

CATHOLIC DISCIPLINE

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8

DAILY HABITS
TOWARD LIVING A
HOLIER LIFE

“Simply I learned about [Wisdom], and ungrudgingly do I share -
her riches I do not hide away;
For to men she is an unfailing treasure;
those who gain this treasure win the friendship of God,
to whom the gifts they have from **discipline** commend them.”

-*Divine Office,*
Common of Doctors of the Church

We are wired to become better than we currently are in every aspect of our lives. Innately, we know that our current state is not where we need to be and so we take the necessary steps to develop the skills to rise to a higher level. Athletes train with passion and deny themselves unhealthy diets to win the crown of victory. Chefs seek out the best ingredients and analyze every recipe until their pallets are satiated. Writers spend countless hours writing, editing, and revising their words until they have articulated their message with perfect clarity.

There is nothing worthwhile in life that comes without discipline.

As Catholics, there is nothing more worthwhile than attaining the ultimate degree of spiritual perfection. And doing so is no different than the athlete, the chef, the writer, etc. To rise to the highest of spiritual clarity, we must become intentional in our approach and disciplined in our pursuit of God.

The words *disciple* and *discipline* come from the same Latin root word, *discipere*, which means “to grasp intellectually, analyze thoroughly.”¹ It would make sense then that, in order for anyone to grow in holiness as a disciple of Jesus Christ, they must first take intentional steps toward grasping him intellectually and analyzing him thoroughly. After all, it was He who gave us these conditions for discipleship; “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself,* take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”²

¹ Online Etymology Dictionary

² Mat. 16: 24-25

So, how do we know when we've "made it?" How do we know when we've "lost" our lives in order to become a true disciple of God?

We look to the Saints.

Hagiography: (noun) biography of saints or venerated persons.

What I've discovered in my life-long study of the hagiography is that all of the Saints I've met through my research, without exception, have shared a common discipline in their spiritual development. Granted, they all lived out their charitable lives in unique ways due to their talents, the time periods in which they lived, etc., but as a whole, they all shared 8 specific traits that led to their sanctity.

These 8 traits are a template, a mold that anyone can use even today to accomplish the same results. Discover how to accomplish these eight daily habits and I guarantee you'll receive the unfailing treasure of Wisdom, whose gifts you receive from discipline will turn you into his *disciple*.

This short ebook contains the 8 traits that all of the Saints possessed which helped them, through discipline, to attain holiness in God's grace. Each section consists of:

- An introduction to the trait
- A conclusion that provides ways can apply that trait to your daily life



TJ BURDICK

T.J. Burdick the author of several books and articles on the Catholic faith. He writes and speaks on how to grow in holiness amongst the distractions and difficulties of the current age. He resides in Grand Rapids, MI, with his wife and four children. When he is not spending time with his family or writing books, you can find him teaching courses on the Catholic faith through Signum Dei (signumdei.com), an online learning platform that serves students of every age and ability.

Marian Devotion

To me, this was the most surprising of all of the traits I found to be common amongst the Saints. Why? Because for a long while, I always considered Jesus to be the *only* friend we needed in heaven. Why bother with his mother, a mere creature, when you had a direct link to the God-man Himself?

It turns out that the first step toward understanding how to become disciplined in holiness is to honor Our Lord's Mother with great intentionality. She was the only human in the history of the world to be chosen specifically for the purpose of shaping, molding, and developing God so that he could accomplish his earthly mission. She is known under many titles, but for all who desire to become true disciples, she is Our Lady Seat of Wisdom, through whom we learn to walk, talk, and act like Jesus upon her motherly lap.

It follows for all of Christ's disciples that if we desire to become more like Jesus, we must follow the commandments to perfection as he did. Specifically, we must honor not only our physical mother and father, but also our spiritual Father in heaven and our spiritual mother, Mary, who intercedes for us with special attention.

The more the Saints loved this most perfect creation and fountain of Grace, the more holy they became.

