

THE WISDOM OF
SAINT FRANCIS
DE SALES

HELPFUL ADVICE FROM
ONE OF THE GREAT SAINTS
OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

DEDICATED TO MARY,
THE MOTHER OF
CHRIST AND
THE HELP OF CHRISTIANS

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FOREWORD

Saint Francis De Sales was a Bishop of the Church in the early Seventeenth Century. At a time of great upheaval and divisions in the Church, he worked tirelessly to restore unity and brought many people back to the Catholic Faith. In addition to his duties as a Bishop, he found time for writing and is considered to be one of the greatest writers in the history of the Church. So great has been his influence that he was named a Doctor of the Church, a title which the Church has given to only a small number of saints. This book is an attempt to make the teachings of Saint Francis De Sales more easily attainable and widely known. Its contents are taken from his classic work, *An Introduction to the Devout Life*. It is hoped that readers will find in it a useful summary of these teachings and, as a result, be better able to practice them in their own lives.

PART ONE: PRAYER AND THE SACRAMENTS

1. THE WORD OF GOD

Always pay careful attention to the word of God, whether you hear or read it in private, or listen to it when publicly proclaimed. Listen with attentiveness and reverence; seek to profit by it; and do not let the precious words fall unheeded; . . . imitate the Blessed Virgin, who “kept all the sayings” concerning her Son “in her heart.” And remember that according to the way in which we listen to and receive God’s words, so will He listen to and receive our prayers.

2. DEVOTION TO MARY THE ANGELS, AND THE SAINTS

Honor, reverence, and love the glorious Virgin Mary, for she is the mother of our Lord, and therefore our mother also. Fly to her as her child, and cast yourself at her knees with a perfect confidence at all times, and on all occasions. Call on this dear mother, appeal to her maternal love, and strive to imitate her virtues.

* * *

Familiarize yourself with the thought of the holy angels and honor especially the guardian angel of the diocese in which you live, those of your neighbors, and above all your own.

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Call on them and honor them often, and ask their help in all your affairs, temporal as well as spiritual.

* * *

Choose as your patrons some saints in particular, to whose life and imitation you are most drawn, and in whose intercession you have a special confidence. The saint whose name you bear is already assigned you from your baptism.

* * *

The Rosary is a most helpful form of prayer, if you know how to say it properly: for this purpose, use one of the booklets which explain it. The litanies of our Lord, of the Blessed Virgin, and of the saints, and all the other prayers which you find in the authorized prayer books are helpful.

3. THE CONFESSION OF SINS

Our Savior has left in His Church the Sacrament of Penance and Confession, in order that as often as our souls are stained by sin we may cleanse and purify them. Since then you have so sure and simple a remedy at hand, never permit your heart to remain long sullied by sin.

* * *

Always have a sincere hatred of the sins you confess, even if they are small, and a heartfelt resolution to amend. Some routinely and from mere habit confess their venial sins without thinking of correcting them, and continuing in them, lose much spiritual good. If, therefore, you make an

insincere confession through want of thought, hasty, words, or self-indulgence, repent heartily and firmly resolve to amend. for it is an abuse of the confessional to confess any sins, either mortal or venial, without resolving to discontinue them.

* * *

as the Church Militant join themselves to our Lord in this divine action, that through Him, with Him, and in Him, we may as it were take God by storm, and obtain His mercy and love. What a privilege to be united in so blessed and mighty an action!

* * *

After receiving Communion, offer your devout homage to the King of our salvation, reveal to Him all of your inmost thoughts and concerns, and cherish His presence within you for your exceeding benefit” In short, give Him the best welcome you can, and prove by the holiness of all your actions that God is with you. When you are unable to receive Him in the Holy Eucharist, unite yourself by desire to this life-giving flesh of the Savior, and make a spiritual communion in your heart.

* * *

Your chief aim in Holy Communion should be to advance, strengthen, and comfort yourself in the love of God, receiving for love's sake what love alone can give. There is nothing in which the love of Christ is set forth more tenderly

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or touchingly than in this Sacrament, by which He, so to speak, annihilates Himself for us and assumes the form of bread, in order to feed us and unite Himself closely to the bodies and souls of the faithful.

5. OTHER PUBLIC DEVOTIONS

Take advantage of the societies (or confraternities) which exist where you are, especially those whose rules abound most in good works and example. This obedience is pleasing to God, for though the Church does not require such ties, she highly recommends them, as shown by the fact that she grants indulgences and other privileges to confraternities; and it is always profitable to be joined to others and cooperate in good works. And although you might perform equally pious exercises by yourself, and perhaps with more self-gratification, yet God is more glorified by our being united to our friends and neighbors.

