

# **The Will to Love Spiritual Audit Values Handbook Part I: Faith**

**Our Relationship with God  
The Call To Be Holy  
Awakening and Conversion  
Humility  
Prayer**

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# Prayer – The First Value

## ***Definition***

Prayer is how we interact with God. Prayer is commonly thought of as words, whether spontaneous or memorized, whether said out loud, sung, or thought silently, whether alone or as a group. Prayer includes words that glorify or acknowledge or praise God, or offer God worship for who God is. Prayer can be words that express gratitude to God. Prayer can be words that ask God for forgiveness, or grace, or other help, whether for yourself or for others. But we do not need to express anything to engage in prayer. Prayer can be just listening, just contemplating, or just being present. Regardless, prayer involves taking time to spend with God. Because we are using ACT as our model of behavioral change, we define prayer as a positive and directional quality of our behavior: the quality of taking time to interact with God, in word, song, or silence, to praise, thank, worship, adore, petition, contemplate, listen to, or just be with God.

## ***Scripture***

Psalm 46:10: "Be still, and know that I am God."

Psalm 37:7: Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for Him.

Jeremiah 33:3: Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known.

James 4:8: "Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you."

John 10:27: "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me"

Isaiah 30:21: "Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left"

Matthew 6:5-13: When teaching his disciples to pray what we call the Lord's Prayer, Jesus said, "Your Father knows what you need before you ask him."

Romans 8:26-27: "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God."

## ***Reflection***

To help understand what it means to pray, let us first consider what prayer is not.

Prayer is not asking for unearned favors for power, wealth, pleasure, or honor, or to be rescued from the consequences of our own actions. When Jesus was tempted in the desert (see Matthew 4), he was tempted to turn stone into bread, or to be saved after throwing himself from a tower, or to have power over the world. These are all examples of temptations toward satisfying worldly desires, not prayers of need.

Prayer also is not an act of superstition. Superstition arises when I expect God to deliver something in response to asking for that thing. But isn't that what we do in prayer – ask for something? Well, yes,

but, it is our disposition, or attitude, or intent towards God that distinguishes one from another. Are we approaching God with trust, humility, and surrender to God's will, or are we trying to control or manipulate God through our "prayer"? Superstition tends to look like doing or saying "the right things" to get some reward, especially where the reward is the satisfaction of a desire for power, wealth, pleasure, or honor.

Memorized, standard prayers (rote prayers) may be frowned upon in some Christian circles, but are frequently used by Catholics. Rote prayers can be helpful because, for example, they can be called upon in moments of difficulty. They also enable group prayer, and prayer in a manner that is known to be theologically correct. They can be easily taught to children. However, if we rely solely on rote prayers, we risk just checking a box (like, did I pray the rosary today), or not actually spending time with God (like, while our mouth is rattling off words, we make a grocery list). We also risk not developing our prayer life.

One thing that can help make a rote prayer more authentic is by taking time to think differently about the prayer and the meaning of the prayer, so that this meaning is on our minds while we pray.

For example, consider the "Our Father". In English, our grammar does not express the depth of meaning that comes through in some other languages, such as French. The Our Father in French, for example, expresses more accurately this idea in English: Let Your Name be Holy, Your Kingdom come, and Your Will be done - let these 3 things happen! - here on Earth as they are already happening in Heaven. Also, try saying the following as one phrase, without the typical break and breath in the middle, and see how the way we say this prayer changes its meaning: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

As another example, consider the beginning of "Hail Mary". One phrase (Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you) is what the angel said to Mary at the Annunciation (Luke 1:28). The next (blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb), is what Elizabeth said to Mary (after John the Baptist left in her womb responding to Jesus' presence - Luke 1:42). After saying these phrases, consider, what do the words told to Mary tell us *about God*?

Some prayer is not even expressed in words - we are just present to God. Reportedly, when asked about her prayer, Mother Teresa said that she just listens. When asked what Jesus did, she would say that He just listens too. But what does it mean to listen in prayer? Scriptures describe hearing God's voice by being still before God and by drawing closer to God. "Be still, and know that I am God." — Psalm 46:10. As we grow in our spiritual life and conform our will more towards God's, it becomes easier to hear God's voice. We come to recognize how God speaks to us. His voice becomes personal. Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me" (John 10:27).

One prayer practice is to be still, especially in solitude and in silence. Sometimes a place in nature can be helpful. Stillness, solitude, and silence reduce our distractions, and enable us to notice the presence of God, whether in large things or small.

Scripture also tells us that God knows what we need. So, if God already knows, why pray? My guess is God wants us to acknowledge what we need and ask God for it. God will not force his will upon us, and wants us to ask. God already knows our imperfections and the healing we need, but waits for us to acknowledge them and ask for healing.

So, how do we grow in our ability to pray?

When asked how one can improve their prayer life, Thomas Merton is said to have answered, “Take the time.” For everything in life, the best way to improve how we do something is by taking the time and actually doing it. Expressing this in an ACT-inspired framework, if you choose to have prayer as a value for your life, then make some committed action towards taking time to pray.

After choosing to take the time, we can then notice things about prayer. We will notice whether we can make the time we chose to set aside. There may be things that help us pray or distract us. We may experience a variety of emotions or thoughts or physical sensations when we pray. We may explore rote prayers, prayers in our heads, vocal prayer. We may prepare our own prayers, and try spontaneous prayer. We may notice the presence of God or an interaction with God.

What does prayer look like when we are in full union with God? Ultimately, sharing in God’s blessed life is eternal prayer. And we will plant this one seed: eternal prayer is not about us, but about worshiping God and interceding for others, so that they may enjoy the mercy and grace of God, and join us in heaven. The eternal prayer is about being love.

# Faith and Trust

## Definition

Because the word “faith” has so many meanings in common use, we start by defining faith both in a Catholic context and as a quality of our behavior. In part, faith includes an intellectual act of assenting to something as true. It also includes an act of the will, a decision to trust someone, namely God. In opposition to faith, there are doubt and indifference. The former relates to questioning whether something is true or someone should be trusted; the other is just not caring. It is said that faith comes through grace, meaning as a gift from God. That gift can take many forms, but all are ultimately some kind of encounter with God. Faith is our response to that encounter. So, for our purposes, **“faith” is the quality of seeking to resolve our doubts and, in response to encounters with God, responding in trust.**

## Scripture

*John 20:24-29:* Thomas, called Didymus, one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples said to him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nail marks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.” Now a week later his disciples were again inside and Thomas was with them. Jesus came, although the doors were locked, and stood in their midst and said, “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe.” Thomas answered and said to him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed.”

*Hebrews 11:* “Faith is the realization of what is hoped for in evidence of things not seen.”

## Reflection

I was once talking with a young woman about why she did not believe in God. At one point I asked, “If you don’t believe in God, what do you believe in?” Her answer? “Science.” Her opinion is like that of many people in the modern world – faith is contradicted by science.

The view that faith contradicts science is based on a misunderstanding of both. Faith is not blindly accepting, as true, some assertion for which there is no evidence. Instead, we have evidence of something we cannot see. That something is actually someone, another Being that we cannot fully understand. Science also is limited to measuring, studying, and understanding the physical world, and therefore is incapable of being applied to spiritual things, such as proving or disproving the existence of any Being that transcends the physical world. Faith and science are therefore complementary and inform each other. For example,

science demonstrates (and even assumes) that everything in this world is wonderfully ordered. Many scientists come to realize this order points to the existence of God.

