

CAN WE BE SAINTS?

Frank Duff's First Book*

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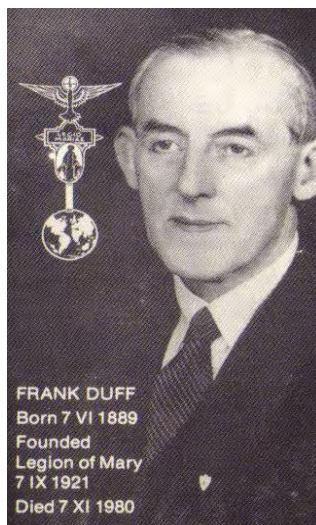
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WHAT IS A SAINT?

In the heart of every right-thinking Catholic, God has implanted the desire to become a Saint. Yet few make a serious attempt to realize the ambition. The cause for this is to a large extent discouragement, due to the misunderstanding of what a Saint really is.

What is a Saint? The answer usually returned to this question is: one who does extraordinary penances and works miracles. Now, this is an incorrect description, for neither miracles nor great penances are essential. The man who works a miracle does not raise himself in God's eyes by it; and, while penance in some shape is necessary, still the teaching of the Saints on this difficult question is encouraging.

What they direct is not bodily penances of a terrifying kind, but rather the strict avoidance of delicacies, softness, comfort. We are told to beware of injuring our health, and to eat enough plain food to enable us to work and pray without hindrance. There is ample opportunity for the severest mortification in the restraint of eyes and tongue, and in a warfare against the seven Deadly Sins.

Thus, there is another definition of what a Saint is. It is this: One who, with the object of pleasing God, does his ordinary duties extraordinarily well. Such a life may be lived out without a single wonder in it, arouse little notice, be soon forgotten, and yet be the life of one of God's dearest friends.

It is obviously an encouragement to look on sanctity in this way. When we see that those things which so terrified us in the lives of the Saints, because we felt we could not do them ourselves, are not the important part of their sanctity at all, we should feel heartened to begin to-day and make a serious effort for great holiness.

Believe this: it is only the first few wrenches given to the will that really hurt.

Perhaps the following words of Cardinal Newman will tempt us to take a step forward on the road: "If you ask me what you are to do in order to be perfect, I say, first do not lie in bed beyond the time of rising; give your first thoughts to God; make a good visit to the Blessed Sacrament; say the Angelus devoutly; eat and drink to God's glory; say the Rosary well; be recollected; keep out bad thoughts; make your evening meditation well; examine yourself daily; go to bed in good time, and you are already perfect."

Who are Called to be Saints?

Every person that is born is called to be a Saint. Take it as most certain that you - no matter how unfitted your life may seem for holiness - are being given graces sufficient, if corresponded with, to bring you to sanctity. We have already seen that nothing beyond our strength is expected; neither is sanctity the exclusive property of any grade or manner of life. Among the Saints canonized by the Church are kings and beggars, and representatives of every trade, slaves, hermits, city people, mothers of families, invalids, soldiers, and persons of every race and color.



As a canonized Saint is a pattern provided by God, it is evident that an invitation to become Saints is extended to men and women of every type. It is equally a fact that to those who seriously try to respond to His invitation, He gives help sufficient to carry them to the goal.

The Two Successes

Watch how the thought of fame or gold moves men. What sufferings they will endure for a mere chance of earthly gain. And in the end, though disappointed themselves, they will fill the minds of their children with the same longings for worldly success, so that each generation sees the same weary beat of the pendulum - ambitious youth to soured age. Is it really worth the trouble? So many are handicapped by lack of health or knowledge or brains that it never is a fair fight. Except for a few, striving is pure waste of time.

How differently God deals with anyone striving after holiness. Here all is certain. Every effort gets its reward. Everything is made to favour us; for alike out of health and sickness, poverty and wealth, what looks good and what looks evil can the man of good-will extract spiritual gain. Every reasonable request granted; obstacles removed for the asking; no trial beyond our strength permitted. In the ears of the world, this would sound like a fairy-tale, but it is in sober truth God's way of dealing with the earnest seeker after Heavenly riches. Surely, to announce calmly, as so many good people do, that they have no ambition to be Saints, is very ungenerous treatment of One so kind. As He has so plainly set His Heart upon our doing great things, let us resolve to please Him and return generosity for generosity.

I Am a Bundle of Weakness

"I am appalled at the thought of a life of constant effort to crush my nature into a new form. I have no strength of will and such a life is beyond my powers." With such reasonings, we harden ourselves against the call which rings so often in our ears. We forget that the same holy lips which say, "Come follow Me," say also to all, "My yoke is sweet and My burden light. What, then, is wrong with us that we fear the yoke of Christ? It is this ... our point of view. Unimportant ideas occupy the strongholds of our minds and shape our thoughts; while He, the owner of Eternity, is left only as one of the hundred interests in our lives, so that it is not surprising that the zeal, the courage, the ardor, that do big things, are spent on gains or pleasures which give a visible and rapid return. In a word, we undervalue holiness.

Once after this - and little is required to do it once - accept the fact that holiness is the most important thing in the world for us, and it will become the most natural thing in the world for us to strive after it. There lies the whole secret of effort. Make the goal attractive and reasonable, and we pursue it in spite of hardships, and almost in spite of ourselves. The human mind works in that way.

A Changed Outlook

The secret of bringing this about is contained in a few words; we must face facts. Now and then we must give the mind a chance to raise itself above the sea in which it is immersed, of things that do not matter, and face in all coldness the grim truths which group themselves around the central facts of Death and Eternity. Think of the immortality of the Soul; the insanity of preferring temporal to eternal; the shortness of our stay on earth; the nearness of that moment which will decide all; and the pricelessness of each minute of time, which, short as it is, yet shapes our undying life beyond the grave.

To occupy oneself deliberately with these solemn considerations and still remain indifferent is impossible. Dwelt upon so that they become familiar, these thoughts bring a new force into our lives. There is operated in us a wonderful change. As if the needle of the compass were to turn from the North and point due South, worldliness will not repel, and reason drive us on to God. Add a little love and the stock-in-trade for a Saint is there. But we have already been deliberating too long. Whilst we have been in doubt, "the precious days have slipped away, and we find ourselves in the rapids above the great waters of the grave, and we hear the falling of the waters into the immeasurable abyss and we feel the suction of eternity." Eternity!! What a thought! So, in God's Name, let us begin, while yet we have the time, and while the thirst is still in us to love Him ardently.