How to Grow in Marian Devotion

Pray the Rosary. Aside from attending Mass, the Rosary is the single greatest thing you can do to both honor Our Lady and grow in wisdom. According to the Apostolic Letter, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, "Mary constantly sets before the faithful the 'mysteries' of her Son, with the desire that the contemplation of those mysteries will release all their saving power. In the recitation of the Rosary, the Christian community enters into contact with the memories and the contemplative gaze of Mary." (RVM, 11)

ST. MAXIMILIAN KOLBE

St. Maximilian Kolbe was one of the most devoted men to Our Blessed Lady. He worked tirelessly to become more holy through her example and protection. He wrote hundreds of prayers and devotions to Our Lady and, at the end of his life, was given the double crowns of purity and martyrdom.



Detachment

Every biography I've read on the Saints has this key phrase that pops out shortly after their conversion: "And they sold all of their possessions and lived a life of simplicity." The path toward sanctity is not paved in gold nor garnished with bells and whistles; it is a path of detachment to the things of the world so as to attach one's self to the one thing that matters most: God.

The idea of detachment can be traced back to Jesus himself who sent his apostles out on their first missions. He told them to carry only the tunic on their back and a walking stick. No money. No food. No phone. Nothing but the wisdom they had been given to preach and the power they had received to heal.

It is the paradox of our faith that in order to become fulfilled to the highest spiritual degree, one must empty themselves of all worldly desires so as to become open to receiving God's outpouring love. As stated in an antiphon during evening prayer of the Divine Office, "If you hunger for holiness, God will satisfy your longing, **good measure, and flowing over.**" The catch is, you must be detached to everything else that isn't God in order to receive Him fully.

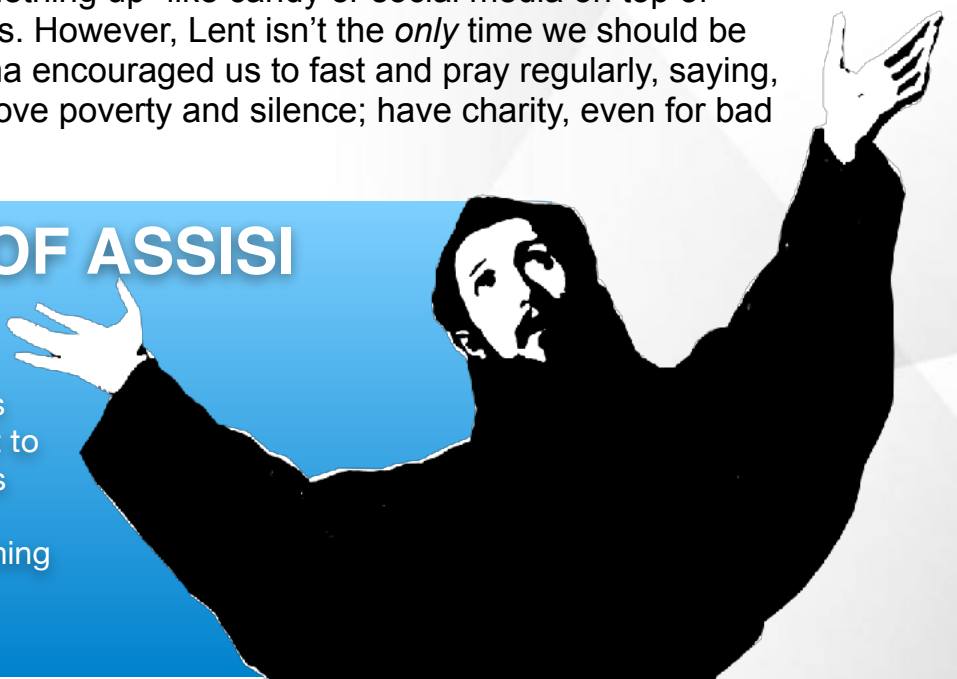
When you do this successfully, you follow what Jesus said when he spoke, "But seek first the kingdom [of God] and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides" (Mat. 6:33). It is in losing yourself to what God desires for you that you receive that what you most desire. When your unaltered heart is given to God in thought, word and deed, he molds you into the perfect version of yourself, the Saint that you were meant to be.

