness of others. This is so much more beautiful than the fear and isolation I felt in growing up around my alcoholic father. It is also much more lenient than the angry, punishing Father God I was raised to believe in.

How has my image of God changed since my youth? Do I still equate images of God with my earthly father?

72. Advice for Husbands!

(I Value Your Love)

Whenever you give your wife advice, always begin by telling her how much you love her. Nothing will persuade her so well to admit the wisdom of your words as your assurance that you are speaking to her with sincere affection. Say to her: "Our time here is brief and

fleeting, but if we are pleasing to God, we can exchange this life for the kingdom to come. Then we will be perfectly one both with Christ and each other, and our pleasure will know no bounds. I value your love above all things, and nothing would be so bitter or painful to me as our being at odds with each other. Even if I lose everything, any affliction is tolerable if you will be true to me." Show her that you value her company, and prefer being at home to being out. Esteem her in the presence of your friends and children. Praise and show admiration for her good acts; and if she ever does anything foolish, advise her patiently.

Pray together at home and go to Church; when you come back home, let each ask the other the meaning of the readings and the prayers. If you are overtaken by poverty...remind one another that nothing in life is to be feared, except offending God. If your marriage is like this, your perfection will rival the holiest of monks.

--St. John Chrysostom, Sermon on Ephesians (JTG)

Joshua 24:15

These readings raise a tough issue: Which relationship is most important and should take precedence in my life-relationship with myself, my spouse, my children or God? In this self-centered "me" period of history, the answer seems clear, but does it work? The large number of broken homes and marriages indicates that it does not. Should my children rule my life? I wouldn't want a three-year-old driving my car or making my financial decisions. It appears that if my household serves the Lord, if my relationship with Jesus is primary, every other relationship falls into place in the long run.

Who or what rules my life? Does it work?

73. Practicing The Presence of God

(Lord, Be My Brother and Friend)

Dear Friend: I write because you want to hear from me so badly about how I arrived at the habitual sense of God's presence. This sense is God's gift... I sought for no more than how to be God's and God's alone. I renounced-because I loved Him so much- everything not of God. Now I began to live as if He and I were the only ones alive in the world....Sometimes I thought of Him as my Father. Always I worshiped Him as often as I could, keeping my mind in His holy presence. When I wandered, I brought Him back to my mind. This was a painful exercise, but I persisted, even through all difficulties. But never did I trouble or disquiet my mind when my thoughts wandered involuntarily. I made practicing His presence my business as much right through the day as at the appointed times of prayer. Though I have practiced His presence very imperfectly, I have greatly benefitted from what I have done. The benefits...all come from God-His mercy and goodness-because we can do nothing without Him.... But when we stand firm to keep ourselves in His holy presence and to make Him absolutely central in our lives, this not only hinders us from offending Him...it also gives rise to freedom...and ...a familiarity with God that makes possible asking and receiving the graces we need..

To summarize: Repeating these acts often translates them into habit, then the presence of God becomes...natural to us. Please join me in giving Him thanks for His great goodness to me; I can never wonder enough at the many favors He has done for so miserable a sinner as I! I want the whole world , material things included, to praise Him. Amen
-Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection, Practice of the Presence of God (JTG)

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Both St. Paul and Brother Lawrence talk of a personal relationship with God. Brother Lawrence indicates that this relationship gives him

freedom and familiarity with God (remember Jeremiah?) that makes it possible to ask for and receive the grace he needs. But, as Paul indicates, God can and will say "no" to specific requests that are not for our highest spiritual good.

Am I willing to accept my "thorns of the flesh" that teach me humility and dependence on God? How would I describe my relationship with God?

74. Testing the Spirits

(He Who Is In Me Is Greater Than He Who Is In The World)

The most important work in spiritual struggle is to enter the heart and there to wage war with Satan; to hate Satan and to fight him by opposing his thoughts. If a man outwardly keeps his body free from lusts and corruption, and yet inwardly commits adultery before God by fornication in his thoughts, then is there no profit whatever in keeping the body pure. There is adultery committed by the body and there is adultery of the soul, communing with Satan.

--St. Macarius the Great, Philokalia: On the Prayer of the Heart

1 John 4:1-4

I rarely think of my spiritual battle as one against Satan. I see it mostly as a battle against my own lusts (the flesh) and the attitudes of society (the world). I suspect that since Satan is a defeated enemy (he has lost the war but still tries to do some skirmishing), he relies more on the flesh and the world to do his work than his own presence. His presence may only be felt when his other two allies fail. Perhaps this is why the desert fathers of the early Church mention him so much: they had given up the world, they were constantly working on their fleshly issues. The "general of darkness" had to become involved. Do the "spirits" of society and the flesh that I listen to acknowledge Jesus? How comfortable am I when my "guiding principles" do not acknowledge God?

75. The Stairway To Heaven Is Also the Door to My Soul (Knock And the Door Will Open)

Try to enter your inner treasure-house and you will see the treasure-house of heaven. For both the one and the other are the same, and one and the same entrance reveals them both. The ladder leading to the Kingdom is concealed within you, that is, in your soul. Wash yourself from sin and you will see the rungs of the ladder by which you can ascend thither.

--St. Isaac of Syria, Philokalia: On the Prayer of the Heart

Much labor and effort are needed in prayer to attain to an untroubled state of thought; that other heaven of the heart where, according to the Apostle, Christ dwells: Know ye not your own selves; how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye fail the test? (2 Cor. 13:5)

--St. John of Karpothos, Philokalia: On the Prayer of the Heart

Genesis 28:10-19

Jesus said (in one translation): The Kingdom of God is within you. The door or ladder to the Kingdom of Heaven is planted in my own soul!

Jacob saw it in a dream and thought it was a characteristic of the "place" where he slept, not realizing he was looking through a window into his own soul. How do I learn to recognize this ladder or door? I must purify myself from sin and attain a calm mind through prayer and meditation.

Am I willing to continue the process of purification and prayer so as to cooperate fully with God's grace to enter His Kingdom?

76. The Cleansing of Mental Clutter

(Jesus....Mercy)

If...you do not succeed in entering into the realm of the heart...do what I shall now tell you and, with God's help, you will find what you seek. You know that in every man inner talking is in the breast. For,

when our lips are silent, it is in the breast that we talk and discourse with ourselves, pray and sing psalms, and do other things. Thus, having banished every thought from this inner talking..., give it the following short prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me!"--and force it, instead of all other thought, to have only this one constant cry within. If you continue to do this constantly, with your whole attention, then in time this will open for you the way to the heart which I have described. There can be no doubt about this, for we have proved it ourselves by experience. If you do this with strong desire and attention, ...a whole host of virtues will come to you...

--Nicephorus the Solitary, Philokalia; On Prayer of the Heart

Psalm 136

"Lord Jesus, have mercy on me....for Your love endures forever." What the mind dwells on it becomes. If it dwells on undisciplined and random thoughts, it will become chaotic. If it concentrates on beauty and simplicity, it becomes calm and clear. The Jesus Prayer and responsorial psalms can both be used to calm the mind and open it to devotion.

Am I committed to practicing centering prayer that will lead to the prayer of silence? What are my favorite centering prayers?

77. Purity and Passionlessness

(Jesus...Jesus)

True reason, such as man had in the beginning, cannot be had or acquired by any man, who has not first been purified and become passionless. Of purity we are deprived by unreasoning tendencies of the senses, and of passionlessness--by the corrupted state of the flesh.

True reason belongs only to those who have become saints through acquiring purity. None who are wise in words have ever had pure reason,

because, from birth, they let their reasoning powers be corrupted by unseemly thoughts. The sensory and prolix spirit of the wisdom of this age, so rich in words, which create the illusion of great knowledge but actually fills one with the wildest thoughts, has its stronghold in this prolixity, which deprives man of essential wisdom, true contemplation, and the knowledge of the one and indivisible.

--St. Gregory of Sinai, Philokalia; On Prayer of the Heart

Psalm 19:1-6, 1 Peter 1:13-15

The readings indicate the importance of the prayer of silence. "The spirit of this age, rich in words, deprives me of true contemplation and knowledge which goes forth throughout the world with no word or sound...." This "silence" is the hardest thing for me to achieve. I must continue to make the time to practice silence.

How do I avoid discouragement with my imperfect attempts at silent prayer and meditation?

78. Awakening to True Life

(Love...Joy...Peace)

Holy Spirit,

give life to all life,

moving all creatures,

root of all things,

washing them clean,

wiping out their mistakes,

healing their wounds,

you are our true life,

luminous, wonderful,

awakening the heart

from its ancient sleep.

--St. Hildegard of Bingen (EH)

Galatians 5:22-25

May the Holy Spirit awaken me from my slumber to be what I was created to be: a Son of God. Teach me, Holy Spirit, to both live in You and follow You by cultivating Your fruits of love, joy and peace. Amen.

How will I know if I am "awake"? How can I cooperate with the Holy Spirit to awaken?

79. Canticle of the Sun

(Lord, How Majestic Your Name)

Most high, all powerful, sweet Lord,
yours is the praise, the glory, and the honor
and every blessing.

Be praised, my Lord,
for all your creatures,
and first for brother sun,
who makes the day bright and luminous.

And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor,
he is the image of you, Most High.

Be praised, my Lord,
for sister moon and the stars,
in the sky you have made them brilliant and precious and beautiful.

Be praised, my Lord, for brother wind,
and for the air both cloudy and serene and every kind of weather,
through which you give nourishment to your creatures.

Be praised, my Lord, for sister water,
who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.

Be praised, my Lord, for brother fire,
through whom you illuminate the night.

And he is beautiful, and joyous, and robust, and strong.

Be praised, my Lord, for our sister, mother earth,

who nourishes us and watches over us,
and brings forth various fruits with colored flowers and herbs.
Be praised, my Lord, for those who forgive through Your love,
and bare sickness and tribulation;
blessed are those who endure in peace,
for they will be crowned by you, Most High.
Be praised, my Lord, for our sister, bodily death,
from whom no living thing can escape.
Blessed are those whom she finds doing your holy will,
for the second death cannot harm them.
Praise and bless my Lord,
and give thanks to Him and serve Him with great humility.

--St. Francis of Assisi (EH)

Psalm 8

The beauty and diversity of the natural world always fill me with joy
and awe, especially when I'm in the back country of our national parks.
God has made us the conscious witnesses to His artistry. He has created
us as little less than "gods", angels in training, perhaps. What a
shame and loss if I do not take the time to be conscious of this
beauty. By not doing so I may trivialize creation and myself. This can
lead to destruction of the natural world, including ourselves, and
reduce our respect for the importance of humankind's place in creation.
Do I make enough time to leave man's creation and return to God's
creation?

80. Awakening In Christ

(The Body of Christ, Amen)

We awaken in Christ's body as Christ awakens our bodies,
and my poor hand is Christ, He enters my foot and is infinitely me.
I move my hand, and wonderfully my hand becomes Christ

becomes all of Him (for God is indivisibly whole, seamless in His Godhood).

I move my foot, and at once He appears like a flash of lightening.

Do my words seem blasphemous?-- Then open your heart to Him and let yourself receive the one who is opening to you so deeply.

For if we genuinely love Him, we wake up inside Christ's body, where all our body, all over, every most hidden part of it, is realized as joy in Him, and He makes us, utterly, real and everything that is hurt, everything that seemed to us dark, harsh, shameful, maimed, ugly, irreparably damaged, is in Him transformed and recognized as whole, as lovely, and radiant in His light we awaken as the Beloved in every last part of our body.

--St. Symeon the New Theologian (EH)

1 Corinthians 12:18-27

What part of Christ's Body am I? As I ponder this, no specific part comes to mind. While I cannot imagine myself as an "eye" given my poor eyesight, I can imagine being a part of Christ's spiritual eye--consciously watching the world. The same can be said for the other body parts. I suspect that ultimately I am meant to be a mirror image of Christ in all aspects.

How am I becoming a mirror image of Jesus?

81. The Saints Are United With Us

(Hail Mary....The Lord Is With You)

Inasmuch as God continually sends us inspirations by means of His Angels, we may fitly send back our aspirations through the same channel. The souls of the holy dead, resting in Paradise, who are, as our Lord Himself has told us, "as the Angels in Heaven," are also united to us in their prayers. My child, let us gladly join our hearts with these heavenly blessed ones; for even as the newly-fledged

nightingale learns to sing from the elder birds, so by our sacred communing with the Saints we shall learn better to pray and sing the praises of the Lord.

Honor, revere and respect the Blessed Virgin Mary with a very special love, she is the Mother of our Sovereign Lord, and so we are her children. Let us think of her with all the love and confidence of affectionate children, let us desire her love and strive with true filial hearts to imitate her graces.

Seek to be familiar with the Angels; learn to realize that they are continually present, although invisible. Specially love and revere the Guardian Angel of the Diocese in which you live, those of the friends who surround you, and your own. Commune with them frequently, join in their songs of praise, and seek their protection and help in all you do, spiritual or temporal.

--St. Francis de Sales, An Introduction to the Devout Life (CCEL)
Ephesians 2:19:22

We are fellow citizens with the saints and members of God's household. Before my mother died, she said that she would pray for us if she could when she entered Heaven and that we should all place rosaries in her casket. To this day, seventeen years after her death, I can still feel her presence at times, knowing that she is praying for me as much as she did when she was in the world. While I do not know if the angels and saints need our prayers, I do know that as members of a loving and extended family, they love us and long for our good.

What does the "communion of saints" mean to me?

82. How to Hear and Read God's Word

(The Law of the Lord Is Perfect)

Cultivate a special devotion to God's Word, whether studied privately or in public; always listen to it with attention and reverence , strive

to profit by it, and do not let it fall to the ground, but receive it within your heart as a precious balm, thereby imitating the Blessed Virgin, who "kept all these sayings in her heart." Remember that our Lord receives our words of prayer according to the way in which we receive His words in teaching.

You should always have some good, devout book at hand, such as the writings of Saints Bonaventura, Gerson, Denis the Carthusian, Blosius, Grenada, Stella, Arias, Pinella, Da Ponte, Avilla, the Spiritual Bombat, the Confessions of St. Augustine, St. Jerome's Epistles, or the like, and daily read some small portion attentively, as though you were reading letters sent by the Saints from Paradise to teach you the way thither, and encourage you to follow them. Read the Lives of the Saints too, which are as a mirror to you of Christian life, and try to imitate their actions according to your circumstances; for although many things which the Saints did may not be practicable for those who live in the world, they may be followed, more or less. Thus, in our spiritual retreats we imitate the solitude of the first hermit Saint Paul, in the practice of poverty of St. Francis, and so on. Of course some Lives throw much more light upon our daily course than others, such as the Life of St. Theresa, the first Jesuits, St. Charles Borromeo, St. Louis, St. Bernard, St. Francis, and such like. Others are more the subjects of our admiring wonder than of imitation such as St. Mary of Egypt, St. Simeon Stylites, St. Catherine of Genoa, and St. Catherine of Sienna, St. Angela, etc., although these should tend to kindle a great love of God in our hearts.

--St. Francis de Sales, An introduction to the Devout Life, (CCEL)

Psalm 19:7-14

"The precepts of the Lord are right. By them your servant is formed."

While I've read scripture for the last thirty years, I have only

recently begun to read the writings of the Saints and the early Church fathers. (A wonderful source of such writings can be found at www.ccel.org) Along with Scripture, other meditative sources and more recent writings, I am encouraged to live a holy life. Overall, I spend at least one hour each day in spiritual reading.

Do I spend enough time with spiritual reading? How can I create more time for this?

83. Converting Evil Into Good

(Jesus, Be My Light)

Jesus said, "If you bring forth what is inside you, what you bring forth will save you. If you don't bring forth what is inside you, what you don't bring forth will destroy you."

Jesus said: "Blessed are those who have chosen their solitude, for they will find the Kingdom of Heaven."

--The Gospel of Thomas (EM)

Matthew 6:22-23

These short readings are from one of the uncanonical Gnostic gospels from the first century. They warn me to take the time for silent self-examination to ensure that the light in me (my reason, my spirit), is not actually in darkness (fear based). Until the last twelve years, I was often afraid to examine myself. I thought I would find the devil. Instead, I found a wounded and lonely child that would act out to get love and attention. I needed to help this part of me "grow up" or it would ultimately destroy me.

How do I take ownership of the darkness within me?

84. Speaking By Example

(I Am To Be A Light of the World)

While he was staying in Siena, he was visited by a Doctor of Theology from the Order of Preachers, a man who was both humble and sincerely

spiritual. When he had discussed the words of our Lord with blessed Francis for some while, this Doctor asked him about the passage in Ezekiel: "When I threaten the sinner with doom of death, it is for thee to give him word and warn him."

And he said, "Good Father, I know many people who are in mortal sin, and do not warn them of their wickedness. Will their souls be required at my hand?" Blessed Francis humbly answered that he was no scholar, so that it would be more profitable for him to receive instruction from his questioner than to offer his own opinion on Scripture. The humble Doctor then added, " Brother, although I have heard this passage expounded by various learned men, I would be glad to know how you interpret it." So blessed Francis said, "If the passage is to be understood in general terms, I take it to mean that a servant of God should burn and shine in such a way by his own life and holiness that he rebukes all wicked people by the light of his example and the devoutness of his conversation; in this way the brightness of his life and the fragrance of his reputation will make all men aware of their own wickedness."

Greatly edified, the Doctor went away, and said to the companions of blessed Francis, "My brothers, this man's theology is grounded on purity and contemplation, and resembles a flying eagle, but our knowledge crawls about the ground on its belly."

--St. Francis, Mirror of Perfection (JTG)

Matthew 5:14-16

"(I) am the light of the world and my light must shine before others so that they may see my good deeds and give glory to God." This reading teaches me that while I grow in holiness for my own joy and salvation, the living of the holy life is also the greatest of teachers to others and silently shouts volumes to others, much more than an ability to

quote Scripture, chapter and verse.

How does my life proclaim the Gospel?

85. The Holy Discipleship of Marriage

(I Am Part of Christ's Bride)

Both celibacy and marriage have their own different forms of service and ministry to the Lord; I have in mind the caring for one's wife and children. For it seems that the particular characteristic of the married state is that it gives the man who desires a perfect marriage an opportunity to take responsibility for everything in the home which he shares with his wife. The apostle says that one should appoint bishops who by their oversight over their own house have learned to be in charge of the whole church. Let each man therefore fulfill his ministry by the work in which he was called, that he may be free in Christ and receive the proper reward of his ministry.

In general all the epistles of the apostle Paul teach self-control and continence and contain numerous instructions about marriage, begetting children, and domestic life. But they nowhere rule out self-controlled marriage. Rather they preserve the harmony of the law and the gospel and approve both the man who with thanks to God enters upon marriage with sobriety and the man who in accordance with the Lord's will lives as a celibate, even as each individual is called, making his choice without blemish and in perfection...

Paul says that the unmarried cares for the things of the Lord, but he who is married how he can please his wife. What then? Is it not lawful also for those who wish to please their wives according to the will of God to give thanks to God? Is it not allowable for both the married man and his wife to care for things of the Lord together? But just as the unmarried woman cares for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit, so also the married woman cares in the Lord

for the things of her husband and the things of the Lord, the one as a wife, the other as a virgin.

--St. Clement of Alexandria, Miscellanies (JTG)

Ephesians 5:29-32

As a married man with no children, I pray daily that the Lord will heal my wife and me of all our weakness and problems so that we may more fully use the gifts we have been given for God's glory and our joy. I pray that we may be used as healing vessels to a greater extent as a couple than we could if we were single. In a way, Christ is meant to be the third partner in our marriage, which makes us a little church.

In what ways can I make the Lord an increasingly important part of my marriage?

86. Ready To Leave

(Love Never Dies)

I am now ready to leave. I have my passport for Heaven, and it is my dear father who has obtained this grace for me. On the 29th he gave me the assurance that I would soon go to join him.....

I have to tell you, little brother, that we don't understand Heaven in the same way. You think that, once I share in the justice and holiness of God, I won't be able to excuse your faults as I did when I was on earth. Are you forgetting that I shall also share in the infinite mercy of the Lord? I believe that the Blessed in Heaven have great compassion for our miseries. They remember that when they were weak and mortal like us, they committed the same faults themselves and went through the same struggles, and their fraternal tenderness becomes still greater then it ever was on earth. It's on account of this that they never stop watching over us and praying for us....

A Dieu, dear little brother, may God give us the grace to love Him and to save our souls for Him. This is the wish of your unworthy little

Sister Therese of the Child Jesus and of the Holy Face.

--St. Therese of Lisieux, Letter to Maurice Belliere, seminarian for
the diocese of Baux (JTG)

2 Maccabees 15:11-16

The earliest written example of the intercession of the saints in
Judaism occurs in the Book of Maccabees from the second century before
Christ. It relates a dream in which Jeremiah, the beloved prophet of
Israel, is still praying and interceding for Israel out of love several
hundred years after his death. St. Theresa, 2,000 years later, also
indicates how much the saints love us and share in the infinite mercy
of God (not just His holiness and justice). I take comfort in this
belief that love never dies, and neither does the power of prayer!

Do I pray for others every day, even when I don't feel moved to do so?

87. The Manifestation of Christ

(Lord, Bid Me Come)

God Himself, who is almighty, the Creator of all things, and invisible
has sent from heaven, and placed among men, Him who is the truth, and
the holy and incomprehensible Word, and has firmly established Him in
their hearts. This messenger He sent to them. Was it then, as one might
conceive, for the purpose of exercising tyranny, or of inspiring fear
and terror? By no means, but under the influence of clemency and
meekness. As a king sends his son, who is also a king, so sent He Him,
as God He sent Him, as to men He sent Him, as a Savior He sent Him, and
as seeking to persuade, not to compel us, for violence has no place in
the character of God. As calling us He sent Him, not as vengefully
pursuing us, as loving us He sent Him, not as judging us. For He will
yet send Him to judge us, and who shall endure His appearing?

-Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus, (early 2nd century) (CCEL)

Matthew 11:28-30

"Take my yoke and learn of me and you will find rest for your souls for I am meek and humble of heart." Jesus never inspired terror or fear, was never violent or vengeful, and always acted with love and clemency. Even the cleansing fire of His judgment doesn't inspire fear in me anymore. Although it is painful at times to experience His judgment, it is the pain of healing at the hands of One who loves me and wants my highest good.

Do I fear the judgment of Christ or do I try to cooperate with His judgment as a part of my healing and growth? Do I believe that God would ever do anything to "hurt" me? How and why?

88. The Relations of Christians to the World

(My Weakness Invites God's Strength)

To sum up all in one word- what the soul is in the body, that are Christians in the world. The soul is dispersed through all the members of the body, and Christians are scattered through all the cities of the world. The soul dwells in the body, yet is not of the body, and Christians dwell in the world but are not of the world. The invisible soul is guarded by the visible body, and Christians are known indeed to be in the world, but their godliness remains invisible. The flesh hates the soul, and wars against it though itself suffering no injury, because it is prevented from enjoying pleasures, the world also hates Christians, though in nowise injured, because they abjure pleasures. The soul loves the flesh that hates it..., Christians likewise love those that hate them. The soul is imprisoned in the body, yet preserves that very body, and Christians are confined in the world as in a prison, and yet they are the preservers of the world. The immortal soul dwells in a mortal tabernacle, and Christians dwell as sojourners in corruptible bodies, looking for an incorruptible dwelling in the heavens. The soul, when but ill provided with food and drink, becomes

better, in like manner, the Christians, though subjected day by day to punishment, increase the more in number. God has assigned them this illustrious position, which it were unlawful for them to forsake.

--Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus, (early 2nd century) (CCEL)

1 Corinthians 1:26-29

God has chosen those who feel a need for Him to carry His message. This feeling of need requires humility borne of weakness, poverty, and other qualities that the world shuns as meaningless, foolish, and contemptible. Our own flesh may agree with this opinion of the world at the same time we are being transformed into the Body of Christ! Yet we, and our growth experience, are vitally important. The soul is imprisoned in the body, yet preserves that very body, and Christians are confined in the world, as in a prison, and yet they are the preservers of the world.

In what ways does my life help to preserve the world? Do I feel like a prisoner in this world? Do I feel like a prisoner in this body?

89. Plunging Into the Vision of God

(Jesus, May I Feel Your Presence)

When a man walks into the sea up to his knees or waist, he can see the water all around him. But when he dives into the water, he can no longer see anything outside, and he knows only that his whole body is in the water. This is what happens to those who plunge into the vision of God.

The more a man enters the light of understanding, the more aware he is of his own ignorance. And when the light reveals itself fully and unites with him and draws him into itself, so that he finds himself alone in a sea of light, then he is emptied of all knowledge and immersed in absolute unknowing.

Our mind is pure and simple. When it is emptied of thought, it enters

the pure and simple light of God, and finds nothing but the light.

--St. Symeon the New Theologian (EM)

2 Corinthians 12:1-4

This reading says something very important. At some point, head knowledge becomes a hindrance to spiritual experience. While I may not have experiences like those of St. Paul or St. Symeon, I am meant to know God, not just know about God. I am meant to be in a relationship with God, not just acquiring facts about God. Relationships of all types, including with God, require time or there is no relationship. Do I intellectualize my relationship with God too much? How can I avoid this?

90. Answering the Call

(May Your Thoughts Become My Thoughts)

O most merciful God, we pray that You would enter into our souls which You prepared for Your reception by the desire which You Yourself inspired. For before we called upon You, You had called us, and had sought us, that we might seek You. Give us then thyself, O our God.

--St. Augustine (P&M0

Isaiah 55:3, 6, 8-9

"Seek out the Lord while He is still to be found, call to Him while He is still near." The Lord is always available to be found, He is nearer than my skin or my breath. I move away from Him, not He from me. The Lord is always calling me, knocking on the door of my soul and wanting to stay with me. Will I let Him in?

How do I shut out the Lord? How do I break down the barriers?

91. God Cannot Resist His Own Nature

(Faith Equals Healing)

God must act and pour Himself into you the moment he finds you ready. Don't imagine that God can be compared to an earthly carpenter, who

acts or doesn't act, as he wishes: who can will to do something or leave it undone, according to His pleasure. It is not that way with God: where and when God finds you ready, He must act and overflow into you, just as when the air is clear and pure, the sun must overflow into it and cannot refrain from doing that.

--Meister Johannes Eckhart (1260-1327), (EM)

Luke 8:40-48

"Your faith has saved you." This is what Jesus told the woman with the hemorrhage after she was healed without His conscious knowledge. Her faith removed a blockage that allowed the power of God to fill her with healing. Her faith, a gift from God as well as something in her own control, made the difference.

What are the blocks to my faith? How can they be removed?

92. Nothing Defeats the Will of God

(I Was Created Good)

You might ask, "How can I know if something is God's will?" My answer is, "If it were not God's will, it wouldn't exist even for an instant; so if something happens, it must be His will." If you truly enjoyed God's will, you would feel exactly as though you were in the kingdom of heaven, whatever happened to you or didn't happen to you.

--Meister Johannes Eckhart, (1260-1327), (EM)

Genesis 1:26-31

Everything God created is good and everything that happens, God allows.

This implies one of two things: (1) The things that I may consider evil that happen to me are in fact a good for me if I have the right attitude toward them; and (2) At the deepest level of reality (eternity), things that seem to be happening are not happening at all--almost like dreaming. The truth may be a mixture of the two.

How can I change my attitude about the "evil" that happens to me or in

the world? What if the life I experience is a kind of "dream" from which I must awaken?

93. The Second Appearance of the Sacred Heart

(I Am Saved By the Blood of Christ)

I saw this divine Heart as on a throne of flames, more brilliant than the sun and transparent as crystal. It had its adorable wound and was encircled with a crown of thorns, which signified the pricks our sins caused Him. It was surmounted by a cross which signified that, from the first moment of His Incarnation, ...the cross was planted in It; that it was filled....with all the bitterness, humiliation, poverty, sorrow and contempt His sacred humanity would have to suffer during the whole course of His life and during His holy Passion.

He made me understand that the ardent desire He had of being loved by men and drawing them from the path of perdition into which Satan was hurrying them in great numbers had caused Him to fix upon this plan of manifesting His Heart to men, together with all its treasures of love, mercy, grace, sanctification, and salvation. This He did in order that those who were willing to do all in their power to render and to procure for Him honor, love and glory might be enriched abundantly... with these divine treasures of the Heart of God...It must be honored under the symbol of the Heart of flesh, Whose image He wished to be publicly exposed. He wanted me to carry it ...over my heart, that He might imprint His love there, fill my heart with all the gifts with which His own is filled, and destroy all inordinate affection. Wherever this sacred image would be exposed for veneration He would pour forth His graces and blessings. This devotion was as a last effort of His love which was to favor men in these last centuries with this loving redemption, in order to withdraw them from the empire of Satan, which He intended to destroy, and in order to put us under the sweet liberty

of the empire of His love. This He would establish in the hearts of all those who would embrace this devotion.

--St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, Letters, (JTG)

Numbers 21:4-9 Ezekiel 1:1-28

"Whenever the sacred image would be exposed for veneration, He would pour forth His grace and blessings." "Make a bronze serpent and mount it on a pole, and if anyone who has been bitten looks upon it, he will recover." When I read the account of Ezekiel's mystical vision and the case of God healing under the symbol of a bronze snake, I don't find it unusual for God to continue to work in a similar manner today.

Am I grateful for God's special revelations of love? Or do I doubt?

94. Total Surrender

(May I Love Through Service)

Our Call-- He has chosen us; we have not first chosen Him. But we must respond by making our society something beautiful for God--something very beautiful. For this we must give all--our utmost. We must cling to Jesus, grasp Him, have a grip on Him, and never let go for anything. We must fall in love with Jesus.

Our Response-- The spirit of our society is one of total surrender, loving trust and cheerfulness as lived by Jesus and Mary in the Gospel.

Our Way of Life-- Just as the seed is meant to be a tree, we are meant to grow into Jesus. Each of us will accept: to live the life of poverty in cheerful trust, to imitate the charity of Mary...and to offer cheerful obedience in inward joy.

Our Life of Prayer and Contemplation-- Jesus has drawn us to be souls of prayer. Jesus is our prayer and He is also the answer to all our prayer. He has chosen to be Himself in us the living song of love, praise, adoration, thanksgiving, intercession, and reparation to the Father in the name of the whole creation, especially the poorest of the

poor and those who do not pray, who do not know how to pray, who do not dare and do not want to pray.

Our Life of Service and Evangelization-- Faith in Action is Love, Love in Action is Service. We need to be pure of heart to see Jesus in the person of the poorest of the poor. Therefore the more repugnant the work, or the more disfigured or deformed the image of God in the person, the greater will be our faith and loving devotion in seeking the face of Jesus, and lovingly ministering to Him in the distressing disguise.

--Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Total Surrender

Acts 2:42-47

Mother Teresa and her community took their faith and works very seriously, just like the early Church as described in Acts. The main difference is that the lay-people of the early Church were expected to act like a "kingdom of priests" even though they were not clergy. While it is clear that a community like Mother Teresa's could not be lay-people, it is also true that the lay-people of today fall far short in their faith and actions when compared with those of the early Church.

In what ways can my life as a layman be made similar to the laymen of the early Church?

95. Transforming Union

(Jesus, Make Me Transparent to Your Grace)

The center of the soul is God. When the soul shall have reached Him, according to its essence, and according to the power of its operations, it will then have attained to its ultimate and deepest center in God.

This will be when the soul shall love Him, comprehend Him, and enjoy Him with all its strength. When, however, the soul has not attained to this state...it is not in the deepest center, because there is still

room for it to advance...But if the soul shall have attained to the highest degree of love, the love of God will then wound it in its utmost depth or center, and the soul will be transformed and enlightened in the highest degree of its substance, faculties, and strength, until it shall become most like unto God. The soul in this state may be compared to crystal, lucid and pure, the greater the light thrown upon it, the more luminous it becomes by the concentration thereof, until at last it seems to be all light and indistinguishable from it; it being then so illumined, and to the utmost extent, that it seems to be one with the light itself.

--St. John of the Cross, *The Living Flame of Love* , (JTG)

Daniel 10:5-6 Exodus 34:29-35

St. John talks about what is, evidently, a process of deification of the soul through a "wounding" of love. The soul is gradually transformed into light; the image of God. The radiance of Moses after talking with the Lord is evidently one of the early stages of this process as is the Transfiguration of Jesus. The reading from Daniel seems to indicate a phase beyond the physical, human level. By the later phase, the recognition of the "being" as human and an individual is almost lost.

When in the presence of God, do I feel the beginning of a transformation? Am I slowly losing the hold of my ego so that I can be more Christ-like?

96. The Chain of Degradation

(Lord, May I Be Fruitful In Your Knowledge)

Take note that before thoughts, stand their causes; before imagination-thoughts; before passions-imagination; before the demons-passions, forming a kind of graded chain of degraded spirits holding on to one another. But nothing here comes to pass without the

demons: neither does imagination paint images, nor does passion act without their hidden power. All the same, what gives them power over us is mostly our own carelessness.

--St. Gregory of Sinai, Philokalia: On Prayer of the Heart

2 Peter 1:3-9

I can take the chain of causation either up (toward God and my spiritual nature) or down (toward the demons and my earthy nature). Up, by empowering my faith with virtue, knowledge, self-control, endurance, devotion, mutual affection and love (God). Down, by my natural tendencies/actions which are empowered by my thoughts, imagination, passions (demons). As St. Gregory says, my own carelessness can break me while my own carefulness can help to save me.

In what ways am I careless in developing my faith? In what ways do I let my passions control me?

97. A Touch of the Angelic

(Lord, May I Minister Unto You)

It is said that in the life to come the angels and saints shall never cease to progress in increasing their gifts, striving for greater and ever greater blessings. No slackening or change from virtue to sin is admitted in that life.

In the future life (or in heaven) the saints hold inner converse with one another, the Holy Spirit speaking in them.

Minds equal unto the angels in freedom from corruption and deification, will be

those saints that are the children of the resurrection.

If we do not learn what we were created by God, we shall not know what we have become through sin.

--St. Gregory of Sinai, Philokalia: on Prayer of the Heart

John 1:51 Matthew 4:11

The angels ministered to the Son of God after the temptation in the desert, in the garden of Gethsemane and other times when needed. I find the idea very comforting that, after death, we continue to grow in spiritual maturity and are to be of service to Jesus in His quest for souls. The future looks joyful!

How can I help prepare myself now to be a servant of Jesus in the afterlife?

98. The Stigmata of St. Francis

(May I Bare Your Marks, Lord Jesus)

On a certain morning about the Feast of Exaltation of the Cross, while Francis was praying on the mountainside, he saw a Seraph with six fiery and shining wings descend from the height of heaven...There appeared between the wings the figure of a man crucified, with his hands and feet extended in the form of a cross and fastened to a cross. When Francis saw this he was overwhelmed, and his heart was flooded with a mixture of joy and sorrow. He rejoiced because of the gracious way Christ looked upon him under the appearance of the Seraph, but the fact that he was fastened to a cross pierced his soul with a sword of compassionate sorrow.

Eventually, he understood by a revelation from the Lord...that, as Christ's lover he might learn in advance that he was to be totally transformed into the likeness of Christ crucified, not by the martyrdom of the flesh, but by the fire of his love consuming his soul.

Aft the vision disappeared, it left in his heart a marvelous ardor and imprinted on his body markings...Immediately the marks of nails began to appear in his hands and feet...His hands and feet seemed to be pierced through the center by nails, with the heads of the nails appearing on the inner side of the hands and the upper side of the feet and their points on the opposite side. The heads of the nails in his

hands and his feet were round and black; their points were oblong and bent as if driven back with a hammer, and they emerged from the flesh and stuck out beyond it. Also his right side, as if pierced with a lance, was marked with a red wound from which his sacred blood often flowed, moistening his tunic and underwear.

When Christ's servant realized that he could not conceal from his intimate companions the stigmata that had been so visibly imprinted on his flesh, he feared to make public the Lord's secret...He then with much fear recounted the vision in detail, adding that the one who had appeared to him had told him some things which he would never disclose to any man as long as he lived.

--St. Bonaventure, The Life of St. Francis of Assisi (JTG)

Galatians 6:17, 2 Kings 13:20-21

The transformation of the soul into the likeness of God evidently has a powerful effect on our physical, human nature. It may be being marked with the stigmata of Christ as happened to St. Francis, Padre Pio and, perhaps, St. Paul. It may be an ability to raise the dead (even after the transformed person has died!) like Elisha the Prophet. All manner of these manifestations were present in Jesus. In some cases, these manifestations seem to be graces and at other times, curses. In any event, these manifestations are distributed as God wills--just like the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The important thing is that my spiritual transformation should have an impact on my physical nature, however modest.

Are my actions becoming more Christ-like as a result of my spiritual growth?

99. The Example of Daily Resurrections

(Lord, May I Always Be With You)

Let us consider, beloved, how the Lord continually proves to us that

there shall be a future resurrection, of which He has rendered the Lord Jesus Christ, the first fruits by raising Him from the dead. Let us contemplate, beloved, the resurrection which is at all times taking place. Day and night declare to us a resurrection. The night sinks to sleep, and the day arises; the day again departs, and the night comes on. Let us behold the fruits of the earth, how the sowing of grain takes place. The sower goes forth, and casts it into the ground, and the seed being thus scattered, though dry and naked when it fell upon the earth, is gradually dissolved. Then out of its dissolution the mighty power of the providence of the Lord raises it up again, and from one seed many arise and bring forth fruit.

Do we deem it any great and wonderful thing for the Maker of all things to raise up again those that have piously served Him in the assurance of a good faith?..

--St. Clement of Rome (friend of St. Paul and St. Luke) Epistle to the Corinthians (CCEL)

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

In addition to the teaching of Jesus, the daily resurrections I see give me hope for a blessed afterlife. While Jesus looked different after His resurrection and the grain of wheat certainly looks different when it sprouts, the essential character of each is still there. Maybe I won't look like myself, but I know that I will be.

How can I study nature to nurture my hope in the resurrection?

100. A Godly Love

(May I Love and Do Rightly, O God)

Let him who has love in Christ keep the commandments of Christ. Who can describe the blessed bond of the love of God? What man is able to tell the excellence of its beauty, as it ought to be told? The height to which love exalts is unspeakable. Love unites us to God. Love covers a

multitude of sins. Love bears all things, is long suffering in all things. There is nothing base, nothing arrogant in love. Love admits of no schisms; love gives rise to no seditions; love does all things in harmony. By love have all the elect of God been made perfect; without love nothing is well pleasing to God. In love has the Lord taken us to Himself. On account of the Love he bore us, Jesus Christ our Lord gave His blood for us by the will of God, His flesh for our flesh, and His soul for our souls.

You see, beloved, how great and wonderful a thing is love, and that there is no declaring its perfection. Who is fit to be found in it, except such as God has vouchsafed to render so? Let us pray, therefore, and implore of His mercy, that we may live blameless in love, free from human partialities for one above another. All the generations from Adam even unto this day have passed away; but those who, through the grace of God, have been made perfect in love, now possess a place among the godly, and shall be made manifest at the revelation of the kingdom of Christ.

--St. Clement of Rome (friend of St. Paul and St. Luke) Epistle to the Corinthians, CCEL

Micah 6:6-8

Without love, nothing is well-pleasing to God. And what does God require if I am to love Him? Simply, to do what is right, love loyalty and walk humbly with Him. Sacrifice is not required. Let us pray for the grace to love God like this.

In what ways do I still believe that God wants "sacrifices" from me?
How can I improve my "walk" with God?

101. Humility vs. Vainglory

(May I Walk Humbly With Jesus)

Elisha bade the poor widow "borrow vessels, even empty vessels not a few, and pour oil into all those vessels," and so in order to receive God's Grace in our hearts, they must be as empty vessels-not filled with self-esteem. The swallow with its sharp cry and keen glance has the power of frightening away birds of prey, and for that reason the dove prefers it to all other birds, and lives surely beside it,-even so humility drives Satan away, and cherishes the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit within us, and for that reason all the Saints-and especially the King of Saints and His Blessed Mother-have always esteemed the grace of humility above all other virtues.

We call that vainglory which men take to themselves, either for what is not in them, or which being in them is not their own, or which being in them and their own yet is not worthy of their self-satisfaction....

You may test real worth as we test balm, which is tried by being distilled in water, and if it is precipitated to the bottom, it is known to be pure and precious. So if you want to know whether a man is really wise, learned, generous, or noble, see if his life is molded by humility, modesty and submission. If so, his gifts are genuine; but if they are only surface and showy, you may be sure that in proportion to their demonstrativeness so is their unreality. Those pearls which are formed amid tempest and storm have only an outward shell, and are hollow within; and so when a man's good qualities are fed by pride, vanity and boasting.

--St. Francis de Sales, Introduction to the Devout Life, (CCEL)

Luke 18:11-14 Ecclesiastes 1:2

Humility, modesty and submission are needed; not pride, vanity and boasting. Every morning for more than ten years I pray that God removes my self-will and pride (the king of sins). As long as I can honestly pray "Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner," I am not likely to stray far from the narrow path.

How genuine is my humility? To what extent is it only a surface quality and showy?

102. An Important Step: Becoming Entirely Ready

(What Profit If I Gain the World and Lose My Soul?)

Oh love! How I would want to say this word everywhere because love alone is that which can dare say with the bride, I am my Beloved's. He gives us permission to think that He, this true Lover, my Spouse and my Good, needs us. Since He gives us permission, let us repeat, daughters, my Beloved is mine and I am my Beloved's. You are mine Lord? If You come to me, why do I doubt that I will be able to serve You? From here on Lord, I want to forget myself and look only at how I can serve You and have no other desire than to do Your will.

But my desire is not powerful, my God; You are the powerful One. What I can do is be determined; thus from this moment I am determined to serve You through deeds.

--St. Teresa of Avila, Meditation on the Song of Songs, (JTG)

Mark 8:34-37

St. Teresa sounds like she is making a sixth-step in a 12-Step recovery program. She is becoming entirely ready to have God remove her self-will and to serve Jesus with deeds. This willingness is necessary before she can ask for God's help to change. What is to encourage her? The words of Jesus: What if I gain the whole world and lose my soul in the process? What can I give in exchange for my soul? Is my self-will worth it?

Have I become "entirely ready" to ask Jesus to help me follow Him?

103. Obedience is the Key

(Obedience, Not Sacrifice)

Perfection is founded entirely on the love of God ...and perfect love of God means complete union of our will with God's. It follows then, that the more one unites his will with the divine will, the greater will be his love of God. Mortification, meditation, receiving Holy Communion, acts of fraternal charity are all certainly pleasing to God--but only when they are in accordance with His will. When they do not accord with God's will, He not only finds no pleasure in them but He even rejects them utterly and punishes them.

Why should we perform actions for God's glory if they are not going to be acceptable to Him? God does not want sacrifices...but He does want obedience to His will. The man who follows his own will independently of God's is guilty of a kind of idolatry. Instead of adoring God's will...he adores his own.

In prosperity, even sinners find it easy to unite themselves to the divine will; but it takes saints to unite themselves to God's will when things go wrong and are painful to self-love.

We must unite ourselves to God's will not only in things that come to us directly from his hands, such as sickness, desolation, poverty, death of relatives, but likewise in those we suffer from man...On these occasions we must remember that while God does not will the sin, he does will our humiliation, our poverty, or our mortification, as the case may be. It is certain and of faith, that whatever happens, happens by the will of God. We call adversities evil; actually they are good and meritorious, when we receive them as coming from God's hands.

--St. Alphonsus de Ligouri, Uniformity With God's Will, CCEL

1 Samuel 15:4-23, Judges 11:29-40

These are very difficult readings for me. When I read them, it helps me to understand why the Gnostics of the early Christian centuries did not believe that Yahweh was the king of Gods. It seems like He has a decidedly nasty human streak. I would rather believe that this "nastiness" had more to do with the writers and interpreters of this history than God Himself. Saul is rejected as King of Israel by God because he does not utterly destroy his enemy-including cattle! A warrior of Israel makes a stupid pledge and believes that he is forced, by his oath, to offer his young daughter as a burnt offering to Yahweh! St. Alphonsus notes that mortification, meditation, receiving Holy Communion, and acts of fraternal charity will be rejected by God and punished if not in accord with His will!

What does this all mean? I suspect that St. Alphonsus may have meant that, for example, if I am a family man, I cannot spend my whole day in prayer and charitable acts-it is not appropriate for my station in life. I wouldn't be surprised if the story from the Judges is what prompted Jesus to preach against making oaths ("Let your yes be yes and your no be no-everything else is from the evil one"). In addition to the importance of doing God's will, the story about Saul may have had to do with ulterior motives regarding the spoils of war.

Am I willing to struggle with and learn from the difficulties I have with the earlier salvation history?

104. First Experience of Divine Love

(Lord, May Your Gifts Not Make Me Proud)

I cannot tell you how astonished I was when I felt my heart grow warm for the first time. It was a real warmth, too, not an imaginary one: I seemed kindled with a fire that I could feel with my senses. I was astonished by the way this heat broke out in my soul, bringing with it a rich consolation that I had never experienced before. I kept feeling

my chest over and over again to see if this burning sensation had a physical cause. But when I realized that it came entirely from within myself and that this fire of love had no sensual or sinful origin but was a gift from my Creator, I melted with joy and wanted my love to increase still more, especially because of the pleasurable sensations of interior sweetness that poured into my soul with this spiritual flame. Before my heart had been flooded by this devotion, which was more comforting than any other I had experienced, I did not think it was possible to feel such divine warmth during this exile of ours. It set my soul ablaze, as though a real fire was burning there.

--St. Richard Rolle of Hampole, The Fire of Love, VOG

1 Samuel 19:19-24

The experience of St. Richard reminded me, though much less dramatic, of the ecstatic frenzy experienced by early Old Testament prophets and those who came into their presence. I guess that it can only be described as a kind of divine spiritual fire that is sometimes out of control. God may give these experiences as a gift to someone for their growth if it is His will. However, these spiritual experiences are not things that I would strive for as ends in themselves since there can be much of the ego in them that may result in pride. I believe that this can be true as well of more common spiritual gifts such as speaking in tongues. The gifts can also become a kind of spiritual thrill-seeking that becomes more emotional than spiritual.

Are spiritual experiences more important to me than the basics of faith, hope and love? In what ways?

105. Dealing With Distractions

(I Will Submit To God)

Once you feel that you have done everything you can to put your life straight according to the laws and judgments of Holy Church, you must

immediately put yourself to work. (If memories and other distractions come) . . . try to cover them with a thick cloud of forgetting as though these things never happened or occurred to you or anybody else. If they persist...there are special methods, techniques and spiritual strategies that you can use to get rid of these distractions.

Do everything in your power to behave as though you were unaware of these distractionsTry to look over their shoulders...as though you were looking for something else: that "something"...is God who is enclosed in the cloud of unknowing. If this technique is properly understood, I believe that it is simply a yearning and desire for God, a longing to experience and see Him as clearly as we can in this life. Here is another technique you can try if you wish. When you feel that there is no way that you can suppress these distractions, cower beneath them as though you were a prisoner or coward defeated in battle. Tell yourself that it is pure stupidity to contend with them any longer; thus you will give yourself up to God, while you are in the hands of your enemies and feel that you have been permanently destroyed. Please give this method your full consideration, because if you try to put it into practice you are bound to fade away completely, and indeed it seems clear to me that if this technique is properly understood it is simply an accurate understanding and experience of yourself as you really are: a filthy wretch who is worse than nothing. This experience and perception is humility, which will always succeed in forcing God Himself to come down...to take revenge on your enemies, to raise you up and to wipe the tears lovingly from the eyes of your soul, just as a father does when his child is about to die...