A New Ambition

Fear the postponed beginnings. A chill grows up, and our great destiny is forgotten. Oh, my God! Grant that I have not in my indecision let that day come upon myself. I confess that Your work has never been anything to me but occupations for an idle moment. My heart has been set upon the things that pass. But henceforth I will give myself entirely to You. Give me the time, and faithfully do I promise now to serve You. Give me back the years that the worm and the locust have devoured, that I may one day restore them to You full of achievement.

And I do not ask for the big things - the life of the missionary or the monk, or those others I see around me so full of accomplishment. I do not ask for any of these; but simply set my face to follow out unswervingly, untiringly, the common life which day by day stretches before me, satisfied in it I love You, and try to make You loved. Nature rebels against this life with its never-ending round of trivial tasks and full of the temptation to take relief in amusement or change. It seems so hard to be great in the small things, to be heroic in the doing of the commonplace, but still this life is Your Will for me. There must be a great destiny in it. And so I am content.

And then to crown the rest, dear Jesus, I beg of You to give me this . . . fidelity to the end . . . to be at my post when the final call comes, and to take my last weary breath in your embrace. A valiant life . . . and faithful to the end. A short wish, dearest Jesus, but it covers all.

Being Really in Earnest

Good will is the very foundation of our progress. By good will is meant not an empty wish to reach the goal, but a readiness to toil along the road that leads to it. Now the symbol of our religion is a Cross. Our Lord has told us that we must carry it daily if we desire to be perfect. What excuse, therefore, can there be for being upset when trials come upon us? He that is discouraged by them evidently began without thought. But he who gives up altogether plainly never was in earnest. Of such Our Lord Himself has said: "These have no roots."

Perseverance

There is usually a sweetness in beginnings. God gives this aid freely then in order to encourage, just as a helping hand is given to children learning to walk. It is not for our good that we should always be carried, so after a while the sweetness is lessened. Then comes the critical time when our resolution is being tested.

Guardian angels must weep to see so many who gave hopes of high sanctity stop short in their course. Now, to give up because our fervor is gone is to admit that we never had in view God's pleasure, but our own. Our pleasure in the work having gone, we labour no more. It apparently matters little to us that God's pleasure in the work is still the same greater, perhaps, for the offering made from a sick heart and tired brain is always the most precious.

Perseverance is the last grace that will be given to us, and the greatest. It is the test of our good will. Excitement, novelty, or any one of a dozen other merely human things may start something, but they will not keep it going. What is wrong with all these who begin so splendidly and stop so soon? Call for volunteers for any good work. There are many full of enthusiasm - but hardly one who remains steadfast, hardly one who keeps his hands to the plough to the end. And the good intentions of a Retreat . . . How short-lived they are! Is there any definite reason why all these people lack the quality of perseverance? Here is the answer in the words of the celebrated Pere de Ravignan: "I do here affirm that all deceptions, all spiritual deficiencies, all miseries, all faults, and even the most serious wanderings out of the right path, all proceed from this single source - a want of constancy in prayer."

The Secret of Perseverance is Prayer

From reading the lives of the Saints, one would conclude that they fall, roughly, into two classes: those who gave themselves to contemplation, and those who spent their lives in active works. In reality they were all alike. All were souls whose whole lives were prayer. Prayer was their business. Their good deeds were only valuable because they sprang from prayer; they bore the same relation to prayer that the trunk of a tree bears to the roots; good deeds are a visible part of prayer; and good deeds cannot live without prayer.

The present is a period when successful appeal is being made to Catholics to show by works of charity the Faith that is in them. That the most ordinary act may become holy when inspired by a holy intention is well understood and the words of Christ Himself, assuring us that "Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family you did it to me," draws us powerfully on to the service of our neighbor.

The possibilities of holiness here are immense. But it is not sufficiently recognised that a proper balance of regular prayer and good works is essential to perseverance in the latter. There is a tendency to consider good works as prayerful enough in themselves. Their variety makes them easy, while prayer is difficult. Besides, we like to see results, and usually we do not see the results of prayer. So we reduce our prayers to little or nothing satisfying ourselves with the recollection that we are doing plenty of practical work for our neighbor.

Readers of Canon Sheehan will remember how a similar course of reasoning ended in the case of Luke Delmege in complete loss of spirituality and in disaster. Of course, this is an extreme case. But we all know of many with noble qualities, holy intentions, and high promise, who just reach a certain point and no further. In a way, these makings of Saints who give up advancing are most to be pitied. It is far easier to pick a sinner out of the mire than to induce such people to get out of the rut of mere goodness, which God never intended for them. Let us sound once more the note upon which we began a little while ago. The cause of all this pitiful failure is this: there is not Prayer enough.

Pray! Pray! Pray!

This is how St. Teresa stated she would summarize all her teachings. People do not understand the importance of prayer. They say it is difficult. What wonder, considering that they make no effort to learn. The man who thinks it quite natural to put his son to a six years' apprenticeship to learn a trade, would think it absurd to spend six hours reading a book which might teach him how to pray.

Prayer must be brought to occupy a most prominent and definite place in our lives. This does not mean that we have to spend many hours each day on our knees. The duties of our state probably prevent that. But certainly we must aim at more than the saying of prayers twice a day, or even three or four times a day.

He prays little who only prays on his knees. Just as a gong or a tuning-fork could be kept quietly sounding all day by an occasional tap, so will the soul of itself send up incessant prayer, if now and then we apply the tap of an aspiration, a thought, an ejaculation. Never let the mind be too long away from God. The great disinclination to pray which most of us feel when the time set apart for prayer comes is plain proof that we are not, as it were, living with Him.

THE DAY IN DETAIL

The Foundation Stone

Foremost in the consideration of our day and on an eminence apart, like the Cross itself must stand the daily Mass and daily reception of the Holy Eucharist. These are so obviously the greatest means of Grace that they need not be urged at length. The person who is able easily to go to morning Mass, and does not do so, only deceives himself if he thinks he is aiming at great holiness.



Mass and Communion mean a day perfectly begun - and that is half the battle.

But out of this great act come two smaller obligations: **(a)** to your neighbor. There are many whom lack of thought alone keeps from Daily Mass. Lend a book; say a word to awaken them; **(b)** to yourself; read to increase knowledge and reverence.

