

RECONQUISTA

(MARIAN EDITION)

A SPIRITUAL PILGRIMAGE
FOR THE MARIAN YEAR

COMMITMENT TO RECONQUISTA

Commitment + Accountability = Success

“The quality of a person’s life is in direct proportion to their commitment to excellence, regardless of their chosen field of endeavor.” (Vince Lombardi)

I, the undersigned, commit myself during the Marian Year (December 8, 2021 to December 8, 2022) to follow *Reconquista*, a program which will last from

_____ until _____,
for a total of 60 days.

I freely engage myself to make every effort in my power to be faithful to the spirit and requirements of this program, for the greater glory of God.

If, through weakness, I should fail to observe these, it is my firm intention not to give up, but to continue to strive to fulfill the program, however many days may remain.

SIGNED: _____

DATE: _____

Suggested Times for *Reconquista*

If start: December 4	Will end: February 2 (Presentation)
If start: January 24	Will end: March 25 (Annunciation)
If start: February 16	Will end: April 17 (Easter Sunday)
If start: April 1	Will end: May 31 (Mary's Queenship)
If start: June 16	Will end: August 15 (Assumption)
If start: July 17	Will end: September 15 (7 Sorrows)
If start: August 8	Will end: October 7 (Holy Rosary)
If start: October 9	Will end: December 8 (Imm. Conc.)

MORNING PRAYERS

Morning Offering

O Jesus, through the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I offer thee my prayers, works, joys, and sufferings of this day, for all the intentions of Thy Sacred Heart, in union with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass throughout the world today, in thanksgiving for Thy favors, in reparation for my sins, for the intentions of all my relatives and friends, and in particular for the intentions of the Sovereign Pontiff.

Hail Mary... (*x3, for the virtue of purity*)

Reconquista Morning Prayer

Come, Holy Ghost, Eternal Sanctifier, Spirit of Christ, Soul of the Church. Ignite in my soul an unfailing desire to reconquer myself for Christ so that I might be an instrument in His hands for the conquest of the world. Drive out from my heart all cowardice, laziness, and self-seeking. Pour out your blessings upon all those engaged in *Reconquista* and keep us faithful to our commitment, for the glory of the Most Holy Trinity and the salvation of our souls. Amen.

EVENING PRAYERS

Examination of Conscience

(How have I done this day with following the requirements of the program? How has my spirit been this day? How have I done with particular faults that I struggle with? Have I been a good accountability partner?)

Act of Contrition

O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee and I detest all of my sins because I dread the loss of heaven and the pains of hell, but most of all because they have offended Thee, my God, Who art all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of Thy grace, to confess my sins, to do penance, and to amend my life.

Hail Mary... *(x3, for the virtue of purity)*

Reconquista Evening Prayer

Most Holy Ghost, receive the consecration that I make of my entire being. From this moment on, come into every area of my life and into each of my actions. Thou art my Light, my Guide, my Strength, and the sole desire of my heart. I abandon myself without reserve to Thy Divine action, and I desire to be ever docile to Thine inspirations. O Holy Ghost, transform me, with and through Mary, into another Christ Jesus, for the glory of the Father and the salvation of the world. Amen.

PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

Prayer

- Morning and evening prayers (includes examination of conscience)
- Daily rosary
- At least 20 minutes per day dedicated to prayer (in the chapel, unless impossible)
- Readings, as recommended
 - Books that we will be using will be available at the switchboard as a packaged deal (at a discounted rate).
 - Here's the list of books in the packaged deal: Achieving Peace of Heart (by Fr. Irala), The New Testament, and Consecration to Our Lady According to St. Louis de Montfort
 - Additionally, there will be some readings from Spiritual Combat (by Fr. Scupoli) and The Imitation of Christ (by A Kempis); both of these are not included in the package, since they are available for free online (during the Marian Year, you can find them at the website: anewimmaculata.org)

Asceticism

- *Practices*
 - Regular and intense exercise (3x/week)
 - Sleep (recommend 7-8 hours per night)

- ***Sacrifices***

- *Physical*

- Cold (or at least lukewarm) showers
 - No snacking between meals
 - Wednesdays and Fridays are to be more serious days of fast. Eat one regular meal and two smaller meals. Abstain from meat on Fridays.
 - No alcohol alone (or drinking at social functions only, in moderation)

- *Entertainment*

- No “modern” music, i.e. rap, pop, rock, modern country
 - No movies, television, video games

- *Internet*

- Internet only for school/work functions. This includes social media.
 - Cell phone only for legitimate communication or coordination (using the device for other things, like music, etc. is fine)

Fraternity

- [Note: it is up to you to establish a group of family members or friends with whom you will engage in *Reconquista*. The parish will not be arranging any fraternity meetings.]
- Attending a weekly meeting of your team, with accusations for failures in the program.

- Attending whole group activities, where applicable.
- Strive to get to know those on your team and support each other!

GENERAL PRACTICES

- Sodality: Uncompromising weekly fraternity meeting. Also consider time together outside of the meeting each week (e.g. a meal together every once in a while, if possible). Lastly, consider taking a fraternity pilgrimage or adventure at the end of *Reconquista*. Past participants in *Reconquista* have reported that the fraternity was essential to personal success.
- Accountability Partner: Each person should be assigned a partner to whom he will give an account of his discipline and struggle on a daily basis. The accounting may be nothing more than a text message or a quick check-in. Probing questions of accountability and deep listening/empathy/compassion is profitable.
- Imperative: Know Christ. Be joyful!

FRATERNITY MEETINGS

STEP ONE: Start with an opening prayer.

STEP TWO: Canvas the room and have each person make an account of his personal freedom. Each man states one 'up' and one 'down' about his prayer and practice of the Reconquista penances. He may also add one 'up' and one 'down' from his family and professional life. The other people are there to listen to and support him with encouragement. It is NOT to become a group therapy session where one is bombarded with advice by other members of the fraternity. The questions below may be helpful for conversation: "Do I continue to enjoy true freedom?"

Have I done/am I doing anything that might jeopardize my freedom? Have I abused the use of technology or social media? Am I angry, apathetic, depressed, overwhelmed, or reclusive? Am I communicating well with my spouse, sons and daughters, parishioners, members of my community? Am I exercising and eating good food? Have I used my freedom to love God more fully and my neighbor (family and friends and others) more perfectly?"

STEP THREE: Discuss the readings. Did anything stand out? Anything you found interesting? Find any connections with anything else?

STEP FOUR: Fraternity Maintenance: Review, discuss, and assess the regimen of Reconquista that you have adopted as your Rule. Set/update/review fraternal goals and plans for the future (A Work of Mercy, a camping trip, a cook-out, the next meeting, etc). Ask: Is there an adjustment that the fraternity needs to make? How can the fraternity serve each person better?

STEP FIVE: Close with prayer intentions and the Prayer of St. Michael for the protection of the Church and our families.

With any questions about any of the above, please feel free to contact Fr. Torzala: jtorzala@smac.edu

+ MARIAN RECONQUISTA +

**DAILY
THOUGHTS
AND
READING
ASSIGNMENTS**

WEEK ONE

Theme: Basics and Preliminaries

Goals for the Week:

Organization:

(1) Go through the monthly overview, filling in any major events or whatever may prevent you from attending the group meetings or team meetings. Use foresight, especially as regards the sacrifices required by the program.

(2) Develop and handwrite a daily/weekly schedule, which should include: rise time and bedtime; prayer schedule (rosary and 20 minutes in the chapel); exercise times; anything that is "fixed" for you, such as work or school; meal times (as regular as possible). Routine is an ally in this kind of program!

Intentions:

(1) Write down your personal intentions. When things are hard, or sacrifices are required, look at these and offer things up for them.

(2) Write down some personal goals you want to achieve during the program or as a result of the program. You will gain efficiency, time, and willpower during this program, so put it to good use to accomplish whatever you want.

Challenges for the Week:

(1) Getting used to the requirements of the program: it will be tough to remember everything and hard sometimes to put it into practice. The solution here is to build your daily schedule.
(2) Having a lot of spare time due to dropping various forms of entertainment. This cannot remain idle time! We **MUST** replace it with something positive. Some ideas:

- (a) Take up a hobby that interests you.
- (b) Decide that you are going to learn a particular topic thoroughly and give time to it each day.
- (c) Write letters (handwrite!) or call friends.
- (d) Create social opportunities within the Reconquista group or within your team. Decide that you are going to form some new friendships.

Mystical Body:

All of us affect the entire group. Support the group by conquering your own challenges! Finally, what you get out of this is what you put into it.

DAY ONE

Recommended Spiritual Reading: *The Spiritual Combat*: Ch. 1 [The chapter numbers we will be referencing are not from the Sophia Press edition, but from the original and complete edition of *The Spiritual Combat*, which is available for free online]

-or-

Consecration to Mary, Introduction to Week 1: The Spirit of the World (pp.17-20) [The page numbers given will be from the Angelus Press edition (8th printing - April 2021) of *Consecration to Mary*]

“The life of man upon earth is a warfare.” (Job 7:1)

Christ was clear about man’s ultimate purpose: “what does it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his soul?” We are here to get to save our own soul and, along with ourselves, as many souls as we can. This does not just “happen,” as if God destines certain men to make it and others not. We are here to work out our salvation, to fight for the incorruptible crown. We are in a war, with each day bringing its battles to be fought courageously and won. *Reconquista* is a special battle, designed to advance us much further towards our final goal and complete victory over the enemy.

As we start *Reconquista*, what we need most is greatness of soul, “magnanimity.” This is not something abstract, but starts with **vision** and **desire**. We *see* what we can become, with our efforts and God’s grace, and then we desire that whole-heartedly. Here we too often limit ourselves. We think it is “impossible” for

ourselves to win certain battles; we cultivate a spirit of defeatism. The battle is over before it begins!