How to Practice Detachment

Fast. There is nothing more liberating for your soul than consistent fasting from the things that distract us most from our relationship with God. During Lent, we are accustomed to "give something up" like candy or social media on top of observing no meat on Fridays. However, Lent isn't the *only* time we should be doing this. Our Lady of Fatima encouraged us to fast and pray regularly, saying, "Fly from riches and luxury; love poverty and silence; have charity, even for bad people."

ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

St. Francis of Assisi based his entire ministry on detachment to worldly things. He gave up his own wealth to live a life of poverty, swearing to own nothing and giving all to the poor.



Study

The deposit of faith is so rich that you could dig into the depths of theology and philosophy for a lifetime and never cease to uncover the invaluable diamonds of knowledge and wisdom. God's grace abounds in the soul that seeks him fervently. According to the book of Isaiah, "He who practices virtue and speaks honestly... stopping his ears lest he hear of bloodshed, closing his eyes lest he look on evil. He shall dwell on the heights, his stronghold shall be the rocky fastness, his food and drink in steady supply" (Is. 33:15-16).

So, how do we seek God? The same way we seek any successful venture; we study.

The process by which we become better at any given skill consists of intentional practice and study. Want to become the next Steve Jobs? Start with learning code. Want to become a master pianist? Start with a few DIY lessons on YouTube. Do you desire to grow in your knowledge of God? **Study**.

The Saints studied. They watched and learned from the greatest teachers, namely those who they served and God who prepared them for this service. For some, this meant spending years earning doctorates at the most prestigious universities of their time. For others, their learning occurred in the difficult terrains of missionary territories where there wasn't a school for miles.

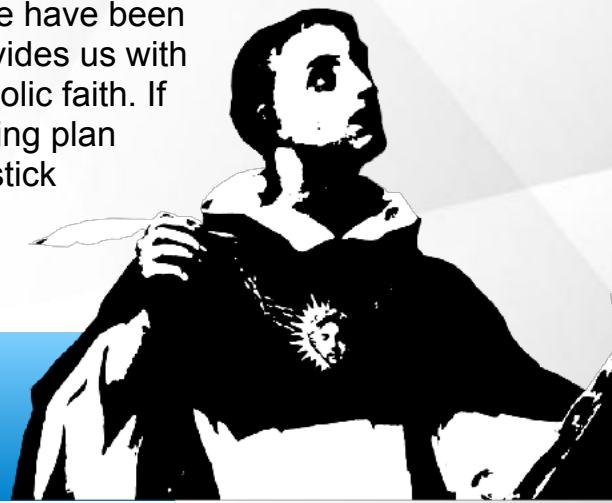
To "study" isn't just discovery through reading, it is capturing the truth of a subject through every lens at every possible angle. The Saints did this regardless of their intellectual abilities and educational opportunities. They came to know God through contemplation, silence, and the abstraction of the things and people around them so as to understand the essence of each being in their relation to God. In doing so they became the fulfillment of the prophet Daniel's words when he wrote, "Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever" (Dan. 12:3).

How to Study

Learn. We were made to pursue God intellectually. We have been given an unprecedented gift in the Internet, which provides us with an almost limitless array of study material for our Catholic faith. If you are savvy enough, you can create your own learning plan using the infinite resources the Internet provides and stick to it. Or, if you'd prefer, join our learning community at signumdei.com where there is always a new course being taught to help you understand your faith.

ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

An intellectual giant, St. Thomas wrote more than 1.5 million words in his *Summa Theologica* alone!



Prayer

The most fruitful trait in this book if you desire to become a Saint is prayer. Everything in life can be a distraction to your sanctity except prayer. Conversing with Our Lord takes on many shapes and forms, but communication is what surrounds us with the “cloud of witnesses” (Heb. 12:1) that we know to be the communion of Saints through whom we have a constant connection with the Divine.