The Morning Offering

The day should have opened with the morning offering of all our thoughts, words, and actions to Jesus through Mary. This offering must be the guiding idea of the whole day. We do not need to repeat the words many times, but the thought of it must lie in the heart, and govern our daily life in such a way that we feel ourselves to be working for God and not for the world.

Our Daily Work

First, let no one pride himself on having what he considers a dignified occupation. In despising menial or manual labour, he is parting company with Christianity and allying himself to paganism, which in all ages has counted such work the greatest of all evils.

The ancient Jews, do the contrary, esteemed it a disgrace that any man should be without a trade. Generally our Lord's followers were from the humblest type of manual labourers, and the whole teaching of traditional Christianity has been to exalt manual work, and to teach that to be poor, to have to toil hard, to be without what the world regards as enviable, is in reality a long start on the way to heaven.

"To work is to pray," was the old saying of the Monks, who never considered themselves any the further from God when working than when on their knees. In some monasteries they sang hymns while at work; in others meditation was ordered. We read of St. Bernard stopping suddenly in the writing of one of his most wonderful sermons, because the time had arrived for him to go to dig in the fields. Others would have some pious book open before them to suggest holy thoughts, while their hands were engaged upon their allotted task; and more wonderful still, others never began their painting or tasks of delicate workmanship without purifying their souls by Sacramental Confession. It was this spirit of prayer and work combined which produced those exquisite works of art, which present generations marvel at, but cannot equal. God, in His approval of work done in such a spirit, breathed beauty into it. Let us, if we desire to produce similar work, approach it in a similar way.

The Importance of a Right Idea of Work

As half of our waking day is spent in toil, the need for rightly understanding the dignity and sanctity of labour is evident. It comes to this, that our work, whatever it may be, as seamstress, labourer, teacher, doctor or farmer was given to us by God as a means of sanctification and as a penance for our sins. Thus it is the foundation of our spiritual life. He who neglects his work and yet thinks, because he says many prayers, that he is leading a holy life, deludes himself.

A Right Idea of Duty

We are to do what it is our duty to do - and at the right time. Duty is not something which is to be thrown off with our working clothes, as so many people imagine. It is as strictly our duty to keep an appointment or a secret as it is to do our work. A duty goes before even "Devotions." It is your duty to wash the dishes, do not run off to Benediction instead.

There are many duties in the day which seem less important than others, and for this reason we think very little of setting them aside to suit the convenience of the moment. Such conduct is wrong, and it does not build up a strong character. The real value of our day lies in the exact performance of all our obligations. The greater ones take care of themselves - their importance makes them easy to do. So look particularly to the small things.

Consider your whole day as a picture where every line has its proper place. And where the smallest may be the most essential. Do everything that you are supposed to do, and do it down to the tiniest detail - not because somebody is supervising you, but simply because you are supposed to do it.

There is a proverb: "Death is light as a feather. Duty as heavy as lead," and a life lived in devotion to duty is going to be a hard life. But it is going to be the life of a Man.

Here is a lesson from the Far East.

A Japanese craftsman was observed to be spending days in perfecting the inside of an article he was making. He was asked "Why waste all this time? Nobody will ever see your work." He replied, "Do I not see it myself?" To this answer, may not we, as Christians add, "And God sees it, too."

Praying at Our Work

We see that Work and Duty are holy things when the idea of God is in them. But, by themselves, they are not holy enough for those who are trying to be Saints. We must bring God closer to our work than by the mere offering of it in the morning.

We must keep Him at our side by frequent thought of Him, It is told by a Spanish Nun who had charge of the refectory that in order never to be distracted she imagined those she served to be Our Blessed Lord and His Mother and the Apostles. In this way her work became a great means of prayer to her, and the hours spent in it were amongst the most devotional in the whole day.

While this may be above the reach of our poor minds, distracted by a thousand things, we may at least confidently seek after a quiet sense of God's Presence.

This does not mean that we have actually to feel Him near us. If we have by the regular practice of prayer and frequent thought of Him, so drilled the mind that there is a tendency to swing back to Him when left free, we are doing very well.

For this means that however distracting our occupations are, the soul is giving Him a quiet attention all the time. We shall have reached the stage of praying always.

The Mechanism of Frequent Prayer

In endeavouring to build up a spirit of prayer such as this, there is little use in relying on vague resolutions - made in moments of fervor to pray frequently. Vague resolutions have no influence over people so strongly drawn away from prayer as we unfortunately are. We must set up certain of the events of each day as regular calls to a word or thought of prayer. Some of these reminders we already have: the Angelus, grace at meals, the passing of a Church, and so forth. This number can be largely increased, so that quite a number of items of our daily life will in the end cause an easy and natural lifting of the mind to God. A passing funeral, the meeting of a friend, the hearing of a death, the striking of a clock, the ringing of a bell, the writing of a date, the sharpening of a pencil, the threading of a needle - one could go on for ever with suggestions for such a list.

But the occupations of each one will determine what is best. Do not mind how foolish your expedients seem. They may have all the more love in them. In any case nothing is foolish that leads to God. It is better that the acts be not too frequent. They might tire out one's good intentions or interfere with attention to work. But above all, they must, for the beginner, be definite. That is, the resolution must take this shape: "Whenever I look at my watch (or whatever else it may be), I will say such an ejaculation."

Do not stop because this practice may at first seem mechanical and un-devotional and tiring. Habit will soon come to your aid and make it less difficult. But determination will always be needed, as the Tempter will make many an effort to hinder so excellent a practice. While progress is being made in acquiring the spirit of prayer those things which are a hindrance must go. Not until there is quiet within us, can an attempt be made to build up a real spiritual life.

HINDRANCES AND PITFALLS ON THE WAY

Sin

Sin in its various forms is, of course, the greater barrier. Such serious things as dishonesty, wronging one's employer or those who work for one, gambling, intemperance, cursing, might be gone into at length. But surely this is unnecessary. We are considering a person who is making a serious effort for sanctity; who is fully aware of the gravity of such failings, and who has probably already cut them out of his life.

Then, there is the host of commoner faults: self-love, lying, backbiting, vanity, envy, and so forth, in direct attacks on which a life-time could be spent with poor results. A surer success will quietly come of itself if prayerfulness and love develop. These will induce a frame of mind to which anything wrong will be distasteful. Such failings become no longer temptations, and simply drop out of one's life.