Expand your vision. What do you want to become? What do you want to conquer? “Anything you ask in My name, that I will give you.” There is no limit placed here. Once we see clearly where we want to go, we must desire that strongly. Like Daniel, we have to be “men of desires” and great desires.

During this first week, focus on this vision and desire. Pray for it and sacrifice for it.

DAY TWO

Recommended Spiritual Reading: *The Spiritual Combat*, Ch. 2&3

-or-

Consecration to Mary, Week 1: Day 1 (pp.21-29)

“The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away.” (Mt. 11:12)

Especially as we begin this program, we face one of the worst enemies of the spiritual life: ourselves. Fr. Scupoli in today’s reading speaks about distrust of self, and indeed this is foundational. St. Philip Neri used to say often to God, “Beware of Philip, Lord, for he will betray you.” If we allow our fallen nature too much leeway, it will drag us down. We are not trying to cultivate a *fearfulness* of self, but rather a *distrust*. We are not afraid of ourselves; rather, we see clearly who we are, and we take steps to minimize the dangers. Just as the General, aware of

a danger to his army, will act to contain that difficulty, so we must counteract the evil tendencies of our fallen nature.

Our Lord says that it is the *violent* who bear away the kingdom of heaven. The violence of which He speaks is a “violence against self,” a natural product of this distrust of self. We act to restrain our unruly passions; we deprive ourselves of something to which we are unduly attached; and so on. There are two great things to remember, in doing violence to oneself. **First**, it is not the magnitude of the acts that matter, but their consistency and intention – better to do small acts of mortification each day, than to do one great act once in a while. **Second**, we must not rely upon our own strength to accomplish even the smallest of these, but rest on the strength of Christ. This is the great complement of the doctrine of distrust of self, viz. *trust* in God.

With regard to confidence and trust, we cannot limit God’s action. He is omnipotent, so we must treat Him as such. Not that we want to achieve the goal without working towards it; rather, we are ready to do anything so that, supported by His power, we achieve our goal.

DAY THREE

Recommended Spiritual Reading: *The Spiritual Combat*, Ch. 4-6

-or-

Consecration to Mary, Week 1: Day 2 (pp.29-36)

Each week, on Day 3, we will take the time to look at a story in Scripture that “fits” our theme of manliness and courage. These

stories can inspire us to “act manfully” and also can open our eyes to the treasures contained in the Bible. **The story for today is found in I Maccabees chapters 1-2.**

DAY FOUR

Recommended Spiritual Reading: *The Spiritual Combat*, Ch. 7

-or-

Consecration to Mary, Week 1: Day 3 (pp.37-43)

“Faith means battles; if there are no contests, it is because there are none who desire to contend.” (St. Ambrose)

Remember the goals of this week! If you have not already, make sure to sit down today to work out a daily schedule for yourself as well as some personal intentions and goals. We have to make these things “real” by handwriting them and keeping them before our eyes. In this kind of program, routine can be a real ally, since it makes us more efficient and brings about a kind of peace, always knowing what we are focusing on. Likewise, it helps us to “live in the moment.”

It is also important, this week, to observe and take note of how much free time we have. Removing certain forms of entertainment may leave gaps that should be filled with meaningful activities. This is the time to think about personal goals and what you may wish to work on. As you go through the weeks of Reconquista, you are going to find yourself much more efficient and more directed in your work. You will be able to apply a greater energy to your work. Therefore, allow yourself to

have great desires for your personal goals, too!

DAY FIVE

Recommended Spiritual Reading: *The Spiritual Combat*, Ch. 8

-or-

Consecration to Mary, Week 1: Day 4 (pp.43-49)

The Story of Charles de Foucauld

When Charles de Foucauld entered the French military academy of Saint Cyr, he was too fat to squeeze into a regulation uniform – a private tailor had to be commissioned. One of his classmates later recalled, “If you have not seen Foucauld in his room, clad in his white flannel pajamas buttoned with frogs, sprawled leisurely upon his divan, or in a commodious armchair, enjoying a tasty snack with pâté de foie-gras, washing it down with a choice champagne, then you have never seen a man really enjoying himself.” Such behavior acquired for him the nickname of “Piggy.” His years in the academy were distinguished only by his riotous living and the frequency of his official reprimands. As a student, he was less than stellar. He graduated from cavalry school 86th in a class of 87. His first assignment was to North Africa where he quickly got into trouble for sending his mistress Mimi ahead of him, passing her off as his wife, the Viscountess de Foucauld. In light of the ensuing scandal, Charles was informed that he must make a choice: either Mimi or the army. Without hesitation he made his choice, resigning his commission and returning to France, and to his scandalized family. They retaliated by putting his finances in the hands of a trustee.

One would hardly call this an auspicious beginning for a life of sanctity in the service of God. But there were some shreds of nobility in the overfed and sensual young Charles de Foucauld. He had scarcely arrived in Paris on his return from North Africa when he received news that his former comrades were about to go into battle against Arab rebels. Charles could not bear the thought of sitting on the sidelines while his friends faced death in service of their country. And so he said farewell to Mimi forever and returned promptly to Algeria. To everyone's surprise, he fought valiantly in battle and demonstrated considerable skill as an officer. This single noble action sowed the seeds of discipline and dedication to a higher cause that would bear fruit later.

Charles, as you have probably gathered by now, was not at this time practicing or even believing the religion of his ancestors. His only god was his belly. He acquired fame on account of a one-man geographical expedition to Morocco, visiting vast territories not traversed by Christians in over a thousand years. He published a book about his journey and was awarded the gold medal of the French Geographical Society. But even this was not enough for Charles. Something was stirring within him. His journey had given him the sense that there is something greater and more real than the pleasures of this world. He restlessly roamed the streets of Paris repeating a prayer, "My God, if you exist, make your existence known to me." Finally overcoming his own reluctance, Charles sought out a famous confessor and spiritual director, the Abbé Huvelin. He found the priest in the confessional, described his predicament to him, and asked the good father to recommend some reading. Huvelin told Charles that what he needed was not to be found in books, and

that if he wished to believe, all he needed to do was to make his confession and receive communion. Charles at once complied and felt his life transformed. He would make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, spend seven years as a Trappist monk, and finally find his place as a missionary hermit in North Africa. Here he lived the life of rigorous austerity coupled with profound apostolic charity. Although on the human level, his missionary work was a failure, the sincerity of his conversion, the depths of his love of God, and the unction of his spiritual writings have inspired Catholics to our day.

To read more about Charles de Foucauld, see his biography by René Bazin, or some selected writings edited by Robert Ellsberg.

DAY SIX

Recommended Spiritual Reading: *The Spiritual Combat*, Ch. 9

-or-

Consecration to Mary, Week 1: Day 5 (pp.49-55)

On the sixth day of each week, we will offer subject-matter for meditation, or a more prolonged consideration of a topic. If you are able, go to the chapel with some of these notes and spend 10-15 minutes considering the various points. At the end, follow the prayer given (as in today) or else make a prayer on your own, asking God for the graces you are inspired to desire.

Today, the meditation is taken from the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. It is the meditation on the Call of Christ the King.

THE CALL OF THE TEMPORAL KING

*IT HELPS TO CONTEMPLATE THE LIFE OF THE KING
ETERNAL*

Before beginning, I will ask grace of God our Lord that all of my intentions, actions and operations may be directed purely to the service and praise of His Divine Majesty.

Then, I will use my imagination to present to myself the synagogues, villages, and towns through which Christ our Lord preached.

Then, I will ask for the grace that I may not be deaf to His call, but ready and diligent to fulfill His most Holy Will.

In the first part of this meditation, there are three points:

First Point. The first Point is, to put before me a human king chosen by God our Lord, whom all Christian princes and men reverence and obey.

Second Point. The second, to look how this king speaks to all his people, saying: “It is my Will to conquer all the land of unbelievers. Therefore, whoever would like to come with me is to be content to eat as I, and also to drink and dress, etc., as I: likewise he is to labor like me in the day and watch in the night, etc., that so afterwards he may have part with me in the victory, as he has had it in the labors.”

Third Point. The third, to consider what the good subjects ought to answer to a King so liberal and so kind, and hence, if any one

did not accept the appeal of such a king, how deserving he would be of being censured by all the world, and held for a mean-spirited knight.

The second part of this Exercise consists in applying the above parable of the temporal King to Christ our Lord, conformably to the three Points mentioned.

First Point. And as to the first Point, if we consider such a call of the temporal King to his subjects, how much more worthy of consideration is it to see Christ our Lord, King eternal, and before Him all the entire world, which and each one in particular He calls, and says: “It is My will to conquer all the world and all enemies and so to enter into the glory of My Father; therefore, whoever would like to come with Me is to labor with Me, that following Me in the pain, he may also follow Me in the glory.”

Second Point. The second, to consider that all those who have judgment and reason will offer their entire selves to the labor.

Third Point. The third, those who will want to be more devoted and signalize themselves in all service of their King Eternal and universal Lord, not only will offer their persons to the labor, but even, acting against their own sensuality and against their carnal and worldly love, will make offerings of greater value and greater importance, saying:

“Eternal Lord of all things, I make my oblation with Thy favor and help, in presence of Thy infinite Goodness and in presence of Thy glorious Mother and of all the Saints of the heavenly Court; that I want and desire, and it is my deliberate determination, if only it

be Thy greater service and praise, to imitate Thee in bearing all injuries and all abuse and all poverty of spirit, and actual poverty, too, if Thy most Holy Majesty wants to choose and receive me to such life and state."

DAY SEVEN

Recommended Spiritual Reading: *The Spiritual Combat*, Ch. 10

-or-

Consecration to Mary, Week 1: Day 6 (pp.55-63)

"I mean to make myself a man, and if I succeed in that, I shall succeed in everything else." (James A. Garfield)

Today marks the completion of the first week of *Reconquista*. Perhaps it was a difficult week, perhaps it was easier than expected. Whatever the case, now is the time to renew our desires and redouble our efforts. The goal is worthwhile, eternally so. Now is the time to act manfully – *viriliter agite*.