That being said, what is faith? Pope Benedict XVI put it this way (and I am paraphrasing). Faith is based on our meeting someone. In other words, we encounter a person, the living God. Something happens. Then faith is our response to recognizing God in that encounter. Like the Apostle Thomas who upon touching the wounds of Jesus exclaimed, “My Lord and my God!” As explained in the letter to the Hebrews, for Abraham, Moses, Isaac, and many others in the Bible, their faith was not a feeling or thought that some doctrine was true. No, they had an encounter with God. Faith is an action - or better, trust and action – in response to this encounter.

In modern days, one of the biggest challenges to faith is doubt. And one of the biggest sources of doubt today is this false opposition between faith and science. While it is okay to have doubts, we cannot be comfortable with doubt. While it is important to have questions, it is also important to desire to have answers – otherwise we slip into indifference.

Faith develops in stages. As with the other themes as you will soon notice, the first stage is usually noticing. Before faith, our noticing is the reaction to God’s action. God acts first. This is called *grace* – which means God actually first helps us *in some way* to lead us to Him. This action may be something that acts upon our senses, such as hearing a scripture passage or spiritual music or a story that resonates with us, or meeting someone, or a coincidence that we cannot explain. This action may be something that arises in our thoughts, such as having a new understanding about God, or a favorable impression. The action may be something that affects our wills, such as a new, fervent desire to act in a loving way towards our neighbor, or a new desire to know God. How we act in response to that grace leads us further into a relationship with God. The more we are open and receptive to God’s grace, the more graces we receive. In each step of growth in the spiritual life is an opportunity to open up our hearts more and more to let God in – the more we open our heart, the more He fills it, and the more He asks us to open our hearts even further.

As one grows in the spiritual life, and becomes completely unified with God’s love, faith looks like complete surrender to God, in trust. All the Catholic theologians note that faith is fully satisfied when we are one with God. There no longer is a need for trust because we realize and fully experience that all of his promises to us have been fulfilled.

# Humility

## *Definition*

We often misunderstand what it means to be “humble.” Sometimes, we believe it means how we feel after something happens to us, when we might feel embarrassed, ashamed, or dishonored. Sometimes, we believe it is those negative thoughts we might have about ourselves - that we are worthless, inadequate, or inferior. Sometimes people describe putting someone else in their place as “humbling” them, as something you do to another. Those meanings are not correct understandings of Humility in a Catholic context. Rather than a feeling or thought about ourselves, or what we do to another, humility is a quality of our behavior. It relates to *recognizing who God is*, as our creator, as the infinite and eternal being, as Love itself, and our proper relation *to God* as His creature, as one He loves, and our proper relation to others, who also are His creatures and loved. **So, for our purposes, we define “humility” as the quality of treating God, ourselves, and others according to our recognizing our proper relationship to them - to God as loving Creator and to others as loved creatures of the same Creator.**

## *Scripture*

Psalm 8:5: “What is man that you are mindful of him, and a son of man that you care for him?”

Job 7:17: “What are human beings, that you make much of them, or pay them any heed?”

Psalm 39:6: “My life is as nothing before you.”

Matthew 18:1-4: “Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”

Luke 18:9-14: “The tax collector stood off at a distance and would not even raise his eyes to heaven but beat his breast and prayed, ‘O God, be merciful to me a sinner.’”

Philippians 2:1-11: “Humbly regard others as more important than yourselves.”

Luke 12:6-7: “Are not five sparrows sold for two small coins?\* Yet not one of them has escaped the notice of God. Even the hairs of your head have all been counted. Do not be afraid. You are worth more than many sparrows.”

Luke 22:24-27: “Let the greatest among you be as the youngest, and the leader as the servant.”

## **Reflection**

Humility is a Christian virtue and the opposite of pride. Humility involves recognizing who God really is, who we are - lesser beings – in comparison to God, and acting accordingly. The examples Jesus gave us are children and the tax collector. A good analogy of our relationship with God is like child with a loving parent. The tax collector also gives us words to answer Jesus' question to us: Q. What do you want me to do for you? A. Be merciful to me, a sinner. With respect to others, humility involves treating every other person as someone who also is created by and is equally loved by God. Since God created and loved them, we should treat other with dignity and as an equal, and actively work for their good.

To understand humility, it can help to consider what humility is *not*. There is false humility, which tends to be a kind of pride or shame. If we put ourselves last in order to receive recognition or reward, then that is a kind of pride. If we demean ourselves, as if we are not worthy of God's love or the love of others, to the extent that we withdraw ourselves from God and others, then that is shame. Feelings of shame do *not* come from God, because God loves us and sees creation as inherently good. Sometimes, we avoid God out of pride. God offers us a means for reconciliation. If we avoid this means of reconciliation because we do not want to reconcile God's way, then that is pride.

Humility develops in stages.

At first, one begins to notice attributes of God, and about our relationship to God. This recognition can be assisted through various exercises. For example, the *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* begin with meditations on how and why God created us, that we belong to God, and that God is supreme, universal, absolute, and eternal. St. Francis de Sales encourages similar first steps (in his *Introduction to the Devout Life*. Both refer to Psalm 39, and connect that verse to similar verses in Job and Psalm 8.

Yet other exercises can help us develop a sense of the immensity of God, by contemplating the universe that he transcends ("When I see your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and stars that you set in place" – Psalm 8:4), and the immediacy of God, by contemplating his awareness of even the tiniest thing ("Even the hairs of your head have all been counted" – Luke 12:7).

We can begin to notice thoughts we have about God, ourselves, and others. We can notice the thoughts that lead us away from humility are attitudes of self-importance or exaggerated self-worth, which lead to actions based in contempt or entitlement. We might forget the even our mere existence is a gift, and believe that gifts we have make us worth more than others. We might think that, *if we were God*, we would have done things differently – someone would not have suffered, or justice or mercy would have been more appropriate. Once we know the thoughts we tend to have, we can work on interrupting their influence on what we do and say.

What does humility look like when we are completely unified with God's love? While we start like the tax collector who "stood off at a distance," God *is* merciful to us, enters into our suffering, draws all things to himself (John 12:32), and heals us.

# Holiness

## *Definition*

Sometimes the term “holiness” is used negatively to imply that someone is “holier than thou,” or self-righteous, or some overly restrained behavior. But within Christianity, the term is meant to signify something that is set apart for God. While you might hear the phrase “strive for holiness,” it is important to understand that we cannot make ourselves into something we are not – we cannot make ourselves holy. God is the one who transforms us, as the bolded phrases below from Scripture describe. Our role is to open ourselves up to allow Him to transform us. **So, we will define “holiness” as the quality of being open to God’s ongoing work of transforming us to set us apart for Him.**

## *Scripture*

Read Psalm 139 in its entirety

Leviticus 19:2: “**Be holy**, for I, the LORD, your God, am holy.”

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24: “**May the God of peace himself make you perfectly holy**, and may you entirely spirit, soul, and body **be preserved** blameless for the coming of our Lord Jesus. The one who calls you is faithful and **he will do it.**”

Titus 3:4-7: “But when the kindness and generous love of God our savior appeared, not because of any righteous deeds we had done but because of his mercy, **he saved us** through the bath of rebirth and renewal by the holy Spirit, whom he richly poured out on us through Jesus Christ our savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life.”