Prayer isn't easy. The devil targets us most when we feel the urge to pray. He fills our minds with distraction and attacks our wills so that we will avoid it. He knows that when we call upon our Lord in thanksgiving, petition, or praise, our souls will be strengthened and Satan's evil hold on us will be loosened. Our vice will become virtue, our temptations toward sin will become an appetite for virtue that only Jesus, the bread of life, can fulfill.

The Saints prayed incessantly. They followed St. Paul's command to “rejoice always” and “pray without ceasing” (1 Thes. 5:16). They didn't walk around town repeating Our Fathers and Hail Marys to make prayer the central part of their daily routines. Rather, they contemplated God in every act of their mental acuity, physical movements, charitable giving, and awareness of thought. Through the constant intercession of the Holy Spirit, they rose to greatness due to their perseverance in prayer (Rom. 12:12).

How to Pray

As stated above, there are many forms of prayer. If you are already saying the Rosary and attending Mass, you are practicing the two greatest forms of prayer. If you are studying, you are likely attaining the first fruits of contemplative prayer as you ponder the truths you are learning. To add another layer to your prayer life, consider visiting an adoration chapel on a weekly basis in order to simply be in the presence of Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. **Speak to him from the silence of your heart** there and you'll notice a great change in your prayer life.

ST. THERESE OF LISIEUX

Considered to be the youngest Doctor of the Church, St. Therese had no formal education past primary school. She spent her time in a Carmelite monastery contemplating the innate truths that God had placed within her. Her prayer life became the source of her spiritual power and, in her humility she became God's “Little Flower.”



The Sacraments

The best way to ground yourself in the rich soil of divine life is to plant yourself there through the Sacraments. Through the Sacraments we are given an outward sign of inward grace and, as a result, our souls are nourished, cleansed, and tended to so as to produce fruit that feeds not only our souls, but those of generations of future saints to come.

The Catholic Church provides these life-saving grace terminals at a ridiculously low price: free. We are so spoiled by our God who loves us.

We receive new birth into God's family through the sacrament of Baptism. The baptismal waters are the unending streams through which we are connected to the living water that is Christ who nourishes us physically and spiritually along our journey toward heaven.

In Reconciliation our tarnished souls are repaired. When we admit to our faults, we accept them and ask God for forgiveness for the wrongs we have committed. The Saints knew that carrying the burdens of sin was no way to arrive at the ultimate goal of union with God. In order to accomplish our innate desire to know, love and serve him, we must accept his sacrifice on the cross and receive his merciful forgiveness. Only then are we free to go about accomplishing the missions he gives us.

The Sacrament of the Eucharist is the spiritually-packed power bar that enlivens our soul and satisfies our spirits. Jesus Christ is truly present in the consecrated host and this reality is what the Catechism of the Catholic Church calls the "source and summit of the Christian life."³ In this tiny, seemingly inconsequential meal, our minds, bodies, and souls are graced with the transformative nature of God himself. Inside of us, he dwells ever so closely so as to form us into his most beloved disciples.

The Sacrament of Confirmation is the means through which we are considered mature members of the Body of Christ. Through this sacrament, we are given the gifts of the Holy Spirit to help us grow in knowledge and zeal in our faith. These gifts include wisdom, understanding, fortitude, council, knowledge, piety, and Fear of God.

The Sacraments of Holy Orders and Marriage are vocational in nature. They provide this who are called to receive them a daily means through which we are to live our lives sacramentally for the world to see. With these, God gives us special graces to maintain the healthiness of our marriage or ministry so that we

³ CCC 1324

can communicate effectively, live joyfully, and thrive as a community with Christ as our primary goal.

Finally, the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick enables us to receive the healing power of God when our bodies and minds are not working to full capacity during our infirm states. Granted, not everyone experiences miraculous healings during the application of this Sacrament, but our souls are better able to accept the sufferings that are to come so as to "fill up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ" (Col. 1:24).