At this first "checkpoint," it is helpful to do a short examination of how the week has gone and what we would like still to work on and fix. Start first by asking yourself whether you have achieved the goals for this week: do you have your schedule? Do you have your intentions and goals written down? Then, ask yourself about following the requirements for the program and fulfilling their spirit: is there a particular penance that is harder than others? Was I caught off guard by something? Am I keeping myself from things that are going to drag me down and militate against my commitment? These questions can reveal where we

need to shore up the walls of our defenses, and where to direct our energies.

Likewise, it is important to celebrate successes, to help motivate us for the continued combat: what went better than expected this week? What was easier than expected? What have I accomplished this week? Answering these questions gives a more complete picture of what is going on, so that we don't fall into despondency in seeing our failures.

Remember that we are learning how to wage this spiritual combat. Every day that we spend during this program is strengthening our will and teaching us how we can defeat our enemies in the spiritual life.

WEEK TWO

Theme: The Human Soul (Part One)

Goals for the Week:

Putting the exercises of Fr. Irala into practice, especially as regards the sacrifices we are making for Reconquista. (See below, taken from Achieving Peace of Heart, by Fr. Irala)

Challenges of this Week:

“**Cheating**”: losing a sense of the importance of fidelity in the little details; stretching the boundaries; following only the letter of the law

Response: Reread your commitment sheet and your personal intentions and goals. Put the good of the program before your mind.

Discouragement: we are not where we thought we would be; the program is long; we have just as many bad habits as before; we don’t see the point anymore

Response: Remind yourself that the program must be taken as a “whole” to be effective. The second week can be, in certain ways, the hardest. Make acts of the will to continue. Talk to your friends: everyone goes through ups and downs.

Reminder: The Mystical Body! Support your brothers.

Fr. Irala's program for regaining control:

- (1) Regain control over our minds
- (2) Train the will to follow what the mind judges to be good, and reject what it decides is bad

FIRST: Regain control over our minds

Why do we lose control of the mind? We have two modes: the receptive or passive mode, the productive or active. And we can only do one at a time. When we try to do both at once it is a "parasite idea" which becomes exhausting for our concentration and energy.

Response: train the receptive power simply to receive. Take a minute just to attend to what you hear, then concentrate only on what you can see, touch, etc. Read only the sentence you are reading. ("Conscious sensations")

SECOND: Train the will

How? It is a two-stage process:

- (1) Deliberation – "Will I do it or won't I?"
- (2) Decision – "Yes" or "No."

Practice making acts of will.

Pick an act, for example, raising your hand, taking a cold shower. Then, go through the four steps:

- (1) Make the act chosen concrete by imagining it vividly. Ask: "What's up? What are my options?"
- (2) Feel it's possibility, a practical conviction that this is a real possibility for me, more than just intellectual assent. Ask: "Is it possible?"

(3) Give ourselves a motive. Ask: “Do I have a reason to do it?” – if no other reason, at least “to strengthen my will.”

(4) Decide “Yes” or “No.” Again, not a mere verbal assent, but a real act of the will, which closes off all other avenues.

DAY EIGHT

Recommended Spiritual Reading: *The Spiritual Combat*, Ch. 11

-or-

Consecration to Mary, Week 1: Day 7 (pp.63-70)

“If unwilling to rise in the morning, say to thyself, ‘I awake to do the work of a man.’” (Marcus Aurelius)

As we enter the second week of *Reconquista*, we want to focus on developing will-power. He who is truly in control of his will, able to direct it by the intellect towards choosing the best course of action, such a one is really a man. This is the first and essential work in being a man, in being one upon whom others can rely and trust. For us, this means that the sacrifices we make now take on the character of so many “will acts” (as Fr. Irala calls them). As with exercise and weight-lifting, we have to develop this power in ourselves by repeating actions, even small actions. Go, then, and do the work of a man!

Regarding electronic devices and the internet, this week and the next can also be a determining time. We have gone through one week and know ourselves a bit better. It is good to set some expectations for ourselves this week in our use of cell phones and the internet. If last week we were a bit too “loose” or “free” with our use of them, perhaps we can make that sacrifice and act of the will this week. The most important thing in this regard is to use these devices *intelligently*. They are *tools*, and therefore their goodness or evilness derives from *how we use them*. Since we are practicing acts of the will, a good idea this week is to make sure we use them after reflection and with an act of the will.

Therefore, have some foresight about when you use them. And when it comes time to do so, *choose* to use them, instead of simply “falling into” their use or checking them out of boredom. As with the entire program, what you get out of this is what you put into it. *Viriliter agite!*

DAY NINE

Recommended Spiritual Reading: *The Spiritual Combat*, Ch. 12

-or-

Consecration to Mary, Introduction to Week 2: Knowing Oneself (pp.71-80)

“The letter kills, but the spirit gives life.” (2 Cor. 3:6)

The whole purpose of *Reconquista* is to develop virtue. The word “virtue” comes from the Latin, *virtus*, which in turn comes from *vir*, meaning “man.” *Virtus* therefore first has the meaning of “manliness” and “courage” (as being the most evident demonstration of manliness). *Reconquista* is therefore not primarily about the various penances and sacrifices “imposed” – it is firstly about self-mastery, strength of will, and development of character. In a word, it is about *virtus*. The sacrifices we make a commitment to do are only means to reach the end.

Even if we look directly at the sacrifices or “penances,” they are primarily a question of our *denying ourselves*, putting our will above our lower nature. Therefore, these are primarily a question of an *interior* movement, something *inside of us*. We could call this the “spirit” of *Reconquista*, i.e. that internal act of

renunciation that helps us gain control of ourselves. Accordingly, as St. Paul says, it is this spirit which “gives life,” which makes the program work. If we are faithful to this spirit, then we will achieve our goal of becoming men of *virtus* and conquering our bad habits that have previously dragged our wills through the mud.

In contrast, the “letter of the law” kills. In our case, this is the “law” of the various penances we have taken upon ourselves, e.g. the restricted use of the internet, of cell phones, of food, of alcohol, and so forth. We can choose to “interpret” these penances in a legalistic spirit and find out exactly what is prohibited and what permitted, but this attitude is to reduce everything to the “letter of the law” and therefore to kill or nullify the effectiveness of *Reconquista*. We know very well what we need to do, what we need to sacrifice, and how we need to interpret the restrictions placed upon us by the program. It is our task to follow that *spirit* rather than constantly searching for “loopholes” or how we can have what we want and still pretend that we are following the program.

In this second week, we have to return often to this “spirit.” Ask yourself often, “why did I commit to this program? What do I want to get out of it?” Perhaps it is also a good time to reread the personal intentions and goals you wrote down last week. Come back to these things, especially when you are tempted to follow only the “letter of the law” and try to get away with whatever is not explicitly prohibited. Follow instead the spirit: make the sacrifice of what you know you are too attached to. The spirit gives life!

DAY TEN

In Scripture, the story for today is found in I Samuel (or I Kings) chapter 17 (David and Goliath). The themes in this story to pay attention to are: the humility of David and his confidence in God; those who trust in God are given the victory over their enemies, however strong they are; the glory of God revealed through human weakness.

DAY ELEVEN

Recommended Spiritual Reading: *The Spiritual Combat*, Ch. 13

-or-

Consecration to Mary, Week 2: Day 1 (pp.81-89)

“Without an adversary, *virtus* shrivels. We see how great and how viable *virtus* is when, by endurance, it shows what it is capable of.” (Seneca)

Today marks the middle of the second week of *Reconquista*. It is a good time to review the goals of this week, which are: reading some of Fr. Irala’s book (*Achieving Peace of Heart*) and trying to put some of his suggestions into practice. As we heard in the weekly group meeting, Fr. Irala recommends practicing acts of the will or “will acts.” These acts of the will can be joined to some of the penances and sacrifices that we are committing to on this program. Even with other things, it is worthwhile to attempt to make a few “will acts” connected with your regular actions.

In the reading from *The Spiritual Combat* for today, Fr. Scupoli speaks about dealing with sensuality (note, however, that the question of chastity is dealt with later). These suggestions complement Fr. Irala's observations well, since they also provide the supernatural motivation and means to resist certain temptations.

We are in a school of strength during this entire program. One of the great strengths of the program is its length: by continually denying ourselves, we will acquire virtue. We must therefore continue generously, taking one step at a time.

DAY TWELVE

The Story of Commander Jeremiah Denton

On July 18, 1965, Navy Commander Jeremiah Denton, leading a squadron of 28 A-6 Intruder attack jets and flying his 12th mission over North Vietnam, took off from the aircraft carrier *Independence* in the South China Sea. His bombardier-navigator was Lt. Bill Tschudy, and the target was a complex of military warehouses at Thanh Hoa, 75 miles south of Hanoi. As he came in over the heavily defended Thanh Hoa Bridge on the Ma River, anti-aircraft batteries opened up. Shells riddled the Intruder, knocking out its sophisticated guidance system. The aircraft went into a tailspin, and pain shot through the commander's left thigh; a tendon had ruptured as he desperately tried to regain control, but it was hopeless. The pilots bailed out and were captured. "Dazed and bleeding as I was, my principal emotion was fury," Commander Denton recalled. "I was mad about being

shot down, and even angrier at being captured.”

The prisoner of war had been tortured for 10 months and beaten repeatedly by his North Vietnamese captors, and there were threats of more if he did not respond properly when the North Vietnamese forced him to do a propaganda broadcast. Haggard but gritty, Commander Denton slumped in a chair before the television cameras. Pretending to be blinded by the spotlights, he began blinking — seemingly random spasms and tics. He answered interrogators’ questions about what good treatment the North Vietnamese were giving the prisoners, however he answered with a trace of defiance, knowing he would be beaten again and again, but hoping that America would detect his secret message in Morse code. To a question about America committing “war atrocities,” the captured pilot said: “I don’t know what is happening in Vietnam because the only news sources I have are North Vietnamese. But whatever the position of my government is, I believe in it, I support it, and I will support it as long as I live.” The North Vietnamese, who lost face, were even more outraged when they learned that Commander Denton, in the Japanese-taped interview broadcast on American television on May 17, 1966, had blinked out “T-O-R-T-U-R-E.” This was the first confirmation that American prisoners of war were being subjected to atrocities during the Vietnam War. It became famous after it was discovered that he had tricked his captors and blinked out the Morse code message that exposed North Vietnam’s brutal treatment of prisoners of war.