Hebrews 10:16: ““This is the covenant I will establish with them after those days,’ says the Lord: ‘**I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them upon their minds.**””

Ephesians 4:22-24: “You should put away the old self of your former way of life, corrupted through deceitful desires, and **be renewed in the spirit of your minds**, and **put on the new self, created in God’s way** in righteousness and holiness of truth.”

2 Corinthians 3:18: “All of us, gazing with unveiled face on the glory of the Lord, **are being transformed** into the same image from glory to glory, as from the Lord who is the Spirit.”

## *Reflection*

One day, while I was greeting tourists at our church, I started talking to a man. He said he was raised Catholic, but had stopped going to church. He, with his brother and sister, lit a

candle for their mother. The sister quipped, “Mom would be happy to see us back at a church.” I felt comfortable asking the man, “Why not go back to church?” His answer stunned and troubled me. He said, “You know, I have done a lot of bad things in my life. I’m just not a good person.”

Like the man I met, we might think that we must first become “a good person,” through our own self-improvement, and then God judges our success or failure. We might believe that God loves us only after we clean up our act, and punishes us or withdraws his love if we don’t.

This belief contradicts a fundamental principle of the Christian faith: *God loves you*. God loves you regardless of what you have done or whatever you think of yourself. Love is not only what God does. Love is who God *is*. God does not love us only after we make ourselves holy, but, *because* God loves us, *God wants to make us holy*.

A critical part of these exercises is that we are not going to try to *transform ourselves*. Instead, we will discover how to *ask God to transform us* and trust that God will. If we can learn to see ourselves as someone that God knows and loves deeply, we can start by asking God to let us see and know ourselves as God sees and knows us. We can ask God to help us identify those things for which we need healing, and for help to open ourselves up to His transformation.

We can start by looking at the thoughts we have about ourselves. Who do you say you are? Who do you say you want to be? Are you a “good person,” “not a good person,” a “success,” a “failure,” unworthy, entitled, important or unimportant, weak or strong, hurt or healthy, young or old, rich or poor? All those labels are lies. Your identity is not defined by your physical or mental characteristics, state in life, occupation, or where you live, or by your feelings, thoughts, emotions, memories of who you were, or who you imagine yourself to be in the future. Instead, the One who made you defines you. God says you were made in His image and likeness. Genesis 2. God says we are “wonderfully made.” Psalm 139. God says, “I will never forget you. See, upon the palms of my hands I have engraved you.” Is. 49:15-16. God says you are a child of God. Like the apostle John, you are “the one whom Jesus loves.”

Holiness develops in stages. Initially, our ability to practice holiness starts with being able simply to notice and acknowledge those thoughts and labels we have for ourselves. Do not judge your thoughts. Just notice what thoughts you have. What we can do is begin to create some distance from those thoughts and how they affect our actions. We might be tempted to explore where these thoughts came from – like, “How did I get here?” Various experiences in our lives shape the labels we have for ourselves. But if these experiences were traumatic events, that exploration typically is better done with a trained counselor.

After creating distance from our noticed thoughts, we can begin to develop the ability to choose how to act towards our values, steeped with the knowledge that God loves us despite what we think of ourselves. Can we inject enough time between the thought and our decision to act - enough time to remind ourselves, “I am a child of God!” Or perhaps, remember that Jesus once asked Peter, “Who do you say that I am?” Maybe we can turn that

around and ask Jesus the same question, “Jesus, who do *You* say that I am?” Sit back, and just listen to his answer.

Ultimately, what does *holiness* look like - when we are completely transformed into the “holy” person through God’s transforming love? We are no longer just ourselves, but the body of Christ. St. Paul said, “You are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the capstone. Through him the whole structure is held together and grows into a temple sacred in the Lord; in him you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.” Eph 2:19-22. We are part of the resurrected and ascended Jesus, by whose wounds we will have been fully healed.

# Authenticity and Integrity

## *Definition*

It is fashionable these days to claim to be “authentic” - true to who we are. This desire for authenticity has two key assumptions. The first is about our identity and what defines it. The second is that authenticity is only relevant in the face of adversity, like conflict or discomfort – there isn’t much merit in being true to ourselves when it is easy. If our identity is defined by our nature as children of God, which in turn informs our values, then the challenge to our ability to act in accordance with those values comes from the inside – our innate desire for pleasure and avoiding pain and our internal reactions to our circumstances. If instead our identity is defined by the same thing – those desires - that challenges our ability to act towards *any* value, then our actions are not directed towards our values, but towards our desires. “Authenticity” becomes the only real value, at odds with our other values, making us lack integrity. **So, we will define “Authenticity” as the quality of aligning our actions with our values and with God’s will in the face of adversity, whether internal or external, while praying for God’s grace to empower us to do so.**

## *Scripture*

Galatians 5:16-17: "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do."

Titus 2:11-12: “For the grace of God has appeared, saving all and training us to reject godless ways and worldly desires and to live temperately, justly, and devoutly in this age.”

James 1:22-25: “Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deluding yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his own face in a mirror. He sees himself, then goes off and promptly forgets what he looked like. But the one who peers into the perfect law of freedom and perseveres, and is not a hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, such a one shall be blessed in what he does.”

James 4:1-3: "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend what you get on your pleasures."

Luke 6:46-49: “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ but not do what I command? I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, listens to my words, and acts on them. That one is like a person building a house, who dug deeply and laid the foundation on rock; when the

flood came, the river burst against that house but could not shake it because it had been well built. But the one who listens and does not act is like a person who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the river burst against it, it collapsed at once and was completely destroyed.”

### **Reflection**

There is an important theological and anthropological point underlying this theme of authenticity, called integrity, which has been explained in depth by Aristotle and then St. Thomas Aquinas. A condensed version, which does not do it justice, is this. We, like other created things, have a physical existence. Like other animals, this existence includes ways to sense our surroundings, and we have innate capabilities that help us respond to those surroundings and survive. As humans, we also have an intellect and will that allow us to decide and act not only out of a desire to survive, but how we want to exist in the world. Finally, for Christians, we recognize that we have a soul and spirit that is intended to be one with God. For any being to truly survive, the lower faculties must always be subjected to the higher faculties. If they are not, we die.

This view of integration does not mean that our physical bodies, or our desires, are inherently evil or bad. Nor does it mean we should suppress or ignore our thoughts, feelings, emotions, senses, memories, or imaginations. We have all these faculties for a reason. Our thoughts help us understand our circumstances. Our imaginations help us plan for the future. Our memories remind us of things that were workable or not workable before. Our emotions and feelings alert us to hidden realities of our situations. But, they don't define our identity, nor should they control our actions. They are still good, but should be subjected to the higher faculties.

The journey in our spiritual life leads us to being fully authentic and integrated. Each step of this journey involves defining values, noticing the thoughts, emotions, feelings, senses, memories, or imaginations that hijack our ability to choose actions that move us towards those values, and developing the skills to make committed actions toward our values notwithstanding this internal struggle. It also relies on God's grace along the way, as we need Him to transform us in ways we cannot transform ourselves, especially in the healing of our souls.

Authenticity and integrity develop in stages, through which these exercises are meant to assist you. For most of the other themes, the beginning steps relate to noticing what is happening internally. But, since authenticity focuses on acting in alignment with values, we suggest starting with defining values. Pick one or two of these exercises, especially in the first section on Humility, and focus on defining some values. Having clearly stated, freely chosen values lets us next notice when we are acting towards or away from those values. From there we can start to notice the internal struggles that arise while pursuing those values.

