



# WINNOWING FAN

The Spiritual Life according to the Fathers and Saints of the Catholic Church in preparation for Christ's Second Coming.

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## YEAR OF THE PRIEST - Meditation 12b - Be Perfect.

The Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, encouraged the priests in this 'Year of the Priest' to contemplate the truths of the Catholic Church. The first time I heard those words were during my seminary days while taking up 'Asceticism, Contemplation and Christian Perfection.' It is the normal way to salvation for all souls. This is to go through the life of Repentance, Faith, Hope and Charity. And perfecting the theological virtues with the help of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. This means 'being perfect as the Heavenly Father is perfect.'

St. Thomas of Aquinas noted that before the Apostles could go out and preach they had to undergo the following steps. First, they had to live a life of repentance as preached by the Old Testament (and specifically by St. John the Baptist.) Added to this they had to perfect their life of repentance as taught by Christ (during His 30 years of hidden life) in the New Testament. Secondly, they attained faith when they left all things (when Christ called them to follow Him.) Thirdly, their imperfect faith had to be tested during Christ's passion when they doubted. Fourthly, their faith was strengthened after the Resurrection. Fifthly, they had to undergo the final instructions of Christ on how the perfect faith of the Church



should look like at the Second Coming. Sixthly, they had to undergo the dark night of the senses when their senses would no longer sense Christ with His Ascension into heaven. Seventhly, they had to be united with one mind and heart in Bethany by a life showing the obedience of the Church (Bethany means 'obedience'). And eighthly, they had to be fortified by the presence of the Holy Spirit for their incoming work. This Catholic Doctrine is very much different from the many Charismatic movements that believe they can reach the 8th state without passing the seven previous stages.

To contemplate the truths of the Catholic Church one has to reach the perfection of Faith, Hope and Charity with the help of the gift of wisdom and while experiencing the peace of Christ. This is what ascetical and mystical theology taught us. And we were taught that this is the normal way of going to heaven. If our priests have not contemplated on the truths of the Church it means they do not know those truths. If they do not know the truths they cannot teach it to their parishioners. If both the parishioners and priests do not know the truths then .....who is Catholic? St. Thomas was clear in saying that no one should go out preaching and being instruments of salvation unless they had reached the eighth step, i.e. fortified by the abiding of the Holy Spirit.

The reason the Pope called the 'Year of the Priest' is to remind all to contemplate the truths of the Church. But considering the steps one must take

to reach that contemplative state, and considering that most priests have to start from step one, how promising is the possibility of accomplishing this goal during Pope Benedict's reign.

Taking the cue from the words of Pope Benedict when he observed that the cause of the problems in the priesthood today is the 'lack of conversion' or as he said more exactly during his Lenten talks, 'the inability to repent' we are now talking of a more serious problem. St. Augustine described contemplation as the highest Beatitude with fear of the Lord as the first step towards it. Pope Benedict is hinting on the fact that many have not yet reached the first Beatitude due to inability to repent or undergo the so-called first conversion.

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Why are souls unable to repent or have their first conversion? Because they do not know what it is and how to go about it. This is sad because these are taught in the Liturgy of the Mass during the whole year. This is briefly summarized during the Lenten Season, our knowledge of it is perfected up to the Ascension. And the 34 Sundays between Pentecost and Christ the King tell the steps on how to perfect our Faith, Hope and Charity that makes us able to contemplate the truths of the Catholic Church.

## Christian Doctrines cannot be taught in a Theology Classroom.

It is probably the defect of some old curricula. In an effort to make the subject clear they had been presented as a manual (like the popular summary of Moral Theology I used for cramming.) This shackles the freedom and dynamism of the life in grace, theological virtues and gifts of the Holy Spirit. After learning these important topics most seminarians do not know how to apply it in their lives.

This is the reason why great spiritual writers, like St. John of the Cross and St. Francis de Sales wrote in a free style, avoiding a schematic form. They tried avoiding making religion look like a skeleton that has no life.

On the other hand the great saints, like Robert Bellarmine and Charles

Borromeo made religion so alive that the student can actually see how the spiritual life is a way of life that looks like a growing child. With the highest degree of perfection, the contemplative life, looking like an everyday young adult doing what is necessary and normal for all who tend towards unity with God.

## THE TWO PURIFICATIONS

Purifications are a common practice in many religions. It is based on the common belief that mankind, somehow at the beginning, did something wrong and has to make amends for that wrong. It is the universal consciousness of “original sin.” And so many consider purification as an essential first step in the spiritual journey.

In Christianity the first is active purification wherein a person exerts human efforts to behave as human as possible by controlling his bodily desires that tend to make him behave like an animal.

The second purification is done by God Himself, in which we do not exert active efforts; thus it is called passive purification.

While the active purification consists in the purification of the

senses making it serve God alone, the passive purification is, also, the purification of the senses. This is the stage of contemplation which Pope Benedict XVI said all priests should reach to be fruitful in their mission. This is still in the normal way of sanctity. There is nothing extraordinary in this. This is normal for all souls working for the attainment of sanctity and, therefore, expected from all.

## THE VIRTUES, GIFTS and CONTEMPLATION.

Contemplation helps actualize the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. The gifts of the Holy Spirit perfect the theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity.

Without the Gifts actualized by contemplation all our thoughts, words, and works are imperfect, cold and troubled. With the gifts actualized by contemplation our works become just, ardent, and clear for the greater service of God, writes St. Ignatius in a well-known letter to St. Francis Borgia.

All men can be spiritual heroes if they do not put any obstacle to God’s work of grace. Unfortunately, only

the spiritual elites respond generously to God’s grace. To be a saint you must be heroes...and that means being an elite in one’s knowledge of the working of grace.

The more a soul attaches himself to God by a life of complete dependence the more apt it becomes in receiving graces in abundance.

Prayer should not only be desirable but necessary for sanctity.

To go straight to heaven without passing through purgatory we reach the full development of the infused theological virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This is necessary to merit the Beatific Vision. This is the description of a soul completely purified by the trials of the present life with a good will.

*Miss no single opportunity of making some small sacrifice, here by a smiling look, there by a kindly word; always doing the smallest thing right and doing it all for love.*

*Remember that nothing is small in the eyes of God. Do all that you do with love.*

St. Therese of Lisieux