--The Cloud of Unknowing, Chapters 31-32, VOG

James 4:6-10

Another way of dealing with distractions is to let them swirl around me

like a stream around a stone, or to step lightly out of their way, letting them come and go, like birds flying overhead. Not contending, not fighting with my own power, is a form of humility.

What methods of dealing with distractions work best for me? Do I humbly acknowledge to God the need for His help in dealing with distractions?

106. Salvation For All Creation

(God Will Sum Up All Things In Christ)

All men who are going to be saved must rely upon this communion of Christians. For, in my view, God is everything that is good and He has made the whole of creation and He loves what He has made. Anybody who loves his fellow Christians for God's sake, loves everything that exists. For everything is included in that portion of humanity who are going to be saved--by that I mean the whole of creation and the Maker of everything too! For God is in man and God is everything. And I hope, by God's grace, that anyone who looks at it like this will be instructed correctly and get whatever consolation he needs.

--St. Julian of Norwich, Revelations of Divine Love, Chapter 9, VOG
Ephesians 1:7-10

"He has made known to us the mystery of His will: to sum up all things in Christ, in heaven and on earth." In some way, the destiny of Christians (i.e., the Church) is tied up with the salvation of the world and all of creation. What a destiny!! Can anything be more profound? Thanks be to God for the grace He has bestowed upon us ,through Jesus, to be a part of so wonderful a plan of love!

Can I recognize how important my holiness is to the plans of God? How much must God love us to want us to be a part of His plan of salvation for all creation?

107. Types of Prayer

(The Lord Trains Whom He Loves)

You must understand that there are three kinds of prayer; the first consists of words that God has composed Himself, like the Lord's Prayer and those that have been prescribed for everybody by Holy Church. There are also those that have been composed by holy men that have been addressed to our Lord, our Lady, and the saints. This kind of prayer is especially helpful to somebody who has just embarked on the spiritual life, and it is better than any other kind of spiritual exercise.

The next kind of prayer also uses words but does not consist of any definite or particular utterances. This happens when a man or woman experiences the grace of fervor as a special gift from God and during this experience speaks to Him as though He were actually present, using those words that come from his mind to express the feeling in his heart after he has counted his sins and realized his wretchedness, perceived the malice and wiles

of the enemy or experienced the goodness or mercy of God.

The third kind of prayer arises only in the heart. It comes softly, using no words, together with great peace and quiet of body and soul.

Anybody who has ambitions to pray like this must have a pure heart, because it comes to those men and women who have achieved peace of soul either after a long struggle of soul and body or by the sharp blows of love that I have just mentioned. Their passions have been transformed into a taste for spiritual things that enable them to pray without ceasing in their hearts and to love and praise God....

--St. Walter Hilton, The Ladder of Perfection (14th century), VOG
Proverbs 3:11-12

"After a long struggle of soul and body, the passions have been transformed into a taste for spiritual things." This long struggle may be experienced as a correcting or training by God in the same way that parents guide and correct their children. If I accept the corrections

as an act of love, for my own good, my unruly, natural passions will lead me closer to God and His will for me.

How are my painful experiences considered acts of training and love? Am I willing to accept the discipline and correction?

108. Death of the Ego

(Lord, Make Me Perfect As You Are Perfect)

Everybody has a special reason for grief, but the person who has a deep experience of himself existing far apart from God feels the most acute sorrow. Any other grief seems trivial in comparison.

If this sorrow is genuine, it is full of holy longing. Otherwise, nobody could bear it. Unless a soul is nourished from time to time with some of the consolations of contemplations, he would never endure this knowledge or experience of his nature. Whenever he longs to have a true experience of God in purity of heart...,inevitably he finds that he experiences instead this foul, putrid, lump of self, which he must entirely reject and forsake if he would be a true disciple as God himself taught... Thus, he is doomed to become almost mad with grief, so much so that he weeps and wails, struggles, curses and reviles himself, and,....it seems that the burden of self is so insupportable that he doesn't care what happens to him as long as God's will be done. And yet...he never wants to stop living, because that would be an insanity inspired by the devil and a rejection of God Himself. Rather, he wants to go on living and he is fully determined to be grateful to God for the great gift of His creation, even though he longs ceaselessly to loose all sense of his own existence.

--Cloud of Unknowing, Chapter 44, VOG

Luke 17:9-10 Matthew 5:48

"Be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." When I read these words, I used to feel hopeless and futile. I will never be perfect.

Thinking like this only makes me neurotic. I've come to believe that while God wants my ultimate perfection, He accepts me where I am and is happy with my improvements over time. My experiences with ego death during periods of depression have taught me that God only wants me to release the diseased parts of my character. While this felt like a fire and death, I've come through and did not die. I've changed in ways that lead slowly toward Perfection. While I don't like depression, I've learned that if I embrace it with the right attitude and with lots of God's grace, it can help to purify my character more quickly than almost anything I can imagine.

What parts of my character need to be "killed"?

109. Meditation: Seeing the Truth About Myself

(Temptation...Desire...Sin...Death)

There are three established ways of achieving contemplation: the study of scripture and doctrine, spiritual meditation and constant and devout prayer. You are not really able to read the scriptures for yourself, so you must rely on prayer and meditation. By meditation, you will come to appreciate how weak you are in virtue, and prayer will help you to acquire it. In meditation you will see what a poor creature you are and discover your sins and failings--pride, covetousness, gluttony, and lust, the wicked emotions of envy, anger, hatred, gloom, irritability, bitterness, laziness, and irrational depression. You will also realize that your heart is full of false regrets and fears that spring from a worldly, carnal outlook. All these emotions will well up from your heart as water flows constantly from the spring of a polluted well and they will block your spiritual vision so that you can neither see nor experience the pure love of Jesus Christ.

--St. Walter Hilton, The Ladder of Perfection, Chapter 15, VOG

Matthew 5:21-22 James 1:12-15

"By meditation, I will come to appreciate how weak I am in virtue but prayer will help me acquire it." Unless I sit still and become aware of my "inner environment," I have little idea how noisy and chaotic I am. It does seem like "demons" are rummaging around my head, but, it is mostly my own undisciplined mind which is creating the trouble. While I must be determined to organize this clutter, I am powerless to do it without God's help. I ask for this help by prayer; asking God to empower my feeble efforts at self-discipline. Slowly over time, some semblance of clarity emerges--like the clearing of a turbid stream. Am I willing to work consistently at calming and clarifying my turbid and disorganized mind? How will I do this?

110. God Does Everything

(God Is My Light And Salvation: Who Do I Fear?)

A man regards some things as well done and others as evil, but our Lord does not regard them like that. For as all natural things have really been performed by God, so everything that has been done has somehow been done by God...All this is due to the plan that God ordained from all eternity. He is the only one who acts.

And he revealed all this to me and filled me with happiness. It is as though He were saying: Look! I am God! Look! I am in all things. Look! I do everything. Look! I do everything. I hold my work always in my hands and I will never let them fall. Look! I am guiding everything to the end I ordained for it from before the beginning of time, with the same wisdom, power and love with which I created it! So how can anything be amiss?

--St. Julian of Norwich, Revelations of Divine Love, Chapter 11, VOG
Psalm 27:1,5 Hebrews 11:1-40

In some mysterious way, all things ultimately work out according to God's plan. I read salvation history as recorded in the Bible and I am

amazed that anything good has come out of that torturous process. But God's will plays out in spite of man's stupidity, greed, pride, envy, lust and every other undesirable trait.

So, the Lord are my light and salvation....what need I fear?

111. The Acid Test of Spirituality

(Lord, Grant Me What Is Best For My Soul)

Many times it will happen that proper medical attention or effective remedies will be lacking, or even that the doctor will not rightly diagnose our case. In such instances, we must unite ourselves to the divine will which thus disposes of our physical health. The story is told of a client of St. Thomas of Canterbury, who being sick, went to the saint's tomb to obtain a cure. He returned home cured. But then he thought to himself: "Suppose it would be better for my soul's salvation if I remained sick, what point then is there in being well?" In this frame of mind he went back and asked the saint to intercede with God that he would grant what would be best for his eternal salvation. His illness returned and he was perfectly content with the turn things had taken, being fully persuaded that God had thus disposed of him for his own good.

Sickness is the acid test of spirituality, because it discloses whether are virtue is real or sham.

--St. Alphonsus de Ligouri, Uniformity of God's Will, Chapter 5, CCEL

2 Corinthians 12:8-10

I've often wondered what I would be like if I had normal eyesight. Would I be more worldly and less caring? Would an ability to drive a car allow me to be more useful? Since I never had normal eyesight, I don't miss it. A dozen years ago, when I nearly lost my remaining sight virtually overnight for a period of three years, I was stunned and unhappy. From this, I assume that what I am and what God has given me

is best for my spiritual growth, including the times when I nearly lost it all.

Would I pray for ill-health if that were best for my spiritual growth?

112. Christ Is All

(Jesus Is The First And Last)

Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me,
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

--St. Patrick, The Shield of St. Patrick, CCEL

Revelations 1:17-18 Colossians 2:9-10

All things are summed up in Jesus. He is the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End. He is within everyone and all things, including me! This is one of the reasons why meditation and knowing myself is so important. I can know nothing better than I know myself. My soul is made in the image of God.

Are there pieces of me that I am still afraid of knowing?

113. Conversing With God

(I Have Strength Through Him Who Empowers Me)

The devout Fr. John Tauler relates this personal experience: For years he had prayed God to send him someone who would teach him the real spiritual life. One day, at prayer, he heard a voice saying: "Go to such and such a church and you will have the answer to your prayers." He went and at the door of the church he found a beggar, barefooted and in rags. He greeted the mendicant saying: "Good day, my friend."

"Thank you, sir, for your kind wishes, but I do not recall ever having had a bad day."

"Then God has certainly given you a very happy life."

"That is very true, sir, I have never been unhappy. In saying this I am not making any rash statement either. This is the reason: When I have nothing to eat, I give thanks to God; when it rains or snows, I bless God's providence; when someone insults me, drives me away, or otherwise mistreats me, I give glory to God. I've said I never had an unhappy day, and it's the truth, because I am accustomed to will unreservedly what God wills. Whatever happens to me, sweet or bitter, I gladly receive from his hands as what is best for me. Hence my unvarying happiness."

"Where did you find God?"

"I found him where I left creatures."

"Who are you anyway?"

"I am a king."

"And where is your kingdom?"

"In my soul, where everything is in good order, where the passions obey reason and the reason obeys God."

"How have you come to such a state of perfection?"

"By silence, I practice silence towards men, while I cultivate the habit of speaking with God. Conversing with God is the way I found and maintain my peace of soul."

Union with God brought this poor beggar to the very heights of perfection. In his poverty he was richer than the mightiest monarch; in his sufferings, he was vastly happier than worldlings amid their worldly delights.

--St. Alphonsus de Ligouri, Uniformity With God's Will, Chapter 3, CCEL
Philippians 4:6-7, 11-13 Jeremiah 12:1-3a

My Lord Jesus, though I don't talk to You directly often enough as friends would talk, I thank You for Your daily companionship and guidance whenever I remember You. I trust You Lord, in Your love, that You will not allow anything to happen to me that is not for my highest good. I ask Lord that You remove from me my self-indulgent will and allow me to be a healing vessel for Your glory and my joy! I praise You my God, Friend, Lord, and Brother. Amen.

How much conversation do I have with God? As much as I would have with a friend? Do I suspect that I would not have a friend-relationship with someone with whom I communicate as little as I talk to God?

114. Call To A Missionary

(Lord, Hear Us)

And again after a few years I was in Britain with my people, who received me as their son, and sincerely besought me that now at last, having suffered so many hardships, I should not leave then and go elsewhere.

And there I saw in the night the vision of a man, whose name was Victoricus, coming as it were from Ireland, with countless letters. And he gave me of them, and I read the opening words of the letter, which were, "The voice of the Irish", and as I read the beginning of the letter I thought that at the same moment I heard their voice-they were those beside the Wood of Voclut, which is near the Western Sea-and thus did they cry out as with one mouth: "We ask thee, boy, come and walk among us once more."

And I was quite broken in heart, and could read no further, and so I woke up. Thanks be to God, after many years the Lord gave to them according to their cry.

--St. Patrick, The Confessions, CCEL

Acts 16:6-10

While I may not be called to minister to the Macedonians as were Saints Paul and Luke, nor to the Irish as was St. Patrick, I am called to minister to my family, friends, co-workers and community. This ministry may not be formal preaching or religiously oriented at all. It may be offering a compassionate ear to a co-worker with a very sick daughter, attending a city council meeting, hosting a dinner for single friends, inviting some lonely individuals to Christmas or Thanksgiving dinner, offering a young neighbor a job to help pay for a trip or babysitting a grandchild. While I may not have visions of whole peoples calling me to minister, the individual voices are all around me?

Am I willing to listen to the voices of those around me who need a little time, talent or treasure? How do I fulfill my ministry?

115. Thanksgiving Of A Missionary

(I Am With You Always)

Hence, then, I give unwearied thanks to God, who kept me faithful in the day of my temptation, so that today I can confidently offer Him my soul as a living sacrifice- to Christ, my Lord, who saved me out of all my troubles.....So indeed I must accept with equanimity whatever befalls me, be it good or evil, and always give thanks to God, who taught me to trust in Him always without hesitation, and who must have heard my prayer so that I, however ignorant I was, in the last days dared to undertake such a holy and wonderful work-thus imitating somehow those who, as the Lord once foretold, would reach His Gospel for a testimony to all nations before the end of the world. So we have seen it, and so it has been fulfilled: indeed, we are witnesses that the Gospel has been preached unto those parts beyond which there lives nobody.

--St. Patrick, The Confessions, CCEL

Matthew 28:16-20 Mark 16:14-15

"I must accept with equanimity whatever befalls me, be it good or evil, and always give thanks to God, who taught me to trust in Him always without hesitation.." The joy and faith contained in St. Patrick's Confession can be felt. He learned to trust God and, at the end of his days, he saw all the good that God accomplished through him. Would he have been so happy or have had such an inspiring life if he had not immediately heeded the Call?

Do I immediately answer God's call whether convenient or not? Am I thankful when I do whether or not I feel so at first?

116. All Revelation Is Complete In Christ

(The Lord Has Placed All Things Under Jesus' Feet)

Any person questioning God or desiring some vision or revelation would not only be guilty of foolish behavior but also of offending Him, by not fixing his eyes entirely upon Christ and by living with the desire for some other novelty.

God could respond as follows: If I have already told you all things in My Word, My Son, and if I have no other word, what answer or revelation can I now make that would surpass this? Fasten your eyes on Him alone, because in Him I have spoken and revealed all, and in Him you shall discover even more than you ask for and desire.....

If you desire Me to answer with a word of comfort, behold My Son, subject to Me and to others out of love for Me, and you will see how much He answers. If you desire Me to declare some secret truths or events to you, fix your eyes on Him, and you will discern hidden in Him the most secret mysteries, and wisdom, and the wonders of God, as My Apostle proclaims: In whom are hidden all the treasures of the wisdom and knowledge of God (Col. 2:3).

--St. John of the Cross, The Ascent of Mount Carmel, Book 2, Chapter 22, JTG

Ephesians :17-23

Jesus "is enthroned far above every power or any other name that can be named, not only in this age but in the age to come." If I "fix my eyes upon Him, I will discover in Him the most secret mysteries, wisdom and wonders of God." When I think I need more spiritual excitement, or new knowledge, or flashy experience, these readings get me back to the basics. I need to fix my eyes on Jesus.

In what ways am I still spiritually thrill-seeking? When I crave something new, will I focus on Jesus and trust what I receive from Him?

117. The Need For Spiritual Reading

(The Scriptures Teach Salvation Through Faith In Jesus)

I am always encouraging you, and I am not going to stop encouraging you, to pay attention not only to what is said here in church, but also, when you are at home, to continue constantly in the practice of reading the divine Scriptures...Let not anyone say to me those silly, contemptible words, "I'm stuck in the courthouse all day". "I'm tied up with political affairs."..."I've got a wife." "I'm raising kids." "I'm responsible for a household." "I'm a businessman." "Reading the Bible isn't my thing. That's for those who are set apart, for those who have made the mountaintops their home, who have a way of life without interruptions." What are you saying, man? It's not your business to pay attention to the Bible because you are distracted by thousands of concerns? Then Bible reading belongs more to you than to the monks!...You are always standing in the line of battle and are constantly being hit, so you need more medicine...Numerous powerful inducements to anger and anxiety, to discouragement and grief, to vanity and loss of sense surround us on every side. ...And so we constantly need the whole range of equipment supplied by Scripture...

--St. John Chrysostom, Sermon on Lazarus 3, JTG

2 Timothy 3:14-17 Nehemiah 8:1-12

"All Scripture is inspired by God and useful for refuting error, for guiding people's lives, and training them to be upright." In addition to Scripture, I also study the lives and writings of the saints; those whose lives have been transformed through the study and meditation on the Scriptures. These are the "medicine" and "equipment" needed to stand on the firing line of the spiritual battle. If the inducements to give up this battle were powerful in the second century, how much worse are they today?

How can I add more spiritual reading to my daily routine?

118. Prayer to the Shepherd

(The Lord Is My Shepherd, I Lack Nothing)

Come therefore, Lord Jesus, to look for your servant, to search for the tired sheep. Come, O Shepherd, and look for me....Your sheep has gone astray while you dwelt in the mountains. Leave there the ninety-nine other sheep, and come after the one who strayed away. Come without the dogs, without the bad workers, without the hirelings to uncouth to enter through the door. Come without help and without being announced: long have I waited for your arrival. I know that you will come....

Come, not with a whip but with charity and gentleness of heart. Come to me for I am disturbed by the incursions of the ravaging wolves. Come to me, for I have been cast out of Paradise...I have wandered far from the herd grazing on the heights...You have placed me there, but the wolf roaming by night drove me away from the fold. Come to look for me, for I am seeking You. Search for me, find me, gather me to You, carry me. You can find the one You seek: deign to welcome the one You find, and to place him on Your shoulders...Come yourself to look for your sheep, rather than send servants or hirelings to do the searching. Draw me to You in this flesh which failed in Adam, draw me to You, not from

Sarah... but from Mary. Carry me to Your cross which is the salvation of the lost and the only rest of the weary, to Your cross by which whoever dies can live again.

--St. Ambrose, Reading Scripture With The Church Fathers, JTG

Psalm 23

As I hike in the Smoky Mt. National Park, the words of Psalm 23 come to mind: "In grassy meadows He lets me lie...by tranquil streams He leads me...to restore my spirit and sooth me." Nature is one of the ways that God calls to and searches for His "tired sheep" that have "gone astray while (the Lord) dwelt in the mountains." It is on such trips that God has often "come to look for me, find me, gather me and carry me" to my next needed life experience.

When I am tired, do I find God calling me to the mountains and streams of His beautiful creation? Do I respond often enough?

119. Human vs. Spiritual

(The Word Is The Real Light)

Now the more the mind is concerned about thinking and dealing with what is merely lower and human, the more it is separated from the experience in the intimacy of devotion of what is higher and heavenly, while the more fervently the memory, desire and intellect is withdrawn from what is below to what is above, the more perfect will be our prayer, and the purer our contemplation, since the two directions of our interest cannot both be perfect at the same time, being as different as light and darkness. He who cleaves to God is indeed translated into the light, while he who clings to the world is in the dark. So the supreme perfection of man in this life is to be so united to God that all his soul with all its faculties and powers are so gathered into the Lord God that he becomes one spirit with him, and remembers nothing but God, but with all his desires unified by the joy of love, he rests

contentedly in the enjoyment of his Maker alone.

--St. Albert the Great, On Cleaving To God, CCEL

John 1:1-5, 9-14 Wisdom 9:13-18

"Who could ever have known (God's) will, had (God) not given wisdom, and sent (His) Holy Spirit from above." Thus: "His Word was made flesh." "The supreme perfection of man in this life is to be so united to the (Word) that all his desires unified by the joy of love, he rests contentedly in the enjoyment of his Maker alone." Jesus teaches me how to be both fully human and God-like.

In what ways is my thinking still too absorbed with the world?

120. Detachment

(Who Will Rescue Me From This Body Doomed To Death? "God..)

Above all, therefore, it is necessary that things heard, seen, done and said, and other such things, must be received without adding things from the imagination, without mental associations and without emotional involvement, and one should not let past or future associations, implications or constructs of the imagination form and grow. For when constructs of the imagination are not allowed to enter the memory and mind, a man is not hindered, whether he be engaged in prayer, meditation, or reciting psalms, or in any other practice or spiritual exercise, nor will they recur again. So commit yourself confidently and without hesitation, all that you are, and everything else, individually and in general, to the unfailing and totally reliable providence of God, in silence and in peace, and he will fight for you. He will liberate you and comfort you more fully, more effectively and satisfactorily than if you were to dream about it all the time, night and day, and were to cast around frantically all over the place with the futile and confused thoughts of your mind in bondage, nor will you wear out your mind and body, wasting your time, and stupidly and

pointlessly exhausting your strength.

--St. Albert the Great, On Cleaving To God, JTG

Romans 7:14-25 1 John 2:15-17

"What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body doomed to death? God""thanks be to Him""through Jesus Christ our Lord." No less a person than St. Paul had trouble with detachment in fighting off those mental associations and emotional attachments that bind us to worldly things and events. But, as St. Albert has indicated, if I commit myself confidently to the providence of God, He will fight for me and liberate me. He will do for me what I cannot do for myself. Praise His Name!

In what ways am I a prisoner ...attached to the outcome of events and owned by the things that I own?

121. Free Will

(I Will Choose Life)

If our free will is in truth preserved with innumerable inclinations towards virtue or vice , toward either duty or its opposite, its future must like other things have been known by God , before coming to pass, from the world's creation and foundation ; and in all things prearranged by God in accordance with what He has seen of each act of our free wills. He has with due regard to each movement of our free wills prearranged what also is at once to occur in His providence and to take place according to the train of future events. God's foreknowledge is not the cause of all future events including those that are to have their efficient cause in our freewill guided by impulse.

--St. Origen, On Prayer, CCEL

Deuteronomy 30:15-20 Ezekiel 14:12-20

"Look! I am offering you life and prosperity or death and disaster.

Choose life." Human free will is powerful. Just look at the World Trade

Center/Pentagon disaster that just took place. Some deliberately choose death. While free-will is real, St. Origen has noted a cause for hope, even in the midst of intentional calamity: "(God) has with due regard to each movement of our free wills prearranged what also is at once to occur in His providence and to take place according to the train of future events." God's grace and providence will always move in the direction of life, love and healing and this movement will be stronger than death and hate as proved by the resurrection of Jesus.

How convinced am I that good will ultimately come from evil according to God's providence? In what ways do I tend to choose death?

122. Particular and Daily Examen

(The Harvest Of The Spirit Is Eternal Life)

It contains in it three times and two to examine oneself.

The first time is in the morning, immediately on rising when one ought to propose to guard himself with diligence against that particular sin or defect which he wants to correct or amend.

The second time is after dinner, when one is to ask of God our Lord what one wants, namely , grace to remember how many times he has fallen into that particular sin or defect, and to amend himself in the future.

Then let him make the first Examen, asking account of his soul of that particular thing proposed, which he wants to correct and amend. Let him go over hour by hour , or period by period, commencing at the hour he rose, and continuing up to the hour and instant of the present examen , and let him make (note of as many) times he has fallen into that particular sin or defect. Then let him resolve anew to amend himself up to the second Examen which he will make.

third time: After supper, the second examen will be made, in the same way, hour by hour, commencing at the first Examen and continuing up to the present (second) one, and let him make (note again of the) times he

has fallen into that particular sin or defect.

--St. Ignatius of Loyola, The Spiritual Exercises, CCEL

Galatians 6:1-5, 7-9 Sirrah 22:27-23:6

"Bear one another's burdens and you will fulfill the law of Christ."

While each of us is responsible for our own behavior, St. Paul indicates that we can help each other through loving correction. We can ask for help in performing our daily examination of conscience.

How often do I examine my conscience? Is it possible to find a friend and do some "fifth step" work? (Admit to God, myself and another human being the exact nature of my wrongs.)

123. On Gentleness Toward Ourselves

(I Will Admonish Myself Gently As I Would My Child)

One important direction in which to exercise gentleness, is with respect to ourselves, never growing irritated with one's self or one's imperfections, for although it is but reasonable that we should be displeased and grieved at our own faults, yet ought we to guard against a bitter, angry, or peevish feeling towards them. Many people fall into the error of being angry because they have been angry, vexed because they have given way to vexation, thus keeping up a chronic state of irritation, which adds to the evil of what is past, and prepares the way for a fresh fall on the first occasion. Moreover, all this anger and irritation against one's self fosters pride and springs entirely from self-love, which is disturbed and fretted by its own imperfection.

What we want is a quiet, steady, firm displeasure at our own faults.

(Problems) arise solely because men do not judge themselves by the light of reason, but under the influence of passions.

Believe me....as a parent's tender affectionate remonstrance has far more weight with his child than anger and sternness, so, when we judge our own heart guilty, if we treat it gently, rather in a spirit of pity

than anger, encouraging it to amendment, its repentance will be much deeper and more lasting than if stirred up in vehemence and wrath.

If anyone does not find this gentle dealing sufficient, let him use sterner self-rebuke and admonition, provided only, that whatever indignation he arouses against himself, he finally works it all up to a tender, loving trust in God

So then, when you have fallen, lift up your heart in quietness, humbling yourself deeply before God by reason of your frailty, without marveling that you fell""there is no reason to marvel because weakness is weak, or infirmity, infirm. Heartily lament that you should have offended God, and begin anew to cultivate the lacking grace, with a very deep trust in His Mercy, and with a bold, brave heart.

--St. Francis de Sales, An Introduction to the Devout Life, CCEL
Matthew 18:1-7 Ephesians 6:4

"Do not provoke your children so that they will not become discouraged." St. Francis de Sales makes a good point: If I train myself lovingly, as I would train my child, my repentance will be deeper and longer lasting. The results will be real changes in my attitude and behavior. In addition, by treating myself gently, I will very likely treat others gently regarding their shortcomings.

Ultimately, harshness begets an unrealistic perfectionism but gentleness begets realistic growth.

How can I be both firm and loving with myself regarding my imperfections?

124. Purity...Clarity...Calm

(I Will Be An Example By The Way I Speak And Behave)

If your desire and aim is to reach the destination of the path and home of true happiness, of grace and glory, by a straight and safe way then earnestly apply your mind to seek constant purity of heart, clarity of

mind and calm of the senses. Gather up your heart's desire and fix it continually on the Lord God above. To do so you must withdraw yourself so far as you can from friends and from everyone else, and from the activities that hinder you from such a purpose. Grasp every opportunity when you can find the place, time and means to devote yourself to silence and contemplation, and gathering the secret fruits of silence, so that you can escape the shipwreck of this present age and avoid the restless agitation of the noisy world. For this reason apply yourself at all times to purity, clarity, and peace of heart above all things, so that, so far as possible, you can keep the doors of your heart resolutely barred to the forms and images of the physical senses and worldly imaginations by shutting off the doors of the physical senses and turning within yourself. After all, purity of heart is recognized as the most important thing among all spiritual practices, as its final aim, and the reward for all the labors that a spiritual-minded person and true religious may undertake in this life.

--St. Albert the Great, On Cleaving To God, CCEL

1 Timothy 4:12-16 2 Timothy 4:1-5

"Be an example to all the believers in the ways you speak and behave, and in your love, your faith and your purity." Purity of heart comes by fixing your eyes on the Lord. Clarity of mind comes by reading the Scriptures. Calmness of the senses come by silence and contemplation.

"Be conscientious about what you do and teach, persevere in this, and in this way you will save both yourself and those that listen to you."

In what ways can I purify my heart?....Clarify my mind?....Calm my senses?

125. The Saints: The Army of Christ

(If I Persevere, I Will Reign With Christ)

We depict Christ as our King and Lord, then, and do not strip Him of

His army. For the saints are the Lord's army... For if the saints are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, they will also share in the divine glory and dominion. If they have partaken in Christ's suffering, and are His friends, shall they not receive a share of glory from the Church on earth?

Therefore, since they are truly gods, not by nature, but because they partake of the divine nature, they are to be venerated, not because they deserve it on their own account, but because they bear in themselves Him who is by nature worshipful. We do not back away and refuse to touch red-hot iron because of the nature of iron, but because it has partaken of what is hot by nature. The saints are to be venerated because God has glorified them, and through Him they have become fearful to the enemy, and are benefactors for the faithful. They are not gods and benefactors by their own nature, but because they were loving servants and ministers of God, they have been endowed with boldness before Him. Therefore we venerate them, because the king is given honor through the worship given to his beloved servants. They are obedient servants and favored friends, but they are not the King Himself. When someone prays with faith, offering his petition in the name of such a favored friend, the King receives it, through the intercession of the faithful servant, because He accepts the honor and faith which the petitioner has shown to His servant. Thus, those who approach God through the apostles enjoyed healing, for the shadow of the apostles, or even handkerchiefs and aprons touched to them, gushed with cures.

--St. John of Damascus, On The Divine Images, JTG

2 Timothy 2:11-13 Sirrah 44:1-15

"If we die with Him, we shall live with Him. If we persevere, we shall reign with Him." What does St. Paul mean? "The saints are to be

venerated because God has glorified them...they bear in themselves Him who is worshipful." God, by His own authority, has delegated His power to the saints both living and dead. As Jesus indicated: Those with faith will do as (He) did; even more.

Am I ready to perform the work that Jesus delegates to me both now and in the next life?

126. Imitating Christ

(Jesus Went About Doing Good...I Will Do The Same)

"He who follows me walks not in darkness" says the Lord (John 8:12). By these words of Christ we are advised to imitate His life and habits, if we wish to be truly enlightened and free from all blindness of heart. Let our chief effort, therefore, be to study the life of Jesus Christ. The teaching of Christ is more excellent than all the advice of the saints, and he who has His spirit will find in it a hidden manna. Now, there are many who hear the Gospel often but care little for it because they have not the spirit of Christ. Yet whoever wishes to understand fully the words of Christ must try to pattern his whole life on that of Christ.

What good does it do to speak learnedly about the Trinity if, lacking humility, you displease the Trinity? Indeed it is not learning that makes a man holy and just, but a virtuous life makes him pleasing to God. I would rather feel contrition than know how to define it. For what would it profit us to know the whole Bible by heart and the principles of all the philosophers if we live without grace and the love of God? Vanity of vanities and all is vanity, except to love God and serve Him alone.

--Thomas a Kempis, The Imitation of Christ, CCEL

Mark 1:31-39 Acts 10:36-42

Jesus went about doing good; therefore, my chief effort must be to

study His life and pattern my whole life on His. What did Jesus do? He taught, He healed, He prayed, He gave His life for those He loved. It would be helpful to ask in any situation in which I find myself: What would a true disciple of Jesus do in this situation?

what ways can I more fully pattern my life on Jesus'?

127. Spiritual Preliminaries

(Faith Calls Forth Grace)

All things are possible to one who believes, even more to one who hopes, and still more to one who loves; but all things are even more possible to one who practices these three virtues and perseveres in them. All who are baptized believers have made the first step on the road that leads to perfection, and will be perfect providing they persevere in the practice of the following guides to their conduct:

First: We must always keep our eyes on God and His glory in all we do, say or undertake.

...Resolve firmly to overcome, by the grace of God, all the difficulties found in the spiritual life.

Second: When we undertake the spiritual life we must consider in depth who we are, and we will find ourselves worth of all scorn, unworthy of the name of Christian, and subject to all sorts of afflictions and countless misfortunes... We will find ourselves among those whom God chooses to make humble through an abundance of suffering and travails, both within and without..

Third: We must believe beyond any doubt that it is to our advantage to sacrifice ourselves to God and that He is pleased by our sacrifice....

Without this submission of heart and spirit to the will of God, there can be no devotion or going on to perfection.

Fourth: A soul is all the more dependent on grace as it aspires to higher perfection, and the help and assistance of God are all the more

necessary to us every moment because without Him the soul can do nothing. The world, the flesh and the devil all combine to make such a strong and continual war against the soul that without the very present help of God and our humble and necessary dependence upon Him, they would carry it away in spite of itself. To our nature this seems harsh, but grace takes pleasure in being dependent upon God and finds its rest in Him.

-Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, *The Spiritual Maxims*, RJE

Romans 3:21-27 Philipians 1:6

"All are justified by the free gift of (God's) grace through being set free through Christ Jesus." It is this grace, through faith, that protects us from the flesh, the world and the devil. Without faith and the grace that it calls forth, I would not be able to resolve to overcome the difficulties that may be necessary to fulfill God's will for me.

How can I increase my faith? How can I more fully cooperate with God's grace?

128. Bearing With the Faults of Others

(Testing Of Faith Produces Perseverance)

Until God ordains otherwise, a man ought to bear patiently whatever he cannot correct in himself and in others. Consider it better thus- perhaps to try your patience and to test you, for without such patience and trial your merits are of little account. Nevertheless, under such difficulties you should pray that God will consent to help you bear them calmly.

If, after being admonished once or twice a person does not amend, do not argue with him but commit the whole matter to God that His will and honor may be furthered in all His servants, for God knows well how to

turn evil to God. Try to bear patiently with the defects and infirmities of others, whatever they may be, because you may also have a fault which others must endure.

If all were perfect, what should we have to suffer from others for God's sake? But God has so ordained, that we may learn to bear with one another's burdens, for there is no man without fault, no man without burden, no man sufficient to himself or wise enough. Hence we must support one another, console one another, mutually help, counsel, and advise, for the measure of every man's virtuous best revealed in time of adversity--adversity that does not weaken a man but rather shows what he is.

--Thomas a Kempis, The Imitation of Christ, CCEL

James 1:2-4 Job 5:17-18

"Try to bear patiently with the defects and infirmities of others because you also may have a fault which others must endure." It is odd to consider that my shortcomings may be a spiritual good to others by giving them practice with the virtues of patience and perseverance! Of course, I need to work on eliminating these faults but it is comforting to know that God can create blessings from my not-so-holy characteristics. Much depends on my attitude and that of those around me.

In what ways am I patient with others because I know that they need to be patient with me? Do I remember that those around me act much like mirrors by reflecting back my own unpleasant characteristics?

129. The Call: Adoring and Loving God

(Lord, Work With Me)

-Thou knowest well that it is not Thy gifts that I look for and desire...but it is Thyself and I can be content with nothing less.

-Believe and count as lost all the time that is not spent in living

God.

-This sums up our entire call and duty: to adore God and to love Him, without worrying about the rest.

-My God, since You are with me, and since it is Your will that I should apply my mind to these outward things, I pray that you will give me the grace to remain with You and keep company with You. But so that my work may be better, Lord, work with me, receive my work and possess all my affections. Amen.

-Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection, The Practice of the Presence of God, RJE

2 Thesalonians 3:7-9 Colossians 3:23

"Whatever you do, do from the heart, as for the Lord and not for others." "Imitate us for we did not act in a disorderly way among you."

Brother Lawrence asks God to work with him so that his work will be better. St Paul indicates that one should work for the Lord and not to please others. For my part, I pray every work morning that God will be my supervisor by guiding and directing me in my daily tasks. While this doesn't ensure that I will do the right thing, it does give my work a greater sense of meaning at a higher level.

In what ways would having Jesus as my supervisor influence my attitude and behaviors surrounding work?

130. Thoughts on Death

(I Will Seek What Is Above, For I Have Died With Christ)

Very soon your life here will end, consider, then, what may be in store for you elsewhere. Today we live, tomorrow we die and are quickly forgotten. Oh, the dullness and hardness of a heart which looks only to the present instead of preparing for that which is to come!

Therefore, in every deed and every thought, act as though you were to die this very day. If you had a good conscience you would not fear

death very much. It is better to avoid sin than to fear death. If you are not prepared today, how will you be prepared tomorrow? Tomorrow is an uncertain day; how do you know you will have a tomorrow?

How happy and prudent is he who tries now in life to be what he wants to be found in death. Perfect contempt of the world, a lively desire to advance in virtue, a love for discipline, the works of penance, readiness to obey, self-denial, and the endurance of every hardship for the love of Christ, these will give a man great expectations of a happy death.

The present is very precious; these are the days of salvation; now is the acceptable time. How sad that you do not spend the time in which you might purchase everlasting life in a better way. The time will come when you will want just one day , just one hour in which to make amends, and do you know whether you will obtain it?

Ah, foolish man, why do you plan to live long when you are not sure of living even a day? How many have been deceived and suddenly snatched away? How often have you heard of people being killed by drownings, by fatal falls from high places, of persons dying at meals, at play, in fires, by the sword, in pestilence, or at the hands of robbers! Death is the end of everyone and the life of man quickly passes away like a shadow.

Keep yourself as a stranger here on earth, a pilgrim whom its affairs do not concern at all. Keep your heart free and raise it up to God, for you have not here a lasting home. To Him direct your daily prayers, your sighs and tears, that your soul may merit after death to pass in happiness to the Lord.

--Thomas a Kempis, The Imitation of Christ, CCEL

Colossians 3:1-3 Romans 8:10

I was walking into the hospice room expecting to see a ghastly sight--

a 75-year old woman with terminal cancer near the end of its course. I was amazed when I saw her! She was beautiful. She had bright blue eyes, and translucent skin that seemed to glow from within. She had a calm and peaceful disposition. She told me that she was a woman of faith all of her life and that her daughter was a minister. The woman was not afraid of death. She was flushed with a youth that hinted of eternity. I knew I was seeing parts of her that would continue on into the afterlife.

How am I living my life as if this were my last day? In what ways would my life be different if I knew I were to die in one year?

131. What Causes a Loss of Virtue?

(Uprightness Is My Master)

The multitude then having erroneous opinions imagine that there are many different things which ruin our virtue: some say it is poverty, others bodily disease, others loss of property, others calumny, others death; and they are perpetually bewailing and lamenting these; and while they are commiserating the sufferers and shedding tears they excitedly say to one another "What a calamity has befallen such and such a man!"

Let us determine what is the virtue of man, and let us regard that alone as an injury which is destructive to it. What then is the virtue of a man? Not riches that he should fear poverty ;nor health of body that he should dread sickness, nor the opinion of the public, that he should view an evil reputation with alarm, nor life simply for its own sake, that death should be terrible to him; nor liberty that he should avoid servitude, but carefulness in holding true doctrine, and rectitude in life. Of these things not even the devil himself will be able to rob a man, if he who possesses them guards them with the needful carefulness-: and that most malicious and ferocious demon is

aware of this.

--St. John Chrysostom, A Treatise To Prove That No One Can Harm The Man Who Does Not Injure Himself, CCEL

Romans 6:15-19

"Once you were a slave to sin...(but now) you took uprightness as your master." "What is the virtue of a man?...holding true doctrine and rectitude of life." These readings remind me that I can't blame my poor behavior on circumstances. I always have the freedom to act uprightly and believe correctly. The choice is mine.

In what ways do I blame my behavior on my circumstances? In what ways can I change my thinking so as to believe correctly?

132. Spiritual Chemotherapy

(May My Spirit Be Saved)

It should be known that the onset of prelest has three main causes: pride, the envy of demons and permission for punishment. Of these, the cause of pride is vain heedlessness (or vanity); of envy--desire of success; of permission for punishment-sinful life. Prelest coming from envy and proud conceit is quickly cured, especially if one humbles oneself. But the prelest due to punishment-deliverance to Satan through sin-God often permits, by forsaking a man, to last until death. It happens sometimes that even the innocent are delivered to the torment of demons for the sake of their salvation. It should be known that the spirit of proud conceit himself prophesies in those who do not keep careful attention on the heart.

--St. Gregory of Sinai, Philokalia: On Prayer of the Heart

1 Corinthians 5:1-5 1 Timothy 1:18-20

This is one of the most startling concepts, to me, in the New Testament; being turned over to Satan for physical destruction to save my soul! Wow! It does sound like spiritual chemotherapy where the cure

may be physically as destructive as the disease itself. There is one difference, however. The purpose of this cure is to save the soul, an infinitely greater good than the body. And, as with chemotherapy, it is only used if the alternative is death; in one case physical and the other spiritual.

Do I recognize that my soul is more important than my body? In what ways do I live as if I believe this?

133. Jesus Christ: The Way

(In Will Arise And Walk Toward Jesus)

"I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:16). Every man desires truth and life, but not every man finds the way. That God is life eternal, immutable, intelligible, intelligent, wise, and bestowing His wisdom, even some philosophers of this world have seen. They saw, indeed, but from afar, the fixed, settled, unwavering truth in which are all the governing principles of all created things. They saw, but they were in error and hence did not find the way to reach so great and ineffable and beatific a possession.

But Christ, who is with the Father, is the truth and the life...As we had no way to go to the truth, the Son of God, who is in the Father and ever the truth and the life, became the way for us by assuming man's nature. Walk by Him the man, and you will come to God. You go by Him, and you go to Him. Do not look for any way to come to Him except by Himself. For if He had not deigned to be the way, we would have always gone astray. Therefore He became the way by which you could come to Him. In do not tell you, look for the way. The way itself has come to you. Arise and walk.

--St. Augustine, Sermon 141, JTG

Mark 2:9-11

Jesus commands that I arise and walk toward Him and to give up my

spiritual crippledness. He wants me to arise and walk toward Him for forgiveness, for salvation, for meaning in life, for healing, for guidance, for love and for anything else I can think of.

At this moment, what does I need to walk toward Jesus to receive?

134. The Power of Baptism

(Jesus, May You Wash Away My Blindness)

Once I lay in darkness and in the depths of night and was tossed to and fro in the waves of the turbulent world, uncertain of the correct way to go, ignorant of my true life, and a stranger to the light of truth.

At that time and on account of the life In then led, it seemed difficult to believe what divine mercy promised for my salvation, namely, that someone could be born again and to a new life by being immersed in the healing water of Baptism. It was difficult to believe that though I would remain the same man in bodily form, my heart and mind would be transformed.

But after the life-giving water of Baptism came to my rescue and washed away the stain of my former years and poured into my cleansed and purified heart the light which comes from above, and after In had drunk in the heavenly Spirit and was made a new man by a second birth, then amazingly what In had previously doubted became clear to me. What had been hidden was revealed. What had been dark became light. What previously had seemed impossible now seemed possible. What was in me of the guilty flesh now confessed it was earthly. What was made alive in me by the Holy Spirit was now quickened by God.

--St. Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, Born to New Life, JTG

Acts 19:1-7

When St. Cyprian was baptized, it seems like the waters washed away a spiritual blindness and he became enabled to see in more than the physical sense. When St. Paul baptized the group of men at Ephesus,

they began to speak in tongues and to prophesy. Baptism is more than a symbol. It is a sacrament of power that is dependent upon the action of the Holy Spirit in union with my faith.

In what ways have my eyes been opened as a result of my faith in Jesus?

In what ways has my lack of faith hindered the action of the Holy Spirit in my life?

135. The Blessed Name

(In Will Trust You, Lord)

Write your blessed Name, O Lord, upon my heart, there to remain so indelibly engraved, that no prosperity, no adversity shall ever move me from your love. Be to me a strong tower of defense, a comforter in tribulation, a deliverer in distress, a very present help in trouble, and a guide to heaven through the many temptations and dangers of this life. Amen

-Thomas a Kempis, The Imitation of Christ, P

Psalm 27:7-10 Mark 10:23-27

This prayer of St. Thomas makes an interesting point. Even if it is not true, I might feel that God has abandoned me if bad things happen, such as, according to the psalmist, if one is abandoned by one's parents.

St. Thomas brings up the opposite point that no prosperity can remove me from the love of God. The implication is that, in good times, I may not feel that I need God. God, however, will never abandon me. I will grow distant from Him.

In what ways would prosperity cause me to move away from God? Do I understand that what I consider adversity may help me to grow closer to God?

136. In Desire What In Love

(O God, In Long For You)

O Lord our God, grant us grace to desire thee with our whole heart, so

that desiring thee we may seek and find thee; and so finding thee, may love thee, and loving thee, may hate those sins which separate us from thee, for the sake of Jesus Christ. Amen.

--St. Anselm, P

Psalm 63:1-5

"My heart thirsts for you as a land parched, dreary and waterless."
Without You, Lord, life, even when it is good, is more dead than the most extreme desert. It is survival at best. With You, life, even when it doesn't feel good, becomes alive with hope and possibilities. Teach me, Lord, to hate those things which may seem to contain life giving water but, in fact, are mirages. Amen.

What are my favorite "mirages"; earthly things that seem to contain life but are in fact illusions?

137. A Steadfast Heart

(The Lord Will Preserve Me From Evil)

Grant me O Lord, a steadfast heart, which no unworthy affection may drag downwards; give me an unconquered heart, which no tribulation can wear out; give me an upright heart, which no unworthy purpose may tempt aside.

Bestow on me also, O Lord my God, understanding to know you, diligence to seek you, wisdom to find you, and a faithfulness that may finally embrace you, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

--St. Thomas Aquinas, P

Psalm 121:1-8

"The Lord guards my comings and goings, henceforth and forever." The Lord offers me not only a steadfast, unconquered and upright heart, but wants to bestow on me understanding, diligence, wisdom and faithfulness. I need simply to accept and cooperate with God's gifts. In what ways can I accept and cooperate with God's gifts which he

offers me henceforth and forever?

138. God Is Everywhere

(In Him We Live, Move, And Have Our Being)

You know the general principle: that God is everywhere; on the throne of his glory among the blessed, indeed, but also throughout the whole universe which he fills, governs and preserves, ruling it by his wisdom and grace. This we learn in our infancy, as in all of our memory in childhood. Yet, in the practice of life, we live along as if we scarcely remembered that God sees us.

God is so infinitely present to us that he is in every part of our life and being. Nothing can separate us from him. He is more intimately present to us than we are to ourselves, and whatever we do is done in him...As birds in changing their places find the air wherever they fly, and fish who live in the water are surrounded by that element wherever they swim, so wherever we go, we must find God everywhere. He is more within us than we are in ourselves.

--St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, EAS: A Woman of Prayer, LF

Acts 17:22-28

God has decreed the times and limits of our habitation in this world so that we might seek and find Him. In addition, "He is more within us than we are in ourselves." God has given us an awareness of how short are the number of our days to give us a sense of urgency to search for and determine what is most important in life; union with God. And since God is everywhere, including within ourselves, He is leading us to examine ourselves and discover our souls.

Do I recognize how limited my days are and how urgent is the call to search for God? In what ways am I aware that God is within me and that this is the place where I have the greatest opportunity of finding Him?

139. Devotion

(In Will Soar As With Eagle's Wings)

True devotion presupposes a thorough love of God and therefore it is simply true love of God. Inasmuch as divine love adorns the soul, it is called grace, which makes us pleasing to his Divine majesty. Insofar as it strengthens us to do good, it is called charity.

When we arrive at that degree of perfection at which it not only makes us do good but also do this diligently, frequently and readily, it is called devotion.

Ostriches do not fly; chickens fly in a faltering fashion; but eagles, doves and robins fly aloft, swiftly and frequently. Sinners do not fly up to God but lie mired in the earth filled with earthly objects. Good people who have not as yet achieved devotion fly toward God by their works but do so seldom or slowly.