6. THE SPIRIT OF RECOLLECTION

Remember then to retire often into the solitude of your heart, even while you are externally occupied in business or society. This mental solitude can take place even though many persons are around you, for they only surround your body and not your heart, which should remain alone in the presence of God. This was what King David did throughout his many cares, and we find him in the Psalms continually

exclaiming, “My God, You are ever before me! The Lord is ever on my right hand! To You, O Lord, I lift up my eyes! O You who dwell in the heavens! My eyes are always looking to the Lord!”

7. CONSOLATIONS IN PRAYER

I would say, then, that devotion does not consist in that sweetness, consolation, and visible tenderness which provokes tears and sighs, and gives us a certain agreeable savor and satisfaction in our spiritual exercises. No, this is not the same thing as devotion; for there are many souls who experience these enjoyments and consolations, and nevertheless have many vices, and thus have no true love of God, much less any true devotion.

* * *

These emotions and affections are, however, at times good and useful, for they excite the soul's appetite, comfort the mind, and add to the earnestness of devotion a holy joy and gladness which renders even our outward actions nice and pleasant.

* * *

If we enjoy much sweetness and consolation, we must humble ourselves profoundly before God, and beware of saying on account of such favors, “How good I am!” No, for such advantages do not prove us good, nor, as I have said, does devotion consist in them. Let us rather say, “Oh how good

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God is to those who love Him, and to the soul that seeks after Him!”

* * *

Blessed Angela of Foligno says that the prayer most acceptable to God is that which is made with difficulty and constraint; that is, which we undertake not from our own taste or inclination, but solely in order to please God, to which we are as it were driven by our will, conquering and doing violence to the repugnance and dryness which we feel. It is the same in regard to all other good works, for the more reluctance we feel towards their performance (be it external or internal), so much the more precious and estimable they are in the sight of God. The less selfinterest we have in the pursuit of virtue, the greater therein will be the purity and brightness of our love for God.

PART TWO : THE VIRTUES

1. THE SELECTION OF VIRTUES

We should always concentrate more on those virtues which are most required of us rather than those which are most to our liking. . . . Thus, the apostles, who were commissioned to preach the Gospel and to feed souls with the Bread of Life, rightly judged that they should not forsake this duty in order to minister to the bodily needs of the poor, even though this in itself is such a sacred duty. Every state of life imposes some special duty; different virtues are required of

a bishop, a prince, or a soldier-the wife has her duties, the widow hers, and although all should practice every virtue, still they should seek to advance mainly in those virtues especially required by the state of life to which God has called them.

* * *

But there are some virtues of universal application, which should infuse their spirit into everything. We rarely have opportunities for the practice of courage, magnanimity, and great sacrifices; but every action of our daily lives should be influenced by gentleness, moderation, humility, and purity. Some qualities may be more eminent, but these are the most needed. . . . Therefore, we should be rich in these everyday virtues, of which we are in such constant need.

* * *

If we are hindered by some particular vice. we should strive as far as possible to cultivate the opposite virtue in all that we do; for by this means we shall subdue the enemy and continue to advance in all virtue. If I am especially tempted by pride or anger, I must seek above all to practice humility and gentleness, and call in all my other devout acts of prayer, the sacraments, prudence, perseverance, and temperance to my aid.

2. PATIENCE

Call to mind frequently that it was by suffering and

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endurance that our Lord saved us, and that it is appropriate that we too must do our part to work out our salvation by sufferings and afflictions, bearing injuries, contradictions, and annoyances with the greatest calm and gentleness.

Do not limit your patience to this or that kind of injury or trouble, but let it embrace every sort of trial that God sends or permits to come upon you. There are some persons who are willing to suffer, provided the sufferings are of a kind that bring honor with them. . . . The truly patient servant of God bears the troubles that bring contempt no less willingly than those that are esteemed honorable.

* * *

When you are overtaken by some misfortune, seek the remedies which God affords you, for not to do so would be tempting His divine providence; but having done so, await the result with perfect resignation. If He sees fit to permit the remedies to overcome the evil, thank Him humbly; but if, on the other hand, He permits the evil to overcome the remedies, patiently bless His Holy Name and submit.

* * *

As far as possible, do not complain of the injuries done to you, for as a general rule, he who complains errs, since our self-love always exaggerates our injuries; but, above all, do

not complain to those who are easily excited to anger and ready to think ill of others. If it is necessary to complain at all, either for redress or to relieve your mind, let it be to someone of a peaceful disposition who truly loves God; for others, instead of soothing you, will only excite you still more: instead of removing the thorn from your foot, they will drive it in deeper.