All the foregoing are plainly labelled "sin." When we are guilty of any of them, we know that it is an occasion for repentance and amendment. But there are other enemies to sanctity that are more hidden, and which constantly deceive even well-intentioned people by assuming an innocent and commendable appearance. Amongst these may be mentioned discontent, human respect, an uncontrolled tongue, ill-temper, discouragement, conceit. The seriousness of these is that they are harboured by good people, when sin has been driven out, in ignorance that they do sin's work.

Discontent

This is the great fault of the good. "There is no harm in being dissatisfied," they will say. Or they will call it ambition, and make a virtue of the turmoil which it makes in their minds. There would be some advantage in discontent if it spurred us on to aim at better things. But unhappily, discontent tends only to make us despise what we have. So warped are we by it that we envy today in someone else what yesterday we scorned in ourselves.

Now, this spirit of discontent particularly concerns us when it sets up the delusion that our particular mode of life and surroundings are unsuited to sanctity. Very often we entertain the thought as a holy one. We feel sure we could be Saints if God made us Priests or Nuns, or indeed anything else but what we happen to be.

Than such a delusion, no greater obstacle to progress can exist. The conditions of each man's life, as it is, are the raw materials out of which he has to fashion his future. Disbelief in the possibilities of doing any good with what he has is unlikely to lead to effort. A man is just as likely to start digging in his back garden for diamonds, as to seek for the jewels of sanctity where he does not believe they exist.

It may be that our present manner of life really is unfavorable to higher things. If this be so, God will in good time open up another door to us, that is, provided we are doing our duty in making the best of what we now have. Most probably, however, far from being unfavorable, our present life is just the only one which will bring us to sanctity. God, Who sees all things, did not choose it over all others for us without ample reason. By discontent we are setting ourselves up as judges over His actions. Now let us pay Him the compliment of thinking deeply over this, and then bind ourselves with a stern resolution to put away every such disturbing thought. Its place will be filled by a grace. A calm will steadily grow up within us. We will find ourselves less and less put out by the worries of everyday life. We are getting on.

When Discontent is Banished

Those who have always been in the close friendship of God cannot fully value the greatness of this treasure peace of mind which they have always possessed. But to those who have known the opposite, this feeling of calm, as it develops, carries a plain message of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the soul. One is on the way to that tranquillity which was a notable feature in the lives of the Saints. For instance, it is written of St. Vincent Ferrer: "Whether in the streets, or the choir, or his own cell, or preaching, or on a journey, or whatever he did, he was always tranquil because he made an oratory in his heart, and there conversed uninterruptedly with God without any outward thing disturbing him.

Another Big Obstacle - Human Respect

The danger of Human Respect is not sufficiently recognized. In almost every Catholic it is a weak spot. In the case of some, it is a defect so grave as to put real holiness out of the question. Human Respect may be defined as the putting of the opinion of others in the place of our conscience. It sets up ridicule and unpopularity as the thing most to be avoided even at the risk of offending against truth and principle. Beginning in small things, if constantly yielded to Human Respect brings about a general lowering of principle. A state of mind is reached which is as different from sanctity as chalk is from cheese.

You have always been in the habit of blessing yourself when at your meals. When not at home, through a form, of shame, you do not do this. This is Human Respect.

You always touch your hat as you pass a Church - except when with Protestants? You would not have a religious picture in your drawing room. You are shy about making the Stations of the Cross. You would be mortified if your Rosary Beads fell from your pocket in Protestant company or in the bus. All these are signs of the disease we are discussing.

In a word, you are so taken up with making your conduct acceptable to others that you have no room for the thought that God might have been pleased by these little open professions of Faith. You have treated Him as the rich are supposed to treat their poor relations - *acknowledging them in private, ignoring them in public.*

In the life of St. Philip Neri, we read how that Saint was in the habit of imposing very humiliating penances upon his disciples in his anxiety to destroy in them any trace of this mean spirit. Such practices would nowadays be termed extreme. Here is a suggestion which is not extreme. It will help anyone resolved upon the destruction of this failing. Wear openly something Catholic; some little devotional badge or emblem that will mark you as a Catholic, who is not ashamed to be known as one. The feeling of unwillingness to do this which will come to many, is the best test of its value; it is the spirit you seek to kill that is protesting in you.

Such objection as: "I don't believe in badge-wearing," and "I don't believe in making a parade of my religion," are usually not sincere. Those who speak in this way seldom seem to have any objection to wearing political or trade badges. Be honest with yourself. The trouble is that you are not really proud of being a Catholic. It is human nature to publish the fact if you are.

The priest and the nun advertise themselves to the world for what they are. Let the laity also, in the little ways that are open to them, confess Christ before men that He may one day confess them before His Father in Heaven. But in this let there be wholesome moderation. Do nothing that will earn for yourself the name of mere eccentricity, for this would destroy much of your influence. To cover yourself with religious emblems or to make an unnecessary show of devotion in a Church is to err in this way.

Discouragement and Pride

This spiritual value of any work you do is not to be judged by the little or much result you see from it, but by the purity of intention and the effort which you have put into it. The powerful sermon or book that converts many might bring less merit to its author than the smallest act of self-sacrifice. Thus it is as foolish to be discouraged by lack of visible results as it is to be puffed up by apparent success. Many average people have seen wonderful things come of their labours, while Saints often have been faced with constant failure.

Whatever you take up - act well your part. Let this be your only concern. Be not anxious for results, which may bring conceit - one touch of which can destroy the beauty of any work in God's sight. Should some success cause stings of self-conceit, summon common sense to your side to tell you how little self-denial there is in your life; how little you do; and how much more you could easily do if you liked. And then contrast yourself with those multitudes of good people over the world who have given up everything for the Master's sake, and yet count themselves as idlers in His sight.

Let your frequent prayer be: "Jesus, meek and humble of heart - make my heart like unto Thy Heart." If you become perfectly humble, God will certainly use you for some great work. O Jesus, I desire to become a saint - not that I may be great, but that You may be greatly loved.

WEAPONS AND AIDS

Devotion to Mary



"Show me how you say your hail Mary's," said a great Saint, "and I will tell you how to love God." The fingertips of the other Saints - hardened by the use of their beads - show this same idea in practice.