Devout souls ascend to him promptly, more frequently and go on to lofty heights. In fact, devotion is simply that spiritual agility and vivacity by which charity works in us or through which we work quickly, cheerfully and lovingly.

--St. Francis de Sales, Introduction To The Devout Life, LF

Isaiah 40:31 Jeremiah 29:11

"They that hope in the Lord will renew their strength, they will soar as with eagles wings; they will run and not grow weary, walk and not grow faint." St Francis de Sales indicates that devout souls ascend to God promptly, more frequently, and go on to lofty heights working quickly, cheerfully and lovingly. Hoping in the Lord leads to these wonderful qualities and gifts.

Do I become discouraged when things do not turn out the way that I would like them to? How can I increase my hope in God's promises and plans?

140. My Vocation Is Love

(God Is Gracious And Merciful)

In consideration of my weakness, you found a way to fulfil my childhood's ambitions, and you've found a way now to fulfil these other ambitions of mine, world-wide in their compass.

I was still being tormented by this question of unfulfilled longings and it was a distraction in my prayer, when I decided to consult St. Paul's epistles in the hopes of getting an answer. It was the twelfth and thirteenth chapters of First Corinthians that claimed my attention. The first of these told me that we can't all be apostles, all of us be prophets.....It was a clear enough answer but it didn't satisfy my aspirations, didn't set my heart at rest...Reading on to the end of the chapter, I met this comforting phrase: "Prize the best gifts of heaven. Meanwhile, I can show you a way which is better than any other."

What was it? The Apostle goes on to explain that all the gifts of heaven, even the most perfect of them, without love, are absolutely nothing; charity is the best way of all, because it leads straight to God. Now I was at peace,.....charity--that was the key to my vocation. Love was the true motive force which enabled the other members of the Church to act....Love, in fact, is the vocation which includes all others...Besides myself with joy, I cried out: "Jesus, my Love! I've found my vocation, and my vocation is love."

--St. Therese of Lisieux, Autobiography, PWST

Jonah 3:1-5, 4:1-3,9-11

I am often concerned about my vocation. Am I doing God's will or my own? Am I wasting my time? How important are feelings in a vocation? How important is it to be constantly busy? How important are results? Am I more like St. Theresa, ecstatic with joy that love is my vocation regardless of the actual tasks I am called to do, or, am I more like

the reluctant prophet Jonah, running away from the divine call to do a specific service because it doesn't fit into my self concept or conception of God? (Should God really hate sinners?) It is obvious that St. Theresa has learned the lesson while Jonah has not.

Do I accept the fact that love is a legitimate vocation that is more important than the specific skills used or tasks accomplished?

141. The Means of Acquiring the Presence of God

(In Cannot Serve Two Masters)

First: The first means is living a very pure life.

Second: The second is remaining very faithful to the practice of this presence and to the interior awareness of God in ourselves.

Third: We must take care to glance inwardly toward God, even for a moment, before proceeding with our outward actions.

Fourth: It would not be out of place for those who are beginning this practice to inwardly form a few words. But those who are beginning should be wary lest their minds should stray and return to the creature when they should be keeping them on God alone.

Fifth: Practicing the presence of God is a little difficult in the beginning, but when it is done faithfully, it secretly works marvelous effects in the soul, bringing a flood of graces from the Lord, and leads it without its knowledge to gaze simply and lovingly at God and find His presence everywhere.

Sixth: Please notice that to arrive at this state, we have to mortify our senses, since it is impossible for a soul which still has some creature-satisfaction, to fully enjoy this divine presence. To be with God, one must leave absolutely all created things behind.

--Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection, Spiritual Maxims, RJE

John 15:4-7 Matthew 6:24

Jesus says to remain in Him as He remains in us while Brother Lawrence

indicates that we should glance inwardly toward God before acting outwardly. Jesus says that you cannot serve two masters, while Brother Lawrence indicates that, to be with God, we need to leave all created things behind. Thus, the essence of practicing the presence of God is remaining close to God in all things while reducing our attachments to outcomes and worldly things.

How can I increase my awareness of God in my life? How can I reduce my attachment to worldly things?

142. Not Working For Personal Gain

(The Lord Knows Every Plan And Thought)

For the good is not good if it is not rightly done. It is really good only if it is not done with the purpose of receiving some reward: as, for instance, the search for popularity or glory may be rewarded by fame, or by excessive gain, or by something else that is wrong. God is not interested in what happens to turn out to be good or in what appears to be good. He is interested in the purpose for which a thing is done.

--St. John of Damaskos, On the Virtues and Vices, Philokalia

He who does something good and expects a reward is serving not God but his own will.

--St. Mark the Ascetic, No Righteousness By Works, Philokalia

1 Chronicles 38:8-10 Genesis 4:3-8

"The Lord scrutinizes all hearts and understands whatever plans they may devise." "He is interested in the purpose for which a thing is done." My motives are always mixed and the honest thing to do is to accept this and know that God knows my true motivations. This is true even in regard to having this manuscript published. While I am doing it for God's glory and my joy, am I also doing it for my own glory? I would be lying if I said that it hasn't occurred to me. I suspect that

my motives will never be truly pure in this life. I know, however, that God wants me to strive for this purity of purpose even if I don't succeed.

Am I willing to be honest with God and others regarding my motivations?

How can I decrease my ulterior motivations?

143. Experiencing Freedom

(God's Peace Shall Not Depart)

Strive to receive a sure, unequivocal pledge of salvation in your heart, so that at the time of your death you will not be distraught and unexpectedly terrified. You have received such a pledge when your heart no longer reproaches you for your failings and your conscience stops chiding you because of your fits of anger; when through God's grace your bestial passions have been tamed; when you weep tears of solace and your intellect prays undistracted and with purity; and when you await death, which most people dread and run away from, calmly and with a ready heart.

--St. Theognostos, On the Practice of the Virtues, Philokalia

Isaiah 54:10 Ecclesiastes 5:19-20

"My love shall never leave you nor my covenant of peace be shaken, says the Lord, who has mercy on you." I will experience God's freedom when I accept, unconditionally, in spite of my feelings, that God's love, peace and mercy will never leave me. When I accept this, my willingness and God's grace will accomplish His work in my life. My heart/conscience will no longer plague me, my animal passions will be calmed, I will have a tame mind that will pray without distraction, and I will not fear physical death when it comes.

In what ways can I train myself to know, in my heart, that God's love and mercy are always with me if I accept them?

144. Grace

(God Withholds No Good Thing From Those Who Do What Is Right)

St. John Chrysostom says: "A man's readiness and commitment are not enough if he does not enjoy help from above as well; equally help from above is no benefit to us unless there is also commitment and readiness on our part. These two facts are proved by Judas and Peter. For although Judas enjoyed much help, it was of no benefit to him, since he had no desire for it and contributed nothing from himself. But Peter, although willing and ready, fell because he enjoyed no help from above. So holiness is woven of these two strands. Thus I entreat you neither to entrust everything to God and then fall asleep, nor to think, when you are striving diligently, that you will achieve everything by your own efforts.

--St. Theodor us the Great Ascetic, A Century of Spiritual Texts,
Fallaciously

Psalm 84:11 two Corinthians 8:9

"You know the gracious act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that for your sake He became poor although He was rich, so that by His poverty you might become rich." "Thus, I entreat you neither to entrust everything to God and then fall asleep, nor to think, when you are striving diligently, that you will achieve everything by your own efforts." If I am to accomplish anything of value in my life, I must always remember that I am God's instrument, to be used by Him when He wishes. My job is to be ready to be used through the training that He provides me through my daily living. The life of Jesus shows me how to do this.

How can I become increasingly ready to do God's work? How will I know when He is using me?

145. Distinguishing Ego From True Self

(Flesh Begets Flesh, Spirit Begets Spirit)

As Antony, the great servant of God, said: "Holiness is achieved when

the intellect is in its natural state." And again, he said: "The soul realizes its integrity when its intellect is in that state in which it was created." And shortly after this he adds: "Let us purify our mind, for I believe that when the mind is completely pure and is in its natural state, it gains penetrating insight..."

--St. Hesychios the Priest, On Watchfulness and Holiness, Philokalia
Everything longs for what is akin to itself: the soul, since it is bodiless, desires heavenly goods, while the body, being dust, seeks earthly nourishment. So we shall surely come to experience immaterial perception if by our labors we refine our material nature.

--St. Diadochos of Photiki, On Spiritual Knowledge, Philokalia
John 3:5-8, 19-21

"Whoever loves the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be clearly seen as done in God." "We shall surely come to experience immaterial perception if by our labors refine our material nature." The "immaterial perception" noted by St. Diadochos is "the light" indicated by Jesus. How do we refine our material nature? By choosing to see the truth revealed by Jesus; that we our spiritual beings living temporarily in material bodies. We can choose to live to develop our spiritual powers instead of choosing mere survival and gratification of the senses.

In what ways do I still choose "darkness" (material) over the "light" (spiritual)?

146. Dying and Being Reborn

(Lord, Give Me A New Heart And Spirit)

He who loves God consciously in his heart is known by God, for the degree that he receives the love of God consciously in his soul, he truly enters into God's love. From that time on, such a man never loses an intense longing for the illumination of spiritual knowledge, until

he senses its strength in his bones and no longer knows himself, but is completely transformed by the love of God. He is both present in this life and not present in it; still dwelling in the body, he yet departs from it, as through love he ceaselessly journeys toward God in his soul. His heart now burns constantly with the fire of love and clings to God with an irresistible longing, since he has once and for all transcended self-love in his love for God...

--St. Diadochos of Photiki, On Spiritual Knowledge, Philokalia

Romans 10:9-11 Ezekiel 36:26-27

"One believes with the heart and is so justified, and one confesses with the mouth and is so saved." Because of this, "his heart now burns constantly with the fire of love since he has once and for all transcended his self-love in his love for God." St. Paul indicates a modern psychological truth. What one thinks and believes controls ones perceptions and life. This is particularly true when one does this consciously (confessing with the mouth). If I choose this love of God, I will naturally, over time, diminish my self-centered love.

Am I willing to believe in my heart and confess with my mouth all that Jesus teaches? How much fear do I have about losing my self-love?

147. Forgetting About Preferences

(The Just Man, Because Of His Faith, Shall Live)

If you patiently accept what comes, you will always pray with joy.

--St. Evagrius the Solitary, On Prayer, Philokalia

He who opposes unpleasant events opposes the command of God.

Unwittingly. But when someone accepts them with real knowledge, he waits patiently for the Lord.

He who prays with understanding patiently accepts circumstances, whereas he who resents them has not yet attained pure prayer.

...For patient acceptance of whatever happens kindles the remembrance

of God, whereas refusal to accept weakens the spiritual purpose of the heart and so makes it forgetful.

--St. Mark the Ascetic, No Righteousness by Works, Philokalia

Habakkuk 1:2-3, 2:2-4 Psalm 40:1

"Anyone whose heart is not upright will succumb, but the upright will live through faithfulness." "He who opposes unpleasant events opposes the command of God but he who patiently accepts what comes will always pray with joy." Obviously, patience with and acceptance of what one considers to be unpleasant events is very difficult for those in a country where so many good things and graces are taken for granted. If I live with gratitude, counting my blessings every day, and faith, trusting that God will bring the best of outcomes even if it doesn't appear that way to me, my life will be filled with joy.

Start a gratitude list and add one thing each day. What am I particularly grateful for today? What am I dealing with that requires much faith?

148. Goodness And Peace In Man

(Jesus, Give Us Your Gift Of Peace)

First keep peace with yourself; then you will be able to bring peace to others. A peaceful man does more good than a learned man. Whereas a passionate man turns even good to evil and is quick to believe evil, the peaceful man, being good himself, turns all things to good.

The man who is at perfect ease is never suspicious, but the disturbed and discontented spirit is upset by many a suspicion. He neither rests himself nor permits others to do so. He often says what ought not to be said and leaves undone what ought to be done. He is concerned with the duties of others but neglects his own.

Direct your zeal, therefore, first upon yourself; then you may with justice exercise it upon those about you. You are well versed in

coloring your own actions with excuses which you will not accept from others, though it would be more just to accuse yourself and excuse your brother. If you wish men to bear with you, you must bear with them. Behold, how far you are from true charity and humility which does not know how to be angry with anyone, or to be indignant save only against self!

It is no great thing to associate with the good and gentle, for such association is naturally pleasing. Everyone enjoys a peaceful life and prefers persons of congenial habits. But to be able to live at peace with harsh and perverse men, or with the undisciplined and those who irritate us, is a great grace, a praiseworthy and manly thing.

Some people live at peace with themselves and with their fellow men, but others are never at peace with themselves nor do they bring it to anyone else. These latter are a burden to everyone, but they are more of a burden to themselves. A few, finally, live at peace with themselves and try to restore it to others.

Now, all our peace in this miserable life is found in humbly enduring suffering rather than in being free from it. He who knows best how to suffer will enjoy the greater peace, because he is the conqueror of himself, the master of the world, a friend of Christ, and an heir of heaven.

--St. Thomas a Kempis, The Imitation of Christ, CCEL

John 14:27 2 Corinthians 13:11

"Live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you." "All of our peace in this life is found in humbly enduring suffering rather than in being free from it." "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you." I would dearly love to be at peace and to be able to impart this to others. I cultivate this by accepting the Peace of Jesus and learning to live in peace. In addition, there is a more mental

component to this; the acceptance of suffering and having the faith to trust in God's outcomes.

In what ways do I strive for peace in myself and others? Is my concept of peace realistic by accepting suffering as a natural part of life and growth?

149. Letting Go Of Thoughts

(To Be Spiritually Minded Is Life And Peace)

If we truly wish to please God and to enjoy the grace of His friendship, we should present to Him an intellect that is stripped bare-not weighted down with anything that belongs to this present life...

--St. John of Karpathos, Texts For the Monks In India, Philokalia

The intellect cannot dally with any sensible object unless it entertains at least some kind of passionate feeling for it.

--St. Thalassios, On Love, Self-Control and Life in Accordance With the Intellect, Philokalia

You cannot attain pure prayer while entangled in material things and agitated by constant cares. For prayer means the shedding of thoughts.

--St. Evagrius the Solitary, On Prayer, Philokalia

Romans 8:2-13,37 Mark 4:18-20

"Those sown among thorns are people who hear the Word, but worldly anxiety, the lure of riches, and the craving for other things intrude and choke the word, and it bears no fruit." "The intellect cannot dally with any sensible objects unless it entertains at least some kind of passionate feeling for it." What I concentrate my mind on most in life becomes my "god," a substitute to take the place of the real God. Jesus makes that really clear. Anxiety, lures and cravings, intensified by my thinking, inhibit the work of God in my life. I must reduce my attachment to worldly things and outcomes. The mind is the place to

start.

What anxieties, lures and cravings most occupy my mind? What steps can I take to reduce these tendencies?

150. Purity of Mind and Unity of Purpose

(In Will Still My Soul Like A Weaned Child)

A man is raised from the earth by two wings-simplicity and purity.

There must be simplicity in his intention and purity in his desires.

Simplicity leads to God, purity embraces and enjoys Him.

If your heart is free from ill-ordered affection, no good deed will be difficult for you. If you aim at and seek after nothing but the pleasure of God and the welfare of your neighbor, you will enjoy freedom within.

If your heart were right, then every created thing would be a mirror of life for you and a book of holy teaching, for there is no creature so small and worthless that it does not show forth the goodness of God. If inwardly you were good and pure, you would see all things clearly and understand them rightly, for a pure heart penetrates to heaven and hell, and as a man is within, so he judges what is without. If there be joy in the world, the pure of heart certainly possess it; and if there be anguish and affliction anywhere, an evil conscience knows it too well.

As iron cast into fire loses its rust and becomes glowing white, so he who turns completely to God is stripped of his sluggishness and changed into a new man. When a man begins to grow lax, he fears a little toil and welcomes external comfort, but when he begins perfectly to conquer himself and to walk bravely in the ways of God, then he thinks those things less difficult which he thought so hard before.

--St. Thomas a Kempis, The Imitation of Christ, CCEL

Psalm 131

"I hold myself in quiet and silence, like a little child in its mother's arms, like a little child, so I keep myself." "A man is raised from earth by two wings-simplicity and purity." This simplicity and purity come across wonderfully in Psalm 131. The simplicity and purity are that of a small baby in its mother's arms! When I watch my four-month-old grandson, he is full of delight and wonder. He seems to be learning from every little thing he sees and hears. He also seems so full of trust. He knows that if he has a need, there are many loving arms to help him meet them. Thus, he sleeps in peace.

In what ways can I simplify my intentions in life and purify my desires?

151. Petitionary Prayer

(Justice Will Be Done)

Divine providence does not early arrange what effects are to occur; it also arranges the causes of these effects and the relationship between them...in the case of prayer we do not pray in order to change God's plan, but in order to obtain by our prayers those things which God planned to bring about by means of prayers, in order, as Gregory says, in order that our prayers should entitle us to receive what almighty God planned from all eternity to give us...

God gives us many things out of sheer generosity, without being asked. The reason why He wants to give us some things in response to our petition is that it is profitable for us to acquire a certain confidence in running to Him and to recognize that He is the source of all that is good for us.

--St. Thomas Aquinas, Suma II-II, PWTA

Luke 18:1-8

God does not need my prayers, I do. Prayer puts me in contact with my Source. The greater my contact with God, the more I recognize my need for Him and the more the blockages to His grace are removed from me. Jesus clearly indicates that the reason for diligent and persistent prayer is to increase faith which is the prerequisite for many blessings.

As it asks in Luke 18:8: When Jesus comes for me at the end of this life, will He find any faith in me? If my prayers were answered quickly, would I pray less often?

152. Childlike Faith

(I Will Not Fear Or Loose Heart)

When Theresa was on her deathbed, her sister Pauline asked her to explain what she meant by "remaining a little child before God."

Theresa replied:

It is to recognize our nothingness, to expect everything from God as a little child expects everything from its father; it is to be disquieted about nothing,....having no other occupation but to gather...the flowers of love and sacrifice, and offering them to God in order to please Him.

To be little is not attributing to oneself the virtues that one practices, believing oneself capable of anything, but to recognize that God places this treasure in the hands of His little child to be used when necessary; but it remains always God's treasure. Finally, it is not to become discouraged over one's faults, for children fall often, but they are too little to hurt themselves very much.

--St. Theresa of Lisieux, Her Last Conversations, PWTL

2 Chronicles 20:15-17

St. Theresa lays out three characteristics of a child-like faith: expect everything necessary from God, do not attribute to myself the virtues I practice, and, do not become discouraged over my faults. These were important even in Old Testament times of war, as noted in the Bible reading. The army of King Jehoshaphat was to expect God to fight for them, not to assume that their fighting skills were their own, and not to become discouraged if their faith was not perfect and, thus, they felt fear. As long as they acted in accord with God's word and showed up for the fight, victory would be theirs---and it was.

How do I avoid becoming preoccupied with my shortcomings?

153. The Nature of Desire

(I Will Store Up Heavenly Treasure)

For desire is drawn toward three things: the pleasure of the flesh,

vain self-glory, and the acquisition of material wealth. As a result of this senseless appetite it scorns God and His commandments, and forgets His generosity; it turns like a savage beast against its neighbor, it plunges the intelligence into darkness and prevents it from looking towards the truth. He who has acquired a spiritual understanding of this truth will share, even here on earth, in the kingdom of heaven and will live a blessed life in expectation of the blessedness that awaits those who love God.

--St. John of Damascus, On the Virtues and the Vices, Philokaiia
Matthew 6:19-21, Acts 12:22-23, 2 Chronicles 10:1-19

Pleasure of the flesh, self-glory, and material acquisitions are the three worldly desires that drive both God and my neighbor out of my life. King Rehoboam split the Kingdom of Israel due to his lust for power and possession. King Herod lost his life by his pride and self-glory. Jesus warns me to store up heavenly treasure, not earthly, for where my treasure is, there will my heart be. The choice is truly mine.

Do my desires for worldly things outstrip my actual need for them?
Which area is my greatest weakness: pleasure, vanity or greed? What void in my life is this weakness trying to fill? How can this void be truly filled?

154. Uncreated

(I Will Not Deceive Myself)

Be on your guard against the tricks of the demons. While you are praying purely and calmly, sometimes they suddenly bring before you some strange and alien form, making you imagine in your conceit that the Deity is there. They are trying to persuade you that the object suddenly disclosed to you is the Deity, whereas the Deity does not possess quantity and form.

--Evagrius the Solitary, On Prayer, Philokalia

1 Corinthians 3:18

"Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you considers himself wise in this age, let him become a fool so as to become wise." I do not know to what extent the demons try to deceive me. I do know that my own ego, self-centeredness and pride are always popping up on my spiritual journey. I have had times when I was sure I understood the connection of events and people (of course, I was somehow always prominent) only to find out later how self-deceived I was. In addition, I've often felt a calling or vision to do something which later evaporated like mist. In these cases, while I don't believe that "callings" need to be permanent, I suspect that at least some worldly self-delusion is involved.

In what ways am I spiritually self-deceived? Do I have spiritual mentors that I can reflect with to reduce these self-deceptions?

155. The Body of Christ

(Do This In Remembrance Of Me....)

Since it was the will of God's only-begotten son that men should share in His divinity, He assumed our nature in order that by becoming man He might make men gods...He offered His body to God the Father on the alter of the cross as a sacrifice for our reconciliation. He shed His blood for our ransom and purification...But to ensure that the memory of so great a gift would abide with us forever, He left His body as food and His blood as drink for the faithful to consume in the form of bread and wine. ...Christ Himself, the true God, is set before us as our food. What could be more wonderful than this? No other sacrament has greater healing power, through it sins are purged away, virtues are increased, and the soul is enriched with an abundance of every spiritual gift....spiritual delight is tasted at its very source

and...we renew the memory of that surprising love for us which Christ revealed in His passion.

--St. Thomas Aquinas, PWTA

Mark 14:22-25

"Take it. This is my body. This is my blood of the covenant which will be shed for many." "Through this gift, sins are purged, virtues are increased and the soul is enriched with an abundance of every spiritual gift. He assumed our nature in order that by becoming man, He might make men gods." Thanks be to God for the love shown in this mystery.

What does Abeing made into a god@ mean?

156. Praying the Way You Can

(God Hears Me)

What an extraordinary thing it is, the efficiency of prayer! Like a queen, it has access at all times to the Royal presence, and can get whatever it asks for. And it's a mistake to imagine that your prayer wont be answered unless you've something out of a book, some splendid formula of words specially devised to meet this emergency. If that were true I'm afraid I'd be in a terribly bad position....I just do what children have to do before they=ve learned to read; I tell God what I want quite simply, without any splendid turns of phrase, and somehow He always manages to understand me. For me, prayer means launching out of the heart towards God; it means lifting up one's eyes, quite simply, to heaven, a cry of grateful love, form the crest of joy or the trough of despair; it's a vast supernatural force which opens out my heart, and binds me close to Jesus.

-St. Theresa of Lisieux, Autobiography, PWTOL

"I can't sleep, I'm suffering too much, so I am praying."

"And what (her sister Celene asked) are you saying to Jesus?"

"I say nothing to Him. I love Him."

-St. Theresa of Lisieux, Her Last Conversations, PWTOL

1 John 5:14-15

According to St. John, "...if we ask anything of Him in accordance with His will, He hears us....we know that what we have asked Him for is ours." St. Theresa would say the same thing whether or not we ask God using words. Her loving presence before Jesus was her prayer.

Must I always pray to God using words? Will I re-dedicate myself to meditation;

just being in Jesus' presence?

157. Beyond Human Knowledge

(God's Foolishness Is Wiser Than Human Wisdom)

Knowledge of created beings is one thing and knowledge of the divine truth is another. The second surpasses the first just as the sun outshines the moon. Knowledge of created beings increases the more we observe the commandments actively; but knowledge of the truth grows the more we hope in Christ.

--St. Mark the Ascetic, No Righteousness By Works, Philokalia

By spiritual knowledge, I do not mean wisdom, but that unerring appreciation of God and of divine realities through which the devout, no longer dragged down by the passions, are raised to a divine state by the grace of the Spirit.

--St. Theognostos, On the Practice of the Virtues, Philokalia

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

"...the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength." "Knowledge of the truth grows the more we hope in Christ." Unlike worldly knowledge, knowledge of the spirit comes not so much from study as from faith and hope in Jesus.

Some of the knowledge is intuitive and experiential, not logical.

Studying the teachings of the Church instructs me on how to interpret

this "knowledge".

In what ways do I have an appreciation of God and divine realities?

158. Being Devoted

(Without Love I Am Nothing)

When the intellect forgets the purpose of true devotion, then external works of virtue bring no profit.

--St. Mark the Ascetic, No Righteousness By Works, Philakolia

Fasts and vigils, the Study of Scriptures, renouncing possessions and everything worldly, are not in themselves perfection, as we have said; they are its tools. For perfection is not to be found in them; it is acquired through them. It is useless, therefore, to boast of our fasting, vigils, poverty and reading of Scripture when we have not achieved the love of God and our fellow men. Whoever has achieved love has God within himself and his intellect is always with God.

--St. John Cassian, On the Holy Fathers of Sketis, Philakolia

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Am I a Pharisee at heart? Do I try to prove my own worthiness through my good deeds regardless of my motives, my attitudes and my feelings surrounding my actions? Many times, yes. I very often want to "do the right thing" even if my inner life is in disarray. Today's readings make the strong point that unless my actions are motivated by true love of God and neighbor, they are probably motivated by ego-fear, and will not profit me spiritually. I must always work on my inner life.

In what ways are my "good deeds" motivated by fear?

159. The Kingdom of God

(Jesus, Thy Kingdom Come)

We pray "Thy kingdom come" because the kingdom of heaven signifies the glory of paradise...This kingdom is most desirable for three reasons:

a) Its supreme righteousness. Here below the wicked are mingled with

the good, whereas in heaven there are no wicked and no sinners.

b) Its perfect liberty. Although all men desire liberty naturally, here there is none; but in heaven there is perfect liberty without any trace of bondage. In fact, not only will all be free, but all will be kings.

This is because all shall be of one will with God: whatever the saints will, God shall will; and whatever God wills, the saints shall will....

c) Its wondrous wealth. Take note that whatever man seeks in this world, he will find it more perfect and more excellent in God alone.

--St. Thomas Aquinas, Three Greatest Prayers, PWST

Mark 4:30-32

"The Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed...the smallest of seeds...but once it is sown it springs up and becomes the largest of plants and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of sky can dwell in its shade." While it is true, as St. Thomas says, that the Kingdom of God is known for its righteousness, liberty and wealth, Jesus' parable also indicates that it is known for its universality. I cannot imagine that the mustard tree offers shade to some birds but not to others. In the same way, the tree does not grab the birds and drag them to its shade. The birds want the protection and claim it. The Kingdom of God is for all people. They must, however, want it and go toward its light.

In what ways do I refuse admission into the Kingdom of God?

160. Being Myself

(I Will Not Bury My Talents)

Jesus has been gracious enough to teach me a lesson about this mystery, simply by holding up to my eyes the book of nature. I realized, then, that all the flowers He has made are beautiful; the rose in its glory, the lily in its whiteness, don't rob the tiny violet of its sweet smell, or the daisy of its charming simplicity. I saw that if all these

lesser blooms wanted to be roses instead, nature would lose the gaiety of her springtime dress--there would be no little flowers to make a pattern over the countryside. And so it is with the world of souls, which is His garden. He wanted to have great Saints, to be his lilies and roses, but He has made lesser Saints as well, and these lesser ones must be content to rank as daisies and violets, lying at His feet and giving pleasure to His eye like that. Perfection consists simply in doing His will, and being just what He wants us to be.

This, too, was made clear to me--that our Lord's love makes itself seen quite as much in the simplest of souls as in the most highly gifted, as long as there is no resistance offered to His grace.

--St. Theresa of Lisieux, Autobiography, PWTOL

Matthew 25:14-18

"To one he gave five talents; to another, two; to a third, one--each according to his ability." "Our Lord's love makes itself seen quite as much in the simplest of souls as in the most highly gifted, as long as there is no resistance to His grace." Jesus and St. Theresa make a similar point: even though some have greater gifts, all are necessary for the functioning of the Body of Christ in this world. Without the variety of gifts, we would all be the poorer. We need only to be open to God's grace so that our life expresses the love of God in all of its diversity.

Am I content to be a handsome carnation as opposed to a sickly orchid if that is what I am meant to be? Am I in resistance to the gifts and talents that God has given me? Am I in rebellion against who and what I really am?

161. Detachment From Worldly Things

(God Has Made Me Laugh)

To anyone among you who is oppressed by a sense of worthlessness and

inability to attain holiness, this is our message: if he attains dispassion he can see Jesus, not only in the future, but coming to him here and now with power and great glory. Though his soul, like Sarah, has grown old in barrenness, it can still bear a holy child, contrary to all expectation; like her he can still say: "God has made me laugh."--that is, God has granted me great joy after the many years I have spent in sorrow, dominated by the passions.

--St. John Kapatios, Texts For The Monks in India, Philokalia
Self-control and strenuous effort curb desire; stillness and intense longing for God wither it.

--St. Thalassios, Philokalia

Genesis 21:1-7

Discipline and effort coupled with meditation and an intense longing for God will help curb worldly passions and give birth to spiritual joy. It may feel like childbirth but the resulting spiritual growth will make it worth the pain of ego-death. It is important to fight any discouragement in attaining holiness. The Lord promises success!
How do I handle spiritual discouragement?

162. Redirecting Your Attention

(I Will Put On The Lord Jesus)

The Holy Spirit, out of compassion for our weakness, comes to us even when we are impure. And if only He finds our intellect truly praying to Him, He enters it and puts to flight the whole array of thoughts and ideas circling within it, and He arouses it to a longing for spiritual prayer.

--Evagrius the Solitary, On Prayer, Philokalia

Think nothing and do nothing without a purpose directed to God...

--St. Mark the Ascetic, On the Spiritual Law, Philokalia

Romans 13:11-14

ALet us throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light
...the Lord Jesus...and make no provision for the desires of the
flesh.@ A If the Holy Spirit finds our intellect praying to Him, He
enters it and arouses it to a longing for spiritual prayer.@ Lord
Jesus, may you empower my feeble efforts at holiness and spiritual
growth. Amen.

How can I take steps to think and do nothing without a purpose directed
towards God?

163. Teachers

(I Will Listen To And Teach True Doctrine)

When Christ Himself spoke to Paul and called him, He could have opened
his eyes at once and made known to him the way of perfection; instead
He sent him to Ananias and told him to learn from him the way of truth,
saying: Arise and go into the city, and there you will be told what you
must do.@ In this manner, He teaches us to be guided by those who are
advanced on the way, so that the vision rightly given to Paul should
not be wrongly interpreted; otherwise it might lead later generations
presumptuously to suppose that each individual must be initiated in to
the truth directly by God, as Paul was, and not by the fathers...

--BSt. John Cassian, On the Holy Fathers of Sketis, Philokalia

A wise man is one who accepts advice, especially that of a spiritual
father counseling him in accordance with the will of God.

--BSt. Thalassios, On Love, Self-Control and Life in Accordance with
the Intellect, Philokalia

John 4:21-24 Deuteronomy 6:4-9 Psalm 78:5-6

As I read these words of the saints of the eastern church, the words of
Jesus come to mind: "Salvation is from the Jews." While all faiths have
valid spiritual experiences, how the experiences are interpreted may
not be so. Other spiritual masters in all world religions have done

many of the works of Christ. How are they different from Jesus? For one thing, many of the non-Christian faiths conceive of God as either an impersonal machinery that runs the universe or, in fact, don't necessarily believe in a God at all. One of the necessities for Jesus to have been born a Jew is to demonstrate that God is a God of love who sacrifices for His children out of love.

How can I increase my readings of the Old Testament and the traditions of the early Church?

164. Does God Talk in Riddles?

(Jesus, Reveal To Me What Has Lain Hidden)

Because the letter kills and the Spirit gives life, it is indispensable that we enter the interior of spiritual discourse with a quickening spirit. We remind ourselves and others that, in the future, the whole of Scripture will be our (mental) dress; the old, as well as the new, will be the means of allegorical understanding, because as we read in the Old Testament: I will open my mouth in parables; I will speak in old mysteries (Ps 78:2), or again, as it is written in the New Testament, Jesus spoke all these things in parables to the crowds and without parables he would not speak to them (Matt 13:34). The heavenly talk of the prophets and the apostles is not to be wondered at; it is brought forth by prayer, not by the usual way that men write. Much will vanish easily if it is gotten readily; great things, which are the true thing, held in the interior, will be brought together, that the blessed sayings of God will be separated from other writings by their worth and type.

BSt. Eucherius of Lyons, Letter to Veranus, CCEL

Matthew 13:34-35 Psalm 78:1-2

I do not believe that Jesus talked in riddles thus trying to hide truth from the crowds. He told stories that could be understood at several

levels and interpreted in various ways depending on where the listener was at both spiritually and mentally. As St. Eucherius says, wisdom that is brought forth through prayer and meditation on the Scriptures will become apparent as God separates the wheat of wisdom from the chaff of the story.

Do I try to understand the parables of Jesus with new eyes each time I read them?

165. Humility: King of the Virtues

(Lord, Hear My Prayer And Restore Me)

I shall tell you something strange, but do not be surprised by it.

Should you fail to attain dispassion because of the predispositions dominating you, but at the time of your death be in the depths of humility, you will be exalted above the clouds no less than the man who is dispassionate. For even if the treasure of those who are dispassionate consists of every virtue, the precious stone of humility is more valuable than them all: it brings about not only propitiation with the Creator, but also entry with the elect into the bridal chamber of His kingdom.

--BSt. Theognostos, On the Practice of the Virtues, Philokalia

2 Chronicles 33:1-18 Isaiah 57:15

King Manasseh of Israel had totally rejected the Lord by going so far as to have his sons burnt to death in the ritual fire offerings of one of the pagan cults. Israel was then conquered by Assyria and Manasseh was taken to Babylon in captivity where he learned humility. After this, he was restored to Israel and he changed his ways by worshiping the Lord alone and abandoning the pagan practices. Why was this so? According to St. Theognostos, humility is more valuable than any virtue. From humility, all virtues follow.

In what ways do I humble myself before the Lord? In what ways do I need

to continue to work at this?

166. A Night Time Prayer

(Let Me See Your Face When I Awake)

Jesus Christ my God, I adore you and thank you for all the graces you have given me this day. I offer you my sleep and all the moments of this night, and I ask you to keep me from sin. I put myself within your sacred side and under the mantle of our Lady. Let your holy angels stand about me and keep me in peace. And let your blessings be on me. Amen.

--St. Alphonsus Liguori, LF

Psalm 17:6-9, 15

"But I in my uprightness shall see your face and when I awake, I shall be filled with the vision of you." St. Alphonsus' lovely little prayer echos the Psalm but both, I think, carry the connotation not only of regular sleep, but death. The ultimate meaning of this prayer is that when I awake from the dream of life, I will be filled with the vision of God, including the angels and Saints. May I be ready!

When I am going to sleep, do I feel prepared to awaken to the afterlife? How can I further prepare?

167. The Benefits of Prayer

(O Lord, May You Be Attentive To My Prayer)

Prayer is in its essence the union of the soul with God. Its effects and fruits are a pure soul, collection of inner forces, reconciliation with God, tears, forgiveness of sins, a bridge that leads us above and over temptation, a wall of protection against sorrows. It is the work of angels, a food for all spiritual beings, the joy of eternity, a divine action, a source of virtues, a treasury of graces; it is spiritual progress, the food of the soul, revelation, the exclusion of faintheartedness, a prop for our confidence, a comfort in grief.

--St. John Climacus, P

Nehemiah 1: 4-11

While St. John Climacus lists the various benefits of prayer (no less than twelve), Nehemiah demonstrates the proper attitude and way to pray. Prerequisites include fasting and mourning. The prayer itself includes praise of God, profession of sins both individual and communal, and petitions in accordance with God's promises. There is also great perseverance (praying night and day). While prayer may seem like hard work, look at the benefits! They make the effort seem small. How many of these benefits of prayer was I aware of? Can I think of additional benefits?

168. Mystery of the Cross

(The Lord Will Pass Over You)

We venerate the wood of thy Cross, O thou who lovest mankind, for upon it thou, the life of all, was nailed. O Savior, thou hast opened paradise to the thief who turned to thee in faith, and thou has counted him worthy of blessedness when he confessed to thee crying, "O Lord, remember me." Accept us like him, as we cry: We all have sinned. In thy merciful kindness, remember us.

--Eastern Orthodox Service, P

Leviticus 17:11 Exodus 12:13

"...the life of the creature is in the blood and I have given it to you for performing the rite of expiation on the alter for your lives..."

"We venerate the wood of the Cross, O Thou who lovest mankind, for upon it Thou, the life of all, was nailed." For me, these passages express the most difficult mysteries of salvation: why is blood and sacrifice (scapegoating) necessary? While in the Old Testament it doesn't appear to have much to do with love (does the sacrificed lamb love those who have killed it?), in the New Testament, it is the central point. It is,

in Jesus, the ultimate expression of love.

Does the fact that Jesus shed His blood for me make me love Him more than if He died in bed of old age?

169. The Love Of Jesus

(God Loved Me Before I Was Conceived)

It is certain that on the tree of the Cross the Heart of Jesus beheld your heart and love it. By his love he won every good that you shall ever need, that you shall ever have. In God's love and mercy he prepared for us all the general and particular means of salvation, including our good resolutions.

Just as an expectant mother prepares cradle, linen, swaddling cloths, and perhaps a nurse for the child she expects, so our Lord, knowing you before you were even conceived, prepared all that would be necessary for your salvation and all else needed for your happiness. Such are the things that attract your soul to the devout life and urge you on to perfection.

How deeply must we imprint this on our memory! I have been loved so tenderly by my Savior that he thought of me in particular even by the little ways that attract me to him. How much, then, must we love Him in return?

--St. Francis de Sales, Introduction To The Devout Life, LF

Jeremiah 1:5 Galatians 1:15-16

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you." It was not only Jeremiah, Paul and the other great souls of the Bible that God knew intimately before they were born, He also knew me and you. As St Francis de Sale says in his own beautiful way, just as a mother prepares everything for her child before it is born (maybe even before it is conceived), the Lord prepared all that would be necessary for salvation and happiness to the smallest detail. How His sacred heart must mourn when one of

these little souls that He has prepared for so personally and lovingly is aborted.

What are my attitudes about abortion?

170. A Prayer of Praise in Sickness

(Lord, Only Say The Word And I Shall Be Healed)

Christ, give me strength: your servant is not well. The tongue that praised you is made silent, struck dumb by the pain of sickness. I cannot bear not to sing your praises. O, make me well again, make me whole, that I may again proclaim your greatness. Do not forsake me, I beseech you. Let me return now to your service.

--St. Gregory of Nazianzus, P

Matthew 8:5-11

I've juxtaposed the prayer for self-healing by St. Gregory with the centurion's prayer for his servant's healing to make a point. Faith is critical for healing. Both prayers are petitionary but in the case of the servant, it is not known if he had faith at all. It was important, however, that someone had faith and prayed. Thus, the importance of petitionary prayer.

Do I spend enough time praying or others--whether or not they have faith?

171. A Healing for Depression

(Lord, Put A New Song In My Mouth)

Just as day declines to evening, often after some little pleasure my heart declines into depression. Everything seems dull, every action feels like a burden. If anyone speaks, I scarcely listen. If anyone knocks, I scarcely hear. My heart is as hard as flint. Then I go out into the fields to meditate, to read the holy Scriptures, and I write down my deepest thoughts in a letter to you. And suddenly your grace, dear Jesus, shatters the darkness with daylight, lifts the burden,

relieves the tension. Soon tears follow sighs, and heavenly joy floods over me with the tears.

--Abbot Aelred of Rievaulx, P

Psalm 40:1-4 Psalm 130:1-8

Abbot Alred had a surprisingly modern and simple cure for his bouts of the blues. Spending time with nature. Praying and meditating. Reading Scripture and journaling his feelings. And suddenly, Jesus' grace shatters the darkness, draws him out of the pit of destruction and puts a new song in his mouth.

What other spiritual remedies for the blues can I try over and above those noted by the Abbot?

172. Committing Myself to God

(Lord, Into Your Hands I Commit Myself)

Into thy hands, O Lord, we commit ourselves this day. give to each one of us a watchful, a humble, and a diligent spirit, that we may seek all things to know thy will, and when we know it may perform it perfectly and gladly, to the honor and glory of thy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

--5th Century Sacramentary, P

Luke 23: 44-46

The final words that were on Jesus' lips as He died on the Cross can be on our lips every day that we live. We commit ourselves to God's loving hands and pray that His will be done with us, to us, and through us.

Like Jesus, we do this with a watchful, humble and diligent spirit.

Like Jesus, we will know that by doing so, darkness will become light, suffering will turn to joy, and death will turn to eternal life.

When I pray, can I picture myself being held by the eternal arms of God?

173. Extending God's Grace

(Jesus, Make Me Your Servant)

O Lord, our Savior, who has warned us that thou will require much of those to whom much is given, grant that we whose lot is cast in so goodly a heritage may strive together more abundantly by prayer and by every other means to extend to others what we so richly enjoy, that as we have entered into the labors of other men, we may so labor that others in their turn may enter into ours, to the fulfillment of thy holy will, and the salvation of all men.

--4th Century Prayer, P

Matthew 20:20-28

Jesus "did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many." I am to extend to those around me the blessings that I have received just as others, whether or not I recognize it, have extended blessings to me and helped to shape my physical and spiritual life and well being. In fact, my prayer life must extend blessings not only to humankind but to all of creation. This is the power of prayer and our calling!

In what ways can I pray for all creation? In what ways can I back this up with action in accordance with God's will?

174. The Sorrow of Knowledge

(My Plea Is For Clear Perception)

I was vainly puffed up, and increased wisdom; not the wisdom which God has given, but that wisdom of which Paul says, "The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God." He speaks also of the multitude of knowledge, not the knowledge of the Holy Spirit, but that which the prince of this world works, and which he conveys to men in order to overreach their souls, with officious questions as to the measures of heaven, the position of earth, the bounds of the sea. But he says also says "He that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow." For they search

even into things deeper than these- inquiring, for example, what necessity there is for fire to go upward, and for water to go downward; and when they have learned that it is because the one is light and the other heavy, they do but increase sorrow: for the question still remains, Why might it not be the very reverse?

--St. Dionysius of Alexandria (AD 200-265), A Commentary On the Beginning of Ecclesiastes, CCEL

Ecclesiastes 1:12-18 Proverbs 2:3-11

"...he who stores up knowledge stores up grief" but, "if you seek wisdom...the knowledge of God you will find." If the author of Ecclesiastes (3rd century BC) and St. Dionysius (3rd century AD) believed that learned people spent too much time trying to acquire esoteric knowledge, how much more so today with knowledge doubling every decade or so? How much of it is necessary? We have obviously survived without it quite nicely for thousands of years. It is not that knowledge is bad but that knowledge just for the sake of knowledge--simply to avoid having to look into myself and learn to know myself--is a distraction from my real reason for being here.

In what ways do I like to acquire facts simply to avoid uncomfortable feelings or uncomfortable questions about life?

175. The Pre-Existent Mind of God

(God Created Heaven And Earth)

In regard to the making of the universe and the creation of all things there have been various opinions, and each person has propounded the theory that suited his own taste. For instance, some say that all things are self-originated and, so they speak, haphazard. The Epicureans are among these; they deny that there is any Mind behind the universe at all...Others take the view expressed by Plato, that giant among the Greeks. He said that God had made all things out of pre-existent and

uncreated matter, just as the carpenter makes things only out of wood that already exists....Then again, there is the theory of the Gnostics, who have invented for themselves an Artificer of all things other than the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. These simply shut their eyes to the obvious meaning of Scripture.

Such are the notions which men put forward. But the impiety of their foolish talk is plainly declared by the divine teaching of the Christian faith. From it we know that, because there is Mind behind the universe, it did not originate itself; because God is infinite, not finite, it was not made from pre-existent matter, but out of nothing and out of non-existence absolute and utter God brought it into being through the Word.

--St. Athanasius, The Incarnation, (AD 297-373), CCEL

Genesis 1:1-31 John 1:1

"In the beginning, God created heaven and earth." "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God." It is interesting to note that after all of the theories on the creation of the universe over the last two thousand years have been explored, cosmologists are starting to sound like theologians. When all is said and done: In the beginning...God....

Do I take comfort that God, through Jesus the Lord, created the universe and saw that it was very good?

176. Greed Wounds

(Life Without God Is Futile)

In truth, to those who occupy their minds with the distractions of life, life becomes a painful thing, which, as it were, wounds the heart with its goads, that is, with the lustful desires of increase. And sorrowful also is the solicitude connected with covetousness: it does not so much gratify those who are successful in it, as it pains those

who are unsuccessful; while the day is spent in laborious anxieties, and the night puts sleep to flight from the eyes, with the cares of making gain. Vain, therefore, is the zeal of the man who looks to these things.

--St. Dionysius of Alexandria, A Commentary on the Beginning of Ecclesiastes, CCEL

Ecclesiastes 2:18-23 Proverbs 21: 25-26

It is true! My desires for increase do not gratify me even when I am successful since I would desire more still. (This is especially true in retirement planning!) If I am unsuccessful, the pain is sharper still.

Greed, in all of its forms, is a curse and an addiction, since I am not aware of how the emptiness can be filled so that I can be truly satisfied.

What do I believe will truly satisfy me? What do I desire over and above the "basics"?

177. God Alone Exists

(I Long To Put On My Heavenly Home)

For God had made man thus (that is, as an embodied spirit), and had willed that he should remain in incorruption. But men, having turned from the contemplation of God to evil of their own devising, had come inevitably under the law of death. Instead of remaining in the state in which God had created them, they were in process of becoming corrupted entirely, and death had them completely under its dominion. For the transgression of the commandment was making them turn back again according to their nature; and as they had at the beginning come into being out of non-existence, so they were now on the way to returning, through corruption, to non-existence again. The presence and love of the Word had called them into being; inevitably, therefore when they lost the knowledge of God, they lost existence with it, for it is God

alone Who exists, evil is non-being, the negation and antithesis of good. By nature, of course, man is mortal, since he was made from nothing; but he bears also the Likeness of Him Who is and if he preserves that Likeness through constant contemplation, then his nature is deprived of its power and he remains incorrupt.

--St. Athanasius, The Incarnation, CCEL

2 Corinthians 5:1-10

"We do not wish to be unclothed but to be further clothed so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life." "They were now on the way to returning, through corruption, to non-existence again for God alone exists." Since I was created out of nothing, without God's sustaining power through Jesus, I will return to nothing again. It is only by God's grace and love that He clothes me with His Spirit, His Likeness, which allows me to exist in His Kingdom for eternity. Praise God!

How do I feel about becoming non-existent? How do I feel about being swallowed up by life?

178. Christ's Kingdom

(Saving Justice, Peace, And Joy Are In The Kingdom Of God)

And when you hear that we look for a kingdom, you suppose, without making any inquiry, that we speak of a human kingdom; whereas we speak of that which is with God, as appears also from the confession of their faith made by those who are charged with being Christians, though they know that death is the punishment awarded to him who so confesses. For if we look for a human kingdom, we should also deny our Christ, that we might not be slain; and we should strive to escape detection, that we might obtain what we expect. But since our thoughts are not fixed on the present, we are not concerned when men cut us off, since also death is a debt which must at all events be paid.