How to Receive the Sacraments

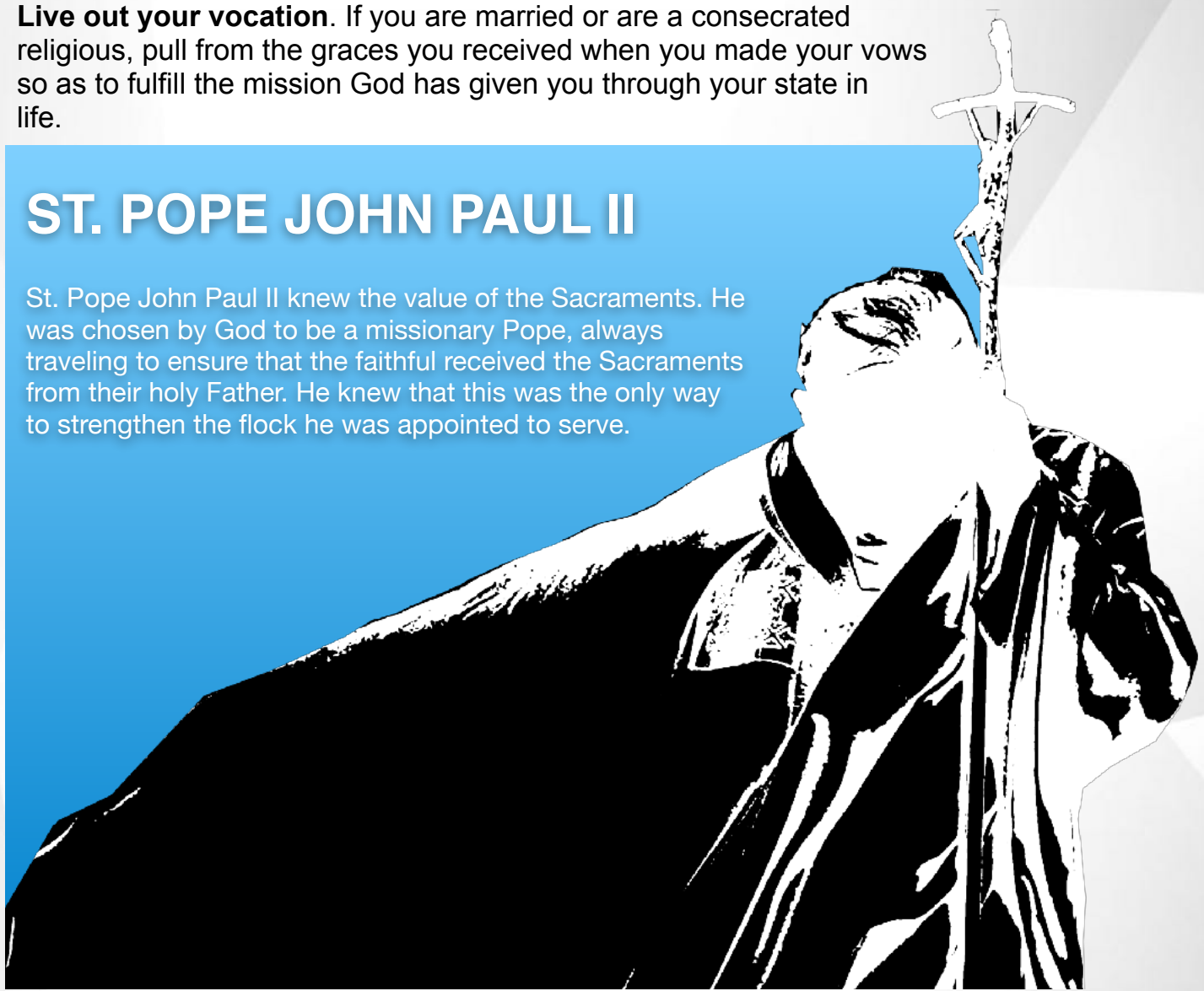
Attend Mass at least every Sunday. If you can, go to daily Mass. As stated above, the Eucharist is the "source and summit of the Christian life" and in receiving God in the Eucharist often, you set yourself up for spiritual strengths that you can't even imagine.