You must have a tremendous love for Mary. Read and pray, and pray again, until you get that love. Implore Our Lord to give you just the love for her that He would wish you to have. A great love for her is a great sign of sanctity.

Do not treat her only as the Queen of all Saints. She is much more than that. She is the most beloved Daughter of the Father, the Mother of the Son, and the Spouse of the Holy Spirit. When you pray to any one of these Three Divine Persons, let her be near to recommend your prayer.

And she is also our Mother. Is this idea real to us? The love of our own dear earthly mothers is a wonderful thing. What seas of fire and water would they not go through for us! Yet their love is faint and weak compared with hers.

There is a beautiful traditional custom which unhappily seems less common than it was - the consecration of babies by their parents to this Blessed Mother. The terrible power of the Evil One over the bodies of people possessed by him should be the best recommendation of this Devotion. More than he can do for evil, a million fold, she can do for good. Let us consecrate to her not only our children, but ourselves in the most solemn manner - remembering that what belongs to Mary is all for Jesus.

St. Joseph



Our Lord and His blessed Mother looked to St. Joseph for their daily bread. What wonder then that the Church tells us: "Go to Joseph." He was very dear to the Saints. In particular that great master of prayer - St. Teresa has glowing things to say of the fruits of devotion to him. There seems to be no occupation or condition of life which cannot claim some point of likeness to him, from which to draw encouragement. Above all, as the Patron of those who work hard and are hard used, we address ourselves to him, knowing that to be like him in this way brings at once the arms of the Divine Babe around us. We might make a frequent practice of saying some little prayer to him, such as "St. Joseph, called Father by Jesus pray for us." This was his greatest dignity.

The Necessity of Spiritual Reading

Read good literature; get others to read good literature; and later, all of us will do good deeds.

We must form a taste for religious literature. It must take a definite place in each day. From it we will acquire an interest in our religion; extend our knowledge of the doctrines of the Church; learn of its history, glories, institutions, opponents, and be able to answer the innumerable questions and objections which constantly proceed from friend and enemy.

There is a dearth of good religious libraries. Probably we shall have to buy the books we wish most to read. But let there be a little sacrifice, an occasional book purchased and read thoroughly, and more than once. If an author has put deep thought into his work, this will not be appreciated in one reading. After that, let its mission be not to gather dust, but souls. Send it on a busy apostolic round amongst those friends who can be trusted to return a borrowed book. Some good religious periodical should enter our home regularly - one which will keep us in touch with the wideworld doings of the Universal Church.

We Must Read the Lives of the Saints

We were taught to read by means of a headline. Unconsciously, we shape our lives by some headlines, too: God's purpose in bringing about the Canonization of the Saints was to provide a headline which would draw us on to goodness and heroism.

Saints are the doctrines and practices of holiness made visible. If we frequent their company, we will soon imitate their qualities.

The Question of the Newspaper

We are inclined to think it necessary to read the daily papers in order to keep in touch with what is going on in the world. Let us beware lest they place us in the world's grip.

The modern newspaper is so well written, so attractive to the eye, that it tends to become an absorbing taste. It is a tendency of the day to wallow in the daily papers.

Endless discussion, a prejudiced outlook, a little scrappy knowledge, a distaste for serious or good literature, loss of power of concentration, faulty memory such are the products of those wasted hours during which God's Kingdom could have been so powerfully advanced.

Meditation, Realization, Action

Reading is a direct preparation for prayer and intimacy with God. To meditate on religious matters, one must have read, otherwise there is nothing to meditate on. The lamp has no oil. But, read slowly and think upon what has been read.

Books rapidly run through and unreflected upon are as valueless as food eaten but not digested. We must, therefore, accuse ourselves of waste of time if we read without the desire to profit by our reading. Yet such is our ordinary habit. We do not meditate, hence we do not realize. We leave in the unexplored depths of our souls the divine truths which should be governing our intellects and driving us on to great things. There is a wonderful difference between merely believing and realizing. Here are some truths we all believe in:

1. Death is inevitable - then judgment.
2. Grace is the greatest possession in the world.
3. Sin even venial - is infinitely the greatest misfortune in the world.

Now to what extent do we realize these truths and act upon them? And again. We know that the Infinite God became Man for our sake: not a King - He wanted love, not fear - but the shivering babe of poor people; a rough handed working-man; a homeless wanderer - one might almost say an out-cast and then He was taken and tortured and put on a cross to die, an object of contempt; all, that He might win our love or even our pity, which is akin to love.

Oh ! the horror of it ! Saints have cried out in anguish to think that love so great should be so unwanted by the world. For so it is! The Crucifix is only a piece of wood or metal to us. We have tears for any friend but Him! ... Loyalty for every cause but His! .. and why? Because we neglected the means which common-sense directs us to use. Prayer and meditation would make Him real and vivid to us; but in our indifference, we leave Him a shadow - and who can love a shadow? Thus it is we miss the greatest force in the world - that personal love for Jesus, which looks for no reward, laughs at death, makes sacrifice delightful, and sanctity easy.

Meditation is so Very Difficult

There are very many who really are unable to meditate in a regular manner.

These should not be so discouraged as to avoid meditation altogether. Meditation is very advisable, and some such simple method as the following can be used.

Endeavouring to bring the Master vividly before our minds, we must attentively consider that Divine Model. His slender Form, and serene, lovely Face, His words, His actions - take them one by one, and as best we can reflect upon them with affection. What an incomparable beauty beams forth in all! Such mildness, wisdom, purity, patience, tenderness; and a love which is true to us in all our waywardness and disloyalty. Look and admire, and seek to draw a breath of their loveliness into ourselves.

We can take consolation from this....we do not seek fruitlessly. The treasury of perfection in Him is not like the treasures of the world, behind bars or in museums - to be admired but not possessed. Each perfection shining in Jesus is there solely to be communicated to us. With all His Heart, He desires to give them to us. So look on them, and long to have them, and they will become yours.

Of this simple character may be our meditation. No regular system is necessary, though it helps. There need be no effort, resolutions even - only a wish to love Him and to be like Him. Yet our advance will be by leaps and bounds. And why is this? It is because, as theologians put it, Our Lord and His qualities are not only holy but sanctifying: that is, the mere looking upon them with good intentions will imprint them on our hearts and make them part of us.