During his seven years and seven months as a prisoner of war, Commander Denton was held in various prison camps, and endured beatings, starvation, torture and more than four years of

solitary confinement, including periodic detentions in coffin-like boxes. He and other officers nevertheless maintained a chain of command and a measure of discipline among the prisoners. “I put out the policy that they were not to succumb to threats, but must stand up and say no,” he later told the press in 1973. The commander was often punished for urging others to resist. He also devised ways for prisoners to communicate by signs or numbers, tapping on a wall or coughing signals in a sequence.

Commander Denton, finally returning home after his captivity, became a Rear Admiral in the Navy. When he retired from the Navy, he ran for office and was elected to the United States Senate to represent Alabama for one term, becoming the first Catholic to be elected to statewide office in Alabama. During his time in office, he worked especially for the preservation and rights of the family, including a bill to push chastity among teenagers. In 1977, Denton established the Coalition for Decency, dedicated to family values and good citizenship.

Rear Admiral Denton’s first wife, by whom he had seven children and to whom he had been married for 61 years, died in 2007. He remarried after that, and then himself passed away in 2014 at the age of 89. Rear Admiral Denton called himself “an average product of Middle America.”

DAY THIRTEEN

Recommended Spiritual Reading: *The Spiritual Combat*, Ch. 14&15

-or-

Consecration to Mary, Week 2: Day 2 (pp.109-114)

Today being the sixth day of the week, we will offer subject-matter for meditation. If you are able, go to the chapel with some of these notes and spend 10-15 minutes considering the various points. At the end, follow the prayers given or else make a prayer on your own, asking God for the graces you are inspired to desire. If you are unable or do not wish to meditate on these points, feel free to choose something else, or just to spend 10-15 minutes in the chapel in silence, adoring Christ present in the tabernacle.

Today, the meditation is taken from the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. It is the meditation on the Two Standards.

THE TWO STANDARDS

The one of Christ, our Commander-in-chief and Lord; the other of Lucifer, mortal enemy of our human nature.

Before beginning, I will ask grace of God our Lord that all of my intentions, actions and operations may be directed purely to the service and praise of His Divine Majesty.

The First Prelude is the narrative. It will be here how Christ calls and wants all under His standard; and Lucifer, on the contrary, under his.

The Second Prelude is to use the imagined to see the place. It will be here to see a great field of all that region of Jerusalem, where the supreme Commander- in-chief of the good is Christ our Lord; another field in the region of Babylon, where the chief of the enemy is Lucifer.

The Third Prelude is to ask for what I want: and it will be here to ask for knowledge of the deceits of the bad chief and help to guard myself against them, and for knowledge of the true life which the supreme and true Captain shows and grace to imitate Him.

First Point. The first Point is to imagine as if the chief of all the enemy seated himself in that great field of Babylon, as in a great chair of fire and smoke, in shape horrible and terrifying.

Second Point. The second, to consider how he issues a summons to innumerable demons and how he scatters them, some to one city and others to another, and so through all the world, not omitting any provinces, places, states, nor any persons in particular.

Third Point. The third, to consider the discourse which he makes them, and how he tells them to cast out nets and chains; that they have first to tempt with a longing for riches – as he is accustomed to do in most cases – that men may more easily come to vain honor of the world, and then to vast pride. So that the first step shall be that of riches; the second, that of honor; the third, that of pride; and from these three steps he draws on to all the other vices.

So, on the contrary, one has to imagine as to the supreme and true Captain, Who is Christ our Lord.

First Point. The first Point is to consider how Christ our Lord puts Himself in a great field of that region of Jerusalem, in lowly place, beautiful and attractive.

Second Point. The second, to consider how the Lord of all the world chooses so many persons – Apostles, Disciples, etc. – and sends them through all the world spreading His sacred doctrine through all states and conditions of persons.

Third Point. The third, to consider the discourse which Christ our Lord makes to all His servants and friends whom He sends on this expedition, recommending them to want to help all, by bringing them first to the highest spiritual poverty, and – if His Divine Majesty would be served and would want to choose them – no less to actual poverty; the second is to be of contumely and contempt; because from these two things humility follows. So that there are to be three steps; the first, poverty against riches; the second, contumely or contempt against worldly honor; the third, humility against pride. And from these three steps let them induce to all the other virtues.

First Colloquy. One Colloquy to Our Lady, that she may get me grace from Her Son and Lord that I may be received under His standard; and first in the highest spiritual poverty, and – if His Divine Majesty would be served and would want to choose and receive me – not less in actual poverty; second, in suffering contumely and injuries, to imitate Him more in them, if only I can suffer them without the sin of any person, or displeasure of His

Divine Majesty; and with that a HAIL MARY.

Second Colloquy. I will ask the same of the Son, that He may get it for me of the Father; and with that say the SOUL OF CHRIST.

Third Colloquy. I will ask the same of the Father, that He may grant it to me; and say an OUR FATHER.

DAY FOURTEEN

Recommended Spiritual Reading: *The Spiritual Combat*, Ch. 16

-or-

Consecration to Mary, Week 2: Day 3 (pp.114-121)

As we close out this second week of *Reconquista*, we want again to make a short examination of how things went and what we can improve on. It is again a good time to review our personal intentions and goals, since these can motivate us as we move forward.

What is necessary right now is a great *confidence* in God. We have begun this program with good intentions; we do want to serve God. Perhaps we have failed in certain respects; perhaps we are feeling keenly our weakness, even in the face of small sacrifices. Our courage will come from our firm belief that God sees our efforts and is pleased with them. We know that He will not abandon us, and that all who hope in Him are not confounded, as the Psalmist says. Let us therefore renew our courage and our confidence and go forward sure of the victory.

WEEK THREE

Theme: The Human Soul (Part Two)

Goals for the Week:

Continuing putting Fr. Irala's exercises into practice, especially as regards the sacrifices we are making for *Reconquista*.

Challenges of this Week:

1) Complacency: being satisfied with where we are, what we are following faithfully or unfaithfully, instead of following the "spirit" of the program, which consists in a denial of self in order to strengthen our character.

Response: Tell yourself you are a man. Cultivate a good pride in the strength you have. There is honor in denying ourselves and conquering difficulties. Let these attitudes direct your actions, which may lead to you "stepping it up" and looking for other things you can conquer and control in your life. This is the time to expand the greatness of your desires: magnanimity again!

2) Discouragement, even leading to sadness: all of the thoughts we discussed this past week, but perhaps added to this is a kind of sadness and near-despair, "I will never be able to do this." / "I still hate this." / "I am just as mediocre as before." / "Well, this was supposed to work and it didn't, so I am just hopeless."

Response: We just started! There is still time and the program works for those who act manfully and continue, in spite of failures and weakness. Look at your commitment sheet again:

there is something in completing the weeks, even if we stumble. Many times, God rewards those who just manfully stick with it, even though they stumble their way through. We have to complete the race, at least!

Topic for Discussion: Fr. Irala on “How to Train the Sexual Instinct”

Introduction:

Delicate, but necessary topic to discuss. Necessary because of the world today, which is absolutely opposed to the virtue of chastity. Necessary also because we are weak, since we do not know how to make a sacrifice anymore. Necessary finally because whatever our path through life, we need the virtue of chastity: whether as religious or as husbands (“marriage is a school of chastity” says the Archbishop).

I would add: necessary because temptations against chastity wear us down and we quickly become discouraged by their number and vehemence. We need HOPE – this virtue is not unattainable, and again, we can live happy and holy lives, even if these temptations come around from time to time or even frequently.

Fr. Irala’s Approach:

“All education should begin with ideas” – first of all, correct the ideas that we have. After that, according to his program of “regaining control,” it is easier to re-educate the will and then the feelings. Notice again the *order* here!

To correct our ideas:

First, we have to realize that the desire to reproduce is not uncontrollable or irresistible, even though we receive this message from the world at large all the time. It is *false*! It is possible to live chastely.

Second, we have to put before our minds the truth that these desires, even if they are satisfied, “cannot fulfill the noble and unlimited aspirations of the spiritual soul” (Fr. Irala). If they could, it would be enough to marry and have done with it... but this alone cannot possibly bring happiness, ever.

Third, we have to remember that there are other and deeper joys which are real and attainable. As Fr. Irala puts it, “[Some] have no suspicion of the deep joys, delicate feelings, mental clearness, and agility of pure souls.” On the other hand, being chained to these lower desires is a real slavery: the “abjection, sadness, despite, and emptiness of vice.” (Fr. Irala)

To strengthen our will:

With these ideas in mind, we have to practice will-acts, according to Fr. Irala’s advice. This helps us to strengthen our will and to restore a feeling of control.

Especially in times of temptation, make conscious acts of the will for movements that oppose what the temptation suggests: command your feet not to go somewhere or command your hands to remain where they are.

Likewise, use conscious sensations to put the mind in a state of receptivity, instead of producing images with the imagination.

For all of these acts, place a strong motive that is not simply “to avoid sin” (negative, focusing on the problem) but rather positive, such as, “to strengthen my character,” “to master myself,” “to strengthen my will.”

To control the feelings:

Accustom the body “to work, a hard life, mortification.” Withdraw it from pleasure. “Healthy, vigorous sports are no little aid to this end.” (Fr. Irala)

Be harsh on occasions of sin. Especially when temptations are not strong, cut ties severely with what might bring these temptations on.