What does authenticity look like when it is completely unified with God's love? At that point we are truly authentic and integrated. Dare we say, *healed*. Our souls are so transformed by

God's grace that our actions are no longer the outcome of an internal struggle, but a natural outflowing of God's love and mercy. We become Christ-like. We become able to love without end. We become love and mercy itself.

# Poverty in Spirit

## **Definition**

There are many kinds of poverty, but the term always means a kind of *unmet need*. We may need material goods, food, clothing, shelter, or just someone to care. We may feel unwanted or unloved. But being "poor in spirit" means to recognize that, regardless our state in life, we are poor and needy spiritually (Psalm 40:17) – We need God. **So, we define “poverty in spirit” as the quality of acknowledging our need for God in all things – our need to rely and depend on God’s providence, love, and mercy, and not on ourselves or material things.**

## **Scripture**

Matthew 5:3: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

James 2:5: “Did not God choose those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom that he promised to those who love him?”

Psalm 40:18: “Though I am afflicted and poor, my Lord keeps me in mind. You are my help and deliverer; my God, do not delay!”

Isaiah 66:2: “This is the one whom I approve: the afflicted one, crushed in spirit, who trembles at my word.”

John 15:5: “I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because **without me you can do nothing.**”

Mark 10:47, 51. “On hearing that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, ‘Jesus, son of David, have pity on me.’ ... Jesus said to him in reply, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man replied to him, ‘Master, I want to see.’”

## **Reflection**

With Alcoholics Anonymous, the first step of recovery from alcoholism is to recognize one’s own powerlessness over alcohol. This principle can be extended to any addiction, and then even to the spiritual life. While “poverty in spirit” is just at the beginning of this stage of Humility, the committed actions we take towards having a poverty in spirit are critical to the next stage, Detachment. As we will see, the stage of Detachment involves how we learn to exercise our will so that it is not driven by our emotions, feelings, senses, thoughts, memories, or imaginations, but instead by our intellect and choice to act in accordance with our values. Our inability to exercise our wills in accordance with our values is much like an

addiction. And we start to recover from those addictions by recognizing we are powerless – that without God we can do nothing.

Becoming poor in spirit develops in stages. The first step can be abrupt – because we cannot realize we are powerless until we realize we are struggling against something in the first place and lack enough power to do so. If we are living in abundance it may be difficult to realize our need to change and to develop this poverty in spirit. Sometimes we are aware that we are struggling, but are unaware of our limitations. Sometimes we do not even know we are struggling. What makes us notice that we are struggling and powerless? Pain and suffering - failure, loss of family or friends, accidents, natural disasters, loss of status, job, or money, poor health, or personal crisis. At these times, the range of emotions we experience are broad: grief, denial, guilt, shame, anger, fear, hatred, loneliness, despair, depression, loss of interest, sadness, hopelessness. This suffering may even be physical. In extreme cases, it is friends and family that notice these emotions or physical problems first.

The next step after noticing the emotions that arise from the suffering of powerlessness, is realizing the fact that we are powerless. In extreme cases, this realization may not be intellectually grasped, and may lead to actions that are cries for help that family and friends need to notice. What is critical to healing is the next step - whatever transforms this realization of powerlessness into us finally saying aloud, “I need help!” If we have faith in Jesus, our cry for help can be transformed by Jesus’ reminder that without him, we can do nothing. Then we can be like the blind man, Bartimaeus, and cry out, “Jesus, son of David, have pity on me.” As we do the rest of these exercises, each theme can be something for which we can tell Jesus, “I want to see.”

What does being *poor in spirit* look like when we are in complete union with God’s love? As the beatitude says, “theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Pope Benedict XVI, when writing as Josef Ratzinger, described the “kingdom of heaven” as Jesus [cite]. The Gospel of Luke says, “the kingdom of God is within you”. Luke 17:21. In this life we experience this presence of Jesus within us as a beginning or imperfectly. (Thom 413). His presence in us is an act of mercy that heals us. But, if we truly are poor in spirit and need nothing but Jesus, in heaven this need is filled completely and eternally. (This fulfillment is a stark contrast to any need we have for material or temporal things, since, at the end of time, those needs are never fulfilled.) At that time we become one with the body of Christ and one with others. We take our share in Jesus’ healing wounds, joining Jesus in being mercy to all others.

# Gratitude

## *Definition*

Gratitude is often described as an emotion - feeling thankful for things others have done or just generally for things in our lives – or an action – actually thanking someone. But, in the Catholic mystical tradition, “gratitude” is a virtue that is understood as an overall quality of our actions in response to God’s love and mercy. Gratitude involves a recognition that *everything* is a gift from God for our benefit. Gratitude also involves an interior disposition of gratefulness and action in response to recognizing we received a gift. That actions are done out of love for God, and acknowledge the gift by word or deed. Such actions typically are a form of worship, prayer, or praise. **So, as a value, “gratitude” is the quality of expressing, in word or deed out of love for God, our gratefulness to God in response to recognizing that all we have, and all that happens to us, is a gift intended for our healing and salvation.**

## *Scripture*

Job 1:21 – “The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD!”

Psalms 136: “Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his mercy endures forever.”

Luke 17:11-19 – “He fell at the feet of Jesus and thanked him.”

Matthew 26:26-28 “While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and giving it to his disciples said, “Take and eat; this is my body.” Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins.”

Colossians 1:9-14 and 3:15-17 – “Do everything ... giving thanks to God.”

John 17:24 Father, they are your gift to me. I wish that where I am they also may be with me, that they may see my glory that you gave me, because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

## *Reflection*

In a village along the way to Jerusalem from Samaria, Jesus encountered ten lepers (Luke 17). Like others in the Bible who sought healing, they cried out to Jesus, “Have pity on us.” (Lk 17:13). Jesus told them to go to the priests. Why? Because under Jewish law, it is the priest’s job to decide whether a person is free of leprosy. A person who is declared clean is then allowed to reconnect with the community. On their way to the priest, the lepers were healed.

But only one of the ten lepers recognized his healing was due to Jesus, and returned to Jesus to thank him. (Lk 17:15).

We do not need a miraculous physical healing to thank and glorify God. St. Paul told the Colossians to “be thankful,” and “whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

Part of the challenge in daily life is simply recognizing when we have received a gift. Even when we recognize our gifts, we might not express our thanks for a variety of reasons ranging from ingratitude to indifference to forgetfulness. And yet other times we express thanks, but out of a sense of obligation or favor.

It can be difficult to recognize certain things in our lives, like suffering and setbacks, as gifts. But St. Catherine of Siena wrote that everything God gives or permits is for our own salvation. And many Christian theologians emphasize that suffering or other setbacks are permitted for our purification, preparation, or correction, but not punishment. Whatever the case may be, the quote from Job is a good example of how to recognize that everything is a gift from God: “The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD!” Job 1:21.

Gratitude develops in stages. Initially, our ability to demonstrate gratitude starts with being able simply to notice and acknowledge that we have received a gift. Next, we develop the ability to choose how to act in response to the gift. How we respond to receiving a gift, likely will depend on thoughts or feelings, which we can also practice noticing, that arise due to the circumstances of the gift. But when we develop the ability to notice what is happening internally, we can choose to be grateful out of love, despite the thoughts or feelings that arise. As we exercise gratitude *out of love*, we come to a deeper understanding of what it means to love and be loved, and we ultimately discover that we *encounter God’s love in the gift*.