--BSt. Justin Martyr AD 110-165, First Apology, CCEL

John 6:14-16 Romans 14: 17-18

The only time in Scripture that Jesus literally fled to the hills was when His followers wanted to make Him an earthly King! Jesus knew that His Kingdom was not of this earth and his followers, like St. Justin Martyr, understand this well. They were willing to die for their belief in the Kingdom of God; a place of righteousness, peace and joy. This is something they were not to experience in this world.

In what ways am I searching for a heaven on earth?

179. Proof Of The Resurrection

(Disobedience Brings Death...Obedience, Life)

For reflect upon the end of each of the preceding kings, how they died the death common to all, which, if it issued insensibility, would be a godsend to all the wicked. But since sensation remains to all who have ever lived, and eternal punishment is laid up, see that ye neglect not to be convinced, and to hold as your belief, that these things are true. For let even necromancy, and the divinations you practice by immaculate children, and the evoking of departed human souls, and those who are called among the magi, Dream-senders and Assistant-spirits (Familiars), and all that is done by those who are skilled in such matters Blet these persuade you that even after death souls are in a state of sensation; and those who are seized and cast about by the spirits of the dead, whom all call demoniacs or madmen,and all that has been uttered of a like kind. Such favor as you grant to these, grant also to us, who not less but more firmly than they believe in God; since we expect to receive again our own bodies, though they be dead and cast into the earth, for we maintain that with God nothing is impossible.

--BSt. Justin Martyr, First Apology, CCEL

1 Samuel 28:8-19

There is much proof that spirits live after death, even in the pagan world. It is constant Christian tradition, however, that one cannot contact the dead at will. In the case of Saul, it was God's will that Samuel appear to him. The medium only provided the occasion. In any case, if souls are sensate after death, why can't they live again if that is God's will?

Why would I even want to contact the dead to learn about the future?

180. God's Power Can Raise The Dead

(The Dead Will Come Back To Life)

Moreover also, that His power is sufficient for the raising of dead bodies, is shown by the creation of these same bodies. For if, when they did not exist, He made at their first formation the bodies of men and their original elements, He will, when they are dissolved, in whatever manner that may take place, raise them again with equal ease: for this, too, is equally possible to Him. And it is no danger to the argument, if some suppose the first beginnings to be from matter, or the bodies of men at least to be derived from the elements as the first materials, or from seed... (This is) a matter which seems to have exceedingly confounded some, even of those admired for wisdom, who, I cannot tell why, think those doubts worthy of serious attention which are brought forward by the many.

--BAthenagoras (2nd Century Philosopher/Christian), On the Resurrection of the Dead, Chapter III, CCEL

Ezekiel 37:1-14 Isaiah 26:19

"O my people, I will put my spirit in you that you may live....I have promised and I will do it." Besides the obvious allusions to the resurrection of the dead contained in Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones, an additional allusion is apparent. God can and does resurrect me each and every day by giving me His Spirit. Many days I feel like

the walking dead with no real life in me, plodding through my routines.

When I pray to God for life, His Spirit empowers me to live again in the joy of His presence.

When I feel dead emotionally, physically, and spiritually, how do I cope? How am I empowered to rise from the dead and go on?

181. A Midnight Prayer

(Bless The Lord)

Having risen from sleep, I offer Thee, O Savior, the midnight song, and I fall down and cry unto Thee: grant me not to fall asleep in the death of sin, but have compassion on me, O Thou Who wast voluntarily crucified, and hasten to raise me who am prostrate in idleness, and save me in prayer and intercession, and after the night's sleep, bless me with a sinless day O Christ, our God, and save me.

--St. Macarius the Great, Prayer Book

Daniel 3:52-63

This portion of a prayer from the Book of Daniel is a mighty, cosmic hymn of praise. I think it is the greatest such hymn in the Bible.

While St. Marcarius prays for blessings, the hymn invites all creation to bless the Lord.

What does this mean? In what ways can I bless the Lord? Why is blessing the Lord necessary for my salvation? (Obviously, God doesn't need it.)

182. A Prayer of Jesus

(May We All Be One)

Whoever you are who approach,...., stop a little and look upon me, who, though innocent, suffered for your crime; lay me up in your mind, keep me in your breast. I am He who, pitying the bitter misfortunes of men, came here as a messenger of offered peace, and as a full atonement for the fault of men....Bend your knee, and with lamentation adore the venerable wood of the cross, and with lowly countenance stooping to the

earth, which is wet with innocent blood, sprinkle it with rising tears, and at times bear me and my admonitions in your devoted heart. Follow the footsteps of my life...If these memorials shall turn away your senses, which are devoted to a perishable world, from the fleeing shadow of earthly beauty, the result will be, that you will not venture, enticed by empty hope, to trust the frail enjoyments of fickle fortune, and to place your hope in the fleeting years of life....

--Lactantius, 4th Century, Poem on the Passion of the Lord, CCEL

John 17:20-26

This prayer, from a fourth century Church Father, is the earliest first person meditation of Jesus that I have found outside of the Bible. It is a predecessor of similar later works like the Imitation of Christ, God Calling and A Course of Miracles. I find these first person meditations very inspiring. And why shouldn't such works be considered inspired, if they don't contradict Scripture? Jesus' prayer is that we all be one, and a part of His Body. If we are one, He can inspire us with His Spirit whether or not this takes the form of actual words.

Am I ever so inspired by Jesus that I can sense His Spirit and Words?

183. Bedtime Prayer to the Father

(Eternal Life Is Knowing God)

O Eternal God and King of all creation, Who hast granted me to arrive at this hour, forgive me the sins that I have committed today in thought, word and deed, and cleanse, O Lord, my humble soul from all defilement of flesh and spirit. And grant me, O Lord, to pass the sleep of this night in peace that when I rise from my bed I may praise Thy most holy Name all the days of my life and conquer my flesh and the fleshless foes that war with me. And deliver me, O Lord, from vain and frivolous thoughts, and from evil desires which defile me...

--St. Marcarius the Great, Prayer Book

John 17:1-5

Notice the difference in the prayers to the Father of St. Marcarius and Jesus. St. Marcarius prays to the Father to forgive him, cleanse him and deliver him while Jesus asks the Father to glorify Him so that He may glorify the Father. As one becomes more Christ-like, the nature of prayer changes from asking for specific things to glorifying God in all things.

Is the nature of my prayer starting to change?

184. An Easter Vision

(I Will Never Forsake You)

Take away the linen cloths, I pray; leave the napkins in the tomb: Thou art sufficient for us and without Thee there is nothing. Release the chained shades of the infernal prison, and recall to the upper regions whatever sinks to the lowest depths...You rescue an innumerable people from the prison of death, and they follow in freedom to the place when their leader approaches. The fierce monster in alarm vomits forth the multitude whom he had swallowed up, and the Lamb withdraws the sheep from the jaws of the wolf.

--Venantius Fortunatus, 4th century, On Easter, CCEL

Hebrews 13:5-8

In this powerful Easter vision, Jesus is seen rescuing countless souls from the prison of death and the jaws of Satan. Since in eternity there is no time, the power and love of Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever@.

Do I take comfort in the fact that Jesus is my Redeemer?

185. Bedtime Prayer to the Son

(I Give Thanks To God Through Jesus)

O All-Ruler, Word of the Father, Jesus Christ, Thou who art perfect, never in Thy great mercy leave me, but ever abide in me, Thy servant. O

Jesus, Good Shepherd, of Thy sheep, deliver me not to the revolt of the serpent and leave me not to the will of Satan, for the seed of corruption if in me. Lord, adorable God, Holy King, Jesus Christ, guard me asleep by the unwaning light, Thy Holy Spirit by Whom Thou didst sanctify Thy disciples. O Lord, grant me, Thy unworthy servant, Thy salvation on my bed. Enlighten my mind with the light of understanding of Thy Holy Gospel. Enlighten my soul with the love of Thy Cross. Enlighten my heart with the purity of Thy Word. Enlighten my body with Thy passionless Passion. Keep my thoughts in Thy humility. And rouse me in good time to glorify Thee, for Thou art supremely glorified, with Thy eternal Father, and the most Holy Spirit forever. Amen.

--St. Antioch, Prayer Book

Romans 1:8-12

St. Antioch asks Jesus to enlighten his mind, heart, spirit and body.

St. Paul indicates that he prays constantly to the Father through Jesus. Part of the enlightenment is realizing that the Father is the Source of all blessings and Jesus is the Channel through which they are accomplished. It is one of the mysteries of our Faith.

Am I gradually being enabled to accept and be enlightened by spiritual truths?

186. A Case Against the Death Penalty

(Hate is Murder)

For it is not the part of a righteous judge to define requital on the principle of like for like, but the originator of evil must pay his debt with addition, if he is to be made better by punishment and render other men wiser by his example. Therefore, since it is ordained that Cain pay the penalty of his sin seven fold, he who kills him, it is said, will discharge the sentence pronounced against him by the divine judgement....Cain supposed that he would be an easy prey to everyone,

because of their being no safety for him in the earth...and of his being deprived of the succor of God...but Scripture proves his error... For to men suffering punishment, death is a gain, because it brings relief from their pain. But thy life shall be prolonged, that thy punishment may be made commensurate with thy sins...

--St. Basil the Great, Letter CCLX, (CCEL)

Genesis 4:1-16 1 John 3: 11-18

St. Basil indicates that the punishment for a crime should be greater than the impact of the crime itself, short of the death penalty, for the person to be corrected by the incarceration and to be an example to others. The goal is correction, not torture and death. The hope is that the person will have a change of heart, repent, and have God give the person a new life and save his soul in the process. I pray that the al Qaeda and Taliban terrorists will be open to having such a change of heart!

What are my feelings on the death penalty?

187. Bedtime Prayer to the Holy Spirit

(The Spirit Will Guide Me In All Truth)

O Lord, Heavenly King, Comforter, Spirit of Truth, have compassion and mercy on Thy sinful servant and pardon my unworthiness, and forgive me all the sins that I humanly committed today, and not only humanly but even worse than a beast--my voluntary sins , known and unknown, from my youth and from evil suggestions, and from my brazenness, and from boredom.....--for I have done all of this and much more--have mercy my Lord and Creator, on me Thy wretched and unworthy servant, and absolve and forgive and deliver me in Thy goodness and love for men, so that, lustful, sinful and wretched as I am, I may lie down and sleep and rest in peace. And I shall worship, praise, and glorify Thy most honorable Name, with the Father and His only-begotten Son, now and ever, and for

all ages. Amen.

--St. Ephrem the Syrian, Prayer Book

John 16:4b-15

According to the Gospel of John, the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Truth because He testifies to the truth about sin (the basic sin is refusal to believe in Christ), righteousness (Jesus returned to the Father in spite of his earthly disgrace) and condemnation (Satan has been condemned by Jesus= death). St. Ephrem prays to the Spirit to guide him to truth about his own sinful nature.

Do I truly want to know the truth about myself?

188. Doubt Isn't Defeat

(Blessed Are Those Who Hear The Word Of God And Keep It)

By a sword is meant the word which tries and judges our thoughts, which pierces even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of our thoughts. Now every soul in the hour of the Passion was subjected, as it were, to a kind of searching...Simeon therefore prophesies about Mary herself, that when standing by the cross and beholding what is being done, and hearing the voices, after the witness of Gabriel, after her secret knowledge of the divine conception, after the great exhibition of miracles, she shall feel about her soul a mighty tempest...Even thou (Mary) thyself, who hast been taught from on high the things concerning the Lord, shall be reached by some doubt. This is the sword....He indicates that after the offence at the Cross of Christ a certain swift healing shall come from the Lord to the disciples and to Mary herself, confirming their heart in faith in Him. In the same way we saw Peter, after he had been offended, holding more firmly to his faith in Christ. What was human in him was proved unsound, that the power of the Lord might be shown.

--St. Basil the Great, Letter CCLX, CCEL

Luke 11:27-28 Luke 2:25-35

Even the faith of Mary, the mother of Jesus, was tested by what her Son endured and what others said about Him. Ultimately, she is not blessed primarily because she was the mother of Jesus, but because she "heard the word of God and kept it." Her faith, though shaken, was confirmed and strengthened. The same was true with St. Peter.

When I have doubts and my faith is shaken, do I still trust in Jesus' words?

189. Prayer For Forgiveness

(Return, Rebellious Children, And I Will Heal You)

O Sovereign Lord Jesus Christ our God, Who alone hast authority to forgive men their sins, overlook in Thy goodness and love for men all my offences whether committed with knowledge or in ignorance, and make me worthy to receive without condemnation Thy divine, glorious, spotless, and life-giving Mysteries, not for punishment, nor for an increase of sins, but for purification and sanctification and as a pledge of the life and kingdom to come, as a protection and help, and for the destruction of enemies, and for the blotting out of my many transgressions. For Thou art a God of mercy and compassion and love for men, and to Thee we send up the glory, with /the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and to the ages of ages. Amen.

--St. John Damascene, Prayer Book

Isaiah 1:16-18 Jeremiah 3:22

While Jesus alone has the authority to forgive sins, as members of His Body, as channels for His Spirit, we are also given a share of His authority. By my forgiveness of people, events, and the world, I am healed. As I am healed, the healing is imparted to all those with whom I come into contact and all of those for whom I pray. My salvation is not just for me; it is for all.

What people or events do I still need to forgive? Does knowing that my forgiveness not only frees me but also those around me, make it easier to forgive?

190. God's Anger

(God Nurses NO Lasting Anger)

I have often observed, Donatus, that many persons hold this opinion, which some philosophers have also maintained, that God is not subject to anger, since the divine nature is either altogether beneficent, and that it is inconsistent with His surpassing and excellent power to do injury to anyone; or, at any rate, He takes no notice of us at all, so that no advantage comes to us from His goodness, and no evil from His ill-will. But the error of these men, because it is very great, and tends to overthrow the condition of human life, must be refuted by us, lest you yourself should also be deceived, being incited by the authority of men who deem themselves wise.

--Lactantius, On the Anger of God, (CCEL)

Psalm 103: 8-12

While I would like to dismiss the Biblical accounts of God's anger as the projection of human qualities into God by the authors, it is also true that we are created in God's Image and our characteristics have a godly counterpart. It appears that anger is an aspect of God's holiness and His absolute demand for loyalty. What I interpret as God's anger is a parent's chastisement of a rebellious or uncomprehending child. Of course the child, wanting his own way, experiences the purification process as painful and controlling. This, however, is not the parents intent.

Does this mean that parents are wrong to correct their children? Does God not have the same right, or obligation, to correct us for our own ultimate happiness?

191. A New Day...A New Start

(Discipline Bears The Fruit Of Righteousness)

Lord, deprive me not of Thy heavenly joys. Lord, deliver me from eternal torments. Lord, if I have sinned in mind or thought, in word or deed, forgive me. Lord, deliver me from all ignorance, forgetfulness, cowardice and stony insensibility. Lord, deliver me from every temptation. Lord, enlighten my heart which evil desires have darkened. Lord, I being human have sinned, but Thou being the generous God, have mercy on me, knowing the sickness of my soul. Lord, send Thy grace to my help, that I may glorify Thy holy Name. Lord Jesus Christ, write me Thy servant in the Book of Life, and grant me a good end. O Lord my God, even though I have done nothing good in Thy sight, yet grant me by Thy grace to make a good start. Lord, sprinkle into my heart the dew of Thy grace. Lord of heaven and earth remember me, Thy sinful servant, shameful and unclean, in Thy Kingdom. Amen.

--St. John Chrysostom, Prayer Book

Hebrews 12: 11-14

Every day is a new day to strive for "that holiness without which no one will see the Lord." To achieve that holiness requires discipline which at first seems a cause for pain but ultimately brings the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who are trained by it. There is no failure in falling. The only failure is not to get up and start anew.

Is my faith and conviction strong enough to weather the tests of every day living? If not, how can I strengthen it?

192. A Declaration of Faith

(Glory To The Father, Son, And Spirit)

There is one God, the Father of the living Word, who is His subsistent Wisdom and Power and Eternal Image: perfect Begetter of the perfect

Begotten, Father of the only-begotten Son. There is one Lord, Only of the Only, God of God, Image and Likeness of Deity, Efficient Word, Wisdom comprehensive of the constitution of all things, and Power formative of the whole creation, true Son true Father, Invisible of Invisible, and Incorruptible of Incorruptible, and Immortal of Immortal and Eternal of Eternal. And there is One Holy Spirit, having His subsistence from god, and being made manifest by the Son, to wit to men. Image of the Son, Perfect Image of he Perfect; Life, the Cause of the living; Holy Fount; Sanctity, the Supplier, or Leader, of Sanctification; in whom is manifested God the Father, who is above all and in all, and God the Son, who is through all. There is a perfect Trinity, in glory and eternity and sovereignty, neither divided nor estranged. Wherefore there is nothing either created or in servitude in the Trinity; nor anything super induced, as if at some former period it was non-existent, and at some later period it was introduced. And thus neither was the Son ever wanting to the Father, nor the Spirit to the Son; but without variation and without change, the same Trinity abideth ever.

--Gregory Thaumaturgus, 3rd century Church Father, (CCEL)

Ephesians 1:3-14

This alternative Creed, older than the Nicean Creed used in Church, contains a staggering number of names for God and qualities of God including: Father, Efficient Word, Wisdom, Power, Eternal Image, Begetter of the Perfect Begotten, Lord, Only of Only, Likeness of Deity, Invisible, Incorruptible, Immortal, Eternal, Holy Spirit, Life, Son, the Cause, Holy Fount, Sanctity, the Supplier, Leader of Sanctification, and Trinity. When I read it, I am overwhelmed by the majesty and mystery of the Trinity. St. Paul's writing on the Trinity in Ephesians is equally overpowering. I don't think that I could

believe in a God I could fully comprehend. There would be no mystery or majesty but only a larger version of myself (ughhh! How egotistical!)

Do I expect to fully comprehend God in this life?

193. The Devil's Last Laugh

(The Son Was Revealed To Destroy The Works Of Satan)

Afore time did the devil deride the nature of man with great laughter, and he has had his joy over the times of our calamity as his festal-days. But the laughter is only a three days pleasure, while the wailing is eternal; and his great laughter has prepared him for a greater wailing and ceaseless tears, and inconsolable weeping, and a sword in his heart. This sword did our Leader forge against the enemy with fire in the virgin furnace, in such wise and after such fashion as He willed, and gave it His point by the energy of His invincible divinity, and dipped it in the water of an undefiled baptism, and sharpened it by sufferings without passion in them, and made it bright by the mystical resurrection; and hence with by Himself He put to death the vengeful adversary, together with his whole host. What manner of word, therefore, will express our joy of his misery? For he who was once an archangel is now a devil; he who once lived in heaven is now seen crawling like a serpent upon earth; he who once was jubilant with the cherubim, is now shut up in pain in the guard-house of swine; and him, too, in fire, shall we put to rout if we mind those things which are contrary to his choice; by the grace and kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory and the power unto the ages of the ages. Amen.

--Gregory Thaumaturgus, On All the Saints, (CCEL)

John 3:8 Mark 1:21-28

This powerful piece of sermon, by an early Church father for the Feast of All Saints, describes the victory of Jesus and the crushing defeat

and fall of Satan. This victory can be witnessed in the exorcisms of Jesus. Amazingly, as members of His Body, Jesus has given us a share of this authority over the powers of evil as long as we use the power of faith in Jesus and not our own feeble strength. With the power of Christ, we can do greater things than He did when on earth. Why doesn't this power of Christ manifest itself more often? Our lack of faith is the answer.

Do I believe that I can have the power to vanquish evil in the Name of Jesus?

194. The Calling of the Magi

(All Gods Will Prostrate Themselves Before The Lord)

And the king forthwith gave orders to bring in all the interpreters of prodigies, and the sages who were under his dominion. And when all the heralds sed with their proclamations, all these assembled in the temple. And when they saw the star above Pege, and the diadem with the star and the stone, and the statues lying on the floor, they said: O king, a root divine and princely has risen, bearing the image of the King of heaven and earth. For Pege is the daughter of the Bethlehemite Pege. And the diadem is the mark of a king, and the star is a celestial announcement of portents to fall on the earth. Out of Judah has arisen a kingdom which shall subvert all the memorials of the Jews. And the prostration of the gods upon the floor prefigured the end of their honor. For he who comes, being of more ancient dignity, shall displace all the recent. Now, therefore, O king, send to Jerusalem. For you will find the Christ of the Omnipotent God borne in bodily form in the bodily arms of a women. And the star remained above the statue of Pege, called the Celestial, until the wise men came forth, and then it went with them.

--BJulius Africanus, 3rd century Church father, Narrative of Events

Happening in Persia on the Birth of Christ, CCEL

1 Samuel 5:1-12 Isaiah 49:6

Whether it be Dagon, the god of the Philistines, prostrating before Yahweh; Pege, the god of Persia, prostrating before the new-born Christ; or my ego, prostrating itself before the spirit of Jesus within me and others, the message is the same. All old gods are left behind in the light of new revealed truth.

Am I open to putting aside my old gods of the ego: power, wealth and fame?

195. The Proper Attitude Towards Prayer

(O God, Be Merciful To Me, A Sinner)

And this Hannah..., who was a type of the Church, maintains and observes, in that she prayed to God not with clamorous petition, but silently and modestly, within the very recesses of her heart. She spoke with hidden prayer, but with manifest faith. She spoke not with her voice, but with her heart, because she knew that thus God hears; and she effectually obtained what she sought, because she asked it with belief....And let not the worshiper...be ignorant in what manner the publican prayed with the Pharisee in the temple. Not with eyes lifted up boldly to heaven, nor with hands proudly raised; but beating his breast, and testifying to the sins shut up within, he implored the help of the divine mercy. And while the Pharisee was pleased with himself, this man who thus asked, the rather deserved to be sanctified, since he placed the hope of salvation not in the confidence of his innocence, because there is none who is innocent, but confessing his sinfulness he humbly prayed, and He who pardons the humble heard the petitioner....

--BSt. Cyprian, Treatise IV: On the Lord=s Prayer, CCEL

1 Samuel 1:1-20 Luke 18:9-14

St. Cyprian points out the qualities and conditions that make prayer

heard by God including silence, modesty, faith, heart-felt need, humility, confession of wounds/errors and patient reliance on the divine mercy. While I believe that God hears all prayer, these qualities and conditions make me receptive to receiving God's answer whether or not it is to my liking.

Am I open to hearing God's answer to my prayer even if it is not what I wanted or expected?

196. Christian Warfare?

(I Will Offer Terms Of Peace)

All the spoiling then, which Rome was exposed to in the recent calamity- all the slaughtering, plundering, burning and misery- was a result of the custom of war. But what was novel was that savage barbarians showed themselves in so gentle a guise, that the largest churches were chosen and set apart for the purpose of being filled with the people to whom quarter was given, and that in them none were slain, from them none forcibly dragged; that into them many were led by their relenting enemies to be set at liberty, and that from them none were led into slavery by merciless foes. Whoever does not see that this is to be attributed to the name of Christ, and to the Christian temper, is blind; whoever see this, and gives no praise, is ungrateful; whoever hinders anyone from praising it, is mad. Far be it from any prudent man to impute this clemency to the barbarians. Their fierce anger and bloody minds were awed, and bridled, and marvelously tempered by Him who so long before said by His prophet: I will visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquities with stripes; nevertheless my loving kindness will I not utterly take from them.

--St. Augustine, City of God, Chapter 7, CCEL

Deuteronomy 20:10-18

The Jews were more lenient to enemies of war than the surrounding

nations. At best, however, the Jews made slaves of all vanquished peoples. Generally, if the enemy was from a distant country, all males would be put to death and all women and children taken into slavery. If the enemy lived nearby, all souls were put to death, including children. St. Augustin's description of the fifth century sack of Rome by the Germanic tribes indicate a humanity that goes well beyond Old Testament teaching and may be considered an aspect of the Christianizing of the ancient world.

How much mercy am I willing to offer al Qaeda and Taliban prisoners of war?

197. The Providence Of God

(The Lord Is Kind To The Ungrateful And Wicked)

To the divine providence it has seemed good to prepare in the world to come for the righteous good things, which the unrighteous shall not enjoy; and for the wicked evil things, by which the good shall not be tormented. But as for the good things of this life, and its ills, God has willed that these should be common to both; that we might not too eagerly covet the things which wicked men are seen qually to enjoy, nor shrink with an unseemly fear from the ills which even good men often suffer.

--St. Augustine, City of God, Chapter 8, CCEL

Psalm 145:13-18 Luke 6: 35-36

I have often believed that adverse circumstances in my life were a form of punishment while pleasant circumstances implied that I did something right, or at least that I prayed correctly. As I grow spiritually I realize, much to my chagrin and astonishment, that I have grown much from the adversity while the good circumstances brought no lasting joy or growth! St. Augustine's words on God's providence regarding worldly things are very pertinent here. What I consider good or bad becomes

increasingly ambivalent depending on where I am at spiritually. What becomes more important is my attitude and my ability to look beyond myself and my ego as the center of the universe, and to look toward what is best for my ultimate good and the good of others.

Am I willing to grow up and mature spiritually?

198. The Restraint Of Human Freedom

(I Will Not Spend My Life On Human Pleasures But On The Will Of God)

...He (God)...placed man at the head of the world, and man, too, made in the image of God, to whom He imparted mind, and reason, and foresight that he might imitate God; and although the first elements of his body were earthly, yet the substance was inspired by a heavenly and divine breathing. And when He had given him all things for his service, He willed that he alone should be free. And lest, again, an unbounded freedom should fall into peril, He laid down a command, in which man was taught that there was no evil in the fruit of the tree; but he was forewarned that evil would arise if perchance he should exercise his free will, in contempt of the law that was given. For, on the one hand, it had behooved him to be free, lest the image of God should, unfittingly be in bondage, and on the other, the law was to be added, so that an unbridled liberty might not break forth even to a contempt of the Giver...

--BNovatian, 3rd century Church father, Concerning the Trinity, CCEL

1 Peter 4: 1-6

The point made by Novatian and St. Peter is well taken. Freedom, without self-restraint, would result in my reverting to the carnal desires of my fleshly nature including debauchery, evil desires, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and wanton idolatry. Worst of all, the lack of self-restraint would ultimately result in my contempt for God. And since I am created in God's image, a spirit, this contempt of God

would result in my self-contempt and convert me into a self-willed evil spirit!

Do I really understand the importance of self-restraint to my salvation?

199. The Wrath Of God

(God Will Destroy Those Who Destroy The Earth)

...If we read of His wrath, and consider certain descriptions of His indignation, and learn that hatred is asserted of Him, yet we are not to understand these to be asserted of Him in the sense in which they are human vices. For all these things, although they may corrupt man, cannot at all corrupt the divine power... He is simple and without any corporeal comixture, being wholly of that essence, which, whatever it be, He alone knows, constitutes, His being, since He is called Spirit. And thus those things which in men are faulty and corrupting, since they arise from the corruptibility of the body, and matter itself, in God cannot exert the force of corruptibility, since, as we have said, they have come, not of vice, but of reason.

--BNovatian, 3rd century Church father, Concerning the Trinity, CCEL
Revelations 11: 18

While I do not pretend to understand the Book of Revelations and the other apocalyptic literature of the Bible, I do know that God's wrath is a purifying fire that will destroy the forces of evil (those who destroy the earth) and establish the reign of God where all things will be created anew.

Do I fear the purifying fire of God's love?

200. The Sermon On The Mount

(Blessed Are The Pure In Spirit)

If any one will piously and soberly consider the sermon which our Lord Jesus Christ spoke on the mount...I think that he will find in it, so

far as regards the highest morals, a perfect standard of the Christian life: and this we do not rashly venture to promise, but gather it from the very words of the Lord Himself. For the sermon itself is brought to a close in such a way, that it is clear there are in it all the precepts which go to mold the life.... He has sufficiently indicated, as I think, that these sayings which He uttered on the mount so perfectly guide the life of those who may be willing to live according to them, that they may justly be compared to one building upon a rock. I have said this merely that it may be clear that the sermon before us is perfect in all the precepts by which the Christian life is molded....

--BSt. Augustine, The Sermon on the Mount, Chapter 1, CCEL

Matthew 5:1-12

The Beatitudes, and the Sermon itself, express the fact that the old, false values of the ego-centered world (wealth, power, fame) are disappearing and a new, spiritual world is being born. Who is Blessed? It is the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger for righteousness, the merciful, the clean of heart, the peacemakers, and those persecuted for righteousness. These values and characteristics are not considered very high by the world's standards but they constitute the standard in the Kingdom of God.

Am I learning to mold my character on the Kingdom of Heaven, and not the earthly culture in which I live?

201. The Way Of Light

(I Will Embrace The Child-Like)

The way of light, then, is as follows. If anyone desires to travel to the appointed place, he must be zealous in his works. The knowledge, therefore, which is given to us for the purpose of walking in this way, is the following. Thou shall love Him who created thee: thou shall glorify Him who redeemed thee from death. Thou shall be simple in heart, and rich in spirit. Thou shall not join thyself to those who walk in the way of death...Thou shall not exalt thyself but shall be of a lowly mind. Thou shall not take evil counsel against thy neighbor. Thou shall not be a corrupter of youth. Thou shall love thy neighbor more then thine own soul. Thou shall not slay the child by procuring abortion; nor, again, shall thou destroy it after it is born. Thou shall not withdraw thy hand from thy son, or from thy daughter, but from their infancy thou shall teach them the fear of the Lord. Receive as good things the trials which come upon thee. Thou shall seek out everyday the faces of the saints, either by word examining them, and going to exhort them, and meditating how to save a soul by the word or by thy hands thou shalt labor for the redemption of thy sins...This is the way of light.

--Epistle Attributed to Barnabas, 2nd century, Chapter 19, CCEL

Mark 10: 13-16 Matthew 2: 16-18

Jesus teaches that one must be child-like to enter the Kingdom of God and that the one who leads them astray would be better off if he/she had never been born. This epistle from the early second century teaches what we in 20th century America have forgotten: the killing of children, born or unborn, physically or spiritually, is a great evil

that will not leave the perpetrator unscathed. By killing their children, physically or spiritually, they are killing the child-light within themselves and are, in effect, aborting their own Godly spirits and humanity.

What are my views on abortion?

202. The Way of Darkness

(Lord, Fill Me With Light)

But the way of darkness is crooked, and full of cursing; for it is the way of eternal death with punishment, in which way are the things that destroy the soul, viz, idolatry, over-confidence, the arrogance of power, hypocrisy, double-heartedness, adultery, murder, rapine, haughtiness, transgression, deceit, malice, self-sufficiency, magic, want of the fear of God, (but incline to) hatred of truth, pity not the needy, murder of children, destroyers of the workmanship of God....

--Epistle Attributed to Barnabas, 2nd century, Chapter 20, CCEL

Luke 11: 33-36 Matthew 5:14

Jesus warns that spiritually blind people will lead others that are blind into the pit of their own destruction. A Take care then that the light in you not become darkness!@ This way of darkness is crooked since it is built on ego-desires and it destroys the soul as it destroys the workmanship of GodB-our own spiritual life.

Am I encouraged to continue to kill my ego so that I may truly live?

203. Order In Creation

(I Will Judge Angels)

On the fifth day the land and water brought forth their progenies. On the sixth day the things that were wanting were created; and thus God raised up man from the soil, as lord of all the things which He created upon the earth and the water. Yet He created angels and archangels before He created man, placing spiritual beings before earthly ones.

For light was made before sky and the earth. This sixth day is called parasceve, that is to say, the preparation of the kingdom. For he perfected Adam, whom He made after His image and likeness. But for this reason He completed His works before He created angels and fashioned man, lest perchance they should falsely assert that they had been His helpers.

--Victorinus, 3rd Century Church Father, On the Creation of the World, CCEL

Colosians 2:18 1 Corinthian 6:3

While the wholly spiritual angels were created before mankind, and, ultimately, we will become wholly spiritual beings; we are not to worship angels and, in fact, we will someday judge the angels! Why is this so? Perhaps it's because angels, never having had bodies, were never subject to the illusions that we, being both fleshly and spiritual, are subject to. When the angels fell from grace, they could not blame it on fleshly desires that creates the human ego. They fell purely due to self-will and, thus, their fall was considered more grievous since they were not blinded by a material point of view. By the time we become spirits, we will have learned the lessons from the changes due to both free-will and ego.

In what ways do I imagine that I will judge the angels?

204. Fearless Witness To The Truth

(I Will Give True Testimony)

Ambrose, Bishop, to the most blessed Prince and most Christian Emperor Valentinian. As all men who live under the Roman sway engage in military service under you, the Emperors and Princes of the world, so too do you yourselves owe service to Almighty God and our holy faith...Since, then, most Christian Emperor, there is due from you to the true God both faith and zeal, care and devotion for the faith, I

wonder how the hope has risen up to some, that you would feel it a duty to restore by your command alters to the gods of the heathen...What will you answer a priest who says to you, "The Church does not seek your gifts, because you have adorned the heathen temples with gifts. The Alter of Christ rejects your gifts, because you have made an alter for idols...The Lord Jesus refuses and rejects your service, because you have served idols, for He said to you: You cannot serve two masters."

--St. Ambrose, Epistle 17, CCEL

Mark 6:17-20 Acts 25:13 - 26:1

I am amazed at the guts of St. Ambrose, a priest, in addressing an Emperor! The Bible points out many cases of highly spiritual people Atalking straight@ to a King with mixed, usually negative, results. John the Baptist lost his head due to his straight talk with King Herod and King Ahab pursued the prophet Elijah for years with the intent of killing him. In other cases, it was more favorable, as when St. Paul addressed King Agrippa. In any event, straight talk in the name of truth, regardless of the consequences, is the result of great spiritual maturity.

Am I willing to talk the truth to those in authority even if it seems to be to my detriment?

205. Evil Is Taught

(I Will Not Teach Lies)

There is nothing evil by nature, but it is by use that evil things become such. So I say...that man was made with a free-will, not as if there were already evil in existence, which he had the power of choosing if he wished, but on account of his capacity of obeying or disobeying God....For this was the object to be gained by free-will. And man after his creation receives a commandment from God, and from

this at once rises evil; for he does not obey the divine command, and this alone is evil, namely, disobedience, which had a beginning. For no one has it in his power to say that it is without an origin, when its author had an origin. But you will be sure to ask whence arose this disobedience. It is clearly recorded in Holy Scripture ...that man was not made by God in this condition, but that he has come to it by some teaching. For man did not receive such a nature as this. For if it were the case that his nature was such, this would not have come upon him by teaching. How one says in Holy Writ, that "man has learnt (evil)". I say, then, that disobedience to God is taught. For this alone is evil which is produced in opposition to the purpose of God, for man would not learn evil by itself....For my part I say that the beginning of evil was envy, and it arose from man's being distinguished by God with higher honor. Now evil is disobedience to the commandment of God.

--Methodius, 3rd century Church father, Concerning Free-Will, CCEL
Titus 1:10-14 Micah 2: 11

I think that it is human nature to seek the easy path, to hear what one wants to hear, in order to feel good about one's attitudes and behaviors. Unfortunately, what I want to hear may have no bearing on the truth which may require work on my part to grow and change. Definitely not the easy way! Unless I am willing to choose teachers that challenge my complacency, I may never grow spiritually.

Am I willing to learn from teachers who are willing to tell me the truth and not just what I want to hear?

206. Encourage Forgiveness

(I Will Forgive)

Although my lord and brother has already begged of your nobleness that you would see that Tutis should be most safe, yet it has been allowed to me to Commend the same person in a letter, in order that, by the

petition being doubled, he may be held all the safer. For let it be granted that a youthful fault and error of a yet unsettled age has injured him so as to inflict a scar on his early years, still one, who did not yet know what was due to right conduct, has gone wrong almost without contracting blame. For when he came to a right state of mind and to reflection, he understood on better thoughts that a theatrical life was to be condemned....It behooves your Excellency to show favor to good intentions, so that he who, by the goodness of God, has entered on a pious duty, should not be forced to sink into the pitfall of the theater.

--Sulpitius Severus, Letter 5, CCEL

Philemon

I am not about to argue that the theater is an evil way of life any more than I would say that it is evil for a slave to try to run away from his slavery. These say more about the culture than about religion and faith. The real issue here is forgiveness. While I am not arguing that there are not real things to be forgiven, these two examples indicate that, with the perspective of hindsight, there are fewer things to forgive than I would have imagined.

Do I hold unrealistic grievances against people and circumstances that primarily hurt my own spiritual growth?

207. Reigning With Christ

(We Will Be Priests Of Christ)

Then the righteous shall go forth from their hiding places, and shall find all things covered with carcasses and bones. But the whole race of the wicked shall utterly perish; and there shall no longer be any nation in this world, but the nation of God alone. Then for seven continuous years the woods shall be untouched, nor shall timber be cut from the mountains, but the arms of the nations shall be burnt, and now

there shall be no war, but peace and everlasting rest. But when the thousand years shall be completed, the world shall be renewed by God, and the heavens shall be folded together, and the earth shall be changed, and God shall transform men into the similitude of angels, and they shall be white as snow; and they shall always be employed in the sight of the Almighty, and shall make offerings to their Lord, and serve Him forever.

--Lactantius, Book 7: Of A Happy Life, Chapter 26, CCEL

Revelations 20: 1-10

When I read about the end times, I feel both joy and fear/confusion. I feel joy for the saints and their destiny, and fear/confusion for the plight of the wicked. Could I become one of the wicked? If God loves me more than my mother could, and my mother would never condemn me to eternal torture, would God do so? I must believe that no one is condemned by accident, and that those who are is due completely to their own free will.

How is the infinite love and mercy of God reconciled with the final judgement and punishment?

208. Exhortation To Righteousness

(For Freedom Christ Set Us Free)

Let those who are hungry come, that being fed with heavenly food, they may lay aside their lasting hunger; let those who are athirst come, that they may with full mouth draw forth the water of salvation from an ever-flowing fountain. By this divine food and drink the blind shall both see, and the deaf hear, and the dumb speak, and the lame walk, and the foolish shall be wise, and the sick shall be strong, and the dead shall come to life again. For whoever by his virtue has trampled upon the corruptions of the earth, the supreme and truthful arbiter will raise him to life and to perpetual light. Let know one trust in riches,

no one in badges of authority, no one even in royal power: these things do not make a man immortal.... Let us therefore apply ourselves to righteousness, which will alone, as an inseparable companion, lead us to God; and while a spirit rules these limbs, let us serve God with unwearied service, let us keep our posts and watches, let us boldly engage with the enemy whom we know, that victorious and triumphant over our conquered adversary, we may obtain from the Lord that reward of valor which He Himself has promised.

--Lactantius, Book 7: Of A Happy Life, Chapter 27, CCEL

Galatians 5:1, 5-6, 13-21

Lactantius said: ALet us apply ourselves to righteousness which alone...leads us to God...and lets us serve God with unwearied service.@ St. Paul says: AThrough the Spirit, by faith, we await the hope of righteousness.@ St. Paul defines righteousness as faith working through love (which is service).

How well do I serve my neighbors, my Church, my Country?

209. Resolving Issues

(We Will Meet Together In The Spirit)

Gregory, servant of the servants of God, to all the Bishops constituted throughout Sicily....This also we have plainly perceived to be a thing that ought to be done; that once in the year your whole fraternity should assemble, at Syracuse or Cabana, receiving...Peter...subdeacon of our See, you may settle with due discretion whatever things pertain to the advantage of the churches of the province, or to the relief of the necessities of the poor and oppressed, or to the admonition of all, and the correction of those whose transgressions may peradventure be proved. from which council far be animosities, which are the nutriment of crimes, and may inward grudges die away, and that discord of souls which is beyond measure execrable. Let concord well-pleasing to God,

and charity, approve you as His priests. Conduct all things, therefore, with such deliberation and calmness that yours may most worthily be called an Episcopal Council.

--St. Gregory the Great, Book 1-Epistle 1, CCEL

Acts 15:1-12, 22-36

From the Council of Jerusalem in about AD 60 to the Second Vatican Council of the 1960's and beyond, Christian leaders have been getting together to resolve the problems of their day. As with the rest of us, everyone has different gifts and no one person, or group of people, have all of the answers. By coming together as the Body of Christ, the Church, the Holy Spirit speaks most clearly and completely. The message of the Holy Spirit may be much more inclusive than I believe!

Am I willing to come together with my brothers and sisters and listen to and learn from their truth?

210. Hardships Of The Spiritual Life

(I Will Suffer With Those Who Suffer)

Gregory to Theoctista, Sister of the Emperor. With how great devotion my mind prostrates itself before your Venerableness I cannot fully express in words; nor yet do I labor to give utterance to it , since, even though I were silent, you read in your heart your own sense of my devotion. I wonder, however, that you withdraw your countenance, till of late bestowed on me, from this my recent engagement in the pastoral office; wherein, under color of episcopacy, I have been brought back to the world; in which I am involved in such great earthly cares as I do not at all remember having been subjected to even in a lay state of life. For I have lost the deep joys of my quiet, and seem to have risen outwardly while inwardly falling down. Whence I grieve to find myself banished far from the face of my Maker. For I used to strive daily to win my way outside the world, outside the flesh; to drive all phantasms

of the body from the eyes of my soul and to see incorporeally supernal joys...But, having been suddenly dashed from this summit of things by the whirlwind of this trial, I have fallen into fears and tremors, since, even though I have no fears for myself, I am greatly afraid for those who have been committed to me. On every side I am tossed by the waves of business, and sunk by storms....

--St. Gregory the Great, Book 1: Epistle 5, CCEL

2 Corinthians 11: 23-29 1 Corinthians 4: 7-11

This personal letter of St. Gregory from his first year as Bishop of Rome is very telling. He indicates how inadequate he feels about his job and how much he missed the monastic life. He even felt that he had been banished from God's sight. He obviously grew from his suffering, as did St. Paul, for he is later referred to as St. Gregory the Great. By the patient and humble acceptance of the hardships of their callings, and their willingness to rely on the Lord's power, they have become inspiring examples of our faith in Jesus.

Am I willing to pursue God's will even if it means I must suffer greatly?

211. Morning Prayer To The Holy Trinity

(Bless The Lord My Soul!)

As I rise from sleep I thank Thee, O Holy Trinity, for through Thy great goodness and patience Thou was not angered with me, an idler and sinner, nor hast Thou destroyed me in my sins, but hast shown Thy usual love for men, and when I was prostrate in despair, Thou hast raised me to keep the morning watch and glorify Thy power. And now enlighten my mind's eye and open my mouth to study Thy words and understand Thy commandments and do Thy will and sing to Thee in heartfelt adoration and praise Thy Most Holy Name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now and ever, and to the ages of ages. Amen.

--St. Basil the Great, Prayer Book

Psalm 103:1-5, 13-18

Psalm 103 is perhaps my favorite since it beautifully expresses the love of God. He forgives sins, cures illness, redeems life, crowns with love and tenderness, contents with good things and renews youthful strength (to name a few). How should I respond to this overflowing love? According to St. Basil, I should glorify, pray, study God's Word, understand and do His will, sing, adore and praise. In my worst moments of fear, despair, anxiety and depression, God is as near and dear as a tender Father. Bless the Lord my soul!

Do I recognize that glorifying, adorning, and praising God may be the answer to my problems? (Not because God needs them, but I do.)

212. The Cross: Not Only A Mystery But An Example

(Jesus Is The Way, Truth, Life)

The cross of Christ, which was set up for the salvation of mortals, is both a mystery and an example: a sacrament where by the Divine power takes effect, an example whereby man's devotion is excited: for to those who are rescued from the prisoner's yolk Redemption further procures the power of following the way of the cross by imitation. For if the world's wisdom so prides itself in its error that everyone follows the opinions and habits and whole manner of life of him whom he has chosen as his leader, how shall we share in the name of Christ save by being inseparably united to Him, Who is, as He Himself asserted, The Way, the Truth, and the Life? The Way that is of holy living, the Truth of Divine doctrine, and the Life of eternal happiness.

--BSt. Leo the Great, Sermon 72: On the Lord's Resurrection II, CCEL

John 14:4-7

Divine Doctrine + Holy Living = Eternal Happiness

I like this equation! It is the only one I've seen that satisfies me

with its comprehensiveness and simplicity (and as an engineer, I've seen a lot of equations!) Since Christianity is a relationship with Jesus, I must base my life both on what He taught and what He did. The power of His teaching inspires my actions and my feeble efforts to live a Christ-like life reveal new insights into His doctrine. Together they lead to joy and peace in both this life and beyond.

In what ways can I get to know Jesus more and more?

213. Morning Prayer

(God Is Faithfulness And Love)

Having risen from sleep, I hasten to Thee, O Lord, Lover of men, and by Thy loving-kindness I strive to do thy work, and I pray to Thee: help me at all times, in everything, and deliver me from every evil thing of the world and every attack of the devil, and lead me into Thine eternal Kingdom. For Thou art my Creator, the Giver and Provider of everything good, and all my hope is in Thee, and to Thee I send up glory, now and ever, and to the ages of ages. Amen.

--St. Macarius the Great, Prayer Book

Titus 3:4-8

Lord Jesus, I thank You for Your love of me; whether or not I deserve it. If it weren't for Your love and sustaining grace, it would not only be inconceivable to do Your good work, I would find it difficult on many days to fight my human weaknesses like depression, guilt and shame. Be gracious to me, Lord, and fill me with Your joy so that I may pass it on to the others you have placed in my path. May You help me to live fully in the present moment LordB the moment You are with me.

Amen.

Do I remember to pray in my weakness?

214. Jesus Experienced Our Weakness And Mortality

(Jesus Understands Me)

When the whole body of mankind had fallen in our first parents, the merciful God purposed so to succor, through His only-begotten Jesus Christ, His creatures made after His image, that the restoration of our nature should not be effected apart from it, and that our new estate should be an advance upon our original position. Happy, if we had not fallen from that which God made us; but happier, if we remain that which he has re-made us. It was much to have received form from Christ; it is more to have a substance in Christ... We were taken up by that nature, which did not break off the Branch from the common stock of our race, and yet excluded all taint of the sin which has passed upon all men. That is to say, weakness and mortality, which were not sin but the penalty of sin, were undergone by the Redeemer of the World in the way of punishment, that they might be reckoned as the price of redemption.

--St. Leo the Great, Sermon 72: On the Lord's Resurrection, CCEL

Hebrews 2:14-18

Jesus experienced all of the weaknesses and effects of mortality that I experience including feelings of frustration, anger and fear, the effects of hormones and aches/pains including physical death. None of these are things which His Father, Yahweh, could experience as a human being. I am grateful that He can understand me! Even more: He loved us so much that He improved upon our nature by adding His own divinity and making us all children of God thus overcoming our weakness and mortality!

Do I spend time meditating on what Jesus has done for me?