Avoid “lower states of mental activity” such as “alcoholism, romanticism, somnolence, mental vagueness, daydreaming.” Why? Because in these states, the imagination and feelings have free rein.

Obviously, we must pray too! Time spent in the chapel for *Reconquista* is helpful here too. But... do not focus on the problem in your prayer; rather ask for positive things that you know will help, such as virtue like Christ’s virtue; strength of will; a developed personality; courage; etc.

Stay close to the sacraments.

At all costs, fight discouragement with acts of hope. The devil’s great weapon is discouragement – when we give up, he knows he can get away with anything. When we refuse to drop any of our practices, even if we slip up, he grows discouraged and we gain an ascendancy.

DAY FIFTEEN

Recommended Spiritual Reading: *The Spiritual Combat*, Ch. 17

-or-

Consecration to Mary, Week 2: Day 4 (pp.121-125)

In this week, it is important to keep our spirits high and to maintain our generosity. The best way to do this is to be faithful in little things, without tension and anxiety, but rather with this motive in mind: to taste the joy that comes from self-possession.

Go through today with this simple truth before your mind (as expressed by Fr. Irala in his book): “Happiness is not found but made.” Even while denying ourselves certain things, we are “making our happiness.” With patience and generosity, we will certainly achieve the goal.

DAY SIXTEEN

Recommended Spiritual Reading: *The Spiritual Combat*, Ch. 18

-or-

Consecration to Mary, Week 2: Day 5 (pp.125-129)

We must take courage and be on our guard to fight manfully against sudden risings of the passions. This is necessary counsel in this third week, for it is still early in our program. We are well on the way to self-mastery, but our fallen nature always revolts against virtue and order.

Take to heart today these words of Fr. Scupoli: “Lift up your mind to God, contemplating His unspeakable goodness and love.” And then again, if we succumb to a sudden revolt of our fallen nature, he gives the following advice: “If... you cannot lift up your heart to God, but remain wounded, strive even then to do as at the beginning, and to fight as if you had not received a wound.”

Never to give up and never to surrender when the cause is worthwhile has always been the mark of the true warrior.

DAY SEVENTEEN

In Scripture, the story for today is found in the Old Testament book of Judges, chapters 6 and 7 (story of Gedeon). In this story, we see how it is God who saves His people, and always in such a way that His glory and His hand is manifest in the work. As with Gedeon, so with us: God wants to save us, and yet He will do so in such a way that we know it is by His power we are saved.

DAY EIGHTEEN

Recommended Spiritual Reading: *The Spiritual Combat*, Ch. 19

-or-

Consecration to Mary, Week 2: Day 6 (pp.129-133)

In the middle of this third week, we should review the goals of the week, which are to practice what Fr. Irala explains for the control of our mind, will, and emotions. Especially important is

to continue to practice making acts of the will.

For Fr. Irala's book, the important chapters are:

- "Re-Education of the Mind"
- "Re-Education of the Will"
- "How to Rest"
- "How to Use the Will"

Since we are also reading Fr. Irala's book, the middle of this week is an opportune time to begin looking at the chapter therein called "How to Be Happy." Try to read through this chapter over the next few days, especially as an antidote to the emotion of sadness, which all experience at one time or another.

Remember that happiness is *made*!

DAY NINETEEN

Edmund Campion

In June 1580, Fr. Edmund Campion arrived in England to minister to the needs of the faithful Catholics under persecution in Protestant England. Growing up, Campion had held every promise of being a successful and powerful Protestant minister. Campion was known to Queen Elizabeth and had captured her regard upon the occasion of her visit to the university of Oxford, where he was a student at the time. Difficulties with Protestantism having troubled his conscience, Campion had left England and his career to study for a time in Ireland. From there,

he moved to Douai in the Low Countries (now France) where he was, by the grace of God, reconciled to the Catholic Church. His generosity and conviction then led him to join the Jesuits, under whom he was ordained, saying his first Mass on September 8, 1578.

Campion's entry into England not quite two years later did not remain unknown to the English government for long. Since the government suspected him of instigating political dissent and treasonous purposes, Campion wrote, at the advice of a friend, a declaration of his intent. This publication became known as "Campion's Challenge to the Privy Council" or "Campion's Brag." The text of this document is given below.

In July of the following year, 1581, a government spy betrayed Campion's presence in home of some faithful and Campion was captured. After four days' imprisonment in the Tower of London, Campion was presented before three Privy Councillors, who offered him freedom, wealth, and honor if he would recant his position. Since Campion adamantly refused, the Councillors sent him back to prison where, during the next four months, he was racked on three occasions. During his imprisonment, Campion was forced to appear four times for public disputation with his Anglican adversaries. Although feeling the effects of the torture and given neither books nor time to prepare, Campion acquitted himself admirably in his defense of the Catholic faith and his own mission in England. Finally, Campion was indicted and charged with high treason. Campion and his fellow defendants were found guilty in their trial of November 20, 1581. All were sentenced to death by being hanged, drawn, and quartered. Edmund Campion completed his martyrdom for the faith on

December 1, 1581 at 41 years of age.

To read more about Campion, see Evelyn Waugh's biography, Edmund Campion.

Campion's Brag

To the Right Honourable, the Lords of Her Majesty's Privy Council:

Whereas I have come out of Germany and Bohemia, being sent by my superiors, and adventured myself into this noble realm, my dear country, for the glory of God and benefit of souls, I thought it like enough that, in this busy, watchful, and suspicious world, I should either sooner or later be intercepted and stopped of my course.

Wherefore, providing for all events, and uncertain what may become of me, when God shall haply deliver my body into durance, I supposed it needful to put this in writing in a readiness, desiring your good lordships to give it your reading, for to know my cause. This doing, I trust I shall ease you of some labour. For that which otherwise you must have sought for by practice of wit, I do now lay into your hands by plain confession. And to the intent that the whole matter may be conceived in order, and so the better both understood and remembered, I make thereof these nine points or articles, directly, truly and resolutely opening my full enterprise and purpose.

i. I confess that I am (albeit unworthy) a priest of the Catholic Church, and through the great mercy of God vowed now these

eight years into the religion [religious order] of the Society of Jesus. Hereby I have taken upon me a special kind of warfare under the banner of obedience, and also resigned all my interest or possibility of wealth, honour, pleasure, and other worldly felicity.

ii. At the voice of our General, which is to me a warrant from heaven and oracle of Christ, I took my voyage from Prague to Rome (where our General Father is always resident) and from Rome to England, as I might and would have done joyously into any part of Christendom or Heathenness, had I been thereto assigned.

iii. My charge is, of free cost to preach the Gospel, to minister the Sacraments, to instruct the simple, to reform sinners, to confute errors—in brief, to cry alarm spiritual against foul vice and proud ignorance, wherewith many of my dear countrymen are abused.

iv. I never had mind, and am strictly forbidden by our Father that sent me, to deal in any respect with matter of state or policy of this realm, as things which appertain not to my vocation, and from which I gladly restrain and sequester my thoughts.

v. I do ask, to the glory of God, with all humility, and under your correction, three sorts of indifferent and quiet audiences: the first, before your Honours, wherein I will discourse of religion, so far as it toucheth the common weal and your nobilities: the second, whereof I make more account, before the Doctors and Masters and chosen men of both universities, wherein I undertake to avow the faith of our Catholic Church by proofs innumerable—Scriptures, councils, Fathers, history, natural and

moral reasons: the third, before the lawyers, spiritual and temporal, wherein I will justify the said faith by the common wisdom of the laws standing yet in force and practice.

vi. I would be loath to speak anything that might sound of any insolent brag or challenge, especially being now as a dead man to this world and willing to put my head under every man's foot, and to kiss the ground they tread upon. Yet I have such courage in avouching the majesty of Jesus my King, and such affiance in his gracious favour, and such assurance in my quarrel, and my evidence so impregnable, and because I know perfectly that no one Protestant, nor all the Protestants living, nor any sect of our adversaries (howsoever they face men down in pulpits, and overrule us in their kingdom of grammarians and unlearned ears) can maintain their doctrine in disputation. I am to sue most humbly and instantly for combat with all and every of them, and the most principal that may be found: protesting that in this trial the better furnished they come, the better welcome they shall be.

vii. And because it hath pleased God to enrich the Queen my Sovereign Lady with notable gifts of nature, learning, and princely education, I do verily trust that if her Highness would vouchsafe her royal person and good attention to such a conference as, in the second part of my fifth article I have motioned, or to a few sermons, which in her or your hearing I am to utter such manifest and fair light by good method and plain dealing may be cast upon these controversies, that possibly her zeal of truth and love of her people shall incline her noble Grace to disfavour some proceedings hurtful to the realm, and procure towards us oppressed more equity.

viii. Moreover I doubt not but you, her Highness' Council, being of such wisdom and discreet in cases most important, when you shall have heard these questions of religion opened faithfully, which many times by our adversaries are huddled up and confounded, will see upon what substantial grounds our Catholic Faith is built, how feeble that side is which by sway of the time prevaieth against us, and so at last for your own souls, and for many thousand souls that depend upon your government, will discountenance error when it is bewrayed [revealed], and hearken to those who would spend the best blood in their bodies for your salvation. Many innocent hands are lifted up to heaven for you daily by those English students, whose posterity shall never die, which beyond seas, gathering virtue and sufficient knowledge for the purpose, are determined never to give you over, but either to win you heaven, or to die upon your pikes. And touching our Society, be it known to you that we have made a league—all the Jesuits in the world, whose succession and multitude must overreach all the practice of England—cheerfully to carry the cross you shall lay upon us, and never to despair your recovery, while we have a man left to enjoy your Tyburn, or to be racked with your torments, or consumed with your prisons. **The expense is reckoned, the enterprise is begun; it is of God; it cannot be withstood. So the faith was planted: So it must be restored.**

ix. If these my offers be refused, and my endeavours can take no place, and I, having run thousands of miles to do you good, shall be rewarded with rigour. I have no more to say but to recommend your case and mine to Almighty God, the Searcher of Hearts, who send us his grace, and see us at accord before the day of payment, to the end we may at last be friends in heaven, when all injuries

shall be forgotten.