One exercise that can develop our sense of gratitude is to carefully scan our surroundings, and thank God for the gift of what we have. We can thank him for the air we breath, and the ground we walk on. We can thank him for each moment, breath, and heartbeat. We can thank him for each person we encounter, and for how God commands every one of them to love us as he loves you (even if they are not good at it!)

What does gratitude look like when a soul is unified with God? For one part, we join a “great multitude” in heaven that is eternally thanking God for everything. See Revelation 7:9-12. We also get to join in Jesus’ prayer to the Father, “I wish that where I am they also may be with me.” Can we see everyone that we encounter every day as a gift from God, and we wish they were with us in heaven?

# Obedience

## *Definition*

In Catholic theology there is a concept of the “right order” of things, which includes the authority of God, authority within the family, and authority within our social structures, like governments and organizations, with their laws, rules, contracts, and other relationships. Some in Catholic religious orders take vows of obedience to authorities in the church—superiors in their orders, their spiritual directors, and their confessors. **Obedience is not simply doing what one is told to do, but the quality of acting in compliance with just authority out of a desire to cooperate with God’s justice and out of love for God.**

## *Scripture*

Ephesians 5:6-20 – “Do not continue in ignorance, but try to understand what is the will of the Lord.”

Mark 1:16-20 – “Then they abandoned their nets and followed him.”

Luke 20:20-26 – “Then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar.”

Mark 14:32-42 – “Abba, Father ... take this cup away from me, but not what I will but what you will.”

Ephesians 6:5–8 (ESV): “Servants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. ... Knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free.”

Colossians 3:22 (ESV): “Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to curry their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord.”

1 Peter 2:13–17: “submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution,”

John 2:5 His mother said to the servers, “Do whatever he tells you.”

## *Reflection*

Obedience flows from an understanding of the will of God.

I have seen many movies, especially movies based on medieval times, where a character shouts, “It’s God’s Will!” to justify violence or exercise power unjustly. But what really is the “will of God” and how do we know what God’s will is for us? And what could possibly be said about it in a few short paragraphs? I will say these three things.

First. It takes work. St. Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, said, “Do not continue in ignorance, but try to understand what is the will of the Lord.” St. Paul did not expect them to *know* God’s will, but to *try* to understand it. He counseled them to *do the work required* not to continue in ignorance.

Second. If you do not know, ask. Most of us are not like St. Paul. We are not going to get hit upside the head with a spiritual two-by-four and be told plainly what God wants us to do with our lives. We need to pray. Even Jesus prayed. We also need to find someone who gives good counsel and talk with them about what we think is God's will. Often, the challenge is mistaking our own desires for God’s will. Prayer, Scripture, Church teaching, and good counsel, help avoid making our own will into God’s.

Third. When you do *know*, act like the apostles when Jesus called them. Do not be afraid. When Jesus called Peter and Andrew, they “abandoned their nets” and followed Jesus. So, once we know what God’s will is for us, we really cannot just sit on the fence.

In some ways, the “right order” of things expresses the will of God. One way the Bible expresses this order is by this commandment: honor your father and mother. Jesus followed this command himself, as the Gospel of Luke tells us that, as a child, Jesus was obedient to his parents. (Lk 2:51). With respect to government and taxes, Jesus said, “Then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar” (Lk 20:25).

As will be explained next, obedience is the quality of behavior in response to *just* authority being exercised *over us*. The exercise of authority is *just* and *personal*. Common objections to the idea of obedience are a wide variety of *injustice* towards *others*. Unless the authority is directed at you personally, something that you are obligated to do or not do, then Obedience is not the theme that applies. Response to *injustice* is addressed by the theme of *Meekness*.

An exercise of just authority over us might provoke a variety of emotions or thoughts. For some, there is anger, which manifests itself with a rebellious reaction like, “No. No. No. No. I don’t want to do it” or “I’m going to do it anyway.” For some, we may be fearful, reacting with compliance perhaps reluctantly, resentfully, or while bad-mouthing our leader. Sometimes, we think we know better or disagree with the authority over us, which is a kind of pride. Our actions in response to these emotions or thoughts may lead us away from obedience out of love of God. While it (hopefully) is easy to see how acts of disobedience to just authority lead us away from the quality of obedience, resentful or reluctant compliance also does - because the compliance happens without the necessary desire to do God’s will. The act and the desire go together, as emphasized by St. Paul.

Obedience out of love of God develops in stages. Initially, our ability to practice obedience starts with noticing our emotions and thoughts that arise, whether we are compliant or rebellious or prideful. Why we have these emotions or thoughts, in response to authority, can be rooted in how we learned to respond to parents, teachers, and others as children, and the relationships we had or did not have with those people. If we start to pay attention to these emotions or thoughts, memories of these people or certain incidents also may arise. Dealing with some of these issues may be best addressed in therapy.

If the nature of our disobedience is rebellion, as we begin to heal in our relationship with authority, we may grow to accept just authority as part of God's plan of justice. If we are disobedient out of pride, we may grow to accept authority as we grow in humility. If our issue is reluctant compliance, the healing of our desires to please and avoid conflict may lead us to desire God's justice. As we grow in ability to recognize the emotions and thoughts that arise, and heal more, we seek to grow in the awareness and acceptance of those authorities in our lives, and notice how they are present as a part of God's justice. We can then grow in the desire to cooperate with God's justice, which often is aided by prayer, and asking for that desire.

So what does obedience to just authority look like when it is completely unified with God's love? Jesus said, "Be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful." (Luke 6:36). What if we prayed for the desire to be one with God's mercy as we cooperate in His justice with our obedience. Would we look like Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane ("not what I will but what you will"), or Jesus on the cross ("Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!"), or the resurrected Jesus ("Reach your finger here and look at My hands, and reach your hand here and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving but believing"- Jn 20:27). Is that how we obey the greatest commandment: "This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you." (John 15:12-14).

## Fear of the Lord and Reverence

### **Definition**

*Afraid of God?* That is what this theme sounds like, but not what it means. According to Catholic teaching, “fear of the Lord” is one of the *gifts* of the Holy Spirit. CCC 1831. So the Holy Spirit makes us afraid of God? No. Just no. Sometimes this gift is called reverence or awe or godliness, depending on the translation of Isaiah 11:2-3. When we have this gift, through the power of the Holy Spirit we are guided away from offending God, out of love and reverence for God. We cannot demand or earn this gift – it is a gift after all – but we can desire it, ask for it, prepare ourselves to receive it, and cooperate with it. **So, for the purpose of defining a value that relates to this gift, we suggest it is the quality of asking for and preparing ourselves to receive and cooperate with this gift.**

### **Scripture**

Isaiah 11:2-3: “The spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him a spirit of wisdom and of understanding, a spirit of counsel and of strength, a spirit of knowledge and of fear of the LORD, and his delight shall be the fear of the LORD, the principle spiritual gifts of the coming Messiah are prophesied.”

Sirach 21:2: “Flee from sin as from a serpent that will bite you if you go near it.”

Psalms 119:120 “My flesh shudders with dread of you, and I fear your ordinances.”