And let our gaze be as Mary's must have been. Ask her help in this contemplation. It was her employment from the night she first looked upon her new-born babe's face.

I Am Not Able to Meditate At All

Those to whom even a simple form of meditation is difficult, will find it very profitable to take some spiritual book before the Blessed Sacrament, and then very slowly to read it - more in the manner of prayer than of ordinary reading.

Pause frequently - after all, every second word represents an idea - and frequently speak to the Eucharistic Presence. The longer one spends on each sentence, the better. Ability to dwell on the reading for a time means that a very satisfactory form of meditation is being made.

Our Work for Our Neighbor

The fact that God in His Providence has left us in the world, instead of giving us a religious vocation, indicates that He wishes the world to be our vocation. That is, the persons and everyday things around us are to be the means of sanctity to us. It may be taken that the practical service of our neighbor is essential for our all round development. We should bear in mind that serving our neighbor out of love of God means that what we do to him we do to God.

The Influence We Can Exert

The power each one of us has to influence others to good or evil is so great that it is almost without limit. The explanation of this is that when God finds a willing, a humble, a dependable worker, He uses him as a channel for His grace to others.

And horrible to say, there are many who lend themselves in similar manner to be the instruments of the Devil, and accept the dreadful destiny of aiding him in his work.

Although on names such as St. Paul, St. Dominic, St. Francis of Assisi, and on the other hand, Luther or Voltaire, will serve to show what it lies in one man to do - to influence a whole world, century after century.

Man is small, but a man who is in earnest about an idea is not small. He is going to influence others, and nobody knows where that is going to end. Let our dominating idea be the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

Trials that show Progress

Certain trials may be expected. We shall be sneered at as would-be Saints, milksops, and upbraided with narrow mindedness and intolerance.

The latter charge should be welcome to us. It lifts us out of that numerous class who are considered and consider themselves as broadminded, when in reality they are only trimmers. Yet the charge possesses just a grain of truth which will make it hurtful to us. For, to have definite rules of principle and conduct does mean that we shall appear narrow to those who are not similarly hampered. It is part of the penalty of being right.

Some Responsibilities of Holiness

To become associated in people's minds with religion, as you undoubtedly will if you work for it, involves a responsibility. It may be unreasonable of them, but nevertheless people will judge religion in general from you. If you play a manly part, you are doing religion a benefit in making it attractive to others. If you make yourself a Universal Good Samaritan, whose tongue like St. Alphonsus Liguori's does not know how to say harsh or sarcastic things, and whose deeds are in keeping - you will draw men to you, and better still, you will make them love God, because in your goodness they will catch a glimpse of Him.

On the other hand, if you are careless at your work, dirty in your dress, mean in your conduct, you have done your religion an injury. It sinks into the gutter with yourself. It is a big thing that Christ should thus have placed His honour in your keeping. If you are but half a man, it will stimulate you. Furthermore, it means that even the more worldly side of your life, your work in the factory or in your home, in the technical school or university or trade union, your athletics, your music, your painting, so on, can all be made to tell for Him in a very practical way.

Attacks Against the Church

Wherever you go, at your work or in clubs or societies, you will hear difficulties raised and questions asked which, perhaps, strike at the foundations of the Church or of Faith itself and in aiding others, do not forget the danger to yourself.

Many of these objections you will be able to meet effectively from your own knowledge. Others may appear so strong as to frighten you. It is useful then to reason thus to oneself: "Whatever the objection is, there is an answer to it. All these difficulties have been raised and answered before. Great men have in all ages endeavoured to pick holes in the doctrine of the Church, and they and their philosophies have gone, while the Church lives on.' Always remember that the truth of Catholic doctrines does not depend on your ability to prove them true. Ten lifetimes would not be long enough to satisfy oneself on every point. The real proof of them lies in the declaration of the Church, which is the pillar and the ground of truth.

So do not let what someone in the works has said unsettle you. Let his objection - even if it raises a difficulty in your mind - only give you the opportunity for an Act of Faith: "I don't understand, Dear Lord, but I believe because the Church teaches it, and the Church is infallible." Read the promise of Our Lord: "Upon this Rock I will build My Church . . . and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it." Then hear the words of Lord Macaulay, who was no friend of the Church, and see how that promise stands after nineteen centuries: When we reflect on the tremendous assaults which the Catholic Church has survived, we find it difficult to conceive in what way she is to perish."

The Call to Good Works

In times of retreat, or at your prayers, or by the invitation of a friend, a call to some good work will come. It may be from on high, so do not lightly refuse. You may miss your life's vocation. St. Augustine speaks solemn words: "Fear Jesus passing by . . . He may not again pass your way."

How we can do Big Things

With industry, self-sacrifice, and some knowledge of human nature, we can all produce results: (a) by organizing - by making things ready for people who will not make them ready for themselves; (b) by bringing to people, who would never get them for themselves, things which will benefit them; (c) by appealing individually to people who would never respond to a general appeal.

In other words, we are to be the bridge that covers the chasm between what people will do of themselves and what God wants them to do. For example:

1. A Pilgrimage is organized. Everything is cut-and-dried. All that one has to do is to buy the ticket and take one's place. One thousand persons go. Would any have gone had the Pilgrimage and its details never been arranged?
2. An appeal is made from a pulpit to support a certain religious publication. Only a handful of people respond. A house-to-house canvass later on, bringing the paper directly under the people's notice, produces hundreds of fresh readers.
3. Everybody in a town knows the needs of a local charity. Yet few subscribe, until a door-to-door call is organized. Then all give.

"Thou Shalt Love Thy Neighbor As Thyself"

The foregoing are only indications of what might be done. Your own tastes, surroundings, conscience, will suggest many powerful means of benefiting your own soul by benefiting the souls of other people. "Love thy neighbor as thyself" is a hard saying. But keep in mind Who said it, and neglect no way of helping others on towards good. Ask St. Vincent de Paul, who is the Patron of all such works, to inspire you with knowledge of what will suit you best. Perhaps you might make a beginning by joining the Society which bears his name.