DAY TWENTY

Recommended Spiritual Reading: *The Spiritual Combat*, Ch. 20

-or-

Consecration to Mary, Week 2: Day 7 (pp.134-140)

Today being the sixth day of the week, we will offer subject-matter for meditation. If you are able, go to the chapel with some of these notes and spend 10-15 minutes considering them. At the end, ask God for the graces you desire. If you are unable or do not wish to meditate on this, feel free to choose something else, or just to spend 10-15 minutes in the chapel in silence, adoring Christ present in the tabernacle.

Today, the meditation is taken from *Minute Meditations* by J.E. Moffatt, SJ.

WHAT DOES IT PROFIT?

They stood about Him the Twelve, eager, attentive. His theme was a serious one – the meaning of life, the value of the immortal soul. He knew well the strong appeal of riches and honors and pleasures to their still earthly hearts. He looked on them pityingly; His gaze reached out to embrace the whole world. Then He spoke: “What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his soul?”

The whole world for my soul! That gives tremendous meaning to

the worth of my soul, does it not? The whole world with all its unmeasured treasures, its honors, its pleasures, all of them cheaper together and given me to have and to hold as my very own – yet worthy only of utter contempt if the exchange demanded is my soul! Yes, for earth's riches and honors and pleasures will all soon fade and cease to be, but my soul shall go on eternally for weal or for woe.

The whole world for my soul! Ah! Yes, that were a foolhardy exchange indeed. But I am not offered the whole world for my soul. No, just the vilest pittance the tempter offers when he comes to bargain with me.

A bit of gross pleasure that befouls whatever it touches, a mere handful of tinsel treasures, an hour of meaningless honor – just that and no more the tempter offers in exchange for my soul.

Can I allow myself to be lured into such a foolhardy bargain? I must pause and reflect and resolve.

Jesus, Divine Friend, have mercy on us!

DAY TWENTY-ONE

Day Twenty-One! This is a milestone for all involved in *Reconquista*. We are over one-third done with the program. It is time to reassess and look at where we stand and perhaps to shore up a few things. Below is a kind of “examination of conscience” covering the items that we have identified as important. ***Even if it takes us this entire next week to finalize these things, that is***

time well spent!

- **Daily Schedule:**
 - Do I have one? How is it working?
 - What have been the greatest challenges with fitting things in? What always gets dropped?
 - How can I modify things to support myself better?
 - Is exercise fitting in? Sleep?
- **Personal Goals:**
 - Are these reasonable?
 - Do I see progress towards them? Or do I need to determine some intermediary things that I can strive for?
 - Are they positive, or just negative?
- **Personal Intentions:**
 - Am I remembering to offer my actions and sacrifices for these?
 - Are they “present” enough to me? Do I really desire them enough to sacrifice for them?
 - Can I simplify and perhaps leave just one or two that are very “real” for me?
- **Developing the Will:**
 - Am I trying sometimes to make real acts of the will?
 - Do I look for other opportunities to deny myself, besides those things simply indicated by the program? [Little things of each day are best!]
 - Am I noticing that I am less attached to certain things?

Do not forget to ***celebrate success***. We have to thank God first of all, and then we have to use this success to push ourselves further along and give ourselves motivation for continuing.

Courage and *viriliter agite!*

WEEK FOUR

Theme: Nature and Grace (Part One)

Goals for the Week:

Mental re-commitment / making a “fresh start”: take 30 minutes to an hour (this can be done anywhere; if you don’t have that much time, do this in your 20 minutes in the chapel) and go through some of the challenges you have faced in doing the program so far. Be honest about what has worked and what has not worked. Choose one thing that *has* worked and resolve to continue doing that. Choose one thing that has *not* worked and make it your goal to get that working *this week*. Remember that we *can* do this. “If you haven’t failed, you aren’t trying hard enough!”

Direct your intention, supernaturally: ultimately, we must do what we do for the love of God. But... that phrase remains abstract unless we “focus” it and find what it is, really, about the spiritual life, or about Christ that is most attractive to us. This week is the time to find this “focus” and to offer the sacrifices you make and the sufferings endured for God, with this specific “focus.”

Challenges of this Week:

1) Giving up: For whatever reason, abandoning the field. It could be depression, it could be that the novelty has worn off. It could be that feeling of being “restricted” and all of the things that I *want to do* (which are legitimate, too!) are being curtailed by this

program. It could be that this seemed like a good idea at the time, but now you see it isn't. And so on.

Response: Mental re-commitment! Go back again to the commitment paper: we are men, we need to persevere in something worth doing. Really take the time to "feel" the force of this: I will complete what I have begun.

2) Half-in, half-out: We continue, in a kind of perfunctory way; materially, perhaps we are faithful to the regimen. But our heart is not in it. We don't advance at all, and we don't look at this time as a time to grow. "Thou hast the name of being alive, and thou art dead." (Apoc. 3:1) It is lukewarmness, really. It would be better to be HOT or COLD!

Response: "There are only two options regarding commitment. You're either IN or you're OUT. There is no such thing as life in-between" (Pat Riley). In a certain sense, it would be better to get fed up and to quit completely, than to pretend. But better still (obviously) is to re-commit, and to finish what we have started. Sometimes, this is the time of grace, when we realize that we have to go one way or the other. Everyone condemns sitting on the fence. (Example also of Dante's *Inferno*, Pilate "outside" hell...)

Topic of Discussion: Nature and Grace

Nature cannot heal itself:

We are wounded with Original Sin. There are four wounds: blindness, malice, weakness, and concupiscence. These wounds make it so that the powers of our soul, although they remain "integral" are nevertheless turned away from their proper objects.

Blindness: it is hard for the intellect to reach the truth

Malice: the will is easily attracted to evil

Weakness: the irascible appetite too easily gives up

Concupiscence: the concupiscible appetite goes after every sense good, without reference to reason

On account of these wounds, we are in a difficult situation: nature is powerless to “heal herself.” Everything we do, in some sense, is affected by these four wounds. Or, to put it another way, pride or other selfish motives insinuate themselves so easily in our actions.

This is also why we find ourselves so weak when it comes to seemingly easy things.

Grace builds on nature:

We often say that “Grace builds on nature” in the sense that grace does not “replace” what is natural. For example, if I receive sanctifying grace, this does not mean that I no longer have to practice temperance with regard to food and drink. And, indeed, it will be easier to keep supernatural, sanctifying grace if I have the natural virtue of temperance in regards to food and drink.

Grace, then, elevates and perfects nature, but it does not (of itself) supply what is of nature.

Dilemma:

The great dilemma then becomes: we need nature as a foundation of the supernatural, and we need the supernatural in order to heal nature, so isn’t this a vicious circle?

Solution:

It is impossible to separate “treating” nature and the workings of grace. Grace will heal nature – Christ came to reestablish and renew wounded nature.

And, first, we must note that, without the supernatural, even what is left of nature does not remain: Chesterton, “Remove the supernatural and you are left with not even what is natural.” (Example: civilizations which collapsed into shocking barbarism)

Second, we affirm that, to heal nature, we must do *natural actions*, but the supernatural cannot be absent from this. How will it be present? By the *motive for which* this action is done. To do natural actions *with a supernatural intention* is therefore the only way to heal nature.

These two together (the action, coming from nature; the intention, coming from grace) make for ONE reality.

Conclusion:

We have to “bring grace into the picture” so to speak; we have to direct our intention, supernaturally, by the grace that is in us (or at least, by the desire to have that grace).

And, at the same time, we have to continue to do what we must in terms of natural actions: acts of the will, basic sacrifices, perseverance, etc.

DAY TWENTY-TWO

Recommended Spiritual Reading: *Imitation of Christ*, Part Three, Chapter 30: “The Quest of Divine Help and Confidence in Regaining Grace” [NB: The recommended spiritual readings for this week will be taken from “Imitation of Christ” by Thomas à Kempis, which is available online. The chapter numbers should be consistent, though the chapter titles may differ slightly.]

-or-

Consecration to Mary, Introduction to Week 3: Knowing Mary (pp.141-151)

As we enter the fourth week of *Reconquista*, let us remember that we have undertaken this program **with Christ**. If we have decided to make sacrifices and renouncements, it is ultimately **for Him** that we have done this. We have to return often to this intention and remember that nothing done for Christ is ever wasted, nor does God ever overlook rewarding what we undertake for Him.

With that in mind, keep before you this thought today: “God is never outdone in generosity.” Let us proceed generously with God, denying ourselves in order to make room in our hearts for His divine grace and His life.

DAY TWENTY-THREE

Recommended Spiritual Reading: *Imitation of Christ*, Part One, Chapter 13: “Resisting Temptation”

-or-

Consecration to Mary, Introduction to Week 3: Day 1 (pp.152-162)

Through *Reconquista*, we are pursuing a kind of “conversion of life.” We want to live more in accord with the Gospel preached by Christ: to overcome our faults, to strengthen our will for the pursuit of heavenly things, and to become “men after God’s heart.” It is obvious that, in striving for these great things, we will face temptation. These temptations arise certainly from our own fallen nature, which resists effort and hates any kind of death to self. They also arise from the devil, who, when he sees that we are striving to draw nearer to God, will not fail to harass us along the route. In this sense, temptation is a good sign, because it means that we are moving in the right direction.

In facing temptation, we must first of all follow the advice of the author of the *Imitation*: it is in the first moments that we have to turn to God, in the first “movement” of temptation that we must strive to resist manfully. Besides this advice, we can also add: avoid, at all costs, discouragement. When we feel the effects of the combat, we grow tired and too easily give up, imagining that it will be interminable. But the enemy too grows weary, and we are always supported by grace. Continue to fight manfully, relying on God’s grace!