Set up a time to confess your sins to a priest at the very least twice a year. If you can, do so more often, perhaps once every month or every two months. Consistent scheduling of your confessions will make you more aware of your sins and thus more able to avoid temptations and practice virtue.

Live out your vocation. If you are married or are a consecrated religious, pull from the graces you received when you made your vows so as to fulfill the mission God has given you through your state in life.

ST. POPE JOHN PAUL II

St. Pope John Paul II knew the value of the Sacraments. He was chosen by God to be a missionary Pope, always traveling to ensure that the faithful received the Sacraments from their holy Father. He knew that this was the only way to strengthen the flock he was appointed to serve.



Virtue

The cross was a necessary component to Christ's story of salvation. Without the difficulty of his death, the glory of his resurrection would have no value. The same went for the Saints; all had to go through immense difficulties, some even a martyr's death, to achieve the heights of holiness. Each one was faced with at least one primary vice and life-long temptations to fall into sin, but they solidified their will in God through a form of asceticism which gave them the strength to overcome it.

Consistency in virtue is one of the most difficult things to attain. We all have constant temptations that entice our passions and, at times, overtake our rationality. We tend to submit our will to evil acts more readily than we do to virtuous ones because of their attractive lure, their ease, and their accessibility. In fact, most people have at least one vice that weighs more heavily on them than others. This is called a root sin and it is a variation of one of the seven deadly sins mentioned by Pope Gregory I in 590 (see table below) that the devil sees as our primary weakness and attacks with constant temptations.

Each of these sins manifests itself in our souls and we, at times, partake in them in order to accomplish a form of happiness that is short-lived and, essentially, empty of value.

The virtues, on the other hand, are the antipode to the empty joy we feel through the effects of our sins. The virtues are harder to attain because they require us to sacrifice our person desires in order to unite our wills with that of God in an act of faith. In virtue, we act as people destined for holiness whereas in vice, we act as animals in order to fulfill our immediate desires.

VICES

Lust
Gluttony
Greed
Sloth
Wrath
Envy
Pride

VIRTUES

Chastity
Temperance
Charity
Diligence
Patience
Kindness
Humility

How to Practice Virtue

Commit yourself to completing a nightly examination of conscience.