For stories about awe of God, see: Exodus 3, Isaiah 6, Ezekiel 1–2, Job 42:5–6, Matthew 17:1–8

Rev 4:9-11: “Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to the one who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before the one who sits on the throne and worship him, who lives forever and ever. They throw down their crowns before the throne, exclaiming: “Worthy are you, Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things; because of your will they came to be and were created.”

### **Reflection**

One of the challenges of the spiritual life is exercising our will in a manner that conforms our will to God’s will. In some ways, it might be understood as a surrender of our will. This gift of the Holy Spirit, this “fear of the Lord,” is a Gift that acts directly on our will. Because the Holy Spirit acts directly upon our will through this gift, it enables us to perform extraordinary and heroic acts to avoid offence to God and to conform our will to His. [See OTT 261] Some writers liken this Gift to a divine instinct, not unlike our animal instincts or reflexes in the manner in which they direct our wills. Our reaction to situations in which sin can arise can

become like touching a hot stove. Unlike our animal instincts, some of which can lead to sin, this gift is supernatural and thus always leads to life. [See Ezra 401-415; T119].

This divine instinct of fear of the Lord gives us a natural aversion to sin and even to situations in which sin might arise. [Gran 349]. It makes vigilant to avoid sin, causing us to “flee from sin as from a serpent,” and shudder with dread of losing our relationship with God. [See T, page 623]. It reminds us of our relationship with God. All of the values described in this section on Humility prepare us to receive this gift, and are built up and made stronger when we receive and cultivate this gift.

There are seven of these gifts of the Holy Spirit. According to St. Teresa of Avila, they tend to appear in our spiritual lives in the following order: fear of the Lord, piety, fortitude, counsel, knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. Christians also recognize another, but different, set of gifts of the Holy Spirit, which are often called “charisms.” These are found in St. Paul’s letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 12:4-11) and sound overlapping: “wisdom, ... knowledge, ...faith, ... healing, ... mighty deeds, prophecy, discernment of spirits, varieties of tongues, interpretation of tongues.” One way to think about the difference is that the former are gifts to the individual that build the individual up; the latter are gifts to individuals that build the church up. [OTT 261]

The order of how these gifts tend to bear fruit in our spiritual lives is significant. If we start with building a foundation of humility which is strengthened by this gift of fear, then we will be stronger as we work on other values, especially those related to our relationship with God (hence piety bears fruit next), then with ourselves and others.

Unlike the other values which we can work on to develop in stages, fear of the Lord is a gift. What we *can* develop is our disposition to be able to have it, our desire to have it, whether we ask for it, and whether we have cultivated our ability to be receptive to it and cooperative with it when received. This preparation happens through prayer, the sacraments (especially Confession), and work on the other values. If we are doing those things, we may begin to notice those times when we feel an aversion to sin. After a while, as we pay attention, we may begin to notice what that prompting from the Holy Spirit feels like – what sensations, thoughts, and feelings do we have when we just “know” what should or should not be done in a situation. As we begin to recognize and respond to the prompting of the Spirit, we reinforce how we react.

What does fear of the Lord look like when are fully in union with God’s love? While here on earth the gift acts upon our will in a way that provides an aversion to sin. In heaven, without the risk of sin, the gift transforms into pure awe and reverence of God. It makes us fully aware of God’s infinite goodness, and directs our will to respond with an appropriate reverence, much like the worship of the angels and saints described in the book of Revelation (see passage above). Our aversion to sin also causes us to be more merciful, because we are more aware of our own need of mercy we are able and willing to extend that same mercy to others.

# Piety and Worship

## **Definition**

Today we look at two themes together, piety and worship. In modern use, the word “pious” is sometimes used negatively – to describe someone who is deeply religious in their outward actions, but is otherwise hypocritical, insincere, judgmental, or self-righteous. However, as we intend to use it here, and according to Catholic teaching, “piety” is another of the *gifts* of the Holy Spirit, like “fear of the Lord.” CCC 1831 and Isaiah 11:2-3. As a gift, we are never entitled to it and cannot earn it. When we have the gift of piety, it acts upon our thoughts and emotions to bring us to see God as a loving Father and bring about affection for God. This leads to fulfilling our religious duties, like worship, with joy and out of love - not obligation or selfishness. [See T, 1325-1329]

For both the Jew and Christian, religious duties are primarily worship, which is primarily a form of sacrifice. Importantly, worship is offering a sacrifice *in the way God asked*. And, by doing so, *God is actually with us*. If we worship how we want to worship, that says a lot about us - our needs and what we are willing to offer God - but that is not doing what God has asked. And while God may be with us when we worship our way, there cannot be the same kind of presence as when we worship in the way God asks.

**So, for the purpose of defining values related to piety and worship, we suggest: “piety” is the quality of asking for and preparing ourselves to receive and cooperate with the gift of seeing God as a loving Father, and “worshiping in spirit and truth” as the quality of offering worship to God, with joy, out of love of God, and in the way God asks.**

## **Scripture**

Romans 8:15 – “For those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God... you received a spirit of adoption, through which we cry, ‘Abba, Father!’”

Exodus 10:25-26: “But Moses replied [to the Pharaoh], “You also must give us sacrifices and burnt offerings to make to the LORD, our God. Our livestock also must go with us. Not an animal must be left behind, for some of them we will select for service to the LORD, our God; but we will not know with which ones we are to serve the LORD until we arrive there.”

Exodus 20 – “Remember the sabbath day—keep it holy.”

Luke 22:14-20 – “This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me.”

## **Reflection**

What does it mean to worship God? I mean, specifically, what *actions* are actually a form of *worship*?

In all religions, worship involves a sacrifice. For the Jewish religion, God instructed the community of Israel how to observe the Passover ritual. They did not just make it up. See Exodus 12. And when they were in the desert, God instructed them how to do everything from how to construct an altar, tabernacle, and ark, to what kinds of sacrifices to offer, to what vestments the priests should wear. See Exodus 25-31. Why did God instruct them to do all that? God said, “so that I, the Lord, their God, might dwell among them.” Exodus 29:46.

In the Christian religion, the sacrifice is Jesus on the cross. Jesus too instructed us how to worship him. At the Last Supper, his last Passover meal, he commanded the apostles, “This is my body ... Do this in memory of me.” Lk 22:19. After the Resurrection, just before ascending to heaven, Jesus reminded the apostles to teach all of us “to observe all that I have commanded you.” Mt. 28:20. Why? Jesus said, “Behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.”

In other words, when we worship in the way God asks we can be assured that God is with us.

One of the challenges in the spiritual life of a Christian is how we worship, or more precisely what attitude we bring to worship. As a Catholic, we can go to Mass every Sunday, pray daily, go to Confession, and practice other devotionals. But what is our motivation? We could be “religious” out of obligation because we see worship or other religious practices simply as a “duty.” Here is where *piety* comes in. This gift of piety from the Holy Spirit acts directly on our emotions, thoughts, and will. Because the Holy Spirit acts directly upon us, we are enabled to set aside our thoughts and emotions and desires to worship because we have to, or because we seek consolation or pleasure for ourselves. Instead, the divinely infused emotions and thoughts of our God as loving Father drive our worship.