DAY TWENTY-FOUR

In Scripture, the story for today is found in the Old Testament, I Maccabees chapter 4. In this story, we see Judas conquering great armies with few men and virtually no weapons. He encourages his men by recalling the great things God had done for their people: “Fear ye not their multitude.” All of these stories signify how God helps those who trust in Him. Against the manifold temptations and weaknesses that we face, God will also do battle for us. “Fear ye not their multitude, neither be ye afraid of their assault.”

DAY TWENTY-FIVE

Recommended Spiritual Reading: *Imitation of Christ*, Part Three, Chapter 50: “How a Desolate Person Ought to Commit Himself into the Hands of God”

-or-

Consecration to Mary, Introduction to Week 3: Day 2 (pp.162-173)

In the middle of this week, let's recall one of the goals from this week, which is to make a conscious “re-commitment” to *Reconquista*. If we have not had the time to do this yet, try to make some time for it today. It is important to be in silence and to reflect on how we can derive more from the program and stay generous.

An integral part of this generosity is also directing our intention supernaturally, since only in this way will we be able to “heal” the

wounds of nature. Find a particular “focal point” among the supernatural truths that we profess. What is it that inspires you about the faith? What is the most attractive doctrine for you? All of the saints had some aspect or another of the Gospel which struck home for them, and they centered their spirituals lives around this truth. It could be, for example, the Sacred Heart; or Christ’s humility; or God’s presence in the soul; and so on. Use this “focal point” to direct your intention when you make sacrifices.

Courage!

DAY TWENTY-SIX

The Story of Guillaumet

(This story is taken from Wind, Sand, and Stars by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry about a fellow pilot, Guillaumet. It is a bit long, so feel free to break it up over the next few days.)

Guillaumet, old friend, of you too I shall say a few words. Be sure that I shall not make you squirm with any clumsy vaunting of your courage and your professional valor. In telling the story of the most marvelous of your adventures, I am after something quite different.

There exists a quality which is nameless. It may be gravity, but the word does not satisfy me, for the quality I have in mind can be accompanied by the most cheerful gaiety. It is the quality of the carpenter face to face with his block of wood. He handles it, he takes its measure. Far from treating it frivolously, he summons

all his professional virtues to do it honor.

I once read, Guillaumet, a tale in which your adventure was celebrated. I have an old score to settle with the infidel who wrote it. You were described as abounding in the witty sallies of the street arab, as if courage consisted in demeaning oneself to schoolboy banter in the midst of danger and the hour of death. The man did not know you, Guillaumet. You never felt the need of cheapening your adversaries before confronting them. When you saw a foul storm you said to yourself, "Here is a foul storm." You accepted it, and you took its measure.

These pages, Guillaumet, written out of my memory, are addressed in homage to you.

It was winter and you had been gone a week over the Andes. I had come up from farthest Patagonia to join Deley at Mendoza. For five days the two of us, each in his plane, had ransacked the mountains unavailingly. Two ships! It seemed to us that a hundred squadrons navigating for a hundred years would not have been enough to explore that endless, cloud-piercing range. We had lost all hope. The very smugglers themselves, bandits who would commit a crime for a five-peso note, refused to form a rescue party out of fear of those counterforts. "We should surely die," they said; "the Andes never give up a man in winter."

And when Deley and I landed at Santiago, the Chilean officers also advised us to give you up. "It is mid-winter," they said; "even if your comrade survived the landing, he cannot have survived the night. Night in those passes changes a man into ice."

And when, a second time, I slipped between the towering walls and giant pillars of the Andes, it seemed to me I was no longer seeking, but was now sitting up with your body in the silence of a cathedral of snow.

You had been gone a week, I say, and I was lunching between flights in a restaurant in Mendoza when a man stuck his head in the door and called out:

“They’ve found Guillaumet!”

All the strangers in the restaurant embraced.

Ten minutes later I was off the ground, carrying two mechanics, Lefebvre and Abri. Forty minutes later I had landed alongside a road, having recognized from the air, I know not by what sign, the car in which you were being brought down from San Rafael. I remember that we cried like fools; we put our arms about a living Guillaumet, resuscitated, the author of his own miracle. And it was at that moment that you pronounced your first intelligible sentence, a speech admirable in its human pride:

“I swear that what I went through, no animal would have gone through.”

Later, you told us the story. A storm that brought fifteen feet of snow in forty-eight hours down on the Chilean slope had bottled up all space and sent every other mail pilot back to his starting point. You, however, had taken off in the hope of finding a rift in the sky. You found this rift, this trap, a little to the south, and now, at twenty thousand feet, the ceiling of clouds being a couple

of thousand feet below you and pierced by only the highest peaks, you set your course for Argentina.

Down currents sometimes fill pilots with a strange uneasiness. The engines run on, but the ship seems to be sinking. You jockey to hold your altitude: the ship loses speed and goes mushy. And still you sink. So you give it up, afraid that you may have jockeyed too much; and you let yourself drift to right or left, striving to put at your back a favorable peak, that is, a peak off which the winds rebound as off a springboard.

And yet you go on sinking. The whole sky seems to be coming down on you. You begin to feel like the victim of some cosmic accident. You cannot land anywhere, and you try in vain to turn round and fly back into those zones where the air, as dense and solid as a pillar, had held you up.

That pillar has melted away. Everything here is rotten and you slither about in a sort of universal decomposition while the cloud-bank rises apathetically, reaches your level, and swallows you up.

"It almost had me in a corner once," you explained, "but I still wasn't sure I was caught. When you get up above the clouds you run into those down currents that seem to be perfectly stationary for the simple reason that in that very high altitude they never stop flowing. Everything is queer in the upper range."

And what clouds!

"As soon as I felt I was caught I dropped the controls and grabbed my seat for fear of being flung out of the ship. The jolts were so

terrible that my leather harness cut my shoulders and was ready to snap. And what with the frosting on the panes, my artificial horizon was invisible and the wind rolled me over and over like a hat in a road from eighteen thousand feet down to ten.

“At ten thousand I caught a glimpse of a dark horizontal blot that helped me right the ship. It was a lake, and I recognized it as what they call Laguna Diamante. I remembered that it lay at the bottom of a funnel, and that one flank of the funnel, a volcano called Maipu, ran up to about twenty thousand feet.

“There I was, safe out of the clouds; but I was still blinded by the thick whirling snow and I had to hang on to my lake if I wasn’t to crash into one of the sides of the funnel. So down I went, and I flew round and round the lake, about a hundred and fifty feet above it, until I ran out of fuel. After two hours of this, I set the ship down on the snow – and over on her nose she went.

“When I dragged myself clear of her I stood up. The wind knocked me down. I stood up again. Over I went a second time. So I crawled under the cockpit and dug me out a shelter in the snow. I pulled a lot of mail sacks round me, and there I lay for two days and two nights. Then the storm blew over and I started to walk my way out. I walked for five days and four nights.”

But what was there left of you, Guillaumet? We had found you again, true; but burnt to a crisp, but shriveled, but shrunken into an old woman. That same afternoon I flew you back to Mendoza, and there the cool white sheets flowed like a balm down the length of your body.

They were not enough, though. Your own foundered body was an encumbrance: you turned and twisted in your sleep, unable to find lodgment for it. I stared at your face: it was splotched and swollen, like an overripe fruit that has been repeatedly dropped on the ground.

You were dreadful to see, and you were in misery, for you had lost the beautiful tools of your work: your hands were numb and useless, and when you sat up on the edge of your bed to draw a free breath, your frozen feet hung down like two dead weights. You had not even finished your long walk back, you were still panting; and when you turned and stirred on the pillow in search of peace, a procession of images that you could not escape, a procession waiting impatiently in the wings, moved instantly into action under your skull. Across the stage of your skull it moved, and for the twentieth time you fought once more the battle against these enemies that rose up out of their ashes.

I filled you with herb-teas.

“Drink, old fellow.”

“You know . . . what amazed me . . .”

Boxer victorious, but punch-drunk and scarred with blows, you were re-living your strange adventure. You could divest yourself of it only in scraps. And as you told your dark tale, I could see you trudging without ice-axe, without ropes, without provisions, scaling cols fifteen thousand feet in the air, crawling on the faces of vertical walls, your hands and feet and knees bleeding in temperature twenty degrees below zero.

Voided bit by bit of your blood, your strength, your reason, you went forward with the obstinacy of an ant, retracing your steps to go round an obstacle, picking yourself up after each fall to earth, climbing slopes that led to abysses, ceaselessly in motion and never asleep, for had you slept, from that bed of snow you would never have risen. When your foot slipped and you went down, you were up again in an instant, else had you been turned into stone. The cold was petrifying you by the minute, and the price you paid for taking a moment too much of rest, when you fell, was the agony of revivifying dead muscles in your struggle to rise to your feet.

You resisted temptation. “Amid snow,” you told me, “a man loses his instinct of self-preservation. After two or three or four days of tramping, all you think about is sleep. I would long for it; but then I would say to myself, ‘If my wife still believes I am alive, she must believe that I am on my feet. The boys all think I am on my feet. They have faith in me. And I am a skunk if I don’t go on.’”

So you tramped on; and each day you cut out a bit more of the opening of your shoes so that your swelling and freezing feet might have room in them.

You confided to me this strange thing:

“As early as the second day, you know, the hardest job I had was to force myself not to think. The pain was too much, and I was really up against it too hard. I had to forget that, or I shouldn’t have had the heart to go on walking. But I didn’t seem able to control my mind. It kept working like a turbine. Still, I could more

or less choose what I was to think about. I tried to stick to some film I'd seen, or book I'd read. But the film and the book would go through my mind like lightning. And I'd be back where I was, in the snow. It never failed. So, I would think about other things..."

There was one time, however, when, having slipped, and finding yourself stretched flat on your face in the snow, you threw in your hand. You were like a boxer emptied of all passion by a single blow, lying and listening to the seconds drop one by one into a distant universe, until the tenth second fell and there was no appeal.