215. Teaching Through Experience

(Leadership = Service)

No one is allowed to preside over the assembly of the brethren, or even over himself, before he has not only deprived himself of all his property but has also learnt the fact that he is not his own maker and

has no authority over his own actions. For one who renounces the world, whatever property or riches he may possess, must seek the common dwelling of a Coenobium, that he may not flatter himself in any way with what he has forsaken or what he has brought into the monastery. He must also be obedient to all, so as to learn that he must, as the Lord says, become again a little child, arrogating nothing to himself on the score of his age and the number of years which he now counts as lost while they were spent to no purpose in the world and, as he is only a beginner, and because of the novelty of the apprenticeship, which he knows he is serving in Christ's service, he should not hesitate to submit himself even to his juniors. Further, he is to habituate himself to work and toil, so as to prepare with his own hands; in accordance with the Apostle's command, daily supply of food, either for his own use or for the wants of strangers; and that he may also forget the pride and luxury of his past life, and gain by grinding toil humility of heart. And so no one is chosen to be set over a congregation of brethren before that he who is to be placed in authority has learnt by obedience what he ought to enjoin on those who are to submit to him.....

--John Cassain, Book II: Of the Canonical System Of the Nocturnal Prayers and Psalms, Chapter 3, CCEL

1 Timothy 3: 1-13

No one is allowed to preside even over himself--before he has learned the fact that he is not his own maker and has no authority over his own actions! In a country built on "rugged individualism", this admonition would not get many cheers. But is it false? It implies that everyone must learn obedience, the giving up of self-will, in order to truly master himself--much less rule anybody else. To teach discipline, one must become self-disciplined through obedience to authority. Christ,

the ultimate authority, says that this obedience is reflected in service to others.

In what ways do I still need to learn self-discipline over my emotions, my desires, and my ego?

216. The True Nature Of Wealth

(God Chooses The Weak To Shame The Strong)

The nature then of Christ's teaching is attested by His own statements: that they who wish to arrive at eternal blessedness may understand the steps of ascent to that high happiness. "Blessed", he saith, "are the poor in spirit for their's is the kingdom of heaven"...He shows that the kingdom of heaven must be assigned to those who are recommended by the humility of their spirits rather than by the smallness of their means. Yet it cannot be doubted that this possession of humility is more easily acquired by the poor than the rich: for submissiveness is the companion of those that want, while loftiness of mind dwells with riches. Notwithstanding, even in many of the rich is found that spirit which uses its abundance not for the increasing of its pride but on works of kindness, and counts that for the greatest gain which it expends in the relief of other's hardships. It is given to every kind and rank of men to share in this virtue, because men may be equal in will, though unequal in fortune: and it does not matter how different they are in earthly means, who are found equal in spiritual possessions. Blessed, therefore, is poverty which is not possessed with a love of temporal things, and does not seek to be increased with the riches of the world, but is eager to amass heavenly possessions.

--St. Leo the Great, Sermon 95: A Homily On the Beatitudes, CCEL

Zephaniah 2:3, 3:12-13 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

ABlessed is poverty which is not possessed with a love of temporal things and does not seek to be increased with the riches of the world. @

I am sure that dire poverty is no more of a blessing than extreme wealth in attaining holiness. The real question, if one has more than enough to live on, is how attached one is to his/her possessions. A poor person may dream and obsess about having more possessions while a rich person may not be owned by his belongings.

What is my attitude about wealth? Why do I want the security it may bring?

217. What Is Fasting?

(The Believers Were United, Heart And Soul)

For in the early days of the faith when only a few, and those the best of men, were known by the name of monks, who, as they received that mode of life from the Evangelist Mark of blessed memory, the first to preside over the Church at Alexandria as Bishop, not only preserved those grand characteristics for which we read, in the Acts of the Apostles, that the Church and multitude of believers in primitive times was famous..., but they added to these characteristics others still more sublime. For withdrawing into more secluded spots outside the cities they led a life marked by such rigorous abstinence that even to those of another creed the exalted character of their life was a standing marvel. For they gave themselves up to the reading of Holy Scripture and to prayers and to manual labor night and day with such fervor that they had no desire or thoughts of food--unless on the second or third day bodily hunger reminded them, and they took their meat and drink not so much because they wished for it as because it was necessary or life; and even then they took it not before sunset, in order that they might connect the hours of daylight with the practice of spiritual meditations, and the care of the body with the night, and might perform other things much more exalted than these.

--John Cassain, Book II: Of the Canonical System of the Nocturnal

Prayers and Psalms, Chapter 4, CCEL

Isaiah 58:5-11 Acts 4: 32-37

When I read about the fasting that was done in the early Christian communities, I cringe! This is definitely not one of my spiritual gifts. I enjoy food very much and do not eat just to stay alive. When I feel sinful because I enjoy my food, I remember the words of Isaiah which say, in effect, that true fasting is not inflicting pain on oneself, but doing good such as feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless and releasing captives. This kind of fasting will result in our light blazing out and our spiritual wounds being quickly healed. May God grant me the ability to fast in this way!

Does fasting bring me closer to God?

218. The Pure Of Heart Shall See God

(The Pure Hearted Shall Receive Blessings)

"Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God." Great is the happiness, beloved, of him for whom so great a reward is prepared.

What, then, is it to have the heart pure, but to strive after those virtues which are mentioned (in the beatitudes)? And how great the blessedness of seeing God, what mind can conceive, what tongue declare?

And yet this shall ensue when man's nature is transformed... Rightly is this blessedness promised to purity of heart. For the brightness of the true light will not be able to be seen by the unclean sight: and that which will be happiness to minds that are bright and clean, will be a punishment to those that are stained. Therefore, let the mists of earth's vanities be shunned and your inward eyes purged from all the filth of wickedness, that the sight may be free to feed on this great manifestation of God...

--St. Leo the Great, Sermon 94: Homily on the Beatitudes, CCEL

Psalm 24: 3-6 Psalm 73:1

I must always remember that to see the truth and to be pure hearted, I must know and think the truth. I am a spirit that is temporarily using a body. In spite of appearances, I am not a separate entity, distinct from my brothers and sisters. We are all parts of the Body of Christ and what hurts one, hurts all. Our sense of separateness, generated by our egos, must be reduced if we are to see the true light.

Am I willing to learn the truth about myself in spite of appearances?

219. Duty Toward Parents Is Love Of Self

(Respect For A Father Expiates Sins)

Not every man that is a sinner is also undutiful: but the undutiful man cannot fail to be a sinner. Let us take an instance from general experience. Sons, though they be drunken and profligate and spendthrift, can yet love their fathers; and with all these vices, and, therefore, not free from guilt, may yet be free from undutifulness. But the undutiful, though they may be models of continence and frugality, are, by the mere fact of despising the parent, worse transgressors than if they were guilty of every sin that lies outside the category of undutifulness.

--Hilary of Poitiers, Fourth Century Church Father, Sermon On Psalm 1,
CCEL

Sirrah 3:1-16

It took me many years to forgive my father for his alcoholism, the lack of attention he gave me and the pain and chaos he caused my family. A turning point came when I looked in a mirror one day and saw my father's face in mine! I had acquired many of his characteristics, good and bad. Would I want my children to forgive me for my less than stellar characteristics? Ultimately, to hate my father was a form of self hatred. To forgive him was to forgive myself and allow myself to grow emotionally and spiritually.

Have I learned to forgive others for their shortcomings so that I may be forgiven for mine?

220. An Entire Theology In A Psalm!

(The Upright Will Flourish)

The Holy Spirit made choice of this magnificent and noble introduction to the Psalter, in order to stir up weak man to a pure zeal for piety by the hope of happiness, to teach him the mystery of the Incarnate God, to promise him participation in heavenly glory, to declare the penalty of the Judgement, to proclaim the two-fold resurrection, to show forth the counsel of God as seen in His award. It is indeed after a faultless and mature design that He has laid the foundation of this great prophecy; His will being that the hope connected with the happy man might allure weak humanity to zeal for the Faith, that the analogy of the happiness of the tree might be the pledge of a happy hope, that the declaration of His wrath against the ungodly might set bounds of fear to the excesses of ungodliness, that difference in rank in the assemblies of the saints might mark difference in merit, that the standard appointed for judging the ways of the righteous might show forth the majesty of God.

--Hilary of Poitiers, Sermon on Psalm 1, CCEL

Psalm 92: 13-15 Psalm 26: 4-8

Reading the first Psalm after reading St. Hilary's comments leaves me with a sense of amazement; an entire theology in only six verses! It is all built on something that all men innately want but generally don't know how to get: happiness.

In what ways have I tried to find happiness apart from God and His will?

221. Symbols Of Christ

(I Shall Be With You)

And Gideon, moved with that message, when he heard that, though thousands of people failed, God would deliver His own from their enemies by means of one man, offered a kid, and according to the word of the Angel, laid its flesh and unleavened cakes upon the rock, and poured the broth upon them. And as soon as the Angel touched them with the end of the staff which he bore, fire burst forth out of the rock, and so the sacrifice which he was offering was consumed. By which it seems clear that rock was a figure for the Body of Christ, for it is written: "They drank of that rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ". Which certainly refers not to His Godhead, but to His Flesh, which watered the hearts of the thirsting people with the perpetual stream of His Blood.

--St. Ambrose, Book 1: On the Holy Spirit, CCEL

1 Corinthians 10: 1-4 Judges 6: 11-24

This kind of scriptural interpretation, seeing symbols of Christ in Old Testament events, seems at times a little contrived. It is, however, comforting to see the essential unity of Scripture, Old and New Testament, and knowing that Jesus is with me, as He was with Gideon, whether or not I am aware of it. I am grateful for God's continuous presence!

In what ways do I recognize God's presence when I am in emotional pain?

222. Interpreting The Apocalypse

(This Calls For Shrewdness..)

"And there are seven kings: five have fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he is come, he will be for a short time." The time must be understood in which the written Apocalypse was published, since then reigned Caesar Domitian; but before him had been Titus his brother, and Vespasian, Otho, Vitellius, and Galba. These are the five who have fallen. One remains, under whom the Apocalypse was

written--Domitian, to wit. "The other has not yet come", speaks of Nerva; "and when he is come, he will be for a short time," for he did not complete the period of two years.

--Victorinus, Commentary On the Apocalypse of the Blessed Job, CCEL
Revelations 17:8-18

Victorinus, a third century Church father, knew more about how to interpret apocalyptic imagery from the Scriptures than anyone today. While there are references and allusions to the future in such literature, it was written primarily to encourage the generation in which it was written to face some persecution. Those to whom it was addressed understood the imagery much better than do we who live thousands of years later in a totally different culture. It might be as easy for someone born and living in central Africa in the 10th century to understand James Joyce=s Ulysses.

Do I have a tendency to over-interpret Scripture according to my own predilections rather than rely on the interpretation handed down by the Church?

223. Dying For The Truth

(I Shall Prove Myself Worthy...)

The sentence of judgement sayest that these men came to Japan from the Philipines, but I did not come from any other country I am a true Japanese. The only reason for my being killed is that I have taught the doctrine of Christ. I certainly did teach the doctrine of Christ. I thank God it is for this reason I die. I believe that I am telling only the truth before I die. I know you believe me and I want to say to you all once again: Ask Christ to help you to become happy. I obey Christ. After Christ's example I forgive my persecutors. I do not hate them. I ask God to have pity on all, and I hope my blood will fall on my fellow men as a fruitful rain.

--St. Paul Mikki, MartyrB1597, SOTD

2 Maccabees 6: 18-31

While I find the idea of martyrdom very unsettling, it raises an important question. Am I willing to give all for the Atruth@? Eleazar of Israel in the second century before Christ preferred to die than to pretend to do something which the Jewish law forbade. He felt it would be a terrible example to those around him who respected him for his wisdom and character. St. Paul Mikki did the same as a martyr in 16th century Japan. He died for no other reason than telling the truth about Christ. Did their deaths mean anything? More than two centuries later, British missionaries found many Christians secretly performing services taught by Paul Mikki and his companions who were martyred in 1597! Am I willing to sacrifice everything for the truth?

224. A Standard For Sacrificial Giving

(My Worldly Wealth Is Rotting)

The bread which you do not use is the bread of the hungry; the garment hanging in your wardrobe is the garment of him who is naked; the shoes that you do not wear are the shoes of the one who is barefoot; the money that you keep locked away is the money of the poor; the acts of charity that you do not perform are so many injustices that you commit.

--St. Basil the Great, SOTD

James 5:1-6

The words of Sts. James and Basil always strike me hard. While I have given much time, talent and treasure to worthy causes over the years, I always keep an ample supply for myself and my future.

Is this the way God would want it? Am I meant to save for a future that may not be there? Does this reflect a lack of faith? Is promising to use ample amounts of my retirement money and time a legitimate substitute for not doing more now, in the present?

225. The Love and Generosity Of God

(May I Learn To Discern Good From Evil)

God accepts our desires as though they were a great value. He longs ardently for us to desire and love him. He accepts our petitions for benefits as though we were doing him a favor. His joy in giving is greater than ours in receiving. So let us not be apathetic in our asking, nor set too narrow bounds to our requests; nor ask for frivolous things unworthy of God's greatness.

--St. Gregory Nazianen, SOTD

1 Kings 3: 4-13 Luke 6:38

King Solomon asked the Lord for the spiritual gifts of discernment and wisdom. Because of this correct placement of priorities, spiritual before temporal, the Lord also gave him the temporal things which he did not ask for such as wealth, long life and glory. I should ask God for big things which are worthy of His greatness and goodness and equal to my rank as a child of God. The greatest I can ask for is to be made a saint and to find joy in bringing God's mercy and love to others in this short span of time that I am in this body and on this planet.

Lord Jesus, will you make me a saint for your glory and my joy??

226. Preparing For Prayer

(What The Upright Desire Comes As A Present)

Prepare for prayer by living virtuously. Without virtue, no one can attain a peaceful mind. Proper prayer can be offered only if one is free of worrying about business, of gossip, of anger, of love of money. Whatever we have been thinking about before we pray will come into our minds while we pray. So, before we pray we must become the kind of people we want to be while we are praying. What we do not want to disrupt our prayer, we must keep out of our lives while we are not praying. Growing in virtue is an important preparation for prayer.

--Abba Isaac (Conference with John Cassian), Rules For Prayer

Proverbs 10: 24-25

What Abba Isaac says is true. When I try to meditate, the things of the world that I am attached to tend to destroy my peace of mind and my prayer. I must become the kind of person I want to be while I am praying through virtuous living and God=s Providence. After all, if I desire only God=s will, my desire will be fulfilled like a present from the Lord.

In what ways must I change in order to obtain peace?

227. We Pray To Know God, Not Give God Orders!

(If It Is The Lord's Will I Shall Still Be Alive)

a) Prayer begins with the proper mental preparation. we should not approach God "carelessly, sluggishly, and disdainful."

b) Pray three times daily.

c) Outline of Prayer:

Praise

Thanksgiving

-for benefits others receive from God

-for benefits we receive from God

Confession

-confession of sins

-for healing and deliverance form the habits that bring us to sin

-for forgiveness

Petitions for great and heavenly things (not the fleeting trivialities of life)

Doxology, praise to God through Christ in the Holy Spirit

--St. Origen (paraphrase), On Prayer, Rules For Prayer

James 4:13-17

While I have been praying a similar outline of prayer every morning for

the last twelve years, there are a couple of areas that I need to concentrate on more. These include thanking God for the graces that others have received and praying for the deliverance of habits of mind and body that lead me into cycles of guilt and depression.

In what ways can I improve my method of prayer?

228. Prayer Rule of St. Benedict

(Lord, Teach Us To Pray...)

a) Pray eight times per day: 2 AM, 5 AM, 6 AM, 9 AM, Noon, 3 Pm, 5 PM, 7 PM

b) The use of the psalms as a basis of prayer relieves us of the burden of setting an agenda for prayer. We will find that almost everything we would ever want to include in our prayer is to be found somewhere in the Psalter

c) Prayer should be brief and pure unless the grace of God inspires us to pray longer.

d) When the community prays together, it should always be brief.

--St. Benedict (paraphrase), The Rule, Rules For Prayer

Matthew 6:7-8

Brief and often. That is a summary of the method of prayer of St. Benedict. When taken to its limits it becomes prayer without ceasing or practicing the presence of God. Even the Lord=s Prayer (the Our Father), brief as it is in the Gospel of Matthew, is even briefer in the Gospel of Luke. Ultimately, prayer becomes a meditation with no words.

Do I use too many words in my prayers?

229. Cross Training

(May I Be Wise As A Fox And Innocent As A Dove)

Greetings in God, my most excellent sir, and venerable son Gregory, from Origen. A natural readiness of comprehension, as you well know,

may, if practice be added, somewhat to the contingent end, if I may so call it, of that which any one wishes to practice. Thus, your natural good parts might make of you a finished Roman lawyer or a Greek philosopher, so to speak, of one of the schools in high reputation. But I am anxious that you should devote all the strength of your natural good parts to Christianity for your end; and in order to this, I wish to ask you to extract from the philosophy of the Greeks what may serve as a course of study or a preparation for Christianity, and from geometry and from astronomy what will serve to explain the sacred Scriptures, in order that all that the sons of the philosophers are wont to say about geometry and music, grammar, rhetoric, and astronomy, as fellow -helpers to philosophy, we may say about philosophy itself, in relation to Christianity.

--St. Origen, Letter to St. Gregory, CCEL

Luke 16:8

Jesus teaches that the children of the world are more astute in dealing with their own kind than the children of light. He also teaches that we need to learn to be as wise as foxes in dealing with them on spiritual matters. St. Origen advises St. Gregory to learn all that he can from philosophy and science and to formulate it to the need to teach Christianity to the educated Greeks. The implication is that truth is one and that the Book of the World is the main source of teaching. In what ways can I make use of new, worldly knowledge to further explain Christianity to those around me?

230. A Case For Purgatory

(I Will Come To Terms With My Opponent)

All souls, therefore, are shut up within Hades, moreover, there are already experienced there punishments and consolations... In short, inasmuch as we understand "the prison" pointed out in the Gospel to be

Hades, and as we interpret "the utmost farthing' to mean the very smallest offence which has to be recompensed there before the resurrection, no one will hesitate to believe that the soul undergoes in Hades some compensatory discipline, without prejudice to the full process of the resurrection, when the recompense will be administered through the flesh besides. This point the Paraclete has also pressed home on our attention in most frequent admonitions, whenever any of us has admitted the force of His words from a knowledge of His promised spiritual disclosures.

--St. Tertullian, A Treatise on the Soul, Chapter 58, CCEL

Matthew 5:25-26

St. Tertullian indicates that he has received his interpretation of Jesus= parable from the Holy Spirit. It is evident that many other Church fathers have also received a similar interpretation which has then become Church dogma. A sign of the working of the Holy Spirit is mercy. The Lord allows the soul to continue to be purged after physical death. The prayers of the Communion of Saints also speeds up the purgation process. Praise God for His mercy and love!

Do I seek to interpret Scripture in a merciful manner?

231. A Father-Son Relationship

(Father, Do Not Put Us To The Test)

Let us, therefore, brethren beloved, pray as God our Teacher has taught us. It is a loving and friendly prayer to beseech God with His own word, to come up to His ear in the prayer of Christ. Let the Father acknowledge the words of His Son when we make our prayer, and let Him also who dwells within in our breast Himself dwell in our voice. And since we have Him as an Advocate with the Father for our sins, let us, when as sinners we petition on behalf of our sins, put forward the words of our Advocate. For since He says, that "whatever we shall ask

the Father in His name, He will give us," how much more effectually do we obtain what we ask in Christ's name, if we ask for it in His own prayer!

--St. Augustine, On the Lord's Prayer, CCEL

Luke 11: 1-4

Lord Jesus, do not subject me to the test. For I am weak and You are strong. I am limited and you are infinite. I am flesh and blood and You are Spirit. I am tired of mental sufferingB even if I need it to grow into Your Image. I am weary of the purification process, as necessary as it might be. I seek Your peace and heart-rest. Be not far from me. Teach me to submit to Your will quickly so as not to create unnecessary pain. Help me to learn my lessons quickly. Please, be merciful to me during the final test as I try to show mercy to those around me. Thank You for Your love. Amen.

In what ways do I put my family members, co-workers, friends, etc. to the test?

232. The Reality Of Evil Spirits

(What Do You Want With Me Jesus?)

What shall we say about magic? Say, to be sure, what almost everyone says of it--that it is an imposture. But it is not we Christians only whose notice this system of imposture does not escape. We, it is true, have discovered, these spirits of evil, to be sure, not by a complicity with them, but by a certain knowledge that is hostile to them; nor is it by any procedure that is attractive to them, but by a power which subjugates them that we handle their wretched system --that manifold pest of the mind of man, that artificer of all error, that destroyer of our salvation and our soul at one swoop....For, as we have already suggested, there is hardly a human being who is unattended by a demon; and it is well known to many, that premature and violent deaths, which

men ascribe to accidents, are in fact brought about by demons. This imposture of the evil spirit lying concealed in the persons of the dead, we are able, if I mistake not, to prove by actual facts, when in cases of exorcism the evil spirit,... after trying to circumvent the bystanders, is vanquished by the pressure of divine grace, and sorely against his will confesses all the truth... In all cases of a true resurrection, when the power of God recalls souls to their bodies, either by the agency of prophets, or of Christ, or of apostles, a complete presumption is afforded us, by the solid, palpable, and ascertained reality of the revived body, that its true form must be such as to compel one's belief of the fraudulence of every incorporeal apparition of dead persons.

--St. Tertullian, A Treatise On the Soul, Chapter 57, CCEL

Mark 5:1-20

Although modern psychiatry says much about mental illness and its manifestations, the story in Mark's Gospel about the Gerasene demoniac clearly shows that there is a force of evil which is beyond the individual ego and will. I suspect that my ego, as diseased as it might become, could not be thrust into a herd of pigs who then rush to their deaths by drowning! Christianity has always taught that evil comes from the flesh, the world and the devil. While most evil can be attributed to the first two, not all of it can. It appears that the only one who benefits from a complete disbelief in evil spirits is Satan himself. While Jesus has conquered evil and His power is far beyond the power of evil, if I don't believe in evil spirits, I will not claim the power needed for my protection and the protection of all beings.

What are my beliefs about the power of evil and its causes?

233. The Father's Will: Be Christ-Like

(I Will Repent And Turn To God)

Now that is the will of God which Christ both did and taught. Humility in conversation; steadfastness in faith; modesty on words; justice in deeds; mercifulness in works; discipline in morals; to be unable to do a wrong, and to be able to bear a wrong when done; to keep peace with the brethren; to love God with all one's heart; to love Him in that He is a Father; to fear Him in that He is God; to prefer nothing whatever to Christ, because He did not prefer anything to us; to adhere inseparably to His love; to stand by His cross bravely and faithfully; when there is any contest on behalf of His name and honor, to exhibit in discourse that constancy wherewith we make confession; in torture, that confidence wherewith we do battle; in death, that patience whereby we are crowned; -this is to desire to be fellow heirs with Christ; this is to do the commandment of God; this is to fulfil the will of the Father.

--St. Augustine, On the Lord's Prayer, CCEL

Acts 3: 11-26

In a nutshell, God wants me to repent (be willing to change) and to give up my evil ways by becoming more Christ-like. To become more Christ-like I must become more humble, steadfast, modest, just, merciful, disciplined, long-suffering, peaceful and loving--preferring nothing to Christ since He preferred nothing to me!

Am I willing to repent and have Christ remake me into His image? In what ways am I not yet ready to repent (change)?

234. A Time For Evil?

(There Is A Season For Everything)

This reflection has befallen me at this time concerning the shaking that is to take place at this time, and the host that has assembled itself for the sword. The times were disposed beforehand by God. The times of peace are fulfilled in the days of the good and just; and the

times of many evils are fulfilled in the days of the evil and transgressors...Good has come to the people of God, and blessedness awaits that man through whom the good came. And evil is stirred up as regards the host that is gathered together by means of the evil and arrogant one who glories; and woe also is there reserved for hi through whom the evil is stirred up. Do not, my beloved, reproach the evil person who has inflicted evil upon many; because the times were beforehand disposed and the time of their accomplishment has arrived.

--Aphrahat, Church Father, The Demonstrations Of Aphrahat,CCEL
Eccleastes 3:1-8

There is a time for love and a time for hate, a time for war and a time for peace. Even though the book of Ecclesiastes is incomplete in its spiritual perception, there appears to be much truth in it if one examines everyday existence. The only problem with perception, whether it be personal, clannish, national, or religious, is that there are always two sides to the same coin. One mans freedom fighter is another mans terrorist. One mans evil empire is another mans holy nation. In the big scheme of things, I do not know what good will come from what I call evil. The Jews in exile in Babylon saw profound evil. God saw the purifying of a people for its own good. I must trust the words of St. Paul: All things turn out for the good for those who love God.

What in my world do I call evil and why?

235. Attending To The Business Of Life

(I Will Seek God's Will In All I Do)

Accept the duties which come upon you quietly, and try to fulfil them methodically, one after another. If you attempt to do everything at once, or with confusion, you will only cumber yourself with your own exertions, and by dint of perplexing your mind you will probably be overwhelmed and accomplish nothing. In all your affairs lean solely on

God's Providence, by means of which alone your plans can succeed. Meanwhile, on your part work on in quiet co-operation with Him, and then rest satisfied that if you have trusted entirely in Him you will always obtain such a measure of success as is most profitable for you, whether it seems so or not to your own individual judgement... When your ordinary work or business is not specially engrossing, let your heart be fixed more on God than on it, and if the work be such as to require your undivided attention, then pause from time to time and look to God..by looking up at the heavens rather than down upon the deeps ...So doing, God will work with you, in you, and for you, and your work will be blessed.

--St. Francis de Sales, Introduction to the Devout Life, Chapter 10, CCEL

Proverbs 3:5-6 Deuteronomy 10:12-13

ATrust in the Lord. Put no faith in your own perception. Acknowledge Him and He will see that your paths are smooth.@ I love St. Francis de Sales! He always says what I need to hear and he says it so simply and gently. I must accept my duties quietly and fulfill them methodically.

I must work in cooperation with the Lord by leaning on His Providence.

When my work is dull or in short supply, then let my heart be fixed more on God than on it. If the work requires my attention, practice the presence of God as often as possible. Doing so, God will work in, for, and with me and my work will prosper to the extent that God wills it.

How can I improve my attitude about work? How is God my supervisor? In what ways does God's work fill up the lacks and gaps in my job?

236. Jesus: The Rock Of Our Faith

(Jesus Is The Cornerstone Of My Faith)

Hear then, my beloved, and open the inward ears of thy heart unto me, and the spiritual perceptions of thy mind to that which I say unto

thee. Faith is compounded of many things, and by many kinds is it brought to perfection. For it is like a building that is built up of many pieces of workmanship and so its edifice rises to the top. And know, my beloved, that in the foundations of the building stones are laid, and so resting upon stones the whole edifice rises until it is perfected. Thus also the true Stone, our Lord Jesus Christ, is the foundation of all our faith. And on Him, on this Stone faith is based. And resting on faith all the structure rises until it is completed. For it is the foundation that is the beginning of all the building. For when anyone is brought nigh unto faith, it is laid for him upon the Stone, that is our Lord Jesus Christ. And his building cannot be shaken by the waves, nor can it be injured by the winds. By the stormy blasts it does not fall because its structure is reared upon the rock of the true Stone.

--Aphrahat, Church Father, The Demonstrations Of Aphrahat, CCEL
Luke 20: 17-18

Jesus is the cornerstone of my faith. If this stone falls on me I will be crushed. If I fall on it, I will be broken. If I build my faith on my ego desires, the rock of Christ will crush it. If I start with Christ as the cornerstone of faith and then build a structure out of hot air and illusion, the structure will collapse and fall on the immovable rock of Christ. The implication is that my faith will be broken or crushed. It might feel like death as my ego and illusions are dashed to pieces, but I can still learn to build my foundation properly! Jesus doesn't desire my death, He desires my happiness which comes from giving up my illusions and my ego and putting my faith on Jesus where it belongs.

Are my ego and beliefs illusions preparing me for a smashing fall? What does a fall feel like (depression, despair, discouragement)?

237. Candle Stick Or Bushel Basket?

(Everything Will Come To Light)

Ye are the light of the world. What view are we to take? That the expression "under a bushel measure" is so used that only the concealment of the candle is to be understood, as if He were saying, No one lights a candle and conceals it? Or does the bushel measure also mean something, so that to place a candle under a bushel is this, to place the comforts of the body higher than the preaching of the truth, so that one does not preach the truth so long as he is afraid of suffering any annoyance in corporeal and temporal things?...Everyone, therefore, who obscures and covers up the light of good doctrine by means of temporal comforts, places his candle under a bushel measure. "But on a candlestick." Now it is placed on a candlestick by him who subordinates his body to the service of God, so that the preaching of the truth is the higher, and the serving of the body the lower; yet by means even of the service of the body the doctrine shines more conspicuously, inasmuch as it is insinuated into those who learn by means of bodily functions, i.e. by means of the voice and tongue, and other movements of the body in good works.

--St. Augustine, On the Sermon On the Mount, CCEL

Luke 8:16-18 John 8:12

One way of letting my light shine definitely does not feel like strength but like weakness and shame. When I am in pain over something work-related, I need to express it to my supervisor and do what needs to be done to resolve the situation in a manner that doesn't blame others but takes responsibility for my own actions and mental health. By doing so, even if very discrete, a situation may change for the better for others as well as myself. Self-care is a legitimate way of letting my light shine and not hiding it under a bushel basket.

In what ways can realistic self-care and responsibility for myself help influence my environment for the better?

238. Owe Nothing To Anyone

(Give To God What Is God's)

Be ye subject to all royal power and dominion in things which are pleasing to God, as to the ministers of God, and the punishments of the ungodly. Render all the fear that is due to them, all offerings, all customs, all honor, gifts, and taxes. For this is God's command, that you owe nothing to anyone but the pledge of love, which God has commanded by Christ.

--BConstitutions of the Holy Apostles (3rd Cent), Book 4, CCEL

Matthew 22: 15-22 Matthew 17:24-27

Jesus paid, and encouraged others to pay, the taxes and other service due to civil and religious institutions. In the case of religious institutions, He believed that citizens of the Kingdom should be exempt; but to avoid being the downfall of others, He paid it. We should owe nothing but the pledge of love which was certainly the main concern of Jesus.

Will the example of my behavior in any way hurt others? Do I fulfill my civic (taxes, voting, jury duty) and religious (time, talent, treasure) duties?

239. Christian Duty Toward Orphans

(The Lord Is Father To The Fatherless)

When any Christian becomes an orphan...it is good that some one of the brethren who is without a child, should take the young man, and esteem him in the place of a son, and he that has a son about the same age, and that is marriageable, should marry the maid to him: for they which do so perform a great work, and become, fathers of the orphans, and shall receive the rewards of this charity from the Lord God. But if any

one that walks in the way of man-pleasing is rich, and therefore is ashamed of orphans, the Father of orphans and Judge of widows will make provision for the orphans, but himself shall have such an heir as will spend what he has spared...

--BConstitutions of the Holy Apostles, Book 4, CCEL

Exodus 22: 21-23 Psalm 68: 6-7

According to both Old and New Testaments, God has a special place near His heart for orphans and widows. While it may not be possible to adopt all orphans, Judeo-Christian morality requires that we do something to help. I have been a Big Brother several times, volunteered time to a protected home for children in transition and have befriended children whose parents were divorced. In all cases, it is a two-way street. I get back love, joy, an ability to learn how to play and healing from my own scares from youth.

In what ways can I be a father, brother or friend to needy children in my community?

240. The Allure Of Evil

(I Will Live In A Godly Manner)

Thou shall not be a wanderer and gadder abroad, rambling about the streets, without just cause, to spy out such as live wickedly. But by minding thy own trade and employment, endeavor to do what is acceptable to God. And keeping in mind the oracles of Christ, meditate in the same continually....Nay, although thou beest rich, and so dost not want a trade for thy maintenance, be not one that gads about, and walks abroad at random; but either go to some that are believers, and of the same religion, and confer and discourse with them about the lively oracles of Go.

-Constitutions of the Holy Apostles, Book 1, CCEL

1 Thesalonians 4: 1-12

Aspire to live a tranquil life, to mind your own affairs and to work with your own hands...that you may conduct yourselves properly towards outsiders. @ I must always remember that my example may be the main message from God that someone may receive today. In addition, I am definitely not above temptation to sin so why do I want to search out temptation?

In what ways does my entertainment consist of being a voyeur to how the ungodly live? What movies, TV shows, books, and music entice me?

241. A Visit By The Guardian Angel

(God Commands The Angels To Guard Me)

After I Had been praying at home, and had sat down on my couch, there entered a man of glorious aspect, dressed like a shepherd, with a white goat's skin, a wallet on his shoulders, and a rod in his hand, and saluted me. I returned his salutation. And straightway he sat down besides me, and said to me, "I have been sent by a most venerable angel to dwell with you the remaining days of your life." And I thought that he had come to tempt me, and I said to him, "Who are you? For I know him to whom I have been entrusted." He said to me, "Do you not know me?" "No," said I. "I", said he, "the shepherd to whom you have been entrusted." And while he yet spake, his figure was changed; and then I knew that it was he to whom I had been entrusted. And straightway I became confused, and fear took hold of me, and I was overpowered with deep sorrow that I had answered him so wickedly and foolishly. But he answered, and said to me, "Do not be confounded, but receive strength from the commandments which I am going to give you. For I have been sent...to show you again all the things which you saw before, especially those of them which are useful to you..." All these words did the shepherd, even the angel of repentance, command me to write.

--Pastor of Hermas, 2nd century, Vision Five, CCEL

Psalm 91:9-13 Psalm 34: 8-10

I have not said the guardian angel prayer since I was a child but I really do believe that the grace of God protects me in ways that are otherwise difficult to explain. As a hiker and camper, there were times when I could have been seriously hurt if not for a felt force pushing me or turning me in such a way as to prevent an accident. I should spend more prayer time thanking God and His angel for their protection. In what mysterious ways have I felt the grace of God protecting me?

242. Gender Issues In Ministering

(I Will Be Chaste Before God)

Our Lord Himself was constantly with His twelve disciples when He had come forth to the world. And not only so; but also, when He was sending them out, He sent them out two and two together, men with men; but women were not sent with them, and neither in the highway nor in the house did they associate with women or with maidens: and thus they pleased God in everything. Also when our Lord Jesus Christ Himself was talking with the woman of Samaria by the well alone, "His disciples came" and found Him talking with her, "and wondered that Jesus was talking with a woman." Is He not a rule, such as may not be set aside, an example, and a pattern to all the tribes of men? And not only so; but also, when our Lord was risen from the place of the dead, and Mary came to the place of sepulture, she ran and fell at the feet of our Lord and worshiped Him, and would have taken hold of Him. But He said to her: "Touch Me not; for I am not yet ascended to My Father." Is it not, then, matter for astonishment, that , while our Lord did not allow Mary, the blessed woman, to touch His feet, yet thou livest with them, and are waited on by women and maidens, and sleepest where they sleep, and women was thy feet for thee, and anoint thee? ...To Jesus Christ our Lord women ministered of their substance: but they did not live

with Him; but chastely, and holily, and unblameably they behaved before the Lord, and finished their course, and received the crown in our Lord God Almighty.

--St. Clement of Rome, Second Epistle, Chapter 15, CCEL

1 Kings 11: 1-3

King Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines-- and they turned his heart from the Lord!! Somehow this doesn't sound surprising (I wonder when he had time to rule)! Like today, many women were attracted to powerful men, and the men, being too human, find the temptation irresistible. Jesus was fully human and thus experienced this temptation but never acted on it. For most of us though, the advice of St. Clement, though extreme, is sensible: Do not put yourself in temptations path.

How do I manage my relationships with the opposite sex so as to live chastely?

243. Tasting Reality

(My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me?)

"The Kingdom of God is within you," says the Lord. Turn, then, to God with all your heart. Forsake this wretched world and your soul shall find rest. Learn to despise external things, to devote yourself to those that are within, and you will see the kingdom of God come unto you, that kingdom which is peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, gifts not given to the impious.... If you do not know how to meditate on heavenly things, direct your thoughts to Christ's passion and willingly behold His sacred wounds. If you turn devoutly to the wounds and precious stigmata of Christ, you will find great comfort in suffering... A man who is a lover of Jesus and of truth, a truly interior man who is free from uncontrolled affections, can turn to God at will and rise above himself to enjoy spiritual peace. He who tastes life as it really is ,

not as men say or think it is, is indeed wise with the wisdom of God rather than of men.

--Thomas a Kempis, The Imitation of Christ, CCEL

Mark 15: 22-37

I rarely think of the sufferings of Jesus as much as during Lent. It is sometimes hard to imagine God suffering and dying. But the Gospels show clearly the reality of the crucifixion. In addition, by one estimate 325 people have received the stigmata of Jesus since the time of St. Francis of Assisi. These are miraculous appearances of the wounds of Christ on hands, feet and side with real blood oozing from them. Do I accept the reality that Jesus suffered and died for the love of me?

244. Am I Greedy?

(I Will Not Make Money A God)

It is the Christian's privilege to be rich in material things, and poor in attachment to them, thereby having the use of riches in this world and the merit of poverty in the next... No one will ever own themselves to be avaricious--every one denies this contemptible vice--men excuse themselves on the plea of providing for their children, or plead the duty of prudent forethought:--they never have too much, there is always some good reason for accumulating more; and even the most avaricious of men not only do not own to being such, but sincerely believe that they are not; and because avarice is as a strong fever which is all the less felt as it rages most fiercely.

--St. Francis de Sales, Introduction to the Devout Life, CCEL

1 Timothy 6:10 Isaiah 55: 1-2

When I read about what St. Francis de Salle says about avarice, I wince. It definitely strikes me as true. It seems like no amount of money is too much either for current wants/needs or certainly for

perceived future needs. It is not only money, however, that I am talking about. It seems that once I own something (micro-wave oven, telephone answering machine, VCR, etc.), I wonder how I ever managed to live without it! But the truth of the matter is that none of these things satisfy me or give me security. Isaiah asks me why I spend my money and energy on what fails to satisfy when all of the important things that do satisfy are provided by God for the asking.

Has money/security become a god to me at the expense of the true God?

245. Is It Possible To Become An Image Of Christ?

(The Just Are Never Abandoned)

The patient and humble endurance of the cross--whatever nature it may be--is the highest work we have to do. Oh, how far I am at 84 years of age from being an image of Jesus in his sacred life on earth.

--St. Katharine Drexel, SOTD

Psalm 37:25-26

The words of St. Katharine make me ponder. A great saint in old age still feels incredibly far from being an image of Christ! And I, in my hubris and mid-life, sometimes feel that I am so Christ-like! A sign of spiritual growth in a saint is a lack of pride and the nearer one gets to Christ, the finer the imperfections that will be noticed.

Ultimately, one can only approach being Christ-like in this life but never achieve it.

How Christ-like do I think I am (on a scale of 1-10)? How Christ-like am I really? (Ask your best friend and your worst enemy.)

246. Faith

(Faith Is Assurance)

It is not only among us, who are marked with the name of Christ, that the dignity of faith is great; all the business of the world, even of those outside the Church, is accomplished by faith. By faith, marriage

laws join in union persons who were strangers to one another. By faith, agriculture is sustained; for a man does not endure the toil involved unless he believes he will reap a harvest. By faith, seafaring men, entrusting themselves to a tiny wooden craft, exchange the solid element of the land for unstable motion of the waves. Not only among us does this hold true but also, as I have said, among those outside the fold. For though they do not accept the Scriptures but advance certain doctrines of their own, yet even these they receive on faith.

--St. Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechesis V, SOTD

Genesis 15:6 Hebrews 11:1

I must be very careful about where I place my faith. There are cases where one who believed that a curse was placed on them actually died of fright to fulfill the curse! Where I place my faith and how/what I think probably have more of an influence on my life than any exterior event.

Where do I place my faith? Is it really worthy of my faith?

247. The Inner Teacher

(I Will Be With Them In Distress)

If I glance at a book, no matter how good and moving it is, my heart at once contracts and I read without understanding or, if I understand, I cannot meditate on it. When I'm in this state, the Bible and The Imitation of Christ come to my rescue. In them I find hidden manna, a pure and substantial food. But above all, the Gospels help me in my prayers. They are always showing me new ways of looking at things and I am always finding hidden and mysterious meanings in them. I understand, and by experience, I know that the Kingdom of God is within us. Jesus has no need of books or doctors of the Church to guide souls. He, the Doctor of doctors, can teach without words. I have never heard him speak, but I know that he is within me. He guides and instructs me

every moment of the day. Just when I need it, a new light shines on my problems. This happens not so much during my hours of prayer as when I'm busy with my daily work.

--St. Therese of Lisieux, *The Autobiography of a Soul*, LF

Psalm 91:14-16 Matthew 10:17-20

Jesus teaches me not to worry about what to say when giving testimony to Him because the Spirit of the Father will give me the words to say at that moment. St. Therese says: "He guides and instructs me every moment of the day. Just when I need it, a new light shines on my problems." I must always remember that where the soul is there is God, right at the center of my being. I need only stop the chatter and clatter of life and listen to the soundless voice for inspiration and guidance.

How do I feel about the fact that God is at the center of every soul?

248. Attaining God

(I Will Love God With My Whole Heart, Soul, Strength)

The price of your faithfulness is your God. God is what you will get, the One who is preparing himself as the reward for true worshipers. Just cast your minds, dearly beloved, over the whole of creation, heaven, earth, sea, everything in heaven, everything on earth, everything in the sea. How beautiful they are, how wonderful, how harmoniously arranged! Do these things move you at all? Of course they do. Why? Because they are beautiful. So what about the One who made them? You would be absolutely stunned if you could see the beauty of the angels. So what about the Creator of the angels? That One is the reward of your faith and your fidelity...Do not expect from the Lord an earthly reward for our good lives. Let us set our sights on the things that are promised to us. Let us place our hearts where they can't go rotten with worldly anxieties. These things which so preoccupy people

all pass away, these things all fly off, nothing but a mist is human life on earth.

--St. Augustine, Sermons, LF

Matthew 22:34-40

The price of my faithfulness is God. He is what I will get. But to get Him I must, as Jesus says, love Him with all my heart, soul, mind and strength. So much so that the things of this life have no attachment to me. The only attachment I must have is to the love of God which I must give freely to those around me.

Is God the most important thing in my life? What things in my life am I too attached to?

249. Spiritual Disputes- Part 1

(I Will Oppose Error)

As for Origen, whose writings he has translated into our language, I have neither formerly known, nor now do I seek to know either who he was or what expression he may have given to his thought. But as to the feeling left by this matter on my own mind I should be glad to speak to your holiness for a moment. The impression which I have received is this,--and it has been brought out clearly by the reading of parts of Origen's works by the people of our City, and by the sort of mist of blindness which it threw over them,--that his object was to disintegrate our faith, which is that of the Apostles, and has been confirmed by the traditions of the fathers, by leading us into tortuous paths.

--Anastasius, Letter to John (Bishop of Jerusalem), CCEL

Galatians 2: 11-14

One Church father accuses another of despicable motives! It even happened among the Apostles when St. Paul accused St. Peter in public of hypocrisy. As a follower of Christ, I may very well disagree with another's point of view on a matter of faith. However, I must be very

Careful if I am to judge someone's motives. If I judge someone's motives it will almost certainly be a negative judgement.

What are my motives for judging the sincerity of the beliefs of others?

250. Spiritual Disputes- Part 2

(I Will Not Distort Scripture)

I am next informed that some stir has been made on the question of the nature of the soul. Whether complaints on a matter of this kind ought to be entertained instead of being put aside, you must yourself decide. If, however, you desire to know my opinion on the subject, I will state it frankly. I have read a great many writers on this question, and I find that they express divers opinions...For myself, I declare in the presence of God that, after reading each of these opinions, I am up to the present moment unable to hold any of them as certain and absolute; the determination of the truth in this question I leave to God and to any to whom it shall please Him to reveal it.

--Rufinus, Letter to Anastasius, Bishop of Rome, CCEL

2 Peter 3:14-16

There are many places in Scripture where different readings or interpretations of a passage are plausible. St. Peter says as much when he indicates that some passages of the writings of St. Paul are difficult to understand. In many cases how one interprets a passage is not critical to the faith although in some cases it is (for example, how do you interpret Jesus' commission to Peter?). It is probably best to use an interpretation endorsed by the Church through the early Church fathers. This will hopefully be the most living interpretation. Otherwise, I may choose an interpretation that is more self-serving than accurate.

Do I accept the teachings of the Church in places where Scripture is unclear?

251. A Saints Dying Words

(The Lord Will Deliver Me)

The last thing I ask of you--and I ask it in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ--is that you love him alone, that you trust implicitly in Him and that you encourage one another continually to suffer for the love of Him.

--St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi, dying words to fellow sisters, SOTD
2 Timothy 3:10-12

"...all who want to live religiously in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." I wonder about this adage of St. Paul. My suffering generally has to do with my ego and not outside persecution. Since I don't suffer for Christ (not that I am aware of) , does this mean that I don't live religiously and have compromised my faith to please others and live in comfort?

252. A Priestly People

(We Are A Kingdom Of Priests)

O Priest! You are not yourself because you are God's. You are not of yourself because you are the servant and minister of Christ. You are not your own because you are the spouse of the Church. You are not yourself because you are the mediator between God and man. You are not from yourself because you are nothing. What then are you? Nothing and everything O Priest! Take care lest what was said to Christ on the cross be said to you: He saved others, himself he cannot save!

--St. Norbert, SOTD

In a sense, all Christians are called to be priests though not necessarily as a profession. If I truly want to do God's will, I am not my own. My time is not my own. Nothing I own is my own. My talents are

gifts and can be taken away if misused. I am supposed to be God's hands, mind and heart to the world around me.

Do I take the fact that I am a part of a kingdom of priests seriously?

253. Praying For The Dead

(God Gives Gifts Through The Prayers Of Many)

Lay me not with sweet spices, for this honor avails me not. Nor yet use incense and perfumes, for the honor befits me not. Burn yet the incense in the holy place. As for me, escort me only with your prayers. Give ye your incense to God and over me send up hymns. Instead of perfume and spice, be mindful of me in your intercessions.

--St. Ephrem, The Testament of St. Ephrem, SOTD

2 Corinthians 1: 11-12

In double blind controlled experiments, prayer for others has been shown to promote healing and health. If the love of God expressed in prayer can bring healing and even raise the dead, I am sure that the love of God can heal souls outside of time in eternity.

Do I pray for my loved ones who are no longer in the flesh?

254. When To Act

(This Is The Way....)

The saints are like the stars. In His providence Christ conceals them in a hidden place that they may not shine before others when they might wish to do so. Yet they are always ready to exchange the quiet of contemplation for the works of mercy as soon as they perceive in their hearts the invitation of Christ.

--St. Anthony of Padua, Sermons, SOTD

Isaiah 30:20-21

While I've never heard God say: "This is the way, keep to it", I know intuitively at times what He wants me to do. Suddenly, doors open, motivation arises and talents are ready to be used in a specific way.

Working on this book is one such case. One week earlier, I never would have thought of doing this. The next week, I'm enthusiastically writing with ease. Praise God!

In what ways have I experienced God's call?

255. Trusting God

(God Is Faithful)

I am not my own; I have given myself to Jesus. He must be my only love. The state of helpless poverty that may befall me if I do not marry does not frighten me. All I need is a little food and a few pieces of clothing. With the work of my hands I shall always earn what is necessary and what is left over I'll give to my relatives and to the poor. If I should become sick and unable to work, then I shall be like the Lord on the Cross. He will have mercy on me and help me, I am sure.

--Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha, SOTD

2 Timothy 2:13

When I read Kateri's words I am struck by her simple faith and trust in the Lord's providence. It was a time when there was no social security and it was possible that she really could have died from hunger and poverty. She puts me to shame! With all of my social safety nets, retirement accounts and savings, I still wonder if I will have enough! May the good Lord forgive me for my lack of trust and help me to change.