Unlike the other themes through which we develop in stages, piety is a gift. What we *can* develop is our disposition to be able to have it, our desire to have it, whether we ask for it, and whether we have cultivated our ability to be receptive to it and cooperative with it when received. This preparation happens through prayer, the sacraments (especially Confession), and work on the other themes around Humility. The gift of piety tends to bear fruit in our spiritual lives as we grow deeper into a humble relationship with our loving Father. If we are doing those things, we may begin to notice those times when we feel a desire to engage in our religious activities. We *want* (!! ) to go to Mass, to confession, to adoration, to prayer. After a while, as we pay attention, we may begin to notice what that prompting from the Holy Spirit feels like – the sensations, thoughts, and feelings do we have when we desire to be with God, or when we are in God’s presence in worship.

What does piety look like when are fully in union with God’s love? While here on earth the gift acts upon our will in a way that gives us the desire to be with God. In heaven, our desire is fulfilled and the gift transforms into pure joy with being in the presence of the Almighty. It makes us fully aware of God’s infinite love and mercy, and we experience pure joy. Another of the consequences of knowing we are children of a loving Father and living with that awareness is that we also realize everyone else is a brother and sister, a fellow child of God. As we are aware of God’s mercy for us, we grow in our ability to be mercy to others.

# Fidelity

## *Definition*

Are you in or are you out? Fidelity is about commitment, or better, staying committed in the face of adversity. But committed to what? On the one hand, there is a commitment to our values and to aligning those with God's will. Realistically, we cannot commit to being perfect, but we can commit to staying on a path towards perfection – to stick with the process. There also is remaining faithful to our relationship with God, and to whatever God may be calling us to do in our lives. **So, we will define “fidelity” as the quality of staying committed to a process of defining our values according to God’s will and of aligning our actions with those values in the face of adversity, while praying for God’s grace to empower us to do so.**

## *Scripture*

2 Timothy 4:1-5: “I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus ...: proclaim the word; be persistent whether it is convenient or inconvenient; convince, reprimand, encourage through all patience and teaching. ... Be self-possessed in all circumstances; put up with hardship; perform the work of an evangelist; **fulfill your ministry.**”

1 Corinthians 9:24-27: “Do you not know that the runners in the stadium all run in the race, but only one wins the prize? **Run so as to win.** Every athlete exercises discipline in every way. They do it to win a perishable crown, but we an imperishable one. Thus I do not run aimlessly; I do not fight as if I were shadowboxing. No, I drive my body and train it, for fear that, after having preached to others, I myself should be disqualified.”

Hebrews 12:4: “In your struggle against sin **you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood.**”

Philippians 3:12-14: “It is not that I have already taken hold of it or have already attained perfect maturity, but **I continue my pursuit** in hope that I may possess it .... I for my part do not consider myself to have taken possession. Just one thing: forgetting what lies behind but **straining forward to what lies ahead, I continue my pursuit toward the goal**, the prize of God's upward calling, in Christ Jesus.”

## *Reflection*

I remember watching the 1984 summer Olympics in Los Angeles on television. It was the first year for the women's marathon. One memorable finisher, 37th place, was Gabriela Andersen-Schiess. She was dehydrated and exhausted from the August, Southern Californian heat but did not give up. When she entered the Los Angeles Coliseum for the final lap, she could hardly walk. But she did not give up! She kept going, did the final lap in

the Coliseum, and reached the finish line to a roaring crowd. We naturally celebrate not giving up!

Our commitment in a relationship tends to start with an initial excitement, but sometimes a little immaturity while the relationship is not tested. Our relationship with God can have a similar dynamic. Initially, it may seem easy to remain committed to the process of our spiritual growth. We initially want to conform our will to God's and love like He does. But then it gets hard to do, or too easy not to do. At these times it is not helpful to tell ourselves that we need to just try harder.

In a way, looking after our spiritual health is more like looking after our physical and mental health than preparing for a competitive sport. Being vigilant, developing good habits, and having a regular checkup, like this audit, will help us to stay aligned with our values and God's will. It helps to have some way to detect whether we are veering off track. As we encounter and overcome challenges, one by one, we get stronger in our commitment and more resistant to those challenges. Those challenges likely will arise under one of the other themes within this audit, and can be addressed through the guidance associated with that theme.

Many passages in the Bible describe heaven as the reward for fidelity or faithfulness to the end. As our wills become fully unified with God's will, our fidelity or faithfulness, like our faith itself, become fulfilled.

# Patience

## **Definition**

There are many meanings of the word “patience,” but for the purposes of these exercises we will use a narrower definition from Catholic mystical theology of patience as a virtue. In this context, patience is a “Christian virtue that makes us withstand, with equanimity of soul for the love of God and in union with Jesus Christ, all physical and moral sufferings.” – Tanqueray. **In other words, “patience” is the quality of enduring suffering out of love of God or love of neighbor.**

## **Scripture**

2 Cor. 12:7-8, 10: St Paul said this about his own suffering: “For I do not do the good I want, but I do the evil I do not want. ... Miserable one that I am! Who will deliver me from this mortal body?” Rom. 7: 19, 24; and “A thorn in the flesh was given to me . . . to keep me from being too elated. Three times I begged the Lord about this, that it might leave me, but he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.’ ... Therefore, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and constraints, for the sake of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong.”

Col. 3: 12-14,17: St. Paul advised the Colossians: “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do. And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection.”

## **Reflection**

A popular reading for weddings begins, “Love is patient.” 1 Cor. 13:4. Patience is an attribute of love. Better, one exercises patience *when suffering is endured out of love of God or love of neighbor*. Thus, patience is an action done *because of and with love*, and not for some other reason. We are not acting with patience if our actions are accompanied by bitterness, resentment, or anger, or are motivated primarily by fear, sense of obligation, pride, or desire for recognition. Patience also is *enduring suffering*, not merely delaying gratification or accepting just consequences of our own actions.

There are several benefits to developing the ability to act with patience in many circumstances. This ability helps us to bring control over our senses, to accept discomfort that inevitably arises from observing our senses, feelings, and thoughts, to resolve conflicts with others, and to accept the suffering that is part of everyday life.

The mystics tell us that patience develops in stages. Initially, our ability to be patient starts with being able simply to *accept* suffering. Perhaps we do not know what to do, other than just acknowledge suffering’s presence. After we can notice and accept suffering for what it

is, we can gradually develop the ability to choose how to act in response to it - and choose to endure it out of a desire for the good of others or ourselves. As we learn to endure suffering *out of love*, we come to a deeper understanding of what it means to love and be loved, and we learn to *embrace* suffering. We ultimately discover that we *encounter God* in suffering, where patience becomes a *love* for suffering, where we endure sufferings *with Jesus* as part of God's greater plan. Weakness, whether our own or another's, turns into strength.

Realistically, how we react to suffering, and the stages of our development of patience, likely will depend on thoughts or feelings that arise due to the circumstances. The suffering we endure may be our own, that of family, friend, or other loved one, or even a stranger. The suffering may be our own fault, someone else's fault, no one's fault, or we might blame someone not at fault or even blame God. Guilt that may arise from injuring a loved one may drive us to endure their suffering more easily than, say, the anger or resentment or sadness that may accompany our own suffering due to another's intentional act or due to a tragic sequence of events beyond anyone's control. But when we develop the ability to notice what is happening internally, we can choose to endure the suffering, theirs or ours, out of love, despite the thoughts or feelings that arise.

For example, while Paul describes the "thorn" in his flesh and his guilt around not doing good and doing evil instead, and acknowledges feeling miserable, he realized God had a purpose - to keep him from becoming too elated. While our own suffering can refine us in some way, as it did St. Paul, we often will not know what God's purpose is. Our suffering could be intended to help others, as Jesus' passion and death did. Therefore, it is especially important to be patient with our own suffering to provide others an opportunity to benefit from it.