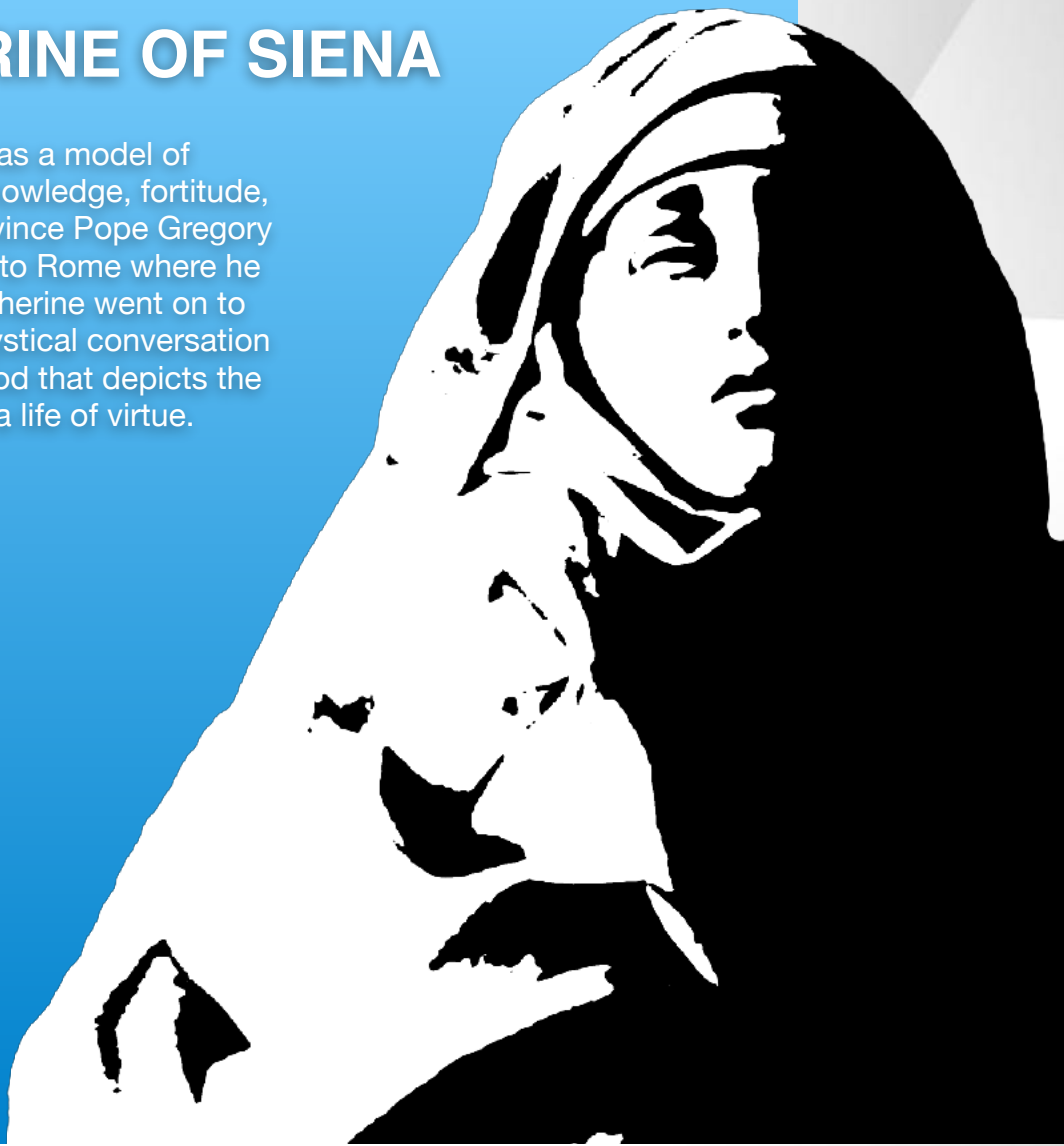
Review your day prior to laying your head down to sleep and bring to the surface the sins you committed. Ask God for forgiveness and seek to right your wrongs by mending the broken bonds with the people you have sinned against. In doing this, you'll begin to discover which is your root sin, which will help you combat it with the opposite virtue.

A great way to make this a daily habit is to **pray the Night Prayer from the Divine Office**. It is a short prayer that allows you time to examine your conscience while praying alongside thousands of others worldwide at any given moment in time.

Becoming a saint is a process that takes a lifetime to achieve, but in the end, there is nothing more worthy of our efforts than God in whom every desire of our souls is met for eternity.

ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA

St. Catherine of Siena was a model of virtue. Her strength in knowledge, fortitude, and piety led her to convince Pope Gregory XI to return from France to Rome where he rightly belonged. St. Catherine went on to write *The Dialogue*, a mystical conversation between her soul and God that depicts the positive effects of living a life of virtue.



Community and Mission

You are not alone. As mentioned previously in this ebook, God has given us a “cloud of witnesses” to walk with us along this pathway toward heaven. Some of these witnesses include our family members, friends, and acquaintances who are on the earth still striving to become saints, others are the men and women who have gone before us into the eternal bliss of the pearly gates. All of us make up the body of Christ, and this community extends beyond space and time to help us arrive at our final destination of heaven.

When Jesus came down to us he showed us the importance of community. He was raised by Mary and Joseph for 30 years prior to beginning his ministry, thus proving that the most important form of community is the love that comes from our immediate family. He then went out and sought his closest followers in the apostles, showing that friendships must be worked at, sustained, and nurtured in order for the greater community to thrive. Even the angels surrounded his presence, watching and waiting to minister to him during the difficult times he had to bear.

Jesus provides us with a multitude of people to ensure that our lives are nourished spiritually. Our priests bring us the Sacraments. Our families provide us the bulwark of love. Our friends unite us with the community as a whole. And all of the angels and Saints await our prayers in order to intercede for us before God himself.