Do I trust God with the simple trust of a child towards his father?

256. Three Callings

(I Will Listen To God's Words)

To make clear therefore the main differences between these three kinds of callings, the first is from God, the second comes through man, the third is from compulsion. And a calling is from God whenever some inspiration has taken possession of our heart, and even while we are

asleep stirs in us a desire for eternal life and salvation, and bids us to follow God and cleave to His commandments with life-giving contrition.....The second kind of calling is that which we said took place through man, viz, when we are stirred up by the example of some of the saints, and their advice, and thus inflamed with the desire of salvation.... But the third kind of calling is that which comes from compulsion when we have been involved in the riches and pleasures of this life and temptations suddenly come upon us and either threaten us with peril of death, or smite us with the loss and confiscation of our goods, or strike us down with the death of those dear to us, and thus at length even against our will we are driven to turn to God whom we scorned to follow in the days of our wealth.

--Abbot Paphnutus, The Conferences of John Cassian, CCEL

Jeremiah 6:19 Psalm 50: 18-21

While I'm sure that I've had callings of the first two types, the third--compulsion--probably has had the greatest impact on my spiritual life. Whether the cause is divorce, alcoholism, blindness, financial problems, work-related problems, or mental health issues; these problems have kept me humble and mindful of God. As I've gotten older, I hope that I've acquired enough wisdom (and a dislike for needless pain and suffering) to be alert to the first two types of callings!

Do I still need to be "beat with a stick" to hear the calling of God?

In what ways do I learn of God's call from other people?

257. The Goal

(I Have A Clear Goal In Mind)

And our profession too has its own goal and end, for which we undergo all sorts of toils not early without weariness but actually with delight, on account of which the want of food in fasting is no trial to us, the weariness of our vigils becomes a delight; reading and constant

meditation on the Scriptures does not pall upon us, and further incessant toil, and self-denial, and the privation of all things, and the horrors also of this vast desert have no terrors for us. And doubtless for this it was that you yourselves despised the love of kinsfolk, and scorned your fatherland, and the delights of this world, and passed through so many countries, in order that you might come to us, plain and simple folk as we are, living in this wretched state in the desert.

--Abbot Moses, The Conferences of John Cassian, CCEL

1 Corinthians 9: 24-27

St. Paul and Abbot Moses talk about the same thing. They have a clear goal in mind--their salvation--and they subordinate everything else in their life to attain that prize. They subdue their bodies and train their minds with a zeal that is almost unheard of in a hedonistic culture such as the one we live in. It would be extremely difficult to be half as focused as the desert saints and apostles.

What goals are more important than my salvation? In what ways can I train my body and mind to reach my goal?

258. Three Renunciations

(I Am Rooted In Jesus)

We must now speak of the renunciations, of which tradition and the authority of Holy Scripture show us three, and which every one of us ought with the utmost zeal to make complete. The first is that by which as far as the body is concerned we make light of all the wealth and goods of this world; the second, that by which we reject the fashions and vices and former affections of soul and flesh; the third, that by which we detach our soul from all present and visible things, and contemplate only things to come, and set our heart on what is invisible.

--Abbot Paphnutius, The Conference of John Cassian, CCEL

Colosians 2: 6-8

If Jesus is my Lord and Savior, it is obvious that I must train my self to live in Him and to root myself in Him. I must give up my attachment for outward things. Secondly, I must give up my ego and its inner attachments. Finally, I must set my heart on the things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father. It is obvious that to do all of this requires a consecrated life set apart from the world as the desert fathers were. To live a layman's life in a spiritual manner, I must beware of all or nothing thinking regarding these renunciations. I must take steps, even if they are small, to reach these goals.

In what ways can I simplify my life and make it less materialistic? In what ways can I live a life of virtue and wrestle with my own inner demons? In what small ways can I let my thinking transcend the world?

259. Mental Dryness In Prayer

(My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me?)

A threefold account of this mental dryness of which you speak has been given by the Elders. For it comes either from carelessness on our part, or from the assaults of the devil, or from the permission and allowance of the Lord. From carelessness on our part, when through our own faults, coldness has come upon us, and we have behaved carelessly and hastily, and owing to slothful idleness have fed on bad thoughts, and so make the ground of our heart bring forth thorns....From the assaults of the devil when...we are actually intent on good desires, our enemy with crafty subtly makes his way into our heart, and without our knowledge and against our will we are drawn away from the best intentions....But for God's permission and allowance there is a twofold reason. First, that being for a short time forsaken by the Lord, and observing with all humility the weakness of our own heart, we may not

be puffed up on account of our previous purity of heart, granted to us by His visitation: and by proving that we are forsaken by Him we cannot possibly recover our former state ...by any...efforts on our own...But a second reason for this allowance, is to prove our perseverance and steadfastness of mind, and real desires, and to show in us, with what purpose of heart, or earnestness in prayer we seek for the return of the Holy Spirit...

--Abbot Daniel, Conferences of John Cassain, CCEL

Matthew 27: 45-46

While most of my mental dryness undoubtedly comes from my own carelessness in pruning my mental garden, some comes from the other sources.

If Jesus Himself had His moment of feeling forsaken by the Father while hanging on the Cross to show the importance of perseverance, why should the same testing not happen to me, a claimed follower of Christ?

260. The Eight Faults

(I Have No Reason To Boast)

There are eight principal faults which attack mankind, viz., first...gluttony, secondly fornication, thirdly...the love of money, fourthly anger, fifthly dejection, sixthly..listlessness or low spirits, seventhly..boasting and eighthly pride. Of these faults there are two classes. For they are either natural to us as gluttony, or arise outside of nature as covetousness. But their manner of acting on us is fourfold. For some cannot be consummated without an act on the part of the flesh, as gluttony and fornication, while some can be completed without any bodily act, as pride and vainglory. Some find the reasons for their being excited outside us, as covetousness and anger; others are aroused by internal feelings, as listlessness and dejection.

--Abbot Serapion, Conferences of John Cassain, CCEL

Ephesians 2: 8-10

I am surprised to see feeling states that accompany dejection and listlessness on the list of principal faults. I suspect that dejection accompanies hopelessness and listlessness accompanies depression. These may be seen as faults because, at their roots, they are the result of a lack of faith and trust in God. I must remember that I am God's work of art, created for the good works He designated to make up my life. If I have faith in God, how can I feel hopeless and depressed?

261. The Grace Of God

(Grace Was From Before Time Began)

...God's grace and mercy always work in us what is good, and that when it forsakes us, the efforts of the worker are useless, and that however earnestly a man may strive, he cannot regain his former condition without His help... And this grace on the other hand sometimes does not refuse to visit with that holy inspiration of which you spoke, and with an abundance of spiritual thoughts, even the careless and indifferent; but inspires the unworthy, arouses the slumberers, and enlightens those who are blinded by ignorance; and mercifully reproves us and chastens us, shedding itself abroad in our hearts, that thus we may be stirred by the compunction which He excites, and impelled to rise from the sleep of sloth. Lastly, we are often filled by His sudden visitation with sweet odors, beyond the power of human composition--so that the soul is ravished with these delights, and caught up, as it were, into an ecstasy of spirit, and becomes oblivious of the fact that it is still in the flesh.

--Abbot Daniel, Conferences of John Cassain, CCEL

2 Timothy 1: 7-10

God's grace and mercy always work out in me what is good, but its effect on me is dependent on my attitude toward legitimate suffering

and the acceptance of correction. For example, when I got divorced, I studied myself and what went wrong through the annulment process and learned to change and grow through the acceptance of the associated pain and suffering. I did not just run to a new relationship to kill the pain or blame everything on my wife. I came out on the other side a stronger, more healed and loving person. If I didn't work on my issues and accept the legitimate suffering, I would have grown hard, insensitive to pain and never have learned from the experience. God's grace would have been ineffective at that time.

What is my attitude toward suffering?

262. How To Vanquish The Devil

(The Devil Will Leave Me)

For it was right that He who was in possession of the perfect image and likeness of God should be Himself tempted through those passions, through which Adam also was tempted while he still retained the image of God unbroken, that is, through gluttony, vainglory, pride; and not through those in which he was by his own fault entangled and involved after the transgression of the commandment, when the image and likeness of God was marred. For it was gluttony through which he took the fruit of the forbidden tree, vainglory through which it was said "Your eyes shall be open", and pride through which it was said "Ye shall be as gods, knowing good from evil". With these three sins then we read that the Lord our Savior was also tempted, with gluttony when the devil said to Him: "Command these stones that they be made bread:" with vainglory: "If Thou art the Son of God cast Thyself down:" with pride, when he showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them and said: "All this will I give to Thee if Thou wilt fall down and worship me:" in order that He might by His example teach us how we ought to vanquish the tempter when we are attacked on the same lines of

temptation as He was.

--Abbot Serapion, Conferences of John Cassain, CCEL

Matthew 4: 1-11

Jesus was tempted in all ways as me yet never gave in to them. He conquered them with the word of God as revealed in the Scriptures. The other principal faults could be conquered in the same way as gluttony, vainglory and pride. For example, anger can be countered by using Ephesians 4: 26 (I will not sin by letting anger get control over me) and greed can be countered with 1 Timothy 6: 6-10 (The love of money is the root of all evil).

Am I aware enough of my flaws to be able to take steps to counter them?

263. The Good, The Bad, And The Indifferent

(He Who Loses His Life For Christ Will Save It)

Altogether there are three kinds of things in the world, viz., good, bad, and indifferent. And so we ought to know what is properly good, and what is bad, and what is indifferent, that our faith may be supported by true knowledge and stand firm in all temptations. We must then believe that in things which are merely human there is no real good except virtue of soul alone, which leads us with unfeigned faith to things divine, and makes us constantly adhere to that unchanging good. And on the other hand we ought not to call anything bad, except sin alone, which separates us from the good God, and unites us to the evil devil. But those things are indifferent which can be appropriated to either side according to the fancy or wish of their owner, as for instance riches, power, honor, bodily strength, good health, beauty, life itself, and death, poverty bodily infirmities, injuries, and other things of the same sort, which can contribute either to good or to evil as the character and fancy of their owner directs.

--Abbott Theodore, Conferences of John Cassain, CCEL

Luke 9: 23-26

Jesus makes the same point as Abbot Theodore when He talks about the ambivalence of worldly existence and what is important. I may gain the whole world, achieve everything my ego wants, acquire everything my heart desires and I would still be unhappy and empty. Everything but virtue and sin has a similar ambivalence and can be used for my spiritual good or ill depending on my attitude and the power of my ego. Who is my master and Lord--Jesus or my ego? Am I sure of this?

264. The Longevity of Sanctity

(The Youngest Will Die At A Hundred)

In the choir of saints who shine like brilliant stars in the night of this world, we have seen the holy Paphnutius, like some great luminary, shining with the brightness of knowledge. For he was a presbyter of our company, I mean of those whose abode was in the desert of Scete, where he lived to extreme old age, without ever moving from his cell, of which he had taken possession when still young, and which was five miles from the church, even to nearer districts; nor was he when worn out with ;years hindered by the distance from going to Church...But not wanting to return from thence empty handed he would lay on his shoulders a bucket of water to last him all the week, and carry it back to his cell, and even when he was past ninety would not suffer it to be fetched by the labor of younger men.

--St. John Cassain, The Conferences of John Cassain, CCEL

Isaiah 65: 20

Unless they were martyred, it seems that the way of life of the desert fathers promotes long life and vigor. There is no Alzheimer disease or obesity here! It is evidently true what Jesus says about serving Him: If I give all for the Kingdom of God, all other important things will be given to me as well.

Are my priorities in the proper order? How can I improve them?

265. Evils Or Afflictions?

(God Is Training Me For Sonship)

Sometimes Holy Scripture is wont by an improper use of terms to use "evils" for "affliction", not that these are properly and in their nature evils, but because they are imagined to be evils by those on whom they are brought for their good. For when divine judgement is reasoning with men it must speak with the language and feelings of men. For when a doctor for the sake of health with good reason either cuts or cauterizes those who are suffering from the inflammation of ulcers, it is considered an evil by those who have to bear it.

--Abbott Theodore, Conferences of John Cassain, CCEL

Hebrews 12: 5-13

There are many episodes in my life which seemed evil at the time but proved to be a blessing in retrospect. There was an extremely painful period at work when I became obsessed with someone who worked for me. The relationship never got off of the ground and I had to constantly fight my feelings so as not to do anything inappropriate. The stress of trying to control my obsession was like a fire in me by burning away much of my interior self and throwing me into a depression. When I finally emerged from this, I found that I had changed. I lost my co-dependency and people-pleasing behaviors and became ready for a real, unobsessive relationship a few years latter. I probably would not have changed with anything less painful. The curse became a blessing!

Can I see the painful episodes of my life as challenges to grow and change?

266. Friendship

(How Good It Is To Live As Brothers)

Among all these then there is one kind of love which is indissoluble, where the union is owing not to the favor of a recommendation, or some great kindness or gifts, or the reason of some bargain, or the necessities of nature, but simply to similarity of virtue. This, I say, is what is broken by no chances, no interval of time or space can sever or destroy, and what even death itself cannot part. This is true and unbroken love which grows by means of the double perfection and goodness of friends, and which when once its bonds have been entered, no differences of liking and no disturbing opposition of wishes can sever.

--Abbot Joseph, Conferences of John Cassain, CCEL

Psalm 133

I have had many very good friendships over the years that have vanished over time due to moving to new localities, changes in priorities, changes in family situations, or the necessity to grow in opposite and conflicting directions. None was built on the decision to help each other to live a virtuous life. Today, however, I do have a friend that does meet this criteria. He is more like a brother that I would have chosen than a friend. We encourage each other in our spiritual growth which is a great joy. How good it is to live as brothers, for there the Lord bestows His blessings...

Am I blessed with the gift of a friend with whom I can share my spiritual journey? Do I really want one?

267. Practical Perfection

(I Will Be Perfected In Christ)

But this practical perfection depends on a double system, for its first method is to know the nature of all faults and the manner of their cure. Its second, to discover the order of the virtues, and form our mind by their perfection so that it may be obedient to them, not as if

it were forced and subject to some fierce sway, but as if it delighted in its natural good, and throve upon it, and mounted by that steep and narrow way with real pleasure. For in what way will one, who has neither succeeded in understanding the nature of his own faults, nor tried to eradicate them, be able to gain an understanding of virtues, which is the second stage of practical training, or the mysteries of spiritual and heavenly things, which exist in the higher stage of theoretical knowledge?

--Abbott Nesteros, Conferences of John Cassain, CCEL

Colosians 1: 28-29

Practical perfection consists of pruning the bad (faults) from my spiritual garden while cultivating the good (virtues). This is not easy! Learning about my faults is painful because I need to accept the truth about myself and my ego. Striving to eradicate faults is painful because they seem to be so much a part of my being that reliving them can feel like death. Cultivating virtue is painful because it requires that I change which is very difficult. It is obvious that I cannot do any of this perfectly on my own even though it requires my cooperation to advance at all. I will, according to St. Paul, become perfected in Christ. It requires the presence of Jesus in my life and in the lives of those around me to accomplish this.

In what ways can I begin to tend my spiritual garden?

268. Controlling Faults

(Perfect Love Drives Out Fear)

There are...three things which enable men to control their faults; viz., either the fear of hell or of laws even now imposed,; or the hope and desire of the kingdom of heaven; or a liking for goodness itself and the love of virtue....If them any one is aiming at perfection, from that first stage of fear which we rightly termed servile he should be

advancing a steep mount to the higher path of hope--which is compared not to a slave but to a hireling, because it looks for the payment of its recompense...., yet it cannot attain to that love of a son who, trusting in his father's kindness and liberality, has no doubt that all that the father has is his...

--Abbot Chaeremon, Conferences of John Cassain, CCEL

1 John 4: 17-19

I would like to say that my spiritual journey is fully motivated by love alone but it wouldn't be true. I have much less fear of punishment than when I was a youth. In my 20's and 30's I was motivated less by fear and more by the good things I could hope to get from God and by pleasing others. In my late 40's I started to become motivated by love (without fully giving up the others), wanting mostly the peace and joy that is not of this world. I pray that as I become a semi-centarian I will increasingly think of myself as a son of God and less as a slave or hireling.

What is my relationship to God: slave, hireling or son?

269. The Foundations Of Friendship

(Jesus Calls Me Friend)

The first foundation then, of true friendship consists in contempt for worldly substance and scorn for all things that we possess....The second is for each man so to prune his own wishes that he may not...prefer his own opinions to those of his neighbor. The third is for him to recognize that everything, even what he deems...necessary, must come after the blessing of love and peace. The fourth for him to realize that he should never be angry for any reason good or bad. The fifth for him to try to cure any wrath which a brother may have conceived against him however unreasonably, in the same way that he would cure his own knowing that the vexation of another is equally bad

for him , as if he himself were stirred against another....The last...that he should realize daily that he is to pass away from this world; as the realization of this not only permits no vexation to linger in the heart, but also represses all the motion of lusts and sins of all kinds.

--Abbot Joseph, Conferences of John Cassain, CCEL

John 15: 12-17

The crux of Abbot Joseph's discussion on friendship is that I should have no priority greater than the attainment of the blessing of love and peace. If my goal is to have a mind-set of love and peace, I must value that more than worldly goods and my own opinion. In short, everything my ego holds dear as a requirement of happiness must take a backseat. I must also, as an act of love, value the needs of others at least as much as I value my own (love my neighbor as myself). Jesus calls us His friends if we imitate His example.

How can I learn to value others as much as I value myself?

270. Vocation

(I Will Work Out My Salvation)

Wherefore it is good and profitable for each one to endeavor with all his might and main to attain perfection in the work that has been begun, according to the line which he has chosen as the grace which he has received; and while he praises and admires the virtues of others, not to swerve from his own line which he has once for all chosen... For no members can claim the offices of other members, because the eyes cannot perform the duties of the hands, nor the nostrils of the ears.

--Abbot Nesteros, Conferences of John Cassain, CCEL

Phillipians 2: 12-14

God gives me the intention and the power to work out my salvation. He also has given me gifts in bud, which must be cultivated to full bloom

through practice. I do not know what my talents are without exploration and practice. I may not receive the power and intention from God to do this before I do my part by taking the first steps toward exploring my talents. Once I have discovered what I should be doing, I must do it with all of my strength and beware of trying to do the work that someone else was called to do!

Do I have talents in bud that need to be cultivated? What steps will I take to do my part in exploring these gifts?

271. Fallen Nature vs. Individual Fault

(God asked: Where Are You?)

The time spent here, and the dwelling in solitude, and meditation, through which you think that we ought to have attained perfection of the inner man, has only done this for us, viz., teach us that which we are unable to be, without making us what we are trying to be...Wherefore we being inflamed by daily exercise of this kind, and yet not seeing that we gain from them any strength and stability in heart are overcome and in despair driven to this opinion; viz., to believe that it is from no fault of our own but from a fault of our nature that these wanderings of mind are found in mankind.

--Abbot Serenus, Conferences of John Cassian, CCEL

Genesis 3: 6-9

As Adam and Eve hid from God in the garden of Eden, I suspect that my wandering mind is a similar way of hiding from the voice of God within.

Unless I am trained from a very early age to stop the mind chatter, it becomes a habit and a part of my nature. But, as in Eden, God continues to call me: Where are you?

Am I going to continue to hide from the One who loves me?"

272. Imitation vs. Reality

(I Will Not Lie To The Holy Spirit)

There are three kinds of monks in Egypt, of which two are admirable, the third is a poor sort of thing and by all means to be avoided. The first are those...who live together in a congregation and are governed by the direction of a single Elder....The second are those who were first trained (as noted above) and then being made perfect in practical life chose the recesses of the desert....And while the Christian religion was rejoicing in these two orders of monks though this system had begun by degrees to deteriorate, there arose afterwards that disgusting and unfaithful kind of monks, or rather that baleful plant revived and sprang up again which when it first shot up in the persons of Ananias and Sapphira in the early Church was cut off by the severity of the Apostle Peter....These sprang from the number of those...who wanted to imitate rather than truly to aim at ...perfection, urged thereto by rivalry or by the praises of those who preferred the complete poverty of Christ.

--Abbot Piamun, Conferences Of John Cassian, CCEL

Acts 5: 1-11

The story of Ananias and Sapphira is one of the most disturbing stories in the New Testament. The heart of the issue is trying to get the honor of the Christian community for virtuous conduct when it is not deserved--in effect, lying to the Holy Spirit. Evidently, many were accepting the title of "monk" without really living the life of a monk. While I cannot judge others in this regard, I must judge myself for my motives and actions are almost never done purely for the love of God.

In what ways do I "talk the talk" without "walking the walk"?

273. A Variety Of Unclean Spirits

(The Devil Is On The Prowl)

It is clearly proved that there exist in unclean spirits as many

desires as there are in men. For some of them, which are commonly called Plani, are shown to be so seductive and sportive that, when they have taken continual possession of certain places or roads, they delight themselves not indeed with tormenting the passers by whom they can deceive, but, contenting themselves merely with laughing at them and mocking them, try to tire them out rather than to injure them: while some spend the night merely by harmlessly taking possession of men, though others are such slaves to fury and ferocity with hurting the bodies of those, of whom they have taken possession, by tearing them in a dreadful manner, but actually are eager to rush upon those who are passing by at a distance, and to attack them with most savage slaughter...Others we find affect the hearts of those whom they have seized with empty pride...Others we find are not only keen for lies, but also inspire men with blasphemies...

--Abbot Serenus, Conferences of John Cassain, CCEL

1 Peter 5: 8-11 1 Kings 22: 18-21

According to Abbot Serenus, it may be difficult to separate what is demon-inspired from what is simply unholy human since, evidently, there are as many desires in demons as there are in human beings. In any case, according to St. Peter, while it may be true that the devil is on the prowl looking for someone to devour, it is also true that if I stand up to him, full of faith in Christ, Jesus will deliver me from his jaws.

Am I willing to call upon the name of Jesus in faith to help me fight my spiritual battles regardless of their origin?

274. Acts Expressing Repentance

(I Am Saved By Grace)

If you plead that owing to weakness of the flesh you cannot get rid of your sins by fasting...then atone for them by profuse almsgiving. If

you have nothing that you can give to the needy, at least you can purge them away by amendment of life. But if you cannot secure perfection in goodness by the eradication of all your faults, you can show a pious anxiety for the good and salvation of another. But if you complain that you are not equal to this service, you can cover your sins by the affection of love. And if in this also some sluggishness of mind makes you weak, at least you should submissively with a feeling of humility entreat for remedies for your wounds by prayers and intercession of the saints...

--Abbot Pinufius, Conferences Of John Cassian, CCEL

Ephesians 2: 4-7

Even while I was dead through sin, Jesus' grace through love has brought me to life again. It is a free gift. I did nothing to deserve it. What remains for me to do is to express gratitude to Jesus by performing the activities mentioned by the Abbot.

In what concrete ways do I express my gratitude to God?

275. Trust: Faith In Action

(I Come To You In The Name Of The Lord)

Strive to live content in the midst of those things that cause you discontent...Free your mind from all that troubles you, God will take care of things. You will be unable to make haste in this

(Choice)without, so to speak, grieving the heart of God, because he sees that you do not honor him sufficiently with holy trust. Trust in him, I beg you, and you will have the fulfillment of what your heart desires.

-St. Vincent de Paul, Letters, SOTD

1 Samuel 17: 40-53

The story of David and Goliath is one of the great examples of trust in God's saving action. His trust in God was so complete that God allowed

the very first stone that David slung to kill the giant. Because of his trust in God, God gave him the desire of his heart which was the glorifying of God's name through the victory of His people.

Do I trust God with my life? (Be honest!)

276. Our Mother The Church

(The Spirit Binds Us Together In Peace)

You cannot have God for your father if you do not have the Church for your mother...God is one and Christ is one, and the Church is one; one is the faith, and one is the people cemented together by harmony into the strong unity of a body...if we are the heirs of Christ, let us abide in the peace of Christ; if we are the sons of God, let us be lovers of peace.

--BSt. Cyprian, The Unity of the Catholic Church, SOTD

Ephesians 4: 1-6

Jesus always prayed that His followers may be one in the mystical Body of Christ, which is the Church. Faith is ultimately not a private matter but communal as was God's relationship with Israel. Whether or not I belong to a specific Church, I am still part of the Body of Christ.

What part of the Body of Christ am I?

277. Walk In Mary's Footsteps

(Lord, Let It Be Done In Accordance With Your Word)

In dangers, in doubts, in difficulties, think of Mary, call upon Mary. Let not her name depart from your lips, never suffer it to leave your heart. And that you may more surely obtain the assistance of her prayer, neglect not to walk in her footsteps. With her for guide, you shall never go astray; while invoking her, you shall never lose heart; so long as she is in your mind, you are safe from deception; while she holds your hand, you cannot fall; under her protection you have nothing

to fear; if she walks before you, you shall not grow weary; if she shows you favor, you shall reach the goal.

--BSt. Bernard, SOTD

Luke 1: 38-41

Walk in Mary's footsteps for it is the path of faith. Mary offered herself as an empty vessel to the Lord and He filled her with His love and His Son. Mary is blessed because she believed what the angel told her all the way the Cross.

Am I willing to walk the path of faith blazed by Mary?

278. When Looking Within May Not Be Good

(Hardships Develop Perseverance)

She was full of faith, yet all her life had been tormented by thoughts against it. While apparently enjoying the peace and easiness of mind of souls who have reached a high state of virtue, she suffered such interior trials that she often told me her mind was so filled with all sorts of temptations and abominations that she had to strive not to look within herself...But for all that suffering her face never lost its serenity, nor did she once relax in the fidelity God asked of her. And so I regard her as one of the holiest souls I have ever met on this earth.

--BSt. Vincent de Paul referring to St. Jane Frances de Chantal,

Butler=s Lives of the Saints, SOTD

Romans 5:1-5

It is very surprising to find a saint that strives not to look within herself when self-examination is a foundation of spiritual growth. I assume that she is referring to looking within as an obsession to search for and punish herself for any little imperfection that she might find which is a form of scrupulosity. All one can do is to be willing and ready to remove the defect. God must do the work. God may

even allow one to keep the defect in order to keep them humble and to develop their character.

Has looking within become an obsession with me?

279. Our Vocation

(One Thing Only Is Needed)

Our wish, our object, our chief preoccupation must be to form Jesus in ourselves, to make his spirit, his devotion, his affections, his desires and his disposition live and reign there. All our religious exercises should be directed to this end. It is the work which God has given us to do unceasingly.

--BSt. John Eudes, The Life and Reign of Jesus In Christians Souls,
SOTD

Luke 10: 38-42

My work is to believe in the one whom God sent, Jesus Christ. It is the one needed thing and it will not be taken from me though I can only give it away through a lack of care.

What is the one needed thing in my life?

280. Public Prayer

(Give Thanks To The Lord For He Is Good)

Private prayer is like straw scattered here and there: If you set it on fire it makes a lot of little flames. But gather these straws into a bundle and light them, and you get a mighty fire, rising like a column into the sky, public prayer is like that.

--BJohn Vianney, SOTD

Psalms 118

If we are truly one in the Body of Christ, our prayer is a communion and Jesus is among us as He promised. In one sense, I suspect that all prayer is public prayer since time and space have no meaning in eternity which is the true nature of things.

Do I pray at least daily whether it is in public or not?

281. The Use Of Knowledge

(Knowledge Inflates, Love Builds)

There are some who desire knowledge early for its own sake; and that is shameful curiosity. And there are others who desire to know, in order that they themselves may be known; and that is vanity, disgraceful too. Others again, desire knowledge in order to acquire money or preferment by it; that too is a discreditable quest. But there are also some who desire knowledge, that they may build up the souls of others with it and that is charity. Others, again, desire it that they may themselves be built u thereby; and that is prudence. Of all these types, only the last two put knowledge to right use.

--St. Bernard, Sermon on the Canticle of Canticles, SOTD

1 Corinthians 8:1-3

I enjoy learning about science, culture, religion and many other things. I know, however, that knowledge, like things, will not make me holy or happy. Only love will do that. If I had the choice of being unlearned but loving or learned and unloving, I would probably choose the latter even though I should choose the former..

In what ways can I use my knowledge to build up others?

282. Self-Renunciation

(Whoever Believes In Jesus Will Never Die)

Perhaps it is after all not so difficult for a man to part with his possessions, but it is certainly most difficult for him to part with himself. To renounce what one has is a minor thing; but to renounce what one is, that is asking a lot.

--St. Gregory the Great, Homilies On The Gospels, SOTD

John 11: 25-27

Renouncing what I own is very difficult for me even though I live a

relatively simple life and I live below my means. Renouncing what I am, giving up my ego with its judgements and self-centeredness, is much more difficult and can only be done with the grace of God. I must put on Jesus and be transformed into a Christ-like person by believing in and loving Him. If I give up myself, I will live. If I don't give up myself, I will never have lived in the truest sense.

How badly do I want to live a real life?

283. The Courage Of A Saint

(God Is With You Wherever You Go)

Courage my sons. Don't you see that we are leaving on a mission? They pay our fare in the bargain. What a piece of good luck! The thing to do now is to pray well in order to win as many souls as possible. Let us, then, tell the Blessed Virgin that we are content, and that she can do with us anything she wishes.

--Maximilian Mary Kobe, SOTD

Joshua 1: 8-9

It is hard to imagine St Maximilian Colby going off to the concentration camps of Nazi Germany in such high spirits! He was a man of incredible faith. He must have truly taken to heart the advice of Joshua: Be firm and steadfast. A Do not fear or be dismayed for the Lord, your God, is with you wherever you go. @

What steps can I take to cultivate a faith like St. Maximilian?

284. The Desire Of Christ

(Jesus Came For Sinners, Not The Upright)

Christ, like a skillful physician, understands the weakness of men. He loves to teach the ignorant and the erring he turns again to his own true way. He is easily found by those who live by faith; and to those of pure eye and holy heart, who desire to knock at the door, he opens immediately. He does not disdain the barbarian, nor does he set the

eunuch aside as no man. He does not hate the female on account of the woman's act of disobedience in the beginning, nor does he reject the male on account of the man's transgression. But he seeks all, and desires to save all, wishing to make all the children of God, and calling all the saints unto one perfect man.

--Hippolytus, Treatise on Christ and Antichrist, SOTD

Mark 2: 15-17

Like a skillful physician, Jesus desires to save all of humanity from the disease of sin and ego. We need only to humbly recognize our boundedness and receive His healing touch. If I refuse to recognize my illness, He will still call me to come to Him for healing. He will not force Himself on me and, like any good physician, He will do no harm.

Why do I refuse to be healed?

285. Dealing With Temptation

(I Will Run From Temptation)

In the remotest part of the wild and stony desert, burnt up with the heat of the scorching sun so that it frightens even the monks that inhabit it, I seemed to myself to be in the midst of the delights and crowds of Rome. In this exile and prison to which for the fear of hell I had voluntarily condemned myself, I many times imagined myself witnessing the dancing of the Roman maidens as if I had been in the midst of them: in my cold body and in my parched-up flesh, which seemed dead before its death, passion was able to live. Alone with this enemy, I threw myself in spirit at the feet of Jesus, watering them with my tears, and I tamed my flesh by fasting whole weeks. I am not ashamed to disclose my temptations, but I grieve that I am not now what I then was.

--St. Jerome, Letter to St. Eustochium, SOTD

Genesis 39: 6-12

St. Jerome and Moses handled temptation in different ways. St. Jerome wrestled with his temptations face to face and learned to tame himself. Moses, when confronted with the temptation of the wife of Pharaoh, ran away. Both responses were adequate for the given situation. Jerome could not run away from himself and Moses didn't think it wise to sit around and argue ethics with a seductress.

In what ways do I deal with temptations?

286. Abstaining From Lawful Things

(I Will Seek My Neighbors Advantage)

..It is not so praiseworthy for us to abstain from forbidden as from lawful things; and not to use these last out of reverence for Him, Who has permitted us to use them because of our weakness. And so if even those who, faithfully offering tithes of their fruits , are obedient to the more ancient precepts of the Lord, cannot yet climb the heights of the gospel, you can see very clearly how far short of it those fall who do not even do this. For how can these men be partakers of the grace of the gospel who disregard fulfilment even of the lighter commands of the law...Christ...does not constrain anyone, by the compulsion of a command, to those lofty heights of goodness, but stimulates them by the power of free will, and urges them on by wise counsels and the desire of perfection...

--Abbot Theonas, Conferences of John Cassain, CCEL

1 Corinthians 10: 23-24

As Jesus teaches in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), love goes beyond the law. While the law is like a finite equation (eye=tooth), love is like an unbounded equation that approaches infinity. (love >= Infinity = God). While the law teaches love and justice as finite things that can have numerical values (should I forgive seven times?), Jesus teaches that we are to love as God loves: infinitely, universally

and perfectly. We are to love others as much as God loves us.

How can I grow beyond my limited concepts of love?

287. The Testimony Of Conscience

(I Will Develop A Clean Mind And Conscience)

...The full and perfect description of penitence is, never again to yield to those sins for which we do penance, or for which our conscience is pricked. But the proof of satisfaction and pardon is for us to have expelled the love of them from our hearts....Wherefore the truest test of penitence and witness of pardon is found in our own conscience, which even before the day of judgement and of knowledge, while we are still in the flesh, discloses our acquittal from guilt, and reveals the end of satisfaction and the grace of forgiveness. And what has been said may be more significantly expressed, then only should we believe that the stains of past sins are forgiven us, when the desires for present delights as well as the passions have been expelled from our heart.

--Abbott Pinufius, Conferences of John Cassain, CCEL

Titus 1: 15-16 Hebrews 13:18

While a well trained conscience is a great God-given warning signal that indicates that we are in spiritually dangerous territory, a corrupted conscience is either too sensitive or not sensitive enough. As a child, I suffered from scrupulosity. I constantly felt guilty and was constantly (several times per week) going to confession. It affects me to this day in the form of self-criticism. The other extreme is a conscience that has been so maltrained or ignored that nothing brings on the warning signals, not even murder.

What is the condition of my conscience?

288. Feeding A Vice

(I Will Look To The Lord In His Strength)

Those then who are unable and ignorant how to struggle against the promptings of their own fancies, when they are harassed in their cell, by accidie attacking their bosom more violently than usual, if they relax their strict rule and allow themselves the liberty of going out oftener, will arouse a worse plague against themselves by means of this which they fancy is a remedy: just as men fancy that they can check the violence of an inward fever by a drought of the coldest water, though it is a fact that by it its fire is inflamed rather than quenched, as a far worse attack follows after the momentary alleviation.

--Abbott Abraham, Conferences of John Cassain, CCEL

1 Chronicles 16: 11-12

Trying to purge an interior temptation with an exterior cure is about as productive as trying to fill an interior void with material tidbits or trying to fill an emotional pain with alcohol. It may work for a short while but it will come back again. The reason is that the attempted cure has little or nothing to do with the perceived problem. This is the likely cause of much addictive behavior. An interior problem needs to be wrestled with interiorly but it probably cannot be conquered alone. One must look to the Lord and His strength. In what ways do I try to resolve spiritual problems with physical cures (or vice versa)?

289. Grace vs Law

(Grace And Truth Come Through Christ)

...It lies today in our own power whether we choose to live under the grace of the gospel or under the terrors of the law: for each man must incline to one side or the other in accordance with the character of his actions, for either the grace of Christ welcomes those who go beyond the law, or else the law keeps its hold over the weaker ones as those who are its debtors and within its clutches. For one who is

guilty as regards the precepts of the law will never be able to attain to the perfection of the gospel, even though he idly boasts that he is a Christian and freed by the Lord's grace: for we must not only regard as still under the law the man who refuses to fulfill what the law enjoins, but the man as well who is satisfied with the mere observance of what the law commands, and who never brings forth fruits worthy of his vocation and the grace of Christ, where it is not said: "Thou shalt offer to the Lord thy God thy tithes and first fruits," but : "Go and sell all that thou hast and give to the poor, and come follow me."

--Abbot Theonas, Conferences of John Cassain, CCEL

John 1: 16-17

Lord Jesus, I must confess that I often have a hard time meeting the demands of the law, much less the demands of love. I seem to be able to transcend my limited self only occasionally and only with Your grace. I ask, Lord, that You work with my best intentions and desires and enable them to produce fruit for Your Kingdom even if I am not aware of them. Do I remember times when I've transcended myself with God's grace?

290. Different Strokes For Different Folks

(Everything Is Lawful, But Not Everything Is Beneficial)

Sometimes we see bad precedents taken from good things. For if a man ventures to do the same thing as another, but not with the same mind and purpose, or not with equal goodness, he will immediately fall into the snares of deception and death through the things from which others gain the fruit of eternal life.....Wherefore it is right for each one of us first to consider carefully the measure of his powers and in accordance with its limits, to choose what system he pleases, because though all are good, yet all things cannot be fit for all men.

--Abbott Abraham, Conferences of John Cassain, CCEL

1 Corinthians 6: 12

I rarely wish I were in someone else shoes anymore. I've learned that everyone has their own personal crosses to bear even if they are well hidden. These crosses are tailor-made for them. They are also given specific gifts made especially for them. I would not want their crosses anymore than they would want mine. I may admire their gifts and try to cultivate some of them if possible, but I should mostly cultivate what I've been given.

Do I cultivate what I've been given or do I wish I had the gifts of others?

291. Against Suicide

(Thou Shall Not Kill)

You have suggested the case of an impious judge giving to two athletes of piety the alternatives of sacrificing to demons, or flinging themselves into the sea. You describe the one as choosing the latter and plunging without hesitation into the deep, while the other, refusing both, shows quite as much abhorrence of the worship of idols as his companion, but declines to commit himself to the waves, and waits for this fate to be violently forced upon him. You have suggested these circumstances, and you ask which of these two took the better course. I think that you will agree with me that the latter was the most praiseworthy. No one ought to withdraw himself from life unbidden, but should await either a natural or a violent death.

--Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus, Letter to Irenaeus, CCEL

Deuteronomy 21: 1-9

Lord, may I learn a proper respect for all life including my own. I am to love others as I love myself but do my actions prove proper self-care? Teach me not to abuse myself with chemicals, junk food, entertainment that kills the soul, or anything else that denies that my body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. Teach me to nurture myself with

love and discipline. And then, Lord, allow me the joy of giving back to all of your creation. Amen.

In what small ways do I kill myself?

292. Tempering Grief

(Christ Has Been Raised From The Dead)

Had I heard of the death of your dignity's most honorable husband I should have written long ago, and now my object in writing is not to lull your great sorrow to sleep by consolatory words. They are unnecessary. They who have learnt the wisdom of philosophers and consider what this life is, find reason strong enough to meet and break grief's rising surge. And even while you are remembering your long companionship, reason recognizes the divine decrees, and to meet the forces of the tears of sorrow marshals at once the course of nature, the law of God, and the hope of the resurrection. Knowing this as I do, there is no necessity to use many words. I only beseech you to avail yourself of good sense in the hour of need. Think of the death of him who is gone as no more than a long journey, and wait for the promise of our God and Savior. For He who promised the resurrection cannot lie, and is the fount of truth.

--Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus, Letter to Theonilla, CCEL

1 Corinthians 15: 12-28

I hate to admit it but my reaction to death has generally been either numbness or depression. Neither response reflects the Christian faith which is absolute confidence in Jesus= promise of a resurrection.

What are my reactions to death?

293. Obeying Superiors of the Faith

(A Bishop Is God's Steward)

Study, therefore, to be established in the doctrines of the Lord and the apostles, that so all things, whatsoever ye do, may prosper both in

the flesh and spirit, in faith and love; in the Son, and in the Father, and in the Spirit; in the beginning and in the end; with your most admirable bishop, and the well compacted spiritual crown of your presbytery, and the deacons who are according to God. Be ye subject to the bishop, and to one another, as Jesus Christ to the Father, according to the flesh;, and the apostles to Christ, and to the Father, and to the Spirit; that so there may be a union both fleshly and spiritual.

--Ignatius, Epistle to the Magnesians, CCEL

Titus 1: 5-9 Matthew 23:1-3

Among other qualities, the New Testament indicates that the character of Church elders should be irreproachable and impeccable. They must be held in good repute by outsiders so as never to fall into disrepute.

They must hold to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.

They are to be examined and admitted only if there is nothing against them. While one should not expect perfection from flesh and blood, if an elder falls far short of these standards, I may still need to obey him but not follow his example (see Matthew 13).

Do I have a proper respect for Church authority?

294. Salvation History

(God Will Write His Law In My Heart)

But why the Gospel was not preached in ancient times to all men and to all nations, as it is now, will appear from the following considerations. The life of the ancients was not of such a kind as to permit them to receive the all-wise and all-virtuous teaching of Christ. For immediately in the beginning, after his original life of blessedness, the first man despised the command of God, and fell into this mortal and perishable state, and exchanged his former divinely inspired luxury for this curse-laden earth. His descendants having

filled our earth, showed themselves much worse, with the exception of one here and there, and entered upon a certain brutal and insupportable mode of life....Then when the excess of wickedness had overwhelmed nearly all the race, like a deep fit of drunkenness, beclouding and darkening the minds of men, the first-born and first-created wisdom of God, the pre-existent Word himself, induced by his exceeding love for man, appeared to his servants, now in the form of angels, and again to one and another of those ancients who enjoyed the favor of God, in his own person as the saving power of God, not otherwise, however, than in the shape of man, because it was impossible to appear in any other way.

-Eusebius, Book 1, CCEL

Jeremiah 31: 31-34 Genesis 19: 1-2

The Old Testament contains hints of its own fulfillment scattered throughout, especially in the prophets. My favorite is the brief description of the new covenant in Jeremiah. It indicates that the new covenant will be eternal, it will be written on our hearts, it will not have to be taught to anyone, and it will involve the forgiveness of sins.

What are my favorite passages in the Old Testament that point to the New Testament?

295. Christ-Types

(I Bore Your Name, O Lord)

Moses was the first to make known the name of Christ as a name especially august and glorious. When he delivered types and symbols of heavenly things, and mysterious images, in accordance with the oracle which said to him, "Look, that thou make all things according to the pattern which was shown thee in the mount," he consecrated a man high priest of God, in so far as that was possible, and him he called Christ. And thus to this dignity of the high priesthood, which in his

opinion surpassed the most honorable position among men, he attached for the sake of honor and glory the name of Christ....(Moses') successor, therefore, who had not hitherto borne the name Jesus, but had been called by another name, Auses, which had been given him by his parents, he now called Jesus, bestowing the name upon him as a gift of honor, far greater than any kingly diadem...Thus Moses bestowed the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ, as a mark of the highest honor, upon two men who in his time surpassed all the rest of the people in virtue and glory, namely, upon the high priest and upon his own successor in the government.

--Eusebius, Book 1, CCEL

Jeremiah 15: 10-21

Just as there are summaries of the New Testament in the Old Testament, there are many Christ-types in the Old Testament including Melkezedeck, Elijah, Elisha, Moses, and Abraham to name a few. My favorite is the prophet Jeremiah. When I read the confessions of Jeremiah scattered throughout the book, I can hear the voice of Jesus, the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, talking to his Father with great intimacy.

Who are my favorite characters from the Old Testament? Do they remind me of Jesus?

296. Christian In Deed

(Without Faith It Is Impossible To Please God)

But although it is clear that we are new and that this new name of Christians has really but recently been known among all nations, nevertheless our life and our conduct, with our doctrines of religion, have not been lately invented by us, but from the first creation of man, so to speak, have been established by the natural understanding of divinely favored men of old. That this is so we shall show in the following way. That the Hebrew nation is not new, but is universally

honored on account of its antiquity, is known to all. The books and writings of this people contain accounts of ancient men, rare indeed and few in number, but nevertheless distinguished for piety and righteousness and every other virtue. Of these, some excellent men lived before the flood, others of the sons and descendants of Noah lived after it, among them Abraham, whom the Hebrews celebrate as their own founder and forefather. If any one should assert that all those who have enjoyed the testimony of righteousness, from Abraham himself back to the first man, were Christians in fact if not in name, he would not go beyond the truth.

--St. Jerome, Lives of Illustrious Men, CCEL

Hebrews 11: 4-12

If righteous, pre-Christian Jews can be considered Christian in deed if not in name, why not righteous pre-Christian non-Jews and post-Christian non-Christians? If righteous, non-Christian persons of faith do not feel called to Christianity, can this be held against them? If the gifts that these persons have is God-given, and they know that, give thanks for them and use them for God=s glory, will God condemn them as unworthy?

Do I believe that just calling myself a Christian will save me?

297. Disease

(I Will Pray To God For Healing)

...It disturbs some that the power of this Disease attacks our people equally with the heathers, as if the Christian believed for this purpose, that he might have the enjoyment of the world and this life free from the contact of ills, and not as one who undergoes all adverse things here and is reserved for future joy. It disturbs some that this mortality is common to us with others, and yet what is there in this world which is not common to us with others, so long as this flesh of

ours still remains, according to the law of our first birth, common to us with them?Moreover, if the Christian know and keep fast under what condition and what law he has believed, he will be aware that he must suffer more than others in the world, since he must struggle more with the attacks of the devil.

--St. Cyprian, Treatise VII: On the Mortality, CCEL

Sirrah 38: 1-15

Given the sea of bacteria that we live in, what amazes me most is not the number of people who get sick but that so many stay well and never contract some strange and deadly disease. The human immune system is truly a miracle that happens so often that we loose sight of what a blessing it is. When the immune system occasionally fails, the amazing blessing of the medical profession is another blessing waiting to happen by utilizing the God-given creativity of healing.

Do I recognize what a miracle my immune system and the other bodily systems are? Do I give thanks to God for these miracles?

298. The Opportunities Of Illness

(I Will Weep With Those Who Weep)

...Beloved brethren,...what a great thing is it, how pertinent, how necessary, that pestilence and plague which seems horrible and deadly, searches out the righteousness of each one, and examines the minds of the human race, to see whether they who are in health tend the sick; whether relations affectionately love their kindred; whether masters pity their languishing servants; whether physicians do not forsake the beseeching patients; whether the fierce suppress their violence; whether the rapacious can quench the ever insatiable ardor of their raging avarice even by the fear of death; whether the haughty bend their neck; whether the wicked soften their boldness; whether, when their dear ones perish, the rich, even then bestow anything; and give,

when they are to die without heirs.

--St. Cyprian, Treatise VII: On the Mortality, CCEL

Romans 12: 14-21

Illness helps create the give-and-take system of mutual love. Illness is humbling and requires that I rely more on others (family, doctors, friends) at these times. It gives others an opportunity to develop their abilities to nurture, care and love.

Do I accept the nurturing love of others when I am sick? How about other times? Do I bestow nurturing love on those who are ill?

299. The Meeting Of Two Hermits

(Unless I Die, I Will Not Live)

...The blessed Paul had already lived on earth the life of heaven for a hundred and thirteen years, and Antony at the age of ninety was dwelling in another place of solitude..., when the thought occurred to the latter, that no monk more perfect than himself had settled in the desert. However, in the stillness of the night it was revealed to him that there was farther in the desert a much better man than he, and that he ought to go and visit him. So then at break of day the venerable old man, supporting and guiding his weak limbs with a staff started to go.....Thus with smiles, Paul gave him access, and, the door being opened, they threw themselves into each other's arms, greeted one another by name, and joined in thanksgiving to God....The blessed Paul spoke to Antony: "I knew long sense, brother, that you were dwelling in those parts: long ago God promised you to me for a fellow-servant; but the time of my falling asleep now draws nigh; I have always longed to be dissolved and to be with Christ; my course is finished, and there remains for me a crown of righteousness. Therefore you have been sent by the Lord to lay my poor body in the ground, yea to return earth to earth."