Now when we suffer because of someone else's action, we may be quick to judge, denounce, blame, or be angry. However, it is generally rare that someone acts with full intent and awareness of what they are doing if those actions are hurting others. Instead, people generally do well if they can. Exercising patience enables us to, in spite of our emotional reactions, to take the time to understand the other person, which also makes it easier to forgive.

Finally, what does it really mean to endure suffering *out of love*? St. Pope John Paul II once wrote that people, in their suffering, "open up space for mercy." To act patiently, out of love, means to *take the time and effort to enter into and be in that space* suffering has opened up - to endure the suffering for as long as necessary *to allow love and mercy* into that space. Eventually, we will realize that Jesus, love and mercy incarnate, is already there in that space, in that moment, waiting for us to encounter Him and to cooperate with Him to be His instrument of mercy.

# Meekness

## ***Definition***

"Meekness" exemplifies how a label is not helpful to explain what we mean. In many modern languages and cultures, the word "meek" often means passive or weak. That was not always so. The word used in the Bible - say, in the Beatitudes, as in "Blessed are the meek" - is the Greek word "*praus*." According to scholars, this word used to mean "strength under control," especially a person's ability to properly control their power when angered in response to an injustice. The Catholic mystics would emphasize that proper "control" means acting in alignment with God's will. Meekness is not merely self-restraint, or worse, passive and weak inaction, but action in cooperation with God. **So, for our purpose, we define "meekness" as the quality of exercising our will over our power and emotions in response to injustice through prompt, deliberate action aligned with God's will.**

## ***Scripture***

Ephesians 4: 26-27: "Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun set on your anger, and do not leave room for the devil."

1 Samuel 24:11: David said to Saul, "You see for yourself today that the LORD just now delivered you into my hand in the cave. I was told to kill you, but I took pity on you instead. I decided, 'I will not raise a hand against my master, for he is the LORD's anointed.'" Read 1 Samuel 24 for full context.

Matthew 26:53-54: When Jesus was being arrested, he said to Peter, "Do you think that I cannot call upon my Father and he will not provide me at this moment with more than twelve legions of angels? But then how would the scriptures be fulfilled which say that it must come to pass in this way?"

Mt 21:12-13: Jesus cleansing the Temple: "Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all those engaged in selling and buying there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves. And he said to them, 'It is written: 'My house shall be a house of prayer,' but you are making it a den of thieves.'" See also Mark 11:15-17; Luke 19 45-46; John 2:13-22; Isaiah 56; Psalm 69:10; Jeremiah 7:11.

## ***Reflection***

Psychologists tell us that feeling angry is, at one level, an emotion that arises in response to a *perceived* injustice. Feeling angry is the way that our mind tells us that injustice is near. Our concern is how we respond to that emotion.

There is a logical reason to be careful in our reaction to this emotion. For one thing, our perception of any situation is limited. We might believe we are right, and want to be right, but

we can never fully know— we might be wrong. Pride makes us overconfident. Even if our feelings are justified, there is a true injustice, how we *react* to that feeling also can be a problem. Like many things in the spiritual life, while external things, like an injustice, can injure our body or minds, how we *choose to respond* is what can wound our souls.

At one extreme is an unrestrained reaction - without deliberately choosing how to act in the moment. Such reactions to feeling angry typically are an exercise of unbridled power – like rage, violence, or revenge, whether physical or emotional. The more power one has, the more likely harm will be done by unleashing that power. At the opposite extreme, exercising restraint without a guide usually results in inaction or delayed action, which is weakness.

Somewhere in the middle is where most of us are. We tend to act following our own rules for handling insult or injury, often developed as children, often around protecting our honor or protecting ourselves physically or emotionally. Many times, we feel angry because we have a deep-seated desire for honor. We react when someone hurts our honor. We bully the bully. Or we hit back harder than we were hit, so we are not hit again. We run and hide. We ask someone else to handle our problems. We give in. Injustices we have experienced from which we create our rules may be severe enough to cause psychological trauma, especially in the case where another person’s malevolence or desire to harm us was evident. If this resonates with you, seek some counseling before going further in this exercise.

Our unrestrained reaction, unguided restraint, or deliberate action driven out of honor or other rule, is not an act of love – are not acts that align with God’s will. God wills that we love - to *will the good of the other*. The guide we have to restrain our power and emotions, yet act promptly and deliberately, is to act in a way that wills the good of the other. Feel angry at injustice, but still be love in that moment.

The first two Scripture passages above exemplify restraint of power in response to a real threat of unjust death. Take some time to read them and the context, and notice how the restraint is guided by the desire to do God’s will.

Then, let us look closely at the event of Jesus cleansing the temple. It is one of the few events that is recorded in all four gospels, so it must be significant. All descriptions of Jesus’s actions are short (about two verses) and appear to emphasize that the temple area, a house of prayer, was being misused as a marketplace.

How is driving out animals and overturning tables *meek*? Popular, modern images and dramatizations of this event suggest Jesus acted angrily. But the Gospels do not say that. Imagine how those words also could describe a Jesus acting calmly, deliberately, authoritatively, and promptly. Remember he was acknowledged as a teacher, who would have had some level of authority or at least influence in the temple. Dr. Brent Pitre explains that the temple, at the time of Jesus, had a central structure into which only Jews could enter. This part was surrounded by a walled-in courtyard. In Jesus’ time, Gentiles were permitted to, and did, come to worship God by entering into that courtyard. By turning that part of the temple into a marketplace, they were preventing Gentiles from entering the temple area for prayer and worship. The injustice Jesus remedied was not what the money changers and vendors were *doing*, but what they were *preventing*. Jesus was restoring the

temple to its proper condition - where Gentiles could worship as God intended. Think about Jesus' actions in this context: "Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you." 1 Cor 3:16. What would Jesus see and do, if you let Him in to cleanse your temple?

Meekness develops in stages. Initially, our ability to practice meekness starts with being able simply to notice and acknowledge when we feel angry, without immediately reacting to it. We become able, in the moment, to say, "Wow, I'm feeling angry right now!" Next, we can learn to create some distance from that feeling. One step is by relying on humility to pose yourself the question, "Why am I feeling that way?" Another step is developing the ability to choose how to act in response to our anger. We can inject enough time between noticing our feeling and deciding how to act - enough to let us ask ourselves, "What rule do I have for myself for acting now?" We can then make the effort to change the rule we have. Finally, As we grow in humility, we can grow in meekness, as we learn to accept external occurrences as not within our control, and we tend not to be easily angered. We might even start asking the question, "Why are they doing that to me?"

What is *extreme meekness*, where our response to injustice is completely unified with God's love? St. Thomas Aquinas said, "If you are not provoked even when you have a just cause, this is above human manner." What does one do, if not provoked? All injustice arises only from human nature, and therefore arises out of the injury to the soul of our brother or sister. When we see in our brother's or sister's eyes that the injustice they cause is due to their pain, their injury, their suffering, to be one with God means to be *mercy – to bring healing*. It is being one with Jesus on the cross. Meekness, in love, means to *respond to another's act of injustice by engaging with the brokenness of their soul with the purpose that they be healed* – with prayer, sacrifice, and acts of mercy - that they might invite Jesus in to cleanse their temple.