You are not alone. On the contrary, your mission is so wrapped up in your community that there should be no differentiation between *who* you serve and *how* you serve them. God has given you many people to guide you in your journey toward him but, perhaps even more importantly, he has given others *you* as a means through which they can come to know him too. Your mutual exchange of love, no matter how small or great such expressions may be, is one essential way that God manifests his grace in order to advance his Kingdom.

This is the reason for the existence of Saints.

How to Establish Community and Mission

Know your mission. Regardless of your current state in life, there is always someone in your community who is suffering or struggling with something. These people are your mission. Be the one they can count on by becoming a member of an existing organization that helps that specific group of people or start your own missionary organization to help fulfill their needs.

In most dioceses, there are already many apostolates looking for people like you to help by volunteering time, talent, and treasure. A few examples include the Knights of Columbus, the local soup kitchen, or maybe your parish could use you as a catechist. Discern what God is calling you to do for your community and complete that mission.

Be Different

G.K. Chesterton once wrote that, "...it is the paradox of history that each generation is converted by **the saint** who **contradicts** it most." This makes every Saint the odd-ball in their communities. They were the trailblazers, the ones who went against the grain and did things "their way." Since they had already accumulated the aforementioned traits, "their way" was more "God's way" than anything of their own production, for "it was no longer they who lived, but Christ within them" (Gal. 2:20).

Becoming a Saint is the most difficult thing for a human to accomplish, which makes it the most meaningful thing we could ever do. For those who are serious about their faith, sanctity isn't an option, it's not even a desire; it is a *need*, and it would do us well to make use of all of the resources the Catholic Church provides us. These 8 traits are only the surface of an eternal bandwidth of knowledge and wisdom known as the deposit of faith, but my hope is that they become the foundation of your daily lives in order to satisfy your eternal longing for holiness.

How to Be Different

Act. The world is filled with lies, darkness, and misery. It is also filled with many people who are capable of fixing those problems, but choose not to. There are very few Saint Theresa of Calcuttas and Pope St. Pope John Paul IIs out there who are actually doing what Christ taught us on a large scale. However, there are also a few who are working their tails off on a smaller scale, be it in international missions, local soup kitchens, or even in their own homes.

Be the one who can fix the problems. Build your ministry in scope and scale. Heed the words of Emily Dickinson who famously wrote:

*If I can stop one heart from breaking,
I shall not live in vain;
If I can ease one life the aching,
Or cool one pain,
Or help one fainting robin
Unto his nest again,
I shall not live in vain.*

ST. TERESA OF CALCUTTA

St. Teresa of Calcutta, or "Mother" Teresa as she was commonly called, gave her entire life to serve the poorest of the poor in Calcutta, India. She was a missionary *par excellence* who was different in that she didn't follow the norms of safely remaining in a comfortable residence.



Conclusion

All of the aforementioned pillars were practiced by the Saints to a heroic degree. They are not a complete list of what is required to become a true, disciplined disciple of Jesus Christ, but they lay the foundation for living a happier, holier life so as to grow in holiness and pursue wisdom to the highest degree we are capable of attaining.

We at Signum Dei take your salvation very seriously. In fact, we've dedicated our lives to helping you attain the knowledge of your faith that will allow you to achieve the peace and clarity that comes with knowing, loving, and serving God.

For more information, visit signumdei.com today. There, you'll learn about our Catholic Online Learning Community, which includes:

- **The Catholic Course Library**
- Unique **formation programs** for adults, teens, and children
- **Free downloadable resources** you can use right now to grow in your faith
- **Weekly YouTube show, Catholic trivia**, and more!

Thank you so much for taking the time to read this simple, but powerful ebook. It was designed to help you grow in your faith and pursue God in your daily acts of virtue.

Please send me an email and let me know how you liked it! I'm always looking for feedback, so if you gleaned anything from reading it, please don't be shy. I respond to every email I get and yours will be no different.

With immense gratitude and ongoing prayers, I thank you.

Your brother,

TJ