When you are sick, offer to Christ our Lord all your pains, your suffering, and your weakness, and ask Him to unite them to those He bore for you. . . . Be willing to suffer in obedience to His will, and be prepared to die when He calls you, that you may be with Him and praise Him forever. Remember that when the bee makes honey it often feeds upon bitter juices, and we have no better opportunity of making acts of patience and gentleness than when we are eating the bread of bitterness and living in the midst of sufferings.

3. HUMILITY

The desire and pursuit of virtue tend to make us virtuous, but the desire and pursuit of honors tend to make us hateful and despicable. A truly noble mind will not waste itself on such empty goods as rank, honor, and form. It has higher pursuits, and leaves these for the weak and vain. He who can procure pearls will not be satisfied with shells, and

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those who aim at virtue do not trouble themselves about honors.

* * *

True humility does not pretend to be humble and makes few lowly speeches, for she not only desires to hide other virtues but, above all, to hide herself. . . My advice, therefore, is that you do not abound in expressions of humility or, at least, let a deep inward belief agree with whatever you say outwardly. Never cast down your eyes without humbling your heart, and do not pretend that you wish to be among the last unless you truly desire it in your heart.

* * *

Some people will not even dare to consider and dwell upon the graces which God has conferred upon them for fear of vanity and conceit, but they are mistaken. . . . On the contrary, a lively consciousness of mercies received makes us humble, for such knowledge gives birth to gratitude.... Thus the Blessed Virgin declared what great things God had done for her, but only in order to humble herself and exalt Him. "My soul" she says, "magnifies the Lord . . . For He who is mighty has done great things for me."
(St. Luke 1:46-49)

4. OBEDIENCE

There are two kinds of obedience, one required and the other voluntary. By the first, you are bound to humbly

obey your ecclesiastical superiors; that is the Pope, your bishop, your pastor and those who represent them. You are further bound to obey your temporal superiors; that is your government leaders and those officials appointed by them. Finally, you owe obedience to your domestic superiors, whether parents or employers. This is required obedience, and no one can be exempt from the duty of obeying his superiors, since their duty to govern and command, according to their various positions, has been given to them by God.

* * *

Of necessity, then, you must obey their orders; but if you would seek perfection, follow also their counsels, and even their wishes and inclinations, as far as charity and prudence will permit. Obey them when they command what is agreeable, such as to eat or rest, for, although there seems to be little merit in obeying such commands, there is blame in disobedience. . . . Obey them in hard, difficult, displeasing things, and that will be perfect obedience. And, last of all, obey meekly without answering back, speedily without delay, cheerfully without brooding, and above all, obey in a loving spirit for love of Him who for our sake became obedient even unto the death of the Cross, and who, says Saint Bernard, preferred losing His life to being disobedient.

5. CHASTITY

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Chastity is the lily of the virtues. It renders humans almost equal to the angels. Nothing is beautiful except through purity, and the purity of human beings is chastity.

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Chastity has its origin in the heart, but its substance is in the body; wherefore it is lost by means of the external senses of the body and by the thoughts and desires of the heart. It is impurity to behold, to hear, to speak of, to breathe, to touch impure things. If the heart takes delight in them. Saint Paul says. "Let not fornication be so much as mentioned among you."

* * *

As the first step to this virtue. beware of admitting any kind of bodily pleasure that is forbidden and prohibited. such as those outside of marriage, or within it if contrary to its rules. As the second step. limit as far as possible all useless and unnecessary pleasures even if they are lawful and permitted. Thirdly: do not fix your affections on the pleasures which are ordained and permitted, for even if they follow from the end and purpose of holy matrimony, you must not attach your heart and mind to them.

* * *

Be extremely prompt in turning away from all that leads and lures to impurity, for this evil works insensibly, and by small beginnings progresses to great mischief. It is always easier to avoid than to cure this. . . . Never permit anyone to

trifle with you, either from folly or vanity, for although chastity may be preserved amidst such actions if they are light rather than malicious, still the flower and freshness of chastity suffer some hurt and damage; but all impure contact is the utter ruin of chastity.

* * *

Do not associate with immodest persons, above all if they are forward, which is usually the case. . . . On the contrary, associate with chaste and virtuous persons; read and often think about sacred things, for the word of God is chaste, and renders those who take delight therein chaste also. . . . Abide ever near to Jesus Christ crucified, spiritually in meditation and actually in Holy Communion.