--St. Jerome, The Life of Paulus, the First Hermit, CCEL

1 Corinthians 15: 36-45

Before these two old saints met they were aware of each other even though many miles apart, through the spiritual gift of intuition. This gift was revealed to them through the silence of nights of meditation.

It is likely that they also had other spiritual gifts that were not recorded. As they strove to become more Christ-like, they became more like Christ and were enabled to do the works that Jesus did.

Do I sense that I have any spiritual gifts that go beyond the normal senses?

300. Beware Of Luxury

(The Lord Hates Pride)

I may be permitted at the end of this little treatise to ask those who do not know the extent of their possessions, who adorn their homes with marble, who string house to house and field to field, what did this old man in his nakedness ever lack? Your drinking vessels are of precious stones; he satisfied his thirst with the hollow of his hand. Your tunics are of wrought gold; he had not the raiment of the meanest of your slaves. But on the other hand, poor though he was, Paradise is open to him; you with all your gold will be received into Gehenna. He though naked yet kept the robe of Christ; you, clad in your silks, have lost the vesture of Christ. Paul lies covered with worthless dust, but will rise again to glory; over you are raised costly tombs, but both you and your wealth are doomed to the burning. Have a care, I pray you, at least have a care for the riches you love. Why are even the grave-clothes of your dead made of gold? Why does not your vaunting cease even amid mourning and tears? Cannot the carcasses of rich men decay except in silk?

--St. Jerome, The Life of Paulus, the First Hermit, CCEL

Amos 6: 1-8

What is your end goal?, the minister asked, and is that goal worthy of Him who lives in you? If I seek a comfortable retirement as my goal, is it worth it? If my goal is to do whatever my ego dictates, is it worth it? The desert monks spent a lifetime cultivating their lives and their relationship with God, striving to do His will in all things and to be controlled by nothing but God. Although they died owning nothing, they died with the peace and assurance that they lived the right way and were going home to the Kingdom of God. My end goal, especially after retirement (God willing), is to use my time, talent and treasure for God's glory and my joy. May I learn to make them one. What is my end goal? Is it worthy of He who lives in me?

301. Flirting

(I Will Preserve Discretion)

Such foolish attachments between man and woman without any matrimonial intentions as are called amourettes,--mere abortions, or rather phantoms of friendship, --must not, idle and empty as they are, profane the name of friendship or love. Yet such frivolous, contemptible attractions often snare the hearts of both men and women, and although they may end in downright sin, there is no such intention on the part of their victims, who consciously do but yield to foolish trifling and toying. Some such have no object beyond the actual indulgence of a passing inclination; others are excited by vanity, which takes pleasure in captivating hearts; some are stimulated by a combination of both these motives. But all such friendships are evil, hollow and vain....

--St. Francis de Salle, Introduction to the Devout Life, CCEL

Proverbs 5:1-14

Flirting is a form of temptation and is not harmless. It can cause jealousy and hurt in a marriage. It is a learned behavior. Children watch their parents or older siblings and pick up on this manipulative kind of behavior.

Would I like my children to learn how to flirt? Would it bother me if my spouse was flirtatious?

302. Understanding and Faith

(Faith Has Overcome The World)

Exhortation of the mind to the contemplation of God. It casts aside cares, and excludes all thoughts save that of God, that it may seek Him. Man was created to see God. Man by sin lost the blessedness for which he was made, and found the misery for which he was not made. He

did not keep this good when he could keep it easily. Without God it is ill with us. Our labors and attempts are in vain without God. Man cannot seek God, unless God himself teaches him; nor find him, unless he reveals himself. God created man in his image, that he might be mindful of him, think of him, and love him. The believer does not seek to understand, that he may believe, but he believes that he may understand: for unless he believed he would not understand.

--St. Anselm, Homo, CCEL

1 John 5:1-11

Faith is the window that opens my eyes to the spiritual world. Without faith, I can no more perceive the Kingdom of God than I can perceive radio waves without a radio. If I interpret my faith through the eyes of the world, I am disillusioned and depressed. If I interpret the world through the eyes of faith, I can see how far man has fallen and thank God for sending His Son to bring healing and heart rest.

Is my spiritual receiver on and tuned in?

303. Heresy

(I Will Beware Of False Teachers)

Inasmuch as certain men have set the truth aside, and bring in lying words and vain genealogies, which, as the apostle says, "minister questions rather than godly edifying which is in faith," and by means of their craftily-constructed plausibilities draw away the minds of the inexperienced and take them captive, [I have felt constrained, my dear friend, to compose the following treatise in order to expose and counteract their machinations.] These men falsify the oracles of God, and prove themselves evil interpreters of the good word of revelation. They also overthrow the faith of many, by drawing them away, under a pretense of [superior] knowledge, from Him who founded and adorned the universe; as if, forsooth, they had something more excellent and

sublime to reveal, than that God who created the heaven and the earth, and all things that are therein. By means of specious and plausible words, they cunningly allure the simple-minded to inquire into their system; but they nevertheless clumsily destroy them, while they initiate them into their blasphemous and impious opinions....

--St. Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Book 1, CCEL

2 Peter 2:1-3

While both Sts. Peter and Irenaeus were referring to a Gnosticism which was prevalent during the first Christian centuries, heresy essentially refers to the acceptance of only one side of a paradox. For example, accepting that Jesus was God but was not really a man (or vice versa) or claiming that the spiritual is good but the material, which God created, is bad. If I am a heretic in any way, it is probably in that I find it difficult to believe that God will really judge and condemn a person for not specifically believing that Jesus is Lord. This paradox is essentially that God is loving but will not ultimately demand justice.

Are there doctrines that I have an especially difficult time accepting?

Is the reason self-serving?

304. Soul Mates

(A Loyal Friend Is Beyond Price)

Do you, my child, love everyone with the pure love of charity, but have no friendship save with those whose intercourse is good and true, and the purer the bond which unites you so much higher will your friendship be. If your intercourse is based on science it is praiseworthy, still more if it arises from a participation in goodness, prudence, justice and the like; but if the bond of your mutual liking be charity, devotion and Christian perfection, God knows how very precious a friendship it is! Precious because it comes from God, because it tends

to God, because God is the link that binds you, because it will last for ever in Him. Truly it is a blessed thing to love on earth as we hope to love in Heaven, and to begin that friendship here which is to endure for ever there. I am not now speaking of simple charity, a love due to all mankind, but of that spiritual friendship which binds souls together, leading them to share devotions and spiritual interests, also as to have but one mind between them.

--St. Francis de Salle, Introduction to the Devout Life, CCEL

Sirrah 6:5-17

The old adage that "birds of a feather flock together" is mostly true. In general, I will only make close friendships with those who are quite similar to me in likes, dislikes, attitudes and behaviors (whether these are good or bad). There are two situations, however, when this will not be true. If I recognize that I need to learn something, say some virtue, I will stay close to those who have that quality which I would like to emulate. If I am strong in my convictions and truly believe that God is asking me to do so, I will associate with those that are quite dissimilar from me so that they may learn by my example. In this case I must be sure that God is asking me to do this because I will very likely be opening myself up to harassment and ridicule. In general, I want to be friends with those who can teach me the most about myself and the spiritual life.

What manner of friendships do I have?

305. Soul As A Feather

(I Will Live In The Truth)

The nature of the soul is not inaptly compared to a very fine feather or very light wing, which, if it has not been damaged or affected by being spoilt by any moisture falling on it from without, is borne aloft almost naturally to the heights of heaven by the lightness of its

nature, and the aid of the slightest breath: but if it is weighted by any moisture falling upon it and penetrating into it, it will not only not be carried away by its natural lightness into any aerial flights but will actually be borne down to the depths of earth by the weight of the moisture it has received. So also our soul, if it is not weighted with faults that touch it, and the cares of this world, or damaged by the moisture of injurious lusts, will be raised as it were by the natural blessing of its own purity and borne aloft to the heights by the light breath of spiritual meditation; and leaving things low and earthly will be transported to those that are heavenly and invisible.

--Abbot Isaac, Conferences of John Cassain, CCEL

3 John:2-4

The soul does not need anything added to it to be complete. It needs, however, to subtract the faults, cares and desires it has picked up over time. The soul flourishes in the warm sun of Truth and withers when steeped in the mire of the ego. If the soul is not burdened with the world, it naturally rises to God.

In what ways can I unburden my soul?

306. Socializing Vs. Solitude

(I Will Seek Conversation With The Upright)

Either to seek or to shun society is a fault in one striving to lead a devout life in the world, such as I am now speaking of. To shun society implies indifference and contempt for one's neighbors; and to seek it savors of idleness and uselessness. We are told to love one's neighbor as one's self. In token that we love him, we must not avoid being with him, and the test of loving one's self is to be happy when alone.

"Think first on thyself," says St. Bernard, "and then on other men." So that if nothing obliges you to mix in society either at home or abroad, retire within yourself, and hold converse with your own heart. But if

friends come to you, or there is fitting cause for you to go forth into society, then by all means go, and meet your neighbor with a kindly glance and a kindly heart.

--St. Francis de Salle, Introduction to the Devout Life, CCEL

Sirrah 9:10-18

Before I went into "Recovery" thirteen years ago, I had a difficult time "conversing with my own heart". I was always agitated and my mind was always churning. Being alone was painful. Since then, I've learned to enjoy my own company and I am generally not afraid to look within myself. There are times when I feel called to be involved in society through volunteer activities and by helping others with their problems. At other times, like the last two years, I feel called to more introverted activity (such as writing this book). I suspect that this period will be followed by a more extroverted one. God must provide the impetus otherwise my "helping" will be co-dependent and my "self-reflection" will become avoidance.

Is there a balance of inner and outer activity in my life?

307. Confessing Self-Truth

(I Will Confess My Sins)

...If thou has confessed thyself a sinner, the truth is in thee: for the Truth itself is light. Thy life hath not yet shone in perfect brightness, because there are sins in thee, but yet thou hast already begun to be enlightened, because there is in thee the confession of sins.... Before all, then, confession; then, love... ...Now let us see whether he commendeth charity in regard of the sins which subsequently overtake us: because charity alone extinguisheth sins. Pride extinguisheth charity: therefore humility strengtheneth charity; charity extinguisheth sins. Humility goes along with confession, the humility by which we confess ourselves sinners: this is humility, not

to say it with the tongue, as if only to avoid arrogancy, lest we should displease men if we should say that we are righteous. This do the ungodly and insane.

--BSt. Augustine, Homily 1, CCEL

James 5:16-18

While I have no problem confessing myself a sinner, it has been about three years since I last went to Confession. There are at least three reasons why this is so. Part of it is a distaste for "sin counting" since such a tendency became obsessive with me when I was a child. In addition, while I believe that my sins are relatively minor, some are very bothersome to me because I believe that exterior circumstances seem to have forced me to sin even though I know that this is probably not totally true. Finally, many of my sins are attitudinal and not very specific. While I haven't received sacramental Confession in a long time, I do confess my shortcomings in the manner of the 12-Step programs. I admit to God, myself and another human being the exact nature of my wrongs. I become ready to have God remove these characteristics. I ask Him to help me remove my shortcomings. While none of this justifies not going to Confession, it at least explains it. May God help me to change so that I can go to Confession more often.

What are my reasons for not going to Confession? How self-serving are these reasons?

308. Speak Of God With Passion!

(I Will Be Sincere And Ernest)

Physicians judge to a great extent as to the health or disease of a man by the state of his tongue, and our words are a true test of the state of our soul....We are apt to apply the hand quickly to the place where we feel pain, and so too the tongue is quick to point out what we love.

If you love God heartily, my child, you will often speak of Him among your relations, household and familiar friends...Take care, then, never to speak of God, or those things which concern Him, in a merely formal, conventional manner; but with earnestness and devotion, avoiding the affected way in which some professedly religious people are perpetually interlarding their conversation with pious words and sayings, after a most unseasonable and unthinking manner. Too often they imagine that they really are themselves as pious as their words, which probably is not the case.

-St. Francis de Salle, Introduction to the Devout Life, CCEL

Titus 2:1-6

I hate to admit it but I sometimes fancy myself as a self-styled theologian and talk big words without necessarily being emotionally attached to them. At these times I am not talking about God from my heart but only from my head.. God becomes an academia exercise. My academic words will never win souls for Christ unless they are also heart felt and reflect the way I truly believe and behave.

When I talk about God, are my heart and head involved or do I just mouth dogma and jargon?

309. Light And Self-Knowledge

(I Will Recognize God=s Will)

How much God is distant from the creature, how much the Maker from the making, how much Wisdom from that which is made by Wisdom, far beyond all things must this light needs be. And haply we shall be near to it, if we get to know what this light is, and apply ourselves unto it, that be it we may be enlightened; because in ourselves we are darkness, and only when enlightened by it can we become light, and not be put to confusion by it, being put to confusion by ourselves. Who is he that is put to confusion y himself He that knows himself to be a sinner. Who is

he that by it is not put to confusion? He who by it is enlightened.
What is it to be enlightened by it? He that now sees himself to be darkened by sins, and desires to be enlightened by it, draws near to it....But thou shalt not be shamed by it, if, when it shall show thee to thyself that thou are foul, thine own foulness shall displease thee, that thou mayest perceive its beauty. This is that He would teach.

--St. Augustine, Homily 1, CCEL

Ephesians 5:6-20

Whether or not my "self-knowledge" brings me to light is dependent on several decisions/actions that I make. The first is: Do I accept myself as an imperfect human being? If I don't, I choose to be blind to the truth. If I do, I can go on to the next question. Secondly: What is my attitude toward accepting myself as a sinner? If I don't like myself I will criticize myself, wallow in guilt, and feel hopeless. Or I will say that this is the way I am and I can't change. If I love myself I will humbly accept the truth about myself and have a desire to change. Finally: What actions will I take to change? If I don't love myself, my behavior will not change as I will be stuck in the pattern of sin-guilt-sin. Despair will increase. If I do love myself, I will know that while I cannot change without God's help, I must become ready to change and ask God to help change me. Ultimately, the light will burn away my darkness only if I cooperate with God's grace. This cooperation is my part.

What is my attitude toward my imperfections?

310. The Love Of God

(Jesus Is Praying For And Watching Over Me)

God is love, and all his operations proceed from love. Once he wills to manifest that goodness by sharing his love outside himself, then the Incarnation becomes the supreme manifestation of his goodness and love

and glory. So, Christ was intended before all other creatures and for his own sake. For him all things were created and to him all things must be subject, and God loves all creatures in and because of Christ. Christ is the first-born of every creature, and the whole of humanity as well as the created world finds its foundation and meaning in him. Moreover, this would have been the case even if Adam had not sinned.

--St. Lawrence of Brindisi, SOTD

John 21: 15-19 John 17:6-19

"Mark, do you love me?" The words of Jesus to Peter could just as appropriately have been said to me. While Peter denied Jesus three times, my behavior has denied Him many times that (seventy times seven times?). While Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved Him, He asks me that question every day.

If my behavior is more important than my words, how do I answer this question?

311. God Is My Supervisor

(God Occupies My Heart With Joy)

Discharge the official duties to which you are severally appointed with the utmost fear of God and affection to your prince, and perfect carefulness. Consider that every command of the emperor which does not offend God has proceeded from God Himself; and execute it in love as well as in fear, and with all cheerfulness. For there is nothing which so well refreshes a man who is wearied out with weighty cares as the reasonable cheerfulness and benign patience of an intimate servant...

--Bishop Theonas, Bishop of Alexandria, Epistle to Lucianus, CCEL

Ephesians 5: 17-19

Each work day I ask God to be my supervisor. When I am not fully occupied with my work, I try to do other, non-trivial things which use my talents potentially for the glory of God. This may be doing homework

for a social work class, it may be writing a meditation for this book, it may be listening to a co-worker who has the need to talk about their troubles. As it says in Ecclesiastes, God occupies with joy those that are blessed.

In what ways can I let God be my supervisor?

312. Blaspheming The Holy Spirit

(The Spirit Is Holy)

He who has offended against the first term and the second, may be judged to deserve smaller punishment; but he who has also despised the third can no longer find pardon. For by the first term and the second, he says, is meant the teaching concerning the Father and the Son; but by the third is meant the doctrine committed to us with respect to the perfection and the partaking of the Spirit. And with the view of confirming this, he adduces the word spoken by the Savior to the Disciples: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. But when the Holy Spirit is come, He will teach you...As the Savior converses with those not yet able to receive what is perfect, condescending to their littleness, while the Holy Spirit communes with the perfected, and yet we could never say on that account that the teaching of the Spirit is superior to the teaching of the Son, but only that the Son condescends to the imperfect, while the Spirit is the seal of the perfected; even so it is not on account of the superiority of the Spirit over the Son that the blasphemy against the Spirit is a sin excluding impunity and pardon, but because for the imperfect there is pardon, while for those who have tasted the heavenly gift, and been made perfect, there remains no plea or prayer for pardon.

--Theognostus, Seven Books of Hypotyposes or Outlines, CCEL

Mark 2:28-30

These verses of Scripture have always troubled me. A sin that is

unforgivable? As I understand it, this refers to a Spirit-filled person who decides to turn his/her back on the Spirit to such an extent that he/she attributes to the evil one the characteristics of God. The sin is unforgivable in that the person does not seek or want forgiveness. They have tasted the heavenly gifts and have consciously rejected them. God, of course, would forgive them if they repented.

Do I have sins or flaws for which I refuse to repent or wish to be healed from?

313. Secular Knowledge and Culture

(All Truth Is From God)

If, therefore, it should happen that a believer in Christ is called to this same office (librarian of the Emperor), he should not despise that secular literature and those Gentile intellects which please the emperor. To be praised are the poets for the greatness of their genius, the acuteness of their inventions, the aptness and lofty eloquence of their style. To be praised are the orators; to be praised also are the philosophers in their own class. To be praised, too, are the historians, who unfold to us the order of exploits, and the manners and the institutions of our ancestors, and show us the rule of life from the proceedings of the ancients.

--Bishop Theonas, Bishop of Alexandria, Epistle to Lucianus, CCEL

Acts 19: 11-20

Truth is one and I should acknowledge the truth in any source whether it be sacred or profane, scientific or fiction, prose or poetry. I can marvel and learn from the beauty, wisdom, eloquence, style, etc. of any source. God can use any source to get a message across whether it be a billboard or the message on a passing truck. If I have "eyes to see" and "ears to hear", the message will be there. None of this implies that I should accept what is false whether it be from a government

official or a trendy movie.

How do I distinguish the kernel of truth from the chaff of falsehood?

314. Role of the Congregation

(I will Serve As Led By The Spirit)

Demetrius has added to his letter that this is a matter that was never heard of before, and has never been done now, -namely, that laymen should take part in public speaking , when there are bishops present. But in this assertion he has departed evidently far from the truth by some means. For, indeed, wherever there are found persons capable of profiting the brethren, such persons are exhorted by the holy bishops to address the people.

-Alexander of Cappadocia, Epistle to the people of Antioch, CCEL

Acts 6: 1-7

The abilities of the laity, the congregation of believers, have often been overlooked in favor of the professional clergy. One can see from the readings from Acts and from the third century that the abilities and gifts of the parishioners were always to be used for the common good of the Church.

In what ways can I use my God given gifts for the benefit of my Church and community?

315. Christian Hope

(The Lord's Plans Are Full Of Hope)

Bishop Theonas to Lucianus, the Chief Chamberlain of Our Most Invincible Emperor. I give thanks to Almighty God and our Lord Jesus Christ, who has not given over the manifesting of His faith throughout the whole world, as the sole specific for our salvation, and the extending of it even in the course of the persecutions of despots. Yea, like gold reduced in the furnace, it has only been made to shine the more under the storms of persecution, and its truth and grandeur have

only become always the more and more illustrious, so that now, peace being granted to the churches by our gracious prince, the works of Christians are shining even in sight of the unbelieving, and God your Father, who is in heaven, is glorified thereby; a thing which, if we desire to be Christians in deed rather than in word, we ought to seek and aspire after as our first object on account of our salvation. For if we seek our own glory, we set our desire upon a vain and perishing object, and one which leads ourselves on to death. But the glory of the Father and of the Son, who for our salvation was nailed to the cross, makes us safe for the everlasting redemption; and that is the greatest hope of Christians.

--Bishop Theonas, Bishop of Alexandria, Epistle to Lucianus, CCEL

Jeremiah 29: 11-14a

"I know what plans I have in mind for you, plans for peace...to give you a future and a hope." When I read these words of God spoken through Jeremiah, I believe that he is talking about the future redemption of Israel and mankind through Jesus. This is something that Jeremiah could never have fully understood, much less the people of Israel. But Israel had faith and hope in God's promise just as Christians do. Christians believe that God still has wonderful plans for us even though we may not fully understand what they may be. We only know that they will be good!

Do God's promises give me hope?

316. Communal Guilt

(God's Kindness Lasts 1000 Generations)

Covetousness is a great evil; and it is not possible in a single letter to set forth those scriptures in which not robbery alone is declared to be a thing horrible and to be abhorred, but in general the grasping mind, and the disposition to meddle with what belongs to others, in

order to satisfy the sordid love of gain.....Wherefore it seemed good to excommunicate such persons, lest the wrath (of God) should come upon the whole people, and upon those first of all who are set over them in office, and yet fail to make inquiry. For I am afraid, as the Scripture says, lest the impious work the destruction of the righteous along with his own.....Behold, did not Achar the son of Zata transgress in the accursed thing, and trouble then lighted on all the congregation of Israel? And this one man was alone in his sin; but he was not alone in the death that came by his sin.

-Gregory Thaumaturgus, Canonical Epistle, CCEL

Exodus 24: 6-7 Joshua 7: 1-26

Both sin and salvation are partially communal. It is not that God punishes the innocent but that our lives (family, clan, community, world) are so increasingly intertwined that our actions have unintended consequences on others for good or ill. The reading from Exodus, however, makes a powerful point. Our acts of love carry more weight and affect more generations (1000) positively than our evil acts affect negatively (2 or 3).

In what ways have the "victimless" indiscretions I've been involved with have negative consequences when viewed in hindsight? Have any of my actions had unintended positive effects on others?

317. A Pure Will

(The Lord Is My Judge)

My child, often, when the fire is burning the flame does not ascend without smoke. Likewise, the desires of some burn toward heavenly things, and yet they are not free from temptations of carnal affection. Therefore, it is not altogether for the pure honor of God that they act when they petition Him so earnestly. Such, too, is often your desire which you profess to be so strong. For that which is alloyed with

self-interest is not pure and perfect. Ask, therefore, not for what is pleasing and convenient to yourself, but for what is acceptable to Me and is for My honor, because if you judge rightly, you ought to prefer and follow My will, not your own desire or whatever things you wish.

-Thomas a Kempis, The Imitation of Christ, CCEL

1 Corinthians 4: 1-5

The only way that I can have a fully pure will is to be totally transformed into Christ. Until then, self-will will always play a part, although an increasingly minor role, in my decisions and actions. There are moments when I feel that I am tuned into god's will because the good I do brings me much joy and I recognize that I am being empowered to do something I would ordinarily not consider doing if my own will was in effect. These times come and go as the Spirit moves. My only role is to cooperate with God's grace at these times and pray that such times will increase in number and duration.

In what ways can I cooperate with God's grace? If I know that God's will brings me joy, why do I not strive to be attuned with it more often?

318. Avoiding Judgement

(I Will Judge Myself)

Of a truth, hasty judgements are most displeasing to God, and men's judgements are hasty, because we are not judges one of another, and by judging we usurp our Lord's own office. Man's judgement is hasty; because the chief malice of sin lies in the intention and counsel of the heart, which is shrouded in darkness to us. Moreover, man's judgements are hasty, because each one has enough to do in judging himself, without undertaking to judge his neighbor. If we would not be judged, it behoves us alike not to judge others, and to judge ourselves. Our Lord forbids the one, his Apostle enjoins the other....

--St. Francis de Salle, Introduction to the Devout Life, CCEL

Romans 7: 1-6

While it is best not to judge others from a spiritual perspective, in a society of this world it is unavoidable. "Judge not lest ye be judged" I can only judge others if I am willing to have my own motives and behaviors judged by God and man. True and just judgement, however, can only be accomplished by God since God knows both the deed and the motive behind the deed. He understands and can read the human heart. Human judgement can only judge by the action. It can never fully understand the mitigating circumstances of one's motives.

When I judge others, am I absolutely certain that my motives are both loving and just before I "cast the first stone"?

319. Nature vs. Grace

(God Probes The Mind And Tests The Heart)

My child, pay careful attention to the movements of nature and of grace, for they move in very contrary and subtle ways, and can scarcely be distinguished by anyone except a man who is spiritual and inwardly enlightened. All men, indeed, desire what is good, and strive for what is good in their words and deeds. For this reason the appearance of good deceives many...Nature is not willing to die, or to be kept down, or to be overcome. Nor will it subdue itself or be made subject. Grace, on the contrary, strives for mortification of self....Nature works for its own interest and looks to the profit it can reap from another.

Grace does not consider what is useful and advantageous to herself, but rather what is profitable to many...Nature is covetous and receives more willingly than it gives. It loves to have its own private possessions. Grace, however, is kind and openhearted. Grace shuns private interest, is contented with little, and judges it more blessed to give than to receive....Nature does everything for its own gain and

interest. It can do nothing without pay and hopes for its good deeds to receive their equal or better, or else praise and favor. It is very desirous of having its deeds and gifts highly regarded. Grace, however, seeks nothing temporal, nor does she ask any recompense but God alone...Nature turns all things back to self. Grace brings all things back to God in whom they have their source...

-Thomas a Kempis, The Imitation of Christ, CCEL

Jeremiah 17: 9-10

Lord, may You purify my motives. May You open my eyes to the reasons underlying my actions. May You purify my motives of self-will and selfishness. May You replace this egoism with the grace of Your presence so that my life may be full of grace. Finally, may You allow me to pass on Your grace to those around me for Your glory and my joy. Amen.

Do I truly want my motives to be purified of self-centeredness?

320. Re-Creation

(God Rested On The Seventh Day)

We must needs occasionally relax the mind, and the body requires some recreation also. Cassian relates how St. John the Evangelist was found by a certain hunter amusing himself by caressing a partridge, which sat upon his wrist. The hunter asked how a man of his mental powers could find time for so trifling an occupation. In reply, St. John asked why he did not always carry his bow strung? The man answered: Because, if always bent, the bow would lose its spring when really wanted. "Do not marvel then," the Apostle replied, "if I slacken my mental efforts from time to time, and recreate myself, in order to return more vigorously to contemplation." It is a great mistake to be so strict as to grudge any recreation either to others or one's self. Walking, harmless games, music, instrumental or vocal, field sports, etc., are such entirely

lawful recreations that they need no rules beyond those of ordinary discretion, which keep everything within due limits of time, place, and degree. So again games of skill, which exercise and strengthen body or mind...

--St. Francis de Salle, Introduction to the Devout Life, CCEL

Genesis 2: 1-3

One of the big revelations in Scripture from Genesis to the Gospels is that God, as Father and as Son, rested as a part of the creative process. There are places in Scripture where personified Wisdom is pictured as playing before the Lord during Creation.

If we are created in God's image, recreation, literally re-creation, is a necessity to knowing and doing God's will as well as a way of resting the physical body.

In what ways do I recreate myself? Are these periods followed by new energy and creativity? (If they are not, perhaps I am not recreating.)

321. Awareness of Shortcomings

(I Must Account For My Behavior)

My confidence is placed in God who does not need our help for accomplishing his designs. Our single endeavor should be to give ourselves to the work and to be faithful to him, and not to spoil his work by our shortcomings.

--St. Isaac Jogues, Letter of 9/12/1646, SOTD

Ecclesiastes 11: 9-10

My shortcomings are always there. I mostly need to be aware of them, consciously recognize them for what they are and not act on them.

Today, on my way to work, I found myself judging and being aggravated by many people who did nothing to deserve my reaction. When I recognized what was happening, I smiled, shook my head and said: AThere you go again Mark, judging others instead of judging yourself.@ The

aggravated feeling then left me.

What shortcomings do I possess that prevent God's grace from working through me?

322. Religious Freedom

(The Church Will Be As A Bride Dressed For Her Husband)

In every country, even the poorest of women is permitted to take a lawful husband according to the law of the land and by her own choice; but, through the desire of evil practices of the wicked, Holy Church, the bride of God and mother of us all, is not permitted lawfully to cling to her spouse on earth in accordance with divine law and her own will.

--St. Gregory VII, A Call To The Faithful, SOTD

Revelations 21: 1-4

The Church of Christ is still persecuted in many countries just as it was in the first years of it's existence. This must be counteracted with love by Christians everywhere. A major way of counteracting this evil is to offer love and acceptance to those of other faiths. We should treat them with the love and respect that we want for ourselves.

Do I try to understand and respect those of other faiths?

323. I Am A Blessing

(My Body Is A Temple Of The Holy Spirit)

Go forth in peace, for you have followed the good road. Go forth without fear, for he who created you has made you holy, has always protected you, and loves you as a mother. Blessed be you, my God, for having created me.

-St. Clare, on her deathbed, SOTD

1 Corinthians 6: 19-20

God has created me uniquely and I am precious in His sight. I have been ransomed at a great price, the shedding of my Creator's blood. If I

take this to heart, I will be able to be like St. Clare when I reach the end of my earthly road. I will be able to be joyfully ready to meet my Maker and I will thank God for having created me.

Do I believe that I am a unique blessing to those around me?

324. The Liturgy: Surpassing Sacred Action

(God Is Not A God Of Disorder But Of Peace)

Rightly, then, the liturgy is considered as an exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ. In the liturgy the sanctification of man is manifested by signs perceptible to the senses...; in the liturgy, full public worship is performed by the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, that is, by the Head and his members...From this it follows that every liturgical celebration, because it is an action of Christ, the priest and of his Body the Church, is a sacred action, surpassing all others.

--St. Benedict, Constitution On The Sacred Liturgy 7, SOTD

1 Corinthians 14: 26-33a

The Mass is mystically performed by Jesus Himself as High Priest and Head of the Church. It is celebrated, thus, in conjunction with the congregation, a part of His Mystical Body. When Mass is celebrated, Jesus is fully present spiritually and physically. It is a shadow and prefiguration of the worship of God that is being celebrated in eternity.

Am I spiritually prepared to participate in this Heavenly celebration?

325. A Prisoner For Christ

(I Am Not Ashamed Of Those In Chains For Christ)

I greet you from Smyrna together with the Churches of God present here with me. They comfort me in every way, both in body and in soul. My chains, which I carry about on me for Jesus Christ, begging that I may happily make my way to God, exhort you persevere in your concord and in

your community prayers.

--St. Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Church at Tralles, SOTD

2 Timothy 1:15-18

While I do attend a weekly Bible study, occasionally pray at a ADay of Prayer@ gathering and am open to talk about my faith if asked my opinion, I generally draw the line there regarding expressing my faith at work. I tend to distance myself from the more militant Christians. I have a tendency to justify my distancing by calling them Alunatic fringe@, Athose who would kill for God@, or Athose who love to see others as damned@. They take an active stand on issues like abortion and have gotten into trouble at work for doing so. Many of them are Apeculiar@. All of this said, I somehow suspect that I am not totally correct or honest in this assessment. I suspect that my desire to Afit in@ has outweighed the need to Astand out@ on many issues. Christians are supposed to be a peculiar people.

Are my reasons for distancing myself from more militant Christians self-serving?

326. Cultivating Our Little Garden

(Blessed Are Those Who Seek God With All Of Their Heart)

We cultivate a very small field for Christ, but we love it, knowing that God does not require great achievements but a heart that holds back nothing for self...The truest crosses are those we do not choose ourselves...He who has Jesus has everything.

--St. Rose Philippine Duchesne, SOTD

Psalms 119:1-5 Isaiah 5:1-6

God can take my smallest efforts, bless them, and increase their impacts one-hundred fold or more like grain from a single kernel. God can take the small piece of Earth where I work and extend the goodness that He allows me to accomplish many times over, like a tree growing

and spreading its branches. All God needs to do this is for me to have a heart that holds back nothing from Him. I must be willing to bloom where I am planted and become the type of plant I am meant to be. Do I believe that God can take me as I am and where I am, and accomplish great things through me?

327. An Intimate Friendship

(I Will Be A Friend Of God)

Lord, you have granted me your secret friendship by opening the sacred ark of your divinity, your deified heart, to me in so many ways as to be the source of all my happiness; sometimes imparting it freely, sometimes as a special mark of our mutual friendship. You have so often melted my soul with your loving caresses that, if I did not know the abyss of your overflowing condescension, I should be amazed were I told that even your Blessed Mother had been chosen to receive such extraordinary marks of tenderness and affection.

-St. Gertrude, The Life And Revelations Of St. Gertrude, SOTD

Luke 1:1-4 James 2:18-23

God=s Friend. Abraham was called God=s friend because his deeds reflected his faith in what God, his Friend, promised. St. Luke=s Gospel is written to Theopholis, Greek for Afriend of God@, one who is searching for truth and hungering to see God=s saving activity in everyday life and history. St. Gertrude considers her friendship Asecret@ and Amutual@, almost a love affair, where extraordinary tendencies and caresses are freely given. This is due to God=s grace and her openness to receive it.

What level of friendship do I have with God? (acquaintance, buddy, best friend, soul-mate, lover...) Do I want to take this friendship to the next level? How do I do this?

328. The Friends Of Christ

(The Descendants Of The Saints Stand By The Commandments)

The saints must be honored as friends of Christ and children and heirs of God, as John the theologian and evangelist says: "But as many as received him, he gave them the power to be made the sons of God..." Let us carefully observe the manner of life of all the apostles, martyrs, ascetics and just men who announced the coming of the Lord. And let us emulate their faith, charity, hope, zeal, life, patience under suffering, and perseverance unto death, so that we may also share their crowns of glory.

-St. John Damascene, Exposition Of The Orthodox Faith, SOTD
Ecclesiasticus 44:16-45:6

It is not only the saints of old that I must emulate. I must also learn from the examples of the saints that I live and work with.

Who are those that I have personally known that have taught me how to live a life of virtue, holiness and selfless service?

329. The Spirit Of Scripture

(Jesus Has Sent His Angel To Attest To The Truth)

We Irish, living in the farthest parts of the earth, are followers of St. Peter and St. Paul and of the disciples who wrote down the sacred canon under the Holy Spirit. We accept nothing outside this evangelical and apostolic teaching....I confess I am grieved by the bad repute of the chair of St. Peter in this country....Though Rome is great and known afar, she is great and honored with us only because of this chair...Look after the peace of the Church, stand between your sheep and the wolves.

-St. Columban, SOTD

Revelations 22:16-21

St. Columban and John the Evangelist make a strong point: I'd best beware of departing from the teaching of Scripture. How then does the

Holy Spirit, who teaches us over time the things which Jesus couldn't impart to His Apostles, fit in with this dictum? Since the Aletter@ of Scripture has much to do with the style and personal characteristics of the individual writers, the Aspirit@ of the teaching must be that of Scripture in general and Jesus in particular to be true. If the teaching is loving, just, forgiving and does not contradict Scripture, it may be valid.

What things do I believe violate the spirit of Scripture? Are they self-serving?

330. The Uniqueness Of Sainthood

(I Will Use The Special Gifts I've Received For The Benefit Of Others)

From the saints I must take the substance, not the accidents of their virtues. I am not St. Aloysius, nor must I seek holiness in his particular way, but according to the requirements of my own nature, my own character and the different conditions of my life. I must not be the dry, bloodless reproduction of a model, however perfect. God desires us to follow the examples of the saints by absorbing the vital sap of their virtues and turning it into our own life-blood, adapting it to our own individual capacities and particular circumstances. If St. Aloysius had been as I am, he would have become holy in a different way.

--Bl. John XXIII, SOTD

1 Peter 4:10-11

God creates no clones. We are all unique. While we are to strive to be Christ-like, we are not Christ and, thus, do not have all of His qualities. We are to be Christ-like in our own unique way!

What are my Christ-like characteristics? How are my Christ-like characteristics leading me to holiness? What path to holiness would both give me joy and glorify God?

331. Proving The Existence Of God

(The Lord Is God)

I answer that the existence of God can be proved in five ways. The first and more manifest way is the argument from motion...It is necessary to arrive at a first mover, put in motion by no other; and this everyone understands to be God. The second way is from the nature of the efficient cause...It is necessary to admit a first efficient cause, to which everyone gives that name God. The third way is taken from possibility and necessity...We cannot but postulate the existence of some being having of itself its own necessity, and not receiving it from another, but rather causing in others their necessity. This all men speak of as God. The fourth way is taken from the gradation to be found in things...There must also be something which is to all beings that cause of their being, goodness, and every other perfection; and this we call God. The fifth way is taken from the governance of the world...Some intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are directed to their end; and this being we call God.

--St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, CCEL

1 Kings 18:20-40

I don't think that St. Thomas Aquinas' proofs for the existence of God would convince many people today anymore than would Elijah's demonstration on Mt. Carmel. In fact, I don't believe that seeing one rise from the dead would convince many people today. The proof of God's existence rests on faith. With faith, the proofs are unnecessary but readily available. Without faith, no proof would be sufficient.

What proof would convince me of the existence of God?

332. The Human Soul Of Jesus

(Stay Awake With Me)

Behold, I have said this: that the contemplative lover of God is united

with God through means (the grace of God, and the sacraments of Holy Church, and the Divine virtues, faith hope and charity, and a virtuous life according to the commandments of God), and also without means, and thirdly, without difference or distinction; and this I find in nature, and in grace, and also in glory. Further I have said that never creature may be or become so holy that it loses its created being and becomes God; even the soul of our Lord Jesus Christ shall ever remain creature, and other than God. Yet, none the less, we must all be lifted up above ourselves into God and become one spirit with God in love; and then we shall be blessed. And therefore mark my words and my meaning, and understand me aright as to what is the condition and the way to our eternal blessedness.

--John of Ruysbroeck, The Book of Supreme Truth, CCEL

Matthew 26:38

I don't think that seeing Jesus in the flesh would increase my faith.

It would probably detract from it. To see Jesus' humanity and sense His human soul would probably invoke a response similar to His family's response: Where did He get this? How can he be God if I know of his human origins?

Does the human side of Jesus detract from His divinity in my perception?

333. Is God The Cause Of Evil?

(Perverse Thoughts Separate One From God)

But the evil which consists in the corruption of some things is reduced to God as the cause. And this appears as regards both natural things and voluntary things. For it was said that some agent inasmuch as it produces by its power a form to which follows corruption and defect, causes by its power that corruption and defect. But it is manifest that the form which God chiefly intends in things created is the good of the

order of the universe. Now, the order of the universe requires, as was said above, that there should be some things that can, and do sometimes, fail. And thus God, by causing in things the good of the order of the universe, consequently and as it were by accident, causes the corruptions of things, according to 1 Kings 2^o6: "The Lord killeth and maketh alive". But when we read that "God hath not made death" (Wisdom 1:13), the sense is that God does not will death for its own sake. Nevertheless the order of justice belongs to the order the universe; and this requires that penalty should be dealt out to sinners. And so God is the author of the evil which is penalty, but not of the evil which is fault, by reason of what is said above.

--St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, CCEL

Wisdom 1:1-11

God does not create evil since He has created all things good and draws all things to Himself. He does, however, create correction to bring humankind back to Him when they wander away. This correction may feel like evil from a human perspective but it is for our ultimate good. How can I believe this? Because God, through Jesus, was willing to die for me to show His great love for me. I can trust Him.

Can I believe that what I consider to be evil in my life may really be God's method of drawing me near to Him?

334. The Necessity Of Obedience

(I Will Enter By The Narrow Gate)

Now at this time I cannot set forth my meaning more clearly. In all that I understand, or feel, or have written, I submit myself to the judgement of the saints and of Holy Church; for I wish to live and die as a servant of Christ, in the Christian faith, and I desire to be, by the grace of God, a life-giving member of Holy Church. And therefore, as I told you before, you should beware of those self-deceived men who,

by means of their idle vacancy, and with their bare and simple gaze have found the Divine Essence within themselves in a merely natural way; and who pretend to be one with God without the grace of God, and without exercise of virtue, and without obedience to God and to Holy Church.

--John of Ruysbroeck, The Book of Supreme Truth, CCEL

Luke 13:22-30

There may well be times when entering through the narrow gate and exercising virtue may not be in strict accord with the actions of Mother Church. The Church's luke-warm response to the Holocaust is an example as is the poor stand taken against slavery (except for the Quakers). Most recently, the Church's policy of shuffling pedophile priests from place to place is legitimately open to severe criticism. While I wish to live and die as a disciple of Christ and member of His Church, I must remember that there are times when prophetic individuals and splintered pieces of the extended Church may be carrying the true Gospel message.

Am I open to the Spirit even if it seems to contradict the actions of the "larger" Church?

335. The Vision Of Constintine

(The Battle Is The Lord=s)

Maxentius sorely oppressed the Roman people, treating them as a tyrant rather than as a king, shamelessly violating the wives of the nobles, putting many innocent persons to death, and perpetrating other similar atrocities. The emperor Constantine being informed of this, exerted himself to free the Romans from the slavery under him (Maxentius), and began immediately to consider by what means he might overthrow the tyrant...In this state of uncertainty, as he was marching at the head of his troops, a preternatural vision, which transcends all

description, appeared to him. In fact, about that part of the day when the sun after passing the meridian begins to decline towards the west, he saw a pillar of light in the heavens, in the form of a cross, on which were inscribed these words, By This Conquer. The appearance of this sign struck the emperor with amazement and scarcely believing his own eyes, he asked those around him if they beheld the same spectacle, and as they unanimously declared that they did, the emperor's mind was strengthened by this divine and marvelous apparition. On the following night in his slumbers he saw Christ who directed him to prepare a standard according to the pattern of that which had been seen; and to use it against his enemies as an assured trophy of victory. In obedience to this divine oracle, he caused a standard in the form of a cross to be prepared, which is preserved in the palace even to the present time: and proceeding in his measures with greater earnestness, he attacked the enemy and vanquished him before the gates of Rome...

--Socrates Scholasticus, History: Book 1, CCEL

John 5:13-6:5

I must explore and pursue the inspiration that I am given. This may not be as drastic or have effects as far reaching as that given to Joshua or Constantine but, if its my part to play in life's drama, I must do it. This, of course, is after the testing of the inspiration against Scripture, the advice of other spiritual people and long-term/solid Church tradition.

Am I willing to explore my inspirations or am I more likely to dismiss them as inconvenient, crazy or irrelevant?

336. A Pattern Of A Saintly Life

(I Am Consecrated To The Lord)

...In my present letter, I mean to give you a brief sketch of the life of our dear Asella. Please do not read it to her; for she is sure to be

displeased with eulogies of which she is herself the object. Show it rather to the young girls of your acquaintance, that they may guide themselves by her example, and may take her behavior as the pattern of a perfect life. I pass over the facts that, before her birth, she was blessed while still in her mother's womb, and that, virgin-like, she was delivered to her father in a dream in a bowl of shining glass brighter than a mirror. And I say nothing of her consecration to the blessed life of virginity, a ceremony which took place when she was hardly more than ten years old, a mere babe still wrapped in swaddling clothes...I come now to the life which after her twelfth year she, by her own exertion, chose, laid hold of, held fast to, entered upon, and fulfilled. Shut up in her narrow cell she roamed through paradise. Fasting was her recreation and hunger her refreshment. If she took food it was not from love of eating, but because of bodily exhaustion; and the bread and salt and cold water to which she restricted herself sharpened her appetite more than they appeased it...To the Bridegroom she spoke constantly in prayer and psalmody. She hurried to the martyr's shrines unnoticed. Such visits gave her pleasure, and the more so because she was never recognized...What would perhaps be incredible...is that she lived this life until her fiftieth year without weakening her digestion or bringing on herself the pain of colic. Lying on the dry ground did not affect her limbs, and the rough sackcloth that she wore failed to make her skin either foul or rough. With a sound body and a still sounder soul she sought all her delight in solitude...

--St. Jerome, Letter 24, To Marcella, CCEL

1 Samuel 1:19-28

The stories of how saintly lives are lived is generally transmitted by those who knew and whose lives were touched by the saintly person.

There is no self-proclaiming horn-blowing here! The saintly person is retiring and does not want to be noticed except when it is for the glory of God. Think of how often Jesus did not want anyone to be told about His healings.

Do I have a need to publicize my attempts at holiness?

337. Adopted By God

(I Will Be A Father To You)

If some eminent and powerful prince, having adopted you for his son and co-partner, should forthwith send for you by his ambassador; you would break through all difficulties, and the wearisome extent of sea and land, that you might appear before him, and have your adoption ratified. God Almighty, the Maker and the Lord of Heaven and Earth, and all that is in them, calls you to this adoption, and offers unto you (if you will receive it) that dear style "a son", by which He calls His Only Begotten, and your glorious Redeemer. And will you not be inflamed and ravished with His divine love? will you not make haste, and begin your journey towards Heaven, lest swift destruction come upon you, and the honors offered you be frustrated by a sad and sudden death?

--Eucherius of Lyons, On Contempt For The World, CCEL

2 Corinthians 6:18 - 7:1

Never having been an orphan, I can only imagine what it is like to be adopted. What is it like to be wanted and loved for who I am, not just accepted as the result of a chance birth? What is it like to become a part of a caring family, not just a cog in an institution? What is it like to have a share in an inheritance, not just left the crumbs I can scrape up or that no one wants? God's call to adoption is infinitely more wonderful than anything that I can imagine!

What does it feel like to be a sibling of Jesus? What does it feel like to be a child of Mary?

338. Can It Be Demonstrated That God Exists?

(God=s Power Has Been Clearly Seen)

I answer that, demonstration can be made in two ways: One is through the cause, and is called "a priori" and this is to argue from what is prior absolutely. The other is through the effect, and is called a demonstration "a posteriori"; this is to argue from what is prior relatively only to us. When an effect is better known to us than its cause, from the effect we proceed to the knowledge of the cause. And from every effect the existence of its proper cause can be demonstrated, so long as its effects are better known to us; because since every effect depends upon its cause, because since every effect the existence of its proper cause can be demonstrated, so long as its effects are better known to us; because since every effect depends upon its cause, if the effect exists, the cause must pre-exist. Hence the existence of God, in so far as it is not self-evident to us, can be demonstrated from those of His effects which are known to us.

--St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, CCEL

Romans 1:18-22

When I see the incredible diversity in nature, and realize that I see only the smallest part of it, I am awed! New species of life, new secrets to the code of life, new mysteries at the edge of the universe are being discovered daily. Can all of this have happened by blind chance in the last 12 to 15 billion years? I think that it takes more faith to believe that than to believe that an all powerful, all loving intelligence brought it all about for His own purpose.

What are my reasons for doubting the existence of God?