Here are some additional suggestions:

1. You know an excellent Sodality. Work hard for it. Be prefect of a guild. Train the sub-prefect to do the work, and then when you are sure you can be done without form another guild for yourself. Thus you will increase the Sodality membership and keep yourself keen.
2. You know a night-school which sends many of its pupils into the Priesthood or the Convent. Tell anybody who might be interested. Many will join, and their settling down to work will be just the final step which will turn into solid resolutions what otherwise would never be anything but hazy desires.
3. There is some organization which you know has produced great spiritual improvement in its members. Bring your friends into it.
4. There is a religious magazine or paper which you think good. Extend its circulation.
5. You know someone who has the gift of making those he meets enlist themselves in social work. Introduce people to him.
6. You have read a book which did you great good. Buy a copy or two and lend it round.

Promoting the Week-End Retreats

You might work for the Enclosed Retreats, those drilling-grounds of Christian perfection - as the latest Pontiff has termed them - producing wherever they exist, hosts of tireless workers in the cause of religion, sanctifying the good, uplifting the degraded.

If you would wish to see far-reaching good accomplished, here is your means to hand, speedy and certain.

So where these Retreats are, organise for them, spread abroad the idea of them, and where they are not yet established, aim to have this done.

Breaking New Ground

Perhaps you could band together others in association to do good, and give the first impulse to what St. Vincent calls the sacred contagion of charity.

Start a little organization. Gather a few around you for some good work. Hold a regular meeting weekly, if possible - and discuss your little efforts under the auspices of prayer. You have it on His own word that He, Who can make your efforts fruitful, is there in the midst of you.

Do not soar too high. Do not be over-anxious. Look above all to the routine duties and the small details of the meeting. A punctual start, carefully-written minutes attendance-roll regularly marked up, discussion of business and business only, affection among the members, these - far more than organizing ability or exceptional workers - will ensure a lasting success.

It cannot be overemphasized that the progress and the permanence of the organization depend upon the meetings, and that the meetings in turn depend upon the system, the prayerfulness, and the fraternity which are found in them. Act mindfully of this: face calmly the inevitable ups and downs and your work may be multiplied exceedingly. All the great movements have had just such simple origins.

Some Homely Ways of Doing Great Work

The following are some of the many ways in which a multitude of men and women are spending their free time serving God. Judgment Day alone will show the joy they have given Him, and the good they have effected. The few examples given will make it clear that such work is within the capacity of anyone with perseverance.

The Catechism Teacher

- The saintly Pius X was once asked by a lady who was desirous of doing some really good work for God, what he would suggest to her. He surprised her by answering: "Teach children the Catechism."
- Take a class and put your heart into it. Acquire a large stock of anecdotes by which you can both train and interest these little ones who are, as has been beautifully said, wax to receive, marble to retain. Many of them will some day do great things for God. And it will be through you.

The Holy Childhood

Organise and run, with the sanction of your Parish Priest, a branch of the Holy Childhood. Keep a double object in view: first, the spreading of devotion to the Foreign Missions together with the aiding of them financially; and secondly, to get into touch with the children, who by the rules have to pay their little subscriptions once a month. Let them pay in person. Get to know them well. Tell them stories, and teach them little devotions and the art of making sacrifices. Tell them to collect used postage stamps; the practice itself is a prayer, and the stamps are valued on the

Foreign Missions.

Such a work can be made the mould of Saints. Not that you will see a wonderful advance suddenly made by the children. That is not their way. But do you keep on without slacking and the years to come will see a rich harvest of holiness from amongst them.

Visiting the Sick

- The first concern of St. Ignatius of Loyola and his companions on coming to each new town was to visit the sick in the hospitals, knowing that in doing this, they did it to Christ Himself.
- Pick some hospital, by preference a workhouse hospital, and find one or more of the very many patients who are without friends or visitors. Be you both friend and visitor to them. Visit them regularly. Your smiling face and cheerful words will make your visits longed for. And what wonderful prayers will ring up to high Heaven for you from these poor suffering ones of Christ, whom you have succored.

Spreading Good Literature

- There are many who act as promoters for a certain valuable little religious periodical, packed full of instructions in simple and interesting form. These promoters have worked up a list of people who are willing to subscribe to the paper, and month by month each home is visited - and it is delivered. Father, mother and children will read it and be influenced by it. It is the setting up in the home of a regular lighthouse of grace.
- A poor widow had a large family and had to work hard during the day to keep them. Yet the day began with Mass and Holy Communion. She had almost a hundred subscribers who took this periodical. She delivered it herself to their widely scattered homes in the evenings when she must have craved for rest. She knew all their families well and used this intimacy to interest them in those things that were dearest to her own heart: Daily Mass and Communion, the Apostleship of Prayer, the Maynooth Mission to China.
- And again. Some years ago in New York a negro washerwoman, who had spent her life in just this same way, received a semi-public funeral and was laid to rest amid the mourning of thousands to whom her face had constantly been a needed reminder of their duty to God.
- Loving Jesus and making Him loved. .. There it is in practice! Who can assess the true value of such lives?

The Duly Authorised Outdoor Collector

His or her little book in hand showing the sanction and approval of the Parish Priest, the outdoor collector may be seen, usually on a Sunday, toiling up long flights of tenement stairs, diving into alleys and back lanes where the most charitable of all people the poor - live. Here he gets week by week his pennies and twopence for some Church Building Fund, or other charitable work sanctioned by the Parish Priest.

Always a holy work, his round may be made a genuine apostolate. He need not take up a preaching tone. A quiet word here and there can do all the work. And he can add to his words weapons more powerful - the Scapulars, Medals, Badges, approved by the Church. In spreading devotion to these he is setting up channels along which grace will certainly flow.

He finds time for a short chat in each home, and he is keenly interested in each member of the family. How are the Children's Communions? Are Paddy and Molly enrolled in the Brown Scapular? Here is a miraculous medal for one and a little picture for another. He has an eye to see that the elders are in some Sodality.

He probably has the father in his own guild.

He does not talk about what is in the papers. They know enough about that without him. Besides, he may differ in opinion from some, which often results in hot words, bitterness left behind and his influence gone. There is more than enough to talk of in the shape of Church and Parish matters, the private concerns of the family, and occasionally a suggestion about the First Fridays Devotion, the Enthronement of the Sacred Heart, etc. Many are the Stories he relates of the blessing of the Family Rosary, and the way in which it saved the Faith in the Black Times. His reference to the approaching Missions will be more powerful than poster covered walls. Moreover, people will talk about their neighbors. So he will gain a good knowledge of his district, and his report on anything amiss is always useful to the Priest. And it will come to this, that his very step, his face, will be like a breath of religion to all, and a special reminder to those that are negligent. People will go to Mass or the Sacraments simply because they saw him and it reminded them of their neglect.