6. POVERTY OF SPIRIT

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.” (St. Matthew 5:3) Woe then to those who are rich in spirit, for their portion will be Hell. He is rich in spirit whose heart is in his riches, and whose riches fill his heart. He is poor in spirit who has not riches in his heart, nor his heart in riches.

* * *

No one will admit to being greedy; everyone repudiates this despicable narrowness of heart. People excuse themselves on the claim of providing for their children, or on that of prudence and foresight; they never have too much,

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but always find some excuse for seeking more; and even the greatest misers not only will not admit to their greed, but in their hearts do not believe themselves to be greedy, for it is like a burning fever which, as it grows stronger, is less noticed by its victim.

* * *

Therefore, do not form desires for those things which you do not have, and do not fix your heart on that which you do have; do not be overpowered by such losses as you may incur, and then although you are rich in fact, you are not in spirit, but that, being poor in spirit, you are blessed because the kingdom of Heaven is yours.

* * *

If you are really poor, then above all be poor in spirit, and make a virtue of necessity by using that precious stone poverty to the best advantage. We do not see its glory in this world, and yet it is of the greatest beauty and value. Have patience; you are in good company. Our Lord, our Blessed Lady, the apostles, and countless saints were poor, and despised the riches which they might have enjoyed.

* * *

Do not, then, complain of your poverty, for we complain only of that which displeases us; and if poverty displeases you, you are no longer poor in spirit, for your heart would rather be otherwise; neither be troubled because you have less security than you need, for therein lies the excellence

of poverty. To wish to be poor without suffering any inconvenience is to be very ambitious, for then you aim at the honor of poverty and the convenience of wealth.

7. SELF-DENIAL

If you are able to fast, you will do well to observe something beyond what is required by the Church; for in addition to the ordinary benefits of fasting, namely lifting up the mind, subduing the flesh, strengthening virtue, and earning an eternal reward, it is important to be able to control our tastes and inclinations, and to keep the body and its appetites subject to the law of the spirit.

* * *

I am inclined to say as Saint Jerome said to the good lady, Leta, “I disapprove of long and immoderate fasting, especially for the young.” I have learned from experience that when the young colt wearies of his trip, he tries to stop; that is to say, that when young people are weakened by excessive fasting, they are easily led into self-indulgence and luxury. The horse runs badly both when it is too fat and when it is too thin, and we are exposed to temptation when the body is over-indulged and when it is over-subdued; for as the one makes it lazy and inactive, so the other makes it weak and despondent; and just as we cannot control it when it is over-fed, neither can it serve us when it is under-

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fed. . . . A continual, habitual temperance is far better than occasional, rigid abstinence alternating with great relaxation.

* * *

Everyone should take that appropriate amount of sleep in the night which they require for being usefully awake in the day. The Holy Bible, the example of the saints, and our own natural reason all teach us that the morning is the best and most profitable part of the day. Our Blessed Lord Himself is called the Rising Sun and His mother the Morning Star. I recommend to you, therefore, to go to rest early at night, so that you may awake and rise early in the morning, which is the most pleasing and least troubled time of the day; the very birds call us to awaken to the praise of God; and early rising is profitable for both health and holiness.

8. MODESTY

Saint Paul desires Christian women (and he undoubtedly includes men) to adorn themselves in decent apparel with modesty and sobriety. (1st Timothy 2:9) Now propriety in dress and its appearances consists in material, fashion, and cleanliness. As to the latter, it should be invariable, and as far as possible you should avoid all dirt and sloppiness. Outward purity is as it were a sign of that which is within; and God Himself especially required personal cleanliness of those who ministered at His altars and took the chief

part in devotion. As to the material and fashion of clothes, propriety in these respects depends upon various circumstances such as time, age, rank, those with whom you associate; and it varies with different occasions. . Learn to be neat, and let nothing about you be slovenly or disorderly. It is an affront to those with whom you associate to be unsuitably dressed, but avoid all conceits, vanities, finery, and affectation. Adhere as far as possible to modesty and simplicity which, undoubtedly, are the best ornaments of beauty and the best remedies for its deficiency.

* * *

Saint James says, “If any man does not offend in word, the same is a perfect man. He is also able with a bridle to lead about the whole body.” (St. James 3:2) Beware of ever using any impure expressions, for even if you have no bad intention, those who hear you may receive them differently. Impure words fall on a weak heart like oil on a cloth, spreading all around, and may fill it with evil thoughts and defile it. As bodily poison enters in by the mouth, so that of the heart enters by the ear, and the tongue that utters it is a murderer. . . . If any foolish person speaks to you in unbecoming language, show that your ears are offended, either by turning away from him or by whatever means may be most discreet at the time.