339. Self-Love

(I Will Not Pride Myself As Being Better Than I Really Am)

Whither then at last will this wild and devious affection of men carry

them? You know how to love accidental and external goods, but cannot love your own self. That which you so much long for is abroad, and without you; you place your affection upon a foreigner, upon an enemy. Return, or retire rather into yourself, and be you dearer and nearer to your own heart than those things which you call yours. Certainly if some wise man, and skillful in the affairs of this world, should converse and come to be intimate with you, it would better please you, that he should affect your person, than affect your goods; and you would choose, that he should rather love you for your self, than for your riches; you would have him to be faithful unto man, not to his money. What you would have another to perform towards you, that do for yourself, who ought to be the most faithful to your self. Our selves, our selves we should love, not those things which we ... call ours. And let this suffice to have been spoken against riches.

--Eucherius of Lyons, On Contempt For The World, CCEL

Romans 12:3, 9-13

In my 20's and early 30's I did everything I could to prove my lovability and indispensability to others but made no real efforts to truly love and know myself. In fact, I often ran from myself, literally, in the hope of leaving myself behind. At times I would even watch myself, from the outside, laughing and acting out a life which felt like I was an actor in a play. I hated to look inside and see the despair, loneliness, sadness and lack of love. While it is infinitely better today, I still have times when I need to fight with myself to show that I love and respect myself more than I care about what others think about me.

In what ways do I prove that I genuinely love myself?

340. The Importance Of Tradition

(I Believe In The Traditions Of The Holy Spirit)

I have often then inquired earnestly and attentively of very many men eminent for sanctity and learning, how and by what sure and so to speak universal rule I may be able to distinguish the truth of Catholic faith from the falsehood of heretical pravity; and I have always, and in almost every instance, received an answer to this effect: That whether I or any one else should wish to detect the frauds and avoid the snares of heretics as they rise, and to continue sound and complete in the Catholic faith, we must, the Lord helping, fortify our own belief in two ways; first, by the authority of the Divine Law, and then, by the Tradition of the Catholic Church. But here some one perhaps will ask, Since the canon of Scripture is complete, and sufficient of itself for everything, and more than sufficient, what need is there to join with it the authority of the Church's interpretation? For this reason, -because owing to the depth of Holy Scripture, all do not accept it in one and the same sense, but one understands its words in one way, another in another; so that it seems to be capable of as many interpretations as there are interpreters...Therefore, it is very necessary, on account of so great intricacies of such various error, that the rule for the right understanding of the prophets and apostles should be framed in accordance with the standard of Ecclesiastical and Catholic interpretation.

--Vincent of Lerins, A Commonitory: For the Antiquity and Universality of the Catholic Faith Against the Profane Novelties of All Heresies, CCEL

Mark 7:6-9

The words of Vincent of Lerins and Jesus seem to contradict each other but they don't. Jesus rejects traditions which attempt to circumvent the spirit of love contained in the words of the Law. Jesus would accept Vincent's purpose for tradition which is to seek to fulfill the

spirit of love behind the words of the Law.

In what ways do I try to circumvent the spirit of laws, whether they are secular or spiritual?

341. The Reversing Of Values

(I Will Live A Life Of Service To The Spirit)

Francis! Everything you have loved and desired in the flesh it is your duty to despise and hate, if you wish to know my will. And when you have begun this, all that now seems sweet and lovely to you will become intolerable and bitter, but all that you used to avoid will turn itself to great sweetness and exceeding joy.

--St. Francis of Assisi, SOTD

Romans 7:1-6

May You change me, Lord: from acting on fear to acting on love, from self-centered actions to other directed actions, from acting out of slavery to the body and ego to acting in conformance with the nourishing of my soul. Amen.

Are my values being reversed? In what ways?

342. Discerning The Truth

(Jesus Bears Witness To The Truth)

What then will a Catholic Christian do, if a small portion of the Church have cut itself off from the communion of the universal faith? What, surely, but prefer the soundness of the whole body to the unsoundness of a pestilent and corrupt member? What, if some novel contagion seek to infect not merely and insignificant portion of the Church, but the whole? Then it will be his care to cleave to antiquity, which at this day cannot possible be seduced by any fraud of novelty. But what, if in antiquity itself there be found error on the part of two or three men, or at any rate of a city or even of a province? Then it will be his care by all means, to prefer the decrees, if such there

be, of an ancient General Council to the rashness and ignorance of a few. But what if some error should spring up on which no such decree is found to bear? Then he must collate and consult and interrogate the opinions of the ancients, of those, namely, who, though living in divers times and places, yet continuing in the communion and faith of the one Catholic Church, stand forth acknowledged and approved authorities: and whatsoever he shall ascertain to have been held, written, taught, not by one or two of these only, but by all, equally, with one consent, openly, frequently, persistently, that he must understand that he himself also is to believe without any doubt or hesitation.

--Vincent of Lerins, A Commonitory: For the Antiquity and Universality of the Catholic Faith Against the Profane Novelties of All Heresies, CCEL

John 18:28-38

What is truth? Pilate's reply, while probably said sarcastically, implies that truth is relative, that there is no absolute truth. Jesus responds that there is an absolute truth behind all that we perceive to be reality. Vincent of Lerins indicates that it may take some work to get to this truth on specific matters and even offers a method for discerning it. What is the core of his faith? God is love. He loves His creation so much that He is willing to die for it.

Can any truth be more awesome than this?

343. Infant Death

(Number Of Years Is Not The True Measure Of Life)

What wisdom, then, can we trace in the following? A human being enters on the scene of life, draws in the air, beginning the process of living with a cry of pain, pays the tribute of a tear to Nature, just tastes life's sorrows, before any of its sweets have been his, before his

feelings have gained any strength; still loose in all his joints, tender, pulpy, unset; in a word, before he is even human (if the gift of reason is man's peculiarity; and he has never had it in him), such an one, with no advantage over the embryo in the womb except that he has seen the air, so short-lived, dies and goes to pieces again, being either exposed or suffocated, or else of his own accord ceasing to live from weakness. What are we to think about him? How are we to feel about such deaths? Will a soul such as that behold its Judge? Will it stand with the rest before the tribunal? will it undergo its trials for deeds done in life?...But in the cases of infants prematurely dying there is nothing of that sort; but they pass to the blessed lot at once, if those who take this view of the matter speak true.

--Eunomius, On Infant's Early Deaths, CCEL

Wisdom 4:7-19

As a Christian, I believe that all are alive in God in eternity. What I call life is a temporary span that is meant to train me for my future role in the Kingdom of God. When I have completed my training here, from the Lord's perspective, I will be ready to leave and go on to the next class, whatever that may be. Part of the lesson is experiencing death so that I can see first hand, from the transition, that I am already in the stream of eternity and God's love.

When I have learned my lesson here, will I be ready to move on? If a major part of my lesson is experiencing death, is there any major reason to delay the lesson?

344. The Fruits Of A Prophet

(I Will Beware Those That Twist The Straight Forward Ways Of God)

We declare to you, the, that these first prophetesses, as soon as they were filled with the spirit, left their husbands.. Do you not think that all Scripture forbids a prophet to receive gifts and money? When,

therefore, I see that the prophetess has received gold and silver and expensive articles of dress, how can I avoid treating her with disapproval?....For we shall show that those among them who are called prophets and martyrs obtain money not only from the rich, but also from the poor, from orphans and widows....If they deny that their prophets have taken gifts, let them confess thus much, that if they be convicted of having taken them, they are not prophets; and we will adduce ten thousand proofs that they have. It is proper, too, that all the fruits of a prophet should be examined. Tell me: does a prophet dye his hair? Does a prophet use stibium on his eyes? Is a prophet fond of dress? Does a prophet play at gaming-tables and dice? Does a prophet lend money on interest? Let them confess whether these things are allowable or not. For my part, I will prove that these practices have occurred among them.

--Apollinous, Concerning Montanism, CCEL

Acts 13:4-12

Is it proper for me to earn a living using my spiritual gifts? All of my talents and gifts are from God and are to be used for His glory. Jesus indicates that the laborer is worth his wage and that there is nothing wrong with earning my living using my God given talents. However, the more spiritual gifts are, to paraphrase Jesus, given to me without cost and are to be used by me for others without cost. While it is OK for St. Paul to earn a living making tents, it would not be OK for him to make a living from raising people from the dead.

Do I use my spiritual gifts purely for the glory of God?

345. The Calling Of A Family

(Holiness Is Passed On By Example)

Moreover, I also, Polycrates, who am the least of you all, in accordance with the tradition of my relatives, some of whom I have

succeeded-seven of my relatives were bishops, and I am the eighth, and my relatives always observed the day when the people put away the leaven-I myself, brethren, I say, who am sixty-five years old in the Lord, and have fallen in with the brethren in all parts of the world, and have read through all Holy Scripture, am not frightened at the things which are said to terrify us. For those who are greater than I have said: We ought to obey God rather than men.

--Polycrates, Bishop of Ephesus, Epistle to Victor, CCEL

2 Maccabees 7:1-41

I doubt that holiness is transmitted through the genes but the thought of eight bishops in one family!! This holiness is evidently taught and transmitted in the family. A similar case is found in the family of St. Therese of Lisieux where she, her two sisters and at least one close cousin became nuns.

Do I recognize the power of holiness in my own life and its potential for being passed on to those close to me?

346. James The Just: His Life

(The Peace Sown Brings A Harvest Of Justice)

James, the Lord's brother, succeeds to the government of the Church, in conjunction with the apostles. He has been universally called the Just, from the days of the Lord down to the present time. For many bore the name of James, but this one was holy from his mother's womb. He drank no wine or other intoxicating liquor, nor did he eat flesh; no razor came upon his head; he did not anoint himself with oil, nor make use of the bath. He alone was permitted to enter the holy place: for he did not wear any woolen garment, but fine linen only. He alone, I say, was wont to go into the temple: and he used to be found kneeling on his knees, begging forgiveness for the people-so that the skin of his knees became horny like that of a camel's, by reason of his constantly

bending the knees in adoration to God, and begging forgiveness for the people...

--Hegesippus, Books of Commentaries on the Acts of the Church, CCEL

James 3:13-18

James the Just was an actual relative of Jesus (perhaps a half-brother), was the elder of the Jerusalem community and is the author of the epistle of James (which is one of only a few books in the New Testament that I wish was longer in length). He taught much about the relationship between peace and justice, and fought for fair treatment of the poor by the rich. His message was used by Cesar Chavez for this purpose in the Grapes of Wrath which fought for the fair treatment of migrant farmers.

Do I practice what I preach or do I mostly pay lip service to the hard task of working toward justice in my community?

347. James The Just: His Death

(I Will Be Patient Until The Lord=s Coming)

They came, therefore, in a body to James, and said: "We entreat thee, restrain the people: for they are gone astray in their opinions about Jesus, as if he were the Christ."...The aforesaid scribes and Pharisees accordingly set James on the summit of the temple, and cried aloud to him, and said: "O just one, whom we are all bound to obey, forasmuch as the people is in error, and follows Jesus the crucified, do thou tell us what is the door of Jesus, the crucified." And he answered with a loud voice: "Why ask ye me concerning Jesus the Son of man? He Himself sitteth in heaven, at the right hand of the Great Power, and shall come on the clouds of heaven."...Then again the said Pharisees and scribes...cried aloud and said" Oh, Oh, the just man himself is in error."...So they went up and threw down the just man, and said to one another: "Let us stone James the Just." And they began to stone him:

for he was not killed by the fall; but he turned, and kneeled down, and said: "I beseech Thee, Lord God our father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." And while they were thus stoning him to death, one of the priests, the sons of Rechab, the son of Rechabim....began to cry aloud, saying: "Cease, what do ye? The just man is praying for us." but one among them, one of the fullers, took the staff with which he was accustomed to wring out the garments he dyed, and hurled it at the head of the just man. And so he suffered martyrdom.....

--Hegesippus, Books of Commentaries on the Acts of the Church, CCEL
James 5:7-15

James the Just died as he lived by praying for his people and patiently waiting for the Lord=s coming.

Do I have the courage to do the same?

348. Eyes Open To See Truth

(I Will See With Spiritual Eyes)

But why this world was made, and why it passes away, and why the body exists, and why it falls to decay, and why it continues, thou canst not know until thou hast raised thy head from this sleep in which thou art sunk, and hast opened thine eyes and seen that God is One, the Lord of all, and hast come to serve Him with all thy heart. Then will He grant thee to know His will: for every one that is severed from the knowledge of the living god is dead and buried even while in his body. Therefore is it that thou dost wallow on the ground before demons and shadows, and askest vain petitions from that which has not anything to give. But thou, stand thou up...and offer thou for thy imperishable soul petitions for that which decayeth not, to God who suffers no decay-and thy freedom will be at once apparent; and be thou careful of it, and give thanks to God who made thee, and gave thee the mind of the free; that thou mightest shape thy conduct even as thou wilt. He hath set

before thee all these things, and showeth thee that , if thou follow after evil, thou shall be condemned for thy evil deeds; but that, if after goodness, thou shall receive from Him abundant good, together with immortal life for ever.

--Melito the Philosopher, Discourse in the Presence of Antoninus Caesar, CCEL

Numbers 22:22-35

A friend of mine thinks that animals are more spiritual than people since they live in the moment and see/hear at ranges that are beyond the range of the human senses. Baalam=s donkey is a perfect case in point. He was able to see spiritual realities that his master could not see and acted in a way that saved Baalam=s life. The donkey was able to see with spiritual eyes and was able to know God=s will.

Can I learn any spiritual qualities from my pets?

349. Relatives Of Jesus

(This Is Your Son)

Some of these heretics, forsooth, laid an information against Symeon the son of Clopas, as being of the family of David, and a Christian. And on these charges he suffered martyrdom when he was 120 years old, in the reign of Trajan Caesar, when Atticus was consular legate in Syria. And it so happened, says the same writer, that , while inquiry was then being made for those belonging to the royal tribe of the Jews, the accusers themselves were convicted of belonging to it. With show of reason could it be said that Symeon was one of those who actually saw and heard the Lord, on the ground of his great age, and also because the Scripture of the Gospels makes mention of Mary the daughter of Clopas, who, as our narrative has shown already, was his father...And after James the Just had suffered martyrdom, as has the Lord also and on the same account, again Symeon the son of Clopas, descended from the

Lord's uncle, is made bishop, his election being promoted by all as being a kinsman of the Lord.

--Hegesippus, Books of Commentaries on the Acts of the Church, CCEL

John 19:25-27

Symeon, descendent of an uncle of Jesus, may well have known the Lord.

His mother was at the Cross of Jesus along with Mary, the mother of Jesus. She would have heard Jesus telling his mother that Athis is your son@ in reference to St. John. I=m sure that the story was passed on in the family for many generations. At some point, however, the family story was lost. It does not matter. By making John, a representative of the Church, Mary=s son, we have all become children of Mary and siblings of Jesus.

What does Jesus= expression that those who do his father=s will are his family mean to me?

350. Untrustworthy Shepherds

(The Lord Will Look After His Flock)

For we may say, to anticipate a little what we intend to write below, that he does not wish to acknowledge that the Son of God came down from heaven. And this is a statement which shall not be made to depend on simple assertion; for it is proved abundantly by those memoranda which we sent you, and not least in that passage in which he says that Jesus Christ is from below. And they who sing his praise and eulogize him among the people, declare that their impious teacher has come down as an angel from heaven. And such utterances the haughty man does not check, but is present even when they are made. And then again there are these women-these adopted sisters, as the people of Antioch call them-who are kept by him and by the presbyters and deacons with him.....We have been compelled, therefore, to excommunicate this man, who has opposed God Himself, and refuses submission, and appoint in his

place another bishop for the Church Catholic.....

--Malchion, Epistle In Name of the Synod of Antioch Against Paul of Samosata, CCEL

Ezekiel 34:1-31

Those in positions of authority and power, especially those with spiritual power, will be judged most severely on how they lead their flock. Since a bishop has the potential to lead so many astray and cannot pretend to be acting out of ignorance, he will be judged more severely than virtually anyone. While I may not have the authority or power of a bishop, I do act as an example to many around me and will be judged accordingly.

Do I lead others astray with the power and authority that I possess?

How so?

351. An Unholy Alliance

(I Will Not Allow Sin To Reign Over My Body)

I saw, said the saint, a Soul and a Body conversing with one another, and first, the Soul said: my Body, god has created me to love, and to enjoy myself; I wish, therefore, to go where I can best accomplish this design; and to have you accompany me in a friendly way, since it will be to your advantage also. We will go through the world; if I find anything which pleases me, I will enjoy it; you can do the same when you find anything which pleases you; and let him do better that can.

The Body answered: Though I may be obliged to do whatever pleases you, yet I see that you cannot accomplish all that you wish without me.

Therefore, if we are to set forth together let us come to a perfect understanding before we start in order that we may not fall out by the way...To prevent this (trouble), I think it would be well to take with us a third companion, some just person who has no share in our partnership, and to whom all of our differences could be referred.

...Let it be Self-love, who lives with us both; he will see that I have what belongs to me, and I shall enjoy with him. He will do the same for you, and thus, both will be satisfied.....Self Love: I consent, and shall find it greatly to my advantage. I shall give each of you what belongs to him, for this will not injure me; and thus I shall live on equal terms with both. But if either of you should wrong me, and deprive me of my support, I shall immediately have recourse to the other, for on no account would I be deprived of my own subsistence.

--St. Catherine of Genoa, Concerning the Discourse of the Soul With the Body and Self-Love , and Also of the Spirit With Humanity, CCEL

Romans 6:8-14

The only way for this alliance to work is for the soul to be imbued with the Holy Spirit and for Self-love to recognize that its ultimate happiness is in listening to the leading of the Soul. The Body will complain for awhile, but it will submit. The worst case would be to have either the Body or an undisciplined Self-love running the show. What coalition of body, soul and self-love controls my life? Am I happy with the result? Can I change it?

352. Love And Virtue

(Anyone Who Loves Jesus Will Keep His Word)

Having thus spoken of the good works of these, he again recurs to His grace....Because this comes not of any pains, nor of any good works of ours, but of love, and yet not of love alone, but of our virtue also.

For if indeed of love alone, it would follow that all must be saved; whereas again were it the result of our virtue alone, then were His coming needless, and the whole dispensation. But it is the result neither of His love alone, nor yet of our virtue, but of both...For tell me, what would Paul have profited, how would he have exhibited what he has exhibited, if God had not both called him from the beginning, and, in that He loved him, drawn him to Himself? But besides, His vouchsafing us so great privileges, was the effect of His love, not of our virtue. Because our being rendered virtuous, and believing, and coming nigh unto Him, even this again was the work of Him that called us tp Himself, and yet, notwithstanding, it is ours also. But that on our coming nigh unto Him, He should vouchsafe us so high privileges, as to bring us at once from a state of enmity, to the adoption of children, this is indeed the work of a really transcendent love.

--St. John Chrysostom, Homily 1 On Epistle to Ephesians, CCEL

John 14:21-24

Lord Jesus, I thank you for Your great love for me. May You enable me to respond to Your love with holy action, both interior and exterior.

While all that is holy is You, and comes from You, teach me, Lord, to have the right attitude, the right will and the right discipline to cooperate with Your love. Amen.

While God=s love is unconditional, do I recognize that my response to Him is anything but unconditional? If God did not discipline me, could it be said that He really loved me? Do I expect God to ignore my rebellion against His love?

353. Evil Is As Evil Does

(I Will Not Rebel Against The Lord)

I must beg you also to consider that, if you represent some other being as the cause of evil to men, he also, in so far as he acts in them, and incites them to do evil, is himself evil, by reason of the things he does. For he too is said to be evil, for the simple reason that he is the doer of evil things, but the things which a being does are not the being himself, but his actions, from which he receives his appellation, and is called evil. For if we should say that the things he does are himself, and these consist in murder and adultery, and theft and such-like , these things will be himself. And if these things are himself, and if when they take place they get to have a substantial existence, but by not taking place they also cease to exist, and if these things are done by men, -men will be the doers of these things, and the causes of existing and of no longer existing. But, if you affirm that these things are his actions, he gets to be evil from the things he does, not from those things of which the substance of him consists.

--Maximus, Bishop of Jerusalem, From the Book Concerning Matter, or in Defense of the Proposition that Matter Is Created, and is Not the Cause

of Evil, CCEL

Isaiah 1:2-9

God created all things and they are good. Only man has the power of free-will and can choose to do good or evil. But, as Isaiah says, "The whole head is sick, the whole heart is diseased". If I go to the great healer, I can choose to renounce evil and instead, choose to do the good which God created me to be and do.

How do I justify the evil things that I do? How can I renounce these behaviors?

354. Rejoicing In Adversity

(I Give Thanks For You To God)

Holy indeed are all the Epistles of Paul: but some advantage have those which he sent after he was in bonds: those, for instance, to the Ephesians and Philemon: that to Timothy, that to the Philippians, and the one before us (Colossians): for this also was sent when he was a prisoner....But why do I say that these Epistles have some advantage over the rest in this respect, because he writes while in bonds? As if a champion were to write in the midst of carnage and victory; so also in truth did he. For himself too was aware that his was a great thing....And this he said, that we should not be dispirited when in adversity, but even rejoice.

--St. John Chrysostom, Homily 1 on Epistle to Colossians, CCEL

Colossians 1:1-13

Even in prison, Paul gave thanks to God for the faith of the Church and remembered them in his prayers. Why was he able to do this? Because God has rescued us from the ruling forces of darkness and transferred us to the Kingdom of the Son that He loves, and in Him we enjoy our freedom...". Even if I am in bodily shackles, I can still be spiritually free.

Do I sense the freedom that Jesus has won for me even in the midst of adversity? How can I increase this sense of freedom?

355. The Soul=s Plight

(I Am No Longer A Slave But A Child Of God)

And thus they went traveling through the world, each seeking to gratify his own desires, and living according to his own pleasure. the Soul looked after the Body, and granted it many things that it esteemed necessary; but , day by day, its appetites increased, incited by Self-Love, which bound them closely together, that they might not become divided. Everything appeared to them reasonable and necessary. They were never willing to deny themselves anything, and if they were not permitted to obtain every day something new, some fresh nourishment, they murmured, and complained that they were injured. Thus was the Soul finally led into an unfathomable sea of earthly love and delight, which effected in her so great a transformation, that she could no longer think or speak of anything, except according to the will of the Body and Self-Love. If she wished to turn to her own concerns, overpowered by her disorderly appetites, she dared not speak; and, in her discontent, she reflected within herself: I am greatly displeased and dissatisfied to be obliged to condescend, in so many things, to the Body; and I fear that feeding it, under this plea of necessity, will lead to my taking part in its gratifications, and thus finally losing the greater for the less. Seeing both of you so craving, makes me fear that you will give me so much to do, that you will change me from spiritual into earthly; for, after tasting earthly things, I shall lose my relish for heavenly ones. I fear, too, lest the intellect should be defiled and the will corrupted. Help me, O my God!

--St. Catherine of Genoa, Containing the Discourse of the Soul with the Body and Self-Love; and also of the Spirit with Humanity, CCEL

Galatians 4:1-11

It comes down to this: Who do I want to be my master? Who do I want to serve? If I want to serve the body and the ego, I will get temporary pleasure but long-term misery and dissatisfaction. Ultimately, it will lead me to spiritual death and my life shall have been no different than that of an ox or other dumb beast. Even worse, the ox has no power of free-will, but I have chosen to be a dumb beast and have no one to blame but myself. If I want to serve the soul, I will get temporary pain and complaint from the body but long-term satisfaction and joy. Ultimately, it will lead me to eternal life; a life I have chosen but a life enabled by Christ. Life or Death. Fire or Water. Joy or Misery. What do I choose?

356. Self-Mutilation

(My Righteousness Must Surpass That Of The Law)

If any one in sickness has been subjected by physicians to a surgical operation, or if he has been castrated by barbarians, let him remain among the clergy, but, if any one in sound health has castrated himself, it behoves that such an one, if (already) enrolled among the clergy, should cease (from his ministry), and that from henceforth no such person should be promoted. But, as it is evident that this is said of those who wilfully do the thing and presume to castrate themselves, so if any have been made eunuchs by barbarians, or by their masters, and should otherwise be found worthy, such men the Canon admits to the clergy.

--The Canons of the 318 Holy Fathers Assembled in the City of Nice, in Bithynia, CCEL

Matthew 5:29-30

While the reading from the Canons and Matthew refer to physical self-mutilation, is emotional self-mutilation any better? I remember as

a child trying desperately not to feel what I was feeling in reference to my alcoholic father. I also remember as an adolescent desperately trying not to feel my emerging sexual feelings. I am not convinced that either attempt has made me a holier or healthier person, just more neurotic.

In what ways have I emotionally self-mutilated myself?

357. Zeal For Truth

(God Will Grant A Covenant Of Peace)

But since he that hath begun a good work will finish it, faint not in furthering the Spirit's power, nor leave half-won the victory over the assailants of Christ's glory, but imitate thy true father who, like the zealot Phineas, pierced with one stroke of his Answer both master and pupil. Plunge with thy intellectual arm the sword of the Spirit through both these heretical pamphlets, lest, though broken on the head, the serpent affright the simpler sort by still quivering in the tail. When the first arguments have been answered, should the last remain unnoticed, the many will suspect that they still retain some strength against the truth.

--Peter, Bishop of Sebasteia, to Gregory of Nyssa, Letter 2, CCEL

Numbers 25:1-18

While zeal for God is a good thing, I think that it can be completely misused. Is being God's Aavenging angel@ a holy and noble cause whether it is as a Christian crusader or a Muslim suicide bomber? Anyone that acts out of fear, hatred or self-regard is not acting from Godly motivation but from the ego and the devil.

In what ways has my zeal for God become a smokescreen for intolerance and fear?

358. Illness: Spiritual Vs. Bodily

(I Will Be Made Clean Both Inside And Out)

What squeamishness is this, pray, that thou canst not sit down in company with the poor? What sayest thou? He is unclean and filthy? Then wash him, and lead him up to thy table. But he has filthy garments? Then change them, and give him clean apparel. Seest thou not how great the gain is? Christ cometh unto thee through him, and dost thou make petty calculations of such things? When thou art inviting the King to thy table, dost thou fear because of such things as these? ...If thou will consider also the guests themselves, thou wilt see that the one are within (the prideful wealthy) just what the others are without; blind, maimed, lame; and as are the bodies of these, such are the souls of those, laboring under dropsy and inflammation. For of such sort is pride, for after the luxurious gratification a maiming takes place; of such sort is surfeiting and drunkenness, making men lame and maimed. And those who live in giving of thanks, who seek nothing beyond a sufficiency, they whose philosophy is of this sort are in all brightness.

--St. John Chrysostom, Homily 1 on the Epistle to the Colosians, CCEL
Matthew 23:25-26

Many of those I judge beneath me or shun due to their outer appearance, like the destitute and homeless, may well be beautiful souls on the inside who can teach me much. Many of those that I admire due to their outer appearance, like the rich and powerful, may well have very deformed and abused souls and I should not try to emulate them. I should never judge someone by surface appearances but by their actions and character.

How can I counteract my tendency to judge others, whether positively or negatively, by their appearance or what they own?

359. Discerning God In The World

(I Will Open Myself At The Prompting Of The Will Of God)

What shall I say of those two brethren who lived beyond that desert of the Thebaid where once the blessed Antony dwelt, and, not being sufficiently influenced by careful discrimination, when they were going through the vast and extended waste determined not to take any food with them, except such as the Lord Himself might provide for them. And when as they wandered through the deserts and were already fainting from hunger they were spied at a distance by the Mazices (a race which is even more savage and ferocious than almost all wild tribes, for they are not driven to shed blood, as other tribes are, from desire of spoil but from simple ferocity of mind), and when these acting contrary to their natural ferocity, met them with bread, one of the two as discretion came to his aid, received it with delight and thankfulness as if it were offered to him by the Lord, thinking that the food had been divinely provided for him, and that it was God's doing that those who always delighted in bloodshed had offered the staff of life to men who were already fainting and dying; but the other refused the food because it was offered to him by men and died of starvation. And though this sprang in the first instance from a persuasion that was blame-worthy yet one of them by the help of discretion got the better of the idea which he had rashly and carelessly conceived, but the other persisting in his obstinate folly, and being utterly lacking in discretion, brought upon himself that death which the Lord would have averted, as he would not believe that it was owing to a Divine impulse that the fierce barbarians forgot their natural ferocity and offered them bread instead of a sword.

--Abbot Moses, The Conferences of John Cassian, CCEL

2 Corinthians 8:1-15

God mostly acts through ordinary channels like people and nature, and rarely through agencies that defy natural law. Reflection and

meditation are ways of discerning God=s voice telling me to act.

Do I feel the tug of motivation to do it? Do I have the means to do it?

Does the thought of doing it bring me joy? Is it in accordance with

God=s will? What is preventing me from doing it?

360. Cleaning My Own Closet

(Physician, Heal Thyself)

And in truth it is a greater miracle to root out from one's own flesh the incentives to wantonness than to cast out unclean spirits from the bodies of others, and it is a grander sign to restrain the fierce passions of anger by the virtue of patience than to command the powers of the air, and it is a greater thing to have shut out the devouring pangs of gloominess from one's own heart than to have expelled the sickness of another and the fever of his body. finally it is in many ways a grander virtue and a more splendid achievement to cure the weaknesses of one's own soul than those of the body of another. for just as the soul is higher than the flesh, so is its salvation of more importance , and as its nature is more precious and excellent, so is its destruction more grievous and dangerous.

--Abbot Nesteros, Conferences of John Cassain, CCEL

Luke 4:23-24

When I try to Aclean someone=s closet@ (point out their flaws and try to heal them), I must be very careful that I am not projecting my own distaste for cleaning my own closet. A recent example concerns a friend of mine. His wife is a bit of a Aclutter bug@ and sharply pointed out the fact that he left a few coffee grounds on the kitchen counter. She did not realize the irony of her remarks and my friend just smiled and lovingly pointed out the humor of her comment. They both had a good laugh.

In what way do I still need to clean my closet? (These are the areas

where I must not try to fix others.)

361. Intentions

(Whether For False Motive Or True, Christ Is Proclaimed)

In every case, as we said, we must look not at the progress of the work but at the intention of the worker, nor must we inquire to begin with what a man has done, but with what purpose, so that we may find that some have been condemned for those deeds from which good has afterwards arisen, and on the other hand that some have arrived by means of acts in themselves reprehensible at the height of righteousness. And in the case of the former the good result of their actions was of no avail to them as they took the matter in and with an evil purpose, and wanted to bring about-not the good which actually resulted, but something of the opposite character, nor was the bad beginning injurious to the latter, as he put up with the necessity of a blameworthy start; not out of disregard for God, or with the purpose of doing wrong, but with an eye to a needful and holy end.

--Abbot Joseph, Conferences of John Cassain, CCEL

Philipians 1:12-20

While God can, and will, bring ultimate good out of circumstances, my own motives will determine whether I receive the benefits of this goodness (defined as growth in my character and holiness). If my motives are wrong, I will experience confusion, frustration and unhappiness. If my motives are good, I will experience clarity, peace and joy.

In what ways have my actions resulted in blessings in spite of my reasons for acting?

362. Interior Vs. Exterior Cleanliness

(God=s House Should Be A Place Of Prayer)

First, we certainly must not think that the (ancient Greek)

philosophers such as Plato, who required of us, on whom it is enjoined that not fornication only, but uncleanness be not so much as named among us. But they had a sort of merit, i.e. some particle of chastity; viz. continence of the flesh, by which they could restrain their lust from carnal intercourse : but this internal purity of mind and continual purity of body they could not attain. I will not say, in act, but even in thought. Finally Socrates, the most famous of them all, as they themselves esteem him, was not ashamed to profess this of himself. for when one who judged a man's character by his looks looked at him, and said "the eyes of a corrupter of boys", and his scholars rushed at him, and brought him to their master and wanted to avenge the insult, it is said that he checked their indignation with these words: Stop my friends, for I am, but I restrain myself. It is then quite clearly shown not only by our assertions but actually by their own admissions that it was only the performance of indecent acts, i.e., the disgrace of intercourse, that was by force of necessity checked by them, and that the desire and delight in this passion was not shut out from their hearts.

--Abbot Chaeremon, Conferences of John Cassian, CCEL

Matthew 21:12-17

While Abbot Chaeremon may well be correct in his assessment of the spiritual condition of the more saintly Greeks or heathen, I don't think that it is entirely fair. I don't think that Socrates was restraining his natural inclinations to win the praises of his fellows or to hide his faults but to attain sanctity. I think that he wished to have his curse lifted, as did St. Paul with his thorn in the flesh. Even as a Christian, I must restrain some of my natural inclinations that just don't go away because I want them to. It requires work on my part, and grace on God's part, to slowly transform my body-temple from

Aa den of thieves@ to a Ahouse of prayer@.

In what ways have my natural inclinations been transformed by the grace of God? What areas of my life still require transformation?

363. A Call For Mercy

(I Am Bound To Have Pity On My Fellow Servants)

Those sainted martyrs, accordingly, who were once with us, and who now are seated with Christ, and are sharers in His kingdom, and partakers with Him in His judgement, and who act as His judicial assessors, received there certain of the brethren who had fallen away, and who had become chargeable with sacrificing to the idols. And as they saw that the conversion and repentance of such might be acceptable to Him who desires not at all the death of the sinner, but rather his repentance, they proved their sincerity, and received them, and brought them together again, and assembled with them, and had fellowship with them in their prayers and at their festivals. What advice then, brethren, do you give us as regards these? What should we do? Are we to stand forth and act with the decision and judgement which those (martyrs) formed, and to observe the same graciousness with them, and to deal so kindly with those toward whom they showed such compassion? Or are we to treat their decision as an unrighteous one, and to constitute ourselves judges of their opinion on such subjects, and to throw clemency into tears, and to overturn the established order?

--Dionysius, To Fabius Bishop of Antioch, CCEL

Matthew 18:21-35

When Jesus indicates that I should be forgiving, it should be as God forgives, which is unconditionally and forgetfully. As long as the hurt comes to mind, I have not forgiven. As long as I add Aifs@ to my Acontract of forgiveness@, I have not forgiven. If I do not forgive in the way Jesus indicated, I am merely feeding my ego=s desire to be

self-righteous and holding my own happiness at bay by still expecting my proverbial Apound of flesh@ in payment for the wrong done to me. If I desire unconditional love and forgiveness for myself, what right do I have to prohibit the same for others? Do I realize that by not forgiving I am primarily hurting myself?

364. Chrism Of Healing

(Be Opened!)

Why also need I mention the acts of Abbot Abraham, who was surnamed the simple from the simplicity of his life and his innocence. This man when he had gone from the desert to Egypt for the harvest in the season of Quinquagesima was pestered with tears and prayers by a woman who brought her little child, already pining away and half dead from lack of milk,; he gave her a cup of water to drink signed with the sign of the cross, and when she had drunk it at once most marvelously her breasts that had been till then utterly dry flowed with a copious abundance of milk. Or the same man as he went to a village was surrounded by mocking crowds, who sneered at him and showed him a man who was for many years deprived of the power of walking from a contracted knee, and crawled from a weakness of long standing, they tempted him and said, "Show us, father Abraham, if you are the servant of God, and restore this man to his former health, that we may believe that the name of Christ, whom you worship, is not vain." Then he at once invoked the name of Christ and stooped down and laid hold of the man's withered foot and pulled it. And immediately at his touch the dried and bent knee was straightened, and he got back the use of his legs, which he had forgotten how to use in his long years of weakness, and went away rejoicing.

--Abbot Nesteros, Conferences of John Cassain, CCEL

Mark 7:31-37

I wonder what happened to this woman and man after they were healed. Besides increasing their faith, I imagine that they put their faith into practice using the areas of their lives that were healed. I can see the woman helping other women with young children, perhaps becoming a wet-nurse. I can picture the man helping others convalescing from joint problems, perhaps as an early example of a physical therapist. How have I used the healed areas of my life for the glory of God and the benefit of others?

365. The Superiority of Unity

(I Will Be Perfectly United In My Beliefs And Judgements)

Dionysius to Novatus his brother, greeting. If you were carried on against your will, as you say, you will show that such has been the case by your voluntary retirement. For it would have been but dutiful to have suffered any kind of ill, so as to avoid rending the Church of God. And a martyrdom borne for the sake of preventing a division of the Church, would not have been more inglorious than one endured for refusing to worship idols, may, in my opinion at least, the former would have been a nobler thing than the latter. For in the one case a person gives such a testimony simply for his own individual soul, whereas in the other case he is a witness for the whole Church. And now, if you can persuade or constrain the brethren to come to be of one mind again, your uprightness will be superior to your error; and the latter will not be charged against you, while the former will be commended in you. But if you cannot prevail so far with your recusant brethren, see to it that you save your own soul. My wish is, that in the Lord you may fare well as you study peace.

--Dionysius, To Novatus, CCEL

1 Corinthians 1:10-13

Jesus, I thank you for allowing me to prepare this anthology and

meditation book. May it be used for your glory. May You use it to promote peace and unity among the various Christian groups and may it bring others knowledge of the Christian faith. Amen.

In what ways does my life promote unity in my family and community?

366. Penance And Mercy

(God Sees My Efforts To Renounce My Evil Ways)

Concerning wilful murderers let them remain protractors; but at the end o life let them be indulged with full communion. Concerning involuntary homicides, a former decree directs that they be received to full communion after seven years (of penance), according to the prescribed degrees; but this second one that they fulfil a term of five years.

-Canon 22 and 23, CCEL

Jonah 3:4-10

The holy life requires a changed and purified character. This requires effort including repentance and the making of amends. While I may not have to publicly humiliate myself and beat myself with a proverbial stick, I still need to show sorrow for my shortcomings, be willing to make restitution for my wrongs, and to suffer whatever legitimate consequences my activities may bring upon me.

Do I show sorrow for my shortcomings? Am I willing to ask God for the grace to change from the inside out?

Index of Scripture References

Genesis

[1]1:1-31 [2]1:26-31 [3]2 [4]3 [5]4:1-16 [6]4:3-8 [7]15:6

[8]18:20-33 [9]19 [10]21:1-7 [11]28:10-19 [12]39

Exodus

[13]12:13 [14]22 [15]24 [16]34:29-35

Leviticus

[17]17:11

Numbers

[18]21:4-9 [19]22:22-35 [20]25:1-18

Deuteronomy

[21]6:4-9 [22]10:12-13 [23]20:10-18 [24]21 [25]30:15-20

Joshua

[26]1 [27]7 [28]24:15

Judges

[29]6 [30]11:29-40

1 Samuel

[31]1:1-20 [32]1:19-28 [33]5:1-12 [34]15:4-23 [35]17

[36]19:19-24 [37]28:8-19

1 Kings

[38]2 [39]3 [40]11 [41]18:20-40 [42]19:9-16 [43]19:19-21

[44]22

2 Kings

[45]4:18-37 [46]13:20-21 [47]20:1-11

1 Chronicles

[48]16 [49]38:8-10

2 Chronicles

[50]10:1-19 [51]20:15-17 [52]33:1-18

Nehemiah

[53]1 [54]8:1-12

Esther

[55]4:17

Job

[56]5:17-18

Psalms

[57]1 [58]1 [59]1:1-6 [60]8 [61]17:6-9 [62]17:15

[63]19:1-6 [64]19:7-14 [65]22 [66]22:1-31 [67]23 [68]23

[69]24 [70]26 [71]27:1 [72]27:5 [73]27:7-10 [74]34
[75]37:25-26 [76]39:1-13 [77]40:1 [78]40:1-4 [79]50 [80]62
[81]63:1-5 [82]68 [83]73:1 [84]78:1-2 [85]78:2 [86]78:5-6
[87]84:11 [88]90:1-17 [89]91:9-13 [90]91:14-16 [91]92
[92]103 [93]103 [94]103:1-5 [95]103:13-18 [96]118
[97]119:1-5 [98]121:1-8 [99]125 [100]127:1-2 [101]130:1-8
[102]131 [103]131 [104]133 [105]136 [106]139 [107]139:1-18
[108]145:13-18

Proverbs

[109]2:3-11 [110]3:5-6 [111]3:11-12 [112]5:1-14 [113]10
[114]21

Ecclesiastes

[115]1:2 [116]1:12-18 [117]2:18-23 [118]5:19-20 [119]11

Isaiah

[120]1:2-9 [121]1:16-18 [122]5:1-6 [123]26:19 [124]30:20-21
[125]40:31 [126]49:6 [127]54:10 [128]55 [129]55:3 [130]55:6
[131]55:8-9 [132]57:15 [133]58:5-11 [134]65

Jeremiah

[135]1:5 [136]2 [137]3:22 [138]6:19 [139]12:1-3 [140]15
[141]17 [142]29 [143]29:11 [144]31

Ezekiel

[145]1:1-28 [146]14:12-20 [147]34:1-31 [148]36:26-27 [149]37
[150]37:1-14

Daniel

[151]3:52-63 [152]10:5-6

Hosea

[153]11:1-4 [154]11:8-9

Amos

[155]6

Jonah

[156]3:1-5 [157]3:4 [158]3:4-10

Micah

[159]2 [160]6:6-8

Habakkuk

[161]1:2 [162]1:2-3

Zephaniah

[163]2:3 [164]2:3

Matthew

[165]2 [166]4 [167]4:11 [168]5 [169]5:1-12 [170]5:11-12

[171]5:14 [172]5:14-16 [173]5:21-22 [174]5:25-26 [175]5:29-30

[176]5:43-48 [177]5:48 [178]6:5-6 [179]6:5-15 [180]6:7-8

[181]6:13 [182]6:19-21 [183]6:22-23 [184]6:22-23 [185]6:24

[186]6:25-34 [187]7 [188]7:1-15 [189]7:7-13 [190]7:24-27

[191]8:5-11 [192]9:9-13 [193]10:17-20 [194]11:2-6

[195]11:28-30 [196]13 [197]13:34 [198]13:34-35 [199]16:24-26

[200]17:1-8 [201]17:24-27 [202]18:1-7 [203]18:19-20

[204]18:21-22 [205]18:21-35 [206]18:23-25 [207]20:20-28

[208]21:12-17 [209]22 [210]22:34-40 [211]23:1-3 [212]23:25-26

[213]25:14-18 [214]26:38 [215]27 [216]27:45-50 [217]28:16-20

Mark

[218]1:21-28 [219]1:31-39 [220]1:35-39 [221]2 [222]2:9-11

[223]2:28-30 [224]4:18-20 [225]4:30-32 [226]5:1-20

[227]6:17-20 [228]7:6-9 [229]7:31-37 [230]8:34-37 [231]10

[232]10:23-27 [233]14:22-25 [234]15 [235]16:14-15

Luke

[236]1 [237]1:1-4 [238]2:25-35 [239]3:10-14 [240]4:1-13

[241]4:23-24 [242]6 [243]6:38 [244]7:36-48 [245]7:47

[246]8:16-18 [247]8:40-48 [248]9 [249]10 [250]11 [251]11

[252]11:27-28 [253]13:22-30 [254]15:4-10 [255]15:11-32
[256]16:8 [257]17:9-10 [258]18:1-8 [259]18:8 [260]18:9-14
[261]18:11-14 [262]18:18-23 [263]18:24-27 [264]20
[265]22:39-46 [266]23

John

[267]1 [268]1:1 [269]1:1-5 [270]1:9-14 [271]1:35-39
[272]1:51 [273]3 [274]3:5-8 [275]3:8 [276]3:16 [277]3:19-21
[278]4 [279]4:21-24 [280]5:13-6:5 [281]6:1-14 [282]6:10
[283]6:14-16 [284]6:35 [285]8:12 [286]8:12 [287]11
[288]13:12-17 [289]14:4-7 [290]14:16 [291]14:21-24 [292]14:27
[293]15 [294]15:4-5 [295]15:4-7 [296]16:4 [297]17:1-5
[298]17:6-19 [299]17:20-26 [300]18:28-38 [301]19:1-3
[302]19:16-18 [303]19:25-27 [304]19:28-30 [305]19:32-34
[306]21

Acts

[307]2:22-25 [308]2:42-47 [309]3 [310]3:1-10 [311]4 [312]5
[313]6 [314]7:55-60 [315]10:36-42 [316]12:1-11 [317]12:22-23
[318]13:4-12 [319]15:1-12 [320]15:22-36 [321]16:6-10
[322]17:22-28 [323]19 [324]19:1-7 [325]25:13

Romans

[326]1:8-12 [327]1:18-22 [328]3:21-27 [329]5:1-5 [330]6:8-14
[331]6:15-19 [332]7 [333]7:1-6 [334]7:14-25 [335]8:1-13
[336]8:2-13 [337]8:10 [338]8:14-17 [339]8:28-30 [340]8:37
[341]10:9-11 [342]12 [343]12:1-2 [344]12:3 [345]12:9-13
[346]13:11-14 [347]14

1 Corinthians

[348]1:10-13 [349]1:18-25 [350]1:26-29 [351]1:26-31 [352]3:18
[353]4 [354]4 [355]5:1-5 [356]6 [357]6 [358]8:1-3 [359]9
[360]10 [361]10 [362]12:4-11 [363]12:18-27 [364]13:1-13

[365]14 [366]15 [367]15 [368]15:1-8

2 Corinthians

[369]1 [370]5:1-10 [371]6:18 [372]8:1-15 [373]11

[374]12:1-4 [375]12:7-10 [376]12:8-10 [377]13:5 [378]13:11

Galatians

[379]1:15-16 [380]2 [381]4:1-11 [382]5:1 [383]5:5-6

[384]5:13-21 [385]5:22-25 [386]6:1-5 [387]6:7-9 [388]6:17

Ephesians

[389]1:3-14 [390]1:3-14 [391]1:7-10 [392]2 [393]2 [394]2:19

[395]4 [396]4 [397]5 [398]5:6-20 [399]5:29-32 [400]6:4

Philippians

[401]4:6-7 [402]4:11-13

Colossians

[403]1:15-20 [404]2:3 [405]2:9-10 [406]3:1-3 [407]3:3-17

[408]3:23

1 Thessalonians

[409]4:13-18

2 Thessalonians

[410]3:6-15

1 Timothy

[411]1:18-20 [412]3 [413]3:14-16 [414]4:12-16 [415]6

[416]6:10

2 Timothy

[417]1 [418]1:15-18 [419]2:11-13 [420]2:13 [421]3:10-12

[422]3:14-17 [423]4:1-5

Titus

[424]1 [425]1 [426]1:10-14 [427]2:1-6 [428]3:4-8

Hebrews

[429]2:14-18 [430]4:5 [431]4:14-16 [432]11 [433]11:1

[434]11:1-40 [435]12 [436]12 [437]13:5-8 [438]13:18

James

[439]1:2-4 [440]1:12-15 [441]2:1-13 [442]2:14-17 [443]2:18-23

[444]2:24-26 [445]3:13-18 [446]4:6-10 [447]4:13-17 [448]5:1-6

[449]5:7-15 [450]5:16-18

1 Peter

[451]1:13-15 [452]4 [453]4:10-11 [454]5

2 Peter

[455]1:3-9 [456]2:1-3 [457]3:14-16

1 John

[458]1:5-10 [459]2:15-17 [460]2:29-3:2 [461]3 [462]4

[463]4:1-4 [464]5:1-11 [465]5:14-15

Wisdom of Solomon

[466]1:1-11 [467]1:2 [468]1:12-16 [469]1:13 [470]4:7-19

[471]7 [472]7:22-30 [473]9:13-18

2 Maccabees

[474]6 [475]7:1-41 [476]15:11-16

Sirach

[477]44:16-45:6

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
 - 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net