THE SECRET OF INFLUENCING OTHERS

There is an art in the moving of others, and those that work for their neighbor must study it. Do not say "I cannot," or "I am not fitted," or "Nobody heeds me." For there is one thing that can clothe you with power in your dealings with others affection for them. This is the great secret of all real influence. To possess it, follow this simple rule - Look only for good qualities in anyone you meet; you will find them. Never look for faults, for you would find them. Act thus, and you will easily develop the habit of love. Convince those around you, by deeds, not phrases, that you truly have this feeling for them, and you can lead them where you like.

GOD IN HIS WORKS

All Things are but Signposts that Point to God

We have been considering at some length methods of serving God. Let us try to remember they are only methods. There is always a tendency for the interest of any work to absorb us so that we forget why and for Whom we began it. It is natural that this should happen. The work is visible; the supernatural is not; and we unthinkingly allow the visible things to push the supernatural into the background of our lives. This takes from the value of all our acts as offerings to God.

Instead, a little thoughtfulness would turn those very things which were inclined to lead us away from God, into visible reminders of His presence in the world. When we see a Church, even though it is only a spire in the distance, it induces a feeling of reverence at the thought of His Presence with us in the Eucharist. But then Churches are rare. We want that feeling of reverence over all our life. We can make it habitual if we cultivate the practice of seeing Him in all things.

In the beginning He created all things from nothing. But he did not then cease to work. It requires His omnipotent power to keep all these things there now. Were His Hand removed this second from any object we see, it would at once disappear from our vision into its original nothingness. Thus everything we see should tell us that God's Hand is upon it. A sense of awe should fill us to think that we can touch what He is touching. The waving leaves on the trees tell us of the presence of the breeze which we do not see. Why not make trees and leaves and wind, and all else around us, speak plainly to us of the wonderful Power which holds them in existence? We pick up an insect, or a flower, or bread, or a book. Each one proclaims Him to the thoughtful mind.

St. Bonaventure said of St. Francis of Assisi that he made everything in nature a step in the ladder by which he went to Heaven. He loved the very stones beneath his feet because there were the works of his Creator. All the Saints saw without effort God in His works. Everything was a cause of prayer to them. But there was a time when they were only beginners as we are. They persevered; shall we?

You are the Temple of the Holy Spirit, Who is in You

In considering God in His works around us, we are not to forget His presence in ourselves. It is of Catholic doctrine that the Holy Spirit makes a dwelling in anyone who is free from mortal sin. Life would be greatly brightened if we could bring home to ourselves this wonderful truth.

How could we ever again feel sorrowful, or lonely, or think ourselves poor! If we consider God in His heavenly Kingdom, we are apt to think of Him as at a great distance. We know Him as a loving Father, but this sense of remoteness diminishes the sense of His protection. Rather let us think of Him living in each of us - giving our hearts their beat and listening to our inmost thoughts. Look at the great Sun blazing in the sky with enough light and heat for the entire world. He Who made it is within us with a Glory infinitely greater.

There is holiness in the very thought of this; and the idea of sin as something that will drive out this Divine Tenant acquires a clearer and more repulsive meaning.



A small survivor with the Holy Spirit

Heaven and Earth are Full of Thy Glory

The greatness and the loveliness of God, being infinite, cannot while we live be measured by us. We can only feebly search after an idea of them by representing to ourselves the pick and cream of what we know, and then trying to raise our minds above that.

Take from what is around, all that is delightful, mighty, pure, exquisite, glorious. Gaze upon them, and their beauty takes the very breath away. But their beauty is only the shadow of His Beauty. In the light of this truth, will not the delicate flower, or sky tinted with splendor, speak to us with a new meaning? Before, we admired them for what they are; now rather, let us reverence them for what they suggest.

God's Dealing with Men

His goodness is equally beyond our comprehension. Our Lord's life on earth, or the Host and Chalice lifted up in the Mass, should give us an idea of the depth of the love He has for each individual one of us, however wretched.

We are being dealt with in a princely way. One of the first results of our increases in holiness will be the gradual realization of the wonderful goodness which is lavished upon us from morning until night. We grumble at the apparent afflictions and punishments that come to us, though each one of them bears, as the saying is, a jewel in its head. We are blind to the fact that nothing which is the bearer of a blessing can really be punishment at all.

God is good.....Let this be the great thought whenever the shadows thicken.

There is nothing from Him which is not kind though it may seem hard. Whether it is one of those things that people dread most, such as death, or cancer, or bankruptcy; or only a headache, we may be sure it is for the best. There is some hidden mercy in it. God is good... God is so good.

Trust as a Characteristic of the Saints

In this spirit of trusting faith did the Saints receive whatever came to them. Aware that they were enfolded in the arms of a loving Providence, it was equally a cause of thanks to them whether they were cradled to the left or to the right. This holy spirit is not beyond imitation by all, for we see it in the poor of our day.

The greatest calamity is met with fortitude. There is no Cross but breaks a heavier," they will observe. and then - even though the tears are falling fast "God's will be done; welcome be the Holy Will of God." We must follow the holy ones of all times in this childlike confidence, this perfect knowledge that He is their Good Father.

Our Love for Him

Our hearts were made to hold the biggest and the purest of loves. For nothing less than this did God intend them. It is dishonoring such vessels to keep in them a love based only on motives of reward or punishment, wholesome though these are. So let us try to send our love for the Good Shepherd to summits far above such thoughts of self, and love Him . "not that in Heaven we may reign . . . not to escape eternal pain . . . nor in the hope of gain" ... but for Himself, and that we may satisfy with something clean that great love of His which craves for our love.

And as this pure love strengthens in our hearts, it will soon, like the eagle, grow impatient even of the mountain peaks, and hunger after heights of heights, till with the little Flower - we will cry out in longing: "Jesus! . . . Jesus! . . . I would so wish to love you... love you as you never yet have been loved."



Nihil Obstat:
Joseph P. Newth. C.C.,
Censor Theol. Deput.
Imprimi Potest: X IOANNES CAROLUS,
Archiep. Dublinen,
Hiberniae Primas.
Dublini die 8th Julii ano 1958