9. FAITHFULNESS TO DUTY

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In reading in the life of Saint Catherine of Siena of all her visions and raptures, her sacred wisdom and discourses . . . at the same time I delighted to find her attending to the lowly household cares in her father's house, turning the roast, lighting the fire, cooking and baking, with a heart full of love and yearning towards God. Nor do I value the humble meditations which occupied her while engaged in such lowly chores less than the ecstasies and raptures which she so often enjoyed. . . .

* * *

Hence, I would have you learn how important it is that all our actions, however small, be offered to God. And to this end, imitate the virtuous woman described by King Solomon (Proverbs 31), who, while she stretched out her hand to great and honorable things, did not neglect her spindle and distaff. Apply yourself to great and honorable things in prayer and meditation, in the sacraments, in telling of God's love and spreading His knowledge in all hearts, and in all such important works as befit your vocation. But do not neglect your spindle and distaff, that is to say practice those lowly, hidden virtues which spring like flowers from the foot of the cross, such as visiting the poor, ministering to the sick, household cares and the labors involved in them, and then you will never be idle; meanwhile, intersperse all such occupations with pious reflections after the example of Saint Catherine.

* * *

Great occasions for serving God rarely offer themselves. Small ones constantly occur, and Christ Himself has said: “He who is faithful in that which is least, is also faithful in that which is greater.” (St. Luke 16:101 If then you do all in the name of God, you will do all well, whether you eat or whether you drink, whether you leep or rest from labor, whether you are engaged in honorable or menial tasks. If you conduct them rightly, you may greatly advance your salvation, doing all things because such is the will of God.

10. SOCIAL VIRTUES

To seek society and to avoid it are alike blamable extremes for those who are living in the world, and it is to them I am speaking. By avoiding it, we indicate dislike and contempt for our neighbor; and by seeking it, we imply idleness and inactivity. . . . If then you are not called upon to receive or enter society, remain by yourself and hold converse with your own heart. But if you are rightly called on to join in society, then go as in God’s sight and mix with a free and loving heart among your companions.

* * *

It is a bad society which has a bad object as its aim, or which is composed of evildoers; from indiscreet or extravagant persons turn away, just as the bee turns away from all that is foul and impure. . . . As to the society of

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virtuous and pious persons, the more often you seek such, the better. The vine that is planted amidst olive trees bears the richest fruit, and the soul that is constantly associated with holy people must receive their good qualities. . . . It is a great advantage to be associated with the truly devout.

* * *

Always be impartial and just in your deeds. Put yourself into your neighbor's place, and him in yours, and then you will judge fairly. When you buy, act as though you were the seller, and when you sell, act as though you were the buyer, and you will buy and sell with justice. . . . Frequently, therefore, examine your heart, whether it is so disposed towards your neighbor as you would have his disposed towards you if you were to change places, for this is the true test.

* * *

Let your speech be gentle, frank, sincere, clear, simple, and truthful. Avoid all duplicity, deception, and pretense; for, although it is not expedient to tell everything which is true, it is never permissible to tell what is not. Never allow yourself to tell a lie in the way of excuse or otherwise, remembering that God is a God of truth. If you accidentally say what is untrue, and it is possible to correct yourself at once by explanation or reparation, do so. A sincere excuse is far more useful and more powerful than a

lie. Although there may be occasions in which we may prudently and discreetly hide and withhold the truth, we should not do so except in matters of importance where it is necessary for the glory and service of God. In truth, all deception is dangerous, for the Holy Spirit will not dwell with the double-minded. No art is so valuable as simplicity.

* * *

Saint Louis, the king, gave it as a counsel never to contradict anyone unless there was some harm in consenting, in order to avoid altercation and dispute. But when it is necessary to contradict someone, or give an opposite opinion, it should be done gently and skillfully, so as not to irritate our neighbors; and besides, we gain nothing by being harsh. . . . Saint Louis condemned private discussion or conversation in general society, especially at meal times. “If anyone has something good to say,” he remarked, “let him give all present the benefit of it; but let him be silent on private and important subjects.”

* * *

A spirit of mockery is one of the worst imperfections of the mind, and displeases God greatly, so that He has often punished it most severely. Nothing is more harmful to charity, and even more to devotion, than contempt and derision of our neighbor, and such is inevitably found in mockery. For this reason, it has been said that mockery is the greatest insult someone can offer to his neighbor, in as

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much as in other offenses he does not altogether cease to respect the person whom he offends, but in this he despises and condemns him.

* * *

Our hand is quickly raised to the spot where we are wounded, and our tongue turns just as quickly to the subject in which we delight. If, then, you have a sincere love of God, you will often speak of Him with your family, friends, and neighbors. . . . Thus it is said of Saint Francis that, when he mentioned the Holy Name of the Lord, his mouth seemed to be filled with the sweetest of delicacies. But when you speak of God, remember of whom it is you speak. And let it be with reverence and devotion, not pompously or as it were preaching, but with the spirit of gentleness, charity, and humility . . . silently asking God to grant that this heavenly dew may reach the hearts of those who are listening.

PART THREE: OBSTACLES TO VIRTUE

1. OPPOSITION FROM THE WORLD

As soon as worldly people see that you are trying to lead a holy life, they will heap upon you all their ridicule and slander; the most ill-tempered will accuse you of hypocrisy, pretense, or intolerance; they will say that you turned to God only after being rejected by the world; and your friends will overwhelm you with a flood of what they consider to be prudent and charitable objections. . . . “If you had been of the world,” said our Savior, “the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.” (St. John 15:19)

* * *

Never heed this blind world, then; let it cry out as it will, like a bat that would disturb the birds of day. Let us be firm in our plans, unchanging in our resolutions; perseverance will show that we are sincere in offering ourselves to God and leading a devout life. . . . We are crucified to the world, and the world should be crucified to us.

* * *

Be open in professing your desire to be devout. I do not refer to being devout, but of desiring to be so. And never be ashamed of the ordinary and necessary actions which lead us towards the love of God. . . . For God, who will have no

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one ashamed of Him or of the cross, is well pleased with this readiness to confess that we desire to serve Him and have dedicated ourselves to His love with special affection.

2. TEMPTATIONS

Whenever you feel the approach of temptation, imitate a little child who sees a wolf or bear in the plain. He instantly flees into his father's or mother's arms, or at least calls on them for help and protection. In a similar way, you should turn to God, seeking His mercy and help. This is the remedy taught to us by our Lord Him-self: "Pray that you do not enter into temptation." (St. Matthew 26:41)

* * *

But while thus protesting and struggling, turn your mind away from your temptation and call to mind your Savior; for if you dwell upon the temptation, it may shake your courage, especially if it is of a violent nature. Divert your mind by some useful, praiseworthy work, for as this enters and occupies your heart, it will banish temptations and evil thoughts. . . . If after all this, our temptation still continues to weary and persecute us, we have no further remedy except to persevere in protesting that we will not consent. For just as a maiden cannot be married as long as she refuses her consent, in like manner the soul, however troubled, cannot be injured while it refuses its consent.

* * *

Although we must struggle with invincible might against great temptations, and the victories gained against them are most useful; yet, on the whole, we gain more by struggling against the lesser temptations which assault us. For although the greater ones are of a more important nature, the number of lesser temptations is so much more that the victory over them is worthy to be measured against that over greater but less frequent ones. . . . Therefore, while we are prepared to contend bravely and well against great temptations whenever they assail us, let us in the meantime be diligent in resisting these lesser, more trifling attacks.

3. HARMFUL DESIRES

Everyone knows that we must avoid evil desires, for by indulging in them we too become evil; but I would urge you also to avoid desires for those things which are dangerous to the soul, such as dances and similar dangerous amusements, honors, titles, visions, raptures, etc.. In all such things there is great risk of vanity and delusion. Do not indulge in longings after events which are as yet far distant, for they only distract and weary the heart, often disturbing it seriously. . . . If, when I am ill, I desire to minister or preach. visit other sick persons, or perform the duties of the healthy, are not my wishes fruitless since it is not in my power to carry them out? And meanwhile, these useless

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wishes impede others which I should have-the wish to be very patient, very resigned, obedient, mortified, and gentle during my sufferings, which is what for the time being God requires of me.

* * *

No person who has an appointed duty or vocation should indulge in wishing for some manner of life different from that which is suitable to it and its indispensable conditions; for such indulgence disturbs the mind and weakens it in the performance of its necessary duties. If I wish for the solitude of a Carthusian monk, I waste my time and allow this desire to take the place of that which ought to occupy me, namely, to perform my present duty faithfully.

* * *

Variety and excess of food always overload the digestion and, if it is weak, ruin it. Do not overload your soul with desires, either worldly ones, which are harmful, or spiritual ones, which will hinder you. When the soul is cleansed and set free from evil desires, it experiences a great hunger for spiritual things and eagerly desires all types of pious exercises in selfdenial, penitence, charity, and prayer. Such an appetite is a good sign, but take care that you are able to digest all that you would eat. With the help of your spiritual father select from among all such practices those which are suitable to you and, for the present, follow and make the most of them; then God will supply you with others in due

season, and you will not waste time in useless desires.

4. DANGEROUS AMUSEMENTS

Sometimes we need to relax the mind and give the body some recreation. . . . It is a defect to be so harsh and rigid that we will not allow ourselves or others to indulge in any recreation.

* * *

You must, of course, guard against excess either in the time they occupy, or the importance given to them; for if you devote too much time, they cease to be recreations and become occupations; you do not refresh the mind or body—on the contrary, you overpower and stun both. After playing for five or six hours at chess, the mind is tired and exhausted, and a long time spent in any active game wearies the body instead of invigorating it. If the interest in a game is too deep, it produces over-anxiety; moreover, it is not well to attach great importance to such things as dexterity and skill in any mere game. Especially avoid attaching yourself to them, for however allowable such things are as amusements, they become evils as soon as they absorb the heart. I do not mean that you may not lawfully take pleasure in your amusement, otherwise it would not be a recreation, but you must not be devoted to it, or anxious and absorbed in it.

5. ANGER

When we feel ourselves stirred with passion, we must imitate the apostles amidst the raging storm and tempest, and call upon God to help us; then He will bid our angry passions to be still, and great shall be our peace. But I would have you remember that when we pray to be delivered from the anger with which we are struggling, we should pray gently and calmly, without excitement. . Furthermore, as soon as you are conscious of having committed a hasty action, lose no time in repairing the error by an act of gentleness towards the person with whom you have been irritated. . . . Moreover, when you are at peace and without any cause for anger, try to lay up a stock of gentleness and meekness, always speaking and acting both in great and small things as gently as possible.

* * *

One of the ways in which we should practice gentleness has to do with ourselves in never growing irritable with ourselves because of our imperfections; for, although we have reason to be upset and angry with ourselves when we commit faults, yet we should guard against a bitter, fretful displeasure, or spiteful anger with ourselves. Some make a great mistake in being angry because they have been angry, hurt because they have been hurt, and annoyed because they have been annoyed. Thus, while they think they are ridding themselves of anger and that their second passion

remedies the first, in truth they are preparing the way for fresh anger as soon as the occasion presents itself. Besides this, all this indignation and vexation and irritation with ourselves tends to foster pride and springs entirely from selflove, which is displeased at finding that we are not perfect. We should attempt then to look upon our faults with a calm, collected, firm displeasure.

6. RASH JUDGMENT AND DETRACTION

“Judge not, so that you will not be judged,” were our Savior’s words; “Condemn not, and you will not be condemned;” and Saint Paul says, “Judge not before the time of the Lord, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the inner thoughts of the heart.” (1st Corinthians 4:5) Rash judgments are most displeasing to God, and the judgments of men are rash because men are not each others judges but therein assume the office of our Lord. They are rash also since the chief guilt of sin depends upon the intention and thought of the heart, which are the hidden things of darkness to us; and they are rash because everyone has enough to do in judging himself, without presuming to judge his neighbor.

* * *

The Blessed Virgin was with child, and Saint Joseph knew it, but he also knew that she was holy, pure, and angelic, and

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could not imagine her to be guilty of sin; therefore, he left her to the judgment of God. Why did he do this? Scripture expressly says because “he was a just man.” (St. Matthew 1:19) The just man, when he can find no excuse for the action or intention of one whom he has held in high esteem, still refuses to condemn him, but rather leaves the judgment to God.

* * *

Whoever unjustly deprives his neighbor of his good name is guilty of sin, and is further obliged to make reparation for his slander; no one can enter Heaven with another's goods, and of all worldly goods none is equal to a good reputation. . . . I beseech you, therefore, never to speak ill of anyone, either directly or indirectly. Beware of falsely imputing crimes and sins to your neighbor, of disclosing his secret faults, of exaggerating those which are obvious, of badly interpreting good actions, of denying the good which you know of or maliciously concealing or lessening it, for all these things grievously offend God: above all of falsely accusing another or denying the truth to his harm, which involves the double sin of falsehood and injury.

* * *

But while you are careful to speak no evil regarding your neighbor, beware of falling into the opposite extreme, as some do who, seeking to avoid slander, praise vice. If you come across a downright slanderer, do not defend him by

calling him frank and truthful; do not misrepresent dangerous freedoms as simplicity and easiness, or call disobedience zeal, or arrogance self-respect; do not fly from slander into flattery and indulgence of vice. . . .

* * *

We may speak freely of notorious and infamous sinners, but still with charity and compassion, avoiding arrogance and presumption, and not rejoicing in another's ill, which is the sure sign of an evil, cruel heart. Of the enemies of God and His Church, we must speak openly, since in charity we are bound to give the alarm whenever the wolf is found among the sheep.

7. ANXIETY

Anxiety is the soul's greatest enemy besides sin. Just as internal disturbance and seditions ruin a nation and make it unable to resist external aggression, so when the heart is anxious and disquieted it loses the power to preserve those virtues which are already acquired and also the means of resisting the temptations of Satan, who does not fail (as the saying goes) to fish in troubled waters.

* * *

Anxiety proceeds from an ill-regulated desire to be delivered from the evil we experience, or to acquire the good to which we aspire; nevertheless, nothing aggravates evil and hinders good as much as anxiety and worry. When

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birds are caught in a trap or net, they cannot escape because they flutter and make all kinds of disorderly attempts to get free, by means of which they only entangle themselves the more. Therefore, if you sincerely desire to be delivered from some evil, or to attain some good, above all calm your mind and compose your judgment and will; then quietly and gently pursue your goal, adopting suitable means in an orderly way.

* * *

If you can disclose your anxiety to the guide of your soul, or at least to some pious and trustworthy friend, without doubt you will be speedily relieved. . . . Thus Saint Louis counseled his son, “If your heart is troubled, hasten to reveal it to your confessor or to some pious person, and by means of his compassion, you will be able to easily bear your affliction.”

* * *

Be very careful and diligent in all such business as pertains to you, for God who has allotted it to you would have you do it well. But if possible, avoid solicitude—that is to say, do not undertake your affairs with disquietude, anxiety, and worry; and do not hurry and excite yourself about them, for all excitement hinders reason and judgment, and prevents us from doing well that very thing about which we are excited.

* * *

In all your undertakings, rely totally on God’s providence,

through which alone they can succeed; but seek steadily on your part to co-operate with it, and then rest assured that if you are trusting all to God, whatever happens will be best for you, whether it seems in your own judgment to be good or bad.

8. SADNESS

“The sorrow that is according to God,” says Saint Paul, “brings forth repentance and leads to salvation; but the sorrow of the world leads to death.” (2nd Corinthians 7:10) Therefore, sorrow may be either good or bad, according to its results upon us. . . . It is only towards the good that the enemy uses sorrow as a temptation, for just as he seeks to make sinners delight in their sins, so he seeks to make good works bitter for the good; and as he can only lead the one to evil by making it seem agreeable, so can he only deter the other from what is good by making it seem disagreeable. Satan delights in sadness and melancholy’ since he himself is sad and melancholy, and will be so for all eternity, a condition which he would like to have all to share with him. “Is any among you sad?” asks Saint James, “let him pray.” (St. James 5:13) Prayer is a sovereign remedy, for it raises the soul to God, who is our only joy and consolation; but in prayer let your emotions and words, whether inward or outward, lead to trust and love of God, such as O God of mercy, merciful and good God, loving Savior, God of my

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heart, my Joy, my Hope, my beloved Spouse, Beloved of my soul, and such as these. . . . Refresh yourself with spiritual songs, which have often caused the tempter to cease his wiles; as in the case of Saul, whose evil spirit departed from him when David played his harp before the king. (1st Samuel 16:23) . . . frequent communion is an excellent remedy, for that heavenly food strengthens the heart and gladdens the spirit.

* * *

Vigorously oppose the inclination to sadness, and although you seem to do everything coldly, sadly, and without fervor, persevere an) way; for the enemy would like to weaken our good works through sadness, and when he finds that we will not discontinue them, and that they are even more meritorious because of our resistance, he will cease to annoy us. . . . It is also useful to keep busy as far as possible in a variety of activities, so as to divert the mind from the cause of its sadness and to purify and enliven it, for sadness is a cold, withering passion. Faithfully and humbly reveal to your confessor and counselor all the emotions, cares, and suggestions which result from your sadness; seek, as much as possible, the company of devout persons; and above all place yourself in God's hands, resolving to endure with patience your bitter sadness, as fitting reparation for your vain pleasures; and never doubt that when God has sufficiently tried you, He will set you free from this trial.