"I've done my best and I can't make it. Why go on?" All that you had to do in the world to find peace was to shut your eyes. So little was needed to blot out that world of crags and ice and snow. Let drop those miraculous eyelids and there was an end of blows, of stumbling falls, of torn muscles and burning ice, of that burden of life you were dragging along like a worn-out ox, a weight heavier than any wain or cart.

Already you were beginning to taste the relief of this snow that had now become an insidious poison, this morphia that was filling you with beatitude. Life crept out of your extremities and fled to collect round your heart while something gentle and precious snuggled in close at the center of your being. Little by little your consciousness deserted the distant regions of your body, and your body, that beast now gorged with suffering, lay ready to participate in the indifference of marble.

Your very scruples subsided. Our cries ceased to reach you, or,

more accurately, changed for you into dream-cries. You were happy now, able to respond by long confident dream-strides that carried you effortlessly towards the enchantment of the plains below. How smoothly you glided into this suddenly merciful world! Guillaumet, you miser! You had made up your mind to deny us your return, to take your pleasures selfishly without us among your white angels in the snows. And then remorse floated up from the depths of your consciousness. The dream was spoiled by the irruption of bothersome details. "I thought of my wife. She would be penniless if she couldn't collect the insurance. Yes, but the company..."

When a man vanishes, his legal death is postponed for four years. This awful detail was enough to blot out the other visions. You were lying face downward on a bed of snow that covered a steep mountain slope. With the coming of summer your body would be washed with this slush down into one of the thousand crevasses of the Andes. You knew that. But you also knew that some fifty yards away a rock was jutting up out of the snow. "I thought, if I get up I may be able to reach it. And if I can prop myself up against the rock, they'll find me there next summer."

Once you were on your feet again, you tramped two nights and three days. But you did not then imagine that you would go on much longer:

"I could tell by different signs that the end was coming. For instance, I had to stop every two or three hours to cut my shoes open a bit more and massage my swollen feet. Or maybe my heart would be going too fast. But I was beginning to lose my memory. I had been going on a long time when suddenly I realized that

every time I stopped I forgot something. The first time it was a glove. And it was cold! I had put it down in front of me and had forgotten to pick it up. The next time it was my watch. Then my knife. Then my compass. Each time I stopped I stripped myself of something vitally important. I was becoming my own enemy! And I can't tell you how it hurt me when I found that out.

“What saves a man is to take a step. Then another step. It is always the same step, but you have to take it.”

“I swear that what I went through, no animal would have gone through.” This sentence, the noblest ever spoken, this sentence that defines man's place in the universe, that honors him, that re-establishes the true hierarchy, floated back into my thoughts. Finally, you fell asleep. Your consciousness was abolished; but forth from this dismantled, burnt, and shattered body it was to be born again like a flower put forth gradually by the species which itself is born of the luminous pulp of the stars. The body, we may say, then, is but an honest tool, the body is but a servant. And it was in these words, Guillaumet, that you expressed your pride in the honest tool:

“With nothing to eat, after three days on my feet...well... my heart wasn't going any too well. I was crawling along the side of a sheer wall, hanging over space, digging and kicking out pockets in the ice so that I could hold on, when all of a sudden my heart conked. It hesitated. Started up again. Beat crazily. I said to myself, ‘If it hesitates a moment too long, I drop.’ I stayed still and listened to myself. Never, never in my life have I listened as carefully to a motor as I listened to my heart, me hanging there. I said to it: ‘Come on, old boy. Go to work. Try beating a little.’

That's good stuff my heart is made of. It hesitated, but it went on. You don't know how proud I was of that heart."

DAY TWENTY-SEVEN

Recommended Reading: (Finish the story of Guillaumet, from the previous day)

Today being the sixth day of the week, we will offer subject-matter for meditation. If you are able, go to the chapel with some of these notes and spend 10-15 minutes considering them. At the end, ask God for the graces you desire. If you are unable or do not wish to meditate on this, feel free to choose something else, or just to spend 10-15 minutes in the chapel in silence, adoring Christ present in the tabernacle.

Today, the meditation is taken from *Every Day with St. Francis de Sales*, an arrangement of texts made by Francis J. Klauder, S.D.B.

Meditation

Our will has an enemy that causes us a lot of trouble and often alienates us from the spiritual life. This enemy is the multiplicity of desires. How many desires have you in the will? "We have two," you will answer me. But two are too many because it is enough for us to have one. Our Lord teaches us: "...one thing only is required: Mary has chosen the better portion..." [Luke 10:14] So one thing alone is necessary. And what is this one thing? It is God alone, my dear souls! We need to love Him alone and nothing

else. Certainly the person who is not satisfied with God, Who is, after all, everything, does not deserve anything else.

(Taken from the sermons of St. Francis de Sales)

DAY TWENTY-EIGHT

Recommended Spiritual Reading: *Imitation of Christ*, Part Three, Chapter 54: “The Different Motions of Nature and Grace”

-or-

Consecration to Mary, Introduction to Week 3: Day 3 (pp.173-179)

At the end of this fourth week, again we want to step back and assess how things are going and how we are doing with the various goals we have set for ourselves. This week, there were two goals:

1) To make a mental “re-commitment” by spending some time considering the whole program and our progress. We were to choose one thing that was going well and resolve to continue; and we were to choose one thing that was not yet working and make it work this week. If we have not yet spent this time, today is a perfect opportunity!

2) To consider how we might direct our intention supernaturally, by finding what is, for us, a great “attraction” of the spiritual life or of our faith. By centering our thoughts here, we make it possible to offer up the sacrifices of this program with a supernatural intention. Grace alone is able to heal nature! Take courage.

+ MARIAN RECONQUISTA +

WEEK FIVE

Theme: Nature and Grace (Part Two)

Goals for the Week:

Same as last week

Challenges of this Week:

Same as last week

DAY TWENTY-NINE

Recommended Spiritual Reading: *Imitation of Christ*, Part Three, Chapter 23: “Four Things Which Bring Great Peace”

-or-

Consecration to Mary, Introduction to Week 3: Day 4 (pp.179-186)

Remember the different “motions” of nature and grace, which the author of the *Imitation* discussed in yesterday’s reading. Grace and the supernatural “level” are entirely outside the scope of nature and any understanding which nature might produce. Nature cannot grasp the workings of grace. Accordingly, what is of grace often looks foolish to nature. To do the will of another, rather than one’s own will? Not to seek more possessions? These things are foreign to nature. It is worthwhile to consider this “difference” from time to time, since it helps us to identify whether our motives are influence by grace, or by nature only.

At the same time, it is important not to “force” the workings of grace in our soul. Rather, our attitude has to be one of *receptivity*: we are open to grace and we receive it when it comes and when it works in our souls. This work of “disposing” ourselves, or tilling the ground so that it might receive the seeds of grace, is what we are primarily doing in *Reconquista*. By mastering our natural desires and dispositions, we render our souls fruitful ground for Christ to sow the seed.

Let us continue in our great and worthy labors!

DAY THIRTY

Recommended Spiritual Reading: *Imitation of Christ*, Part Three, Chapter 35: “There Is No Security From Temptation in This Life”

-or-

Consecration to Mary, Introduction to Week 3: Day 5 (pp.187-193)

Day Thirty! We have accomplished half our journey. If the first half was difficult, take courage: these days will go by quickly.

We have begun to build in ourselves habits of self-denial and self-mastery. This is an excellent beginning! But it is too early, right now, to claim the complete victory. We must continue along this same path without tiring and without slackening our pace. We will be satisfied with nothing short of a decisive defeat delivered to our enemies.

The author of the *Imitation* wisely shows us not to seek rest in this life and not to drop our defenses against temptations. Especially in this second half of *Reconquista*, let us beware the danger of lukewarmness and of laxity in our sacrifices. Likewise, if some parts of the program have been exceptionally difficult or we have not yet succeeded in our goals, let us not lose hope and trust, for Christ will fight for us.

Viriliter agite!

DAY THIRTY-ONE

In Scripture, the story for today is found in the New Testament, Acts of the Apostles, chapter 9 (Conversion of St. Paul). Notice, in this famous story, the effects and power of God's grace. We have to believe in the transforming quality of grace! Notice also the reference to the Mystical Body, when Christ speaks about Himself as receiving the persecutions. St. Paul would later formulate the doctrine of the Mystical Body very precisely in his epistles.

DAY THIRTY-TWO

Recommended Spiritual Reading: *Imitation of Christ*, Part One, Chapter 25: "Zeal in Amending Our Lives"

-or-

Consecration to Mary, Introduction to Week 3: Day 6 (pp.193-199)

"Two things particularly further improvement – to withdraw oneself forcibly from those vices to which nature is viciously inclined, and to work fervently for those graces which are most needed." These are wise words from the author of the *Imitation*! Let us remember that *Reconquista* is also a time to get to know ourselves, to discover our weaknesses and our strengths. By focusing on these areas and directing our efforts, especially towards our weaknesses, we will certainly make progress.

Progress! It is a word we need to take in the right sense: if we are measuring ourselves always by the "progress" we see in

ourselves, then we are wasting our efforts. Many times, progress in the spiritual life is not visible, especially to the one looking at himself. The correct “attitude” is therefore to take a step every day, without spending too much time wondering where we are. Let us keep taking a step, day after day, without tiring – that is the way to reach the goal. If we have fallen, let us rise again quickly and immediately take a step.

DAY THIRTY-THREE

The Conversion of St. Augustine

Text abbreviated from the Catholic Encyclopedia, newadvent.org

Augustine was born at Tagaste on 13 November, 354. Although eminently respectable, his family was not rich, and his father, Patricius, was still a pagan. However, the admirable virtues that made Monica the ideal of Christian mothers at length brought her husband the grace of baptism and of a holy death, about the year 371.

Augustine received a Christian education. His mother had him signed with the cross and enrolled among the catechumens. Once, when very ill, he asked for baptism, but, all danger being soon passed, he deferred receiving the sacrament, thus yielding to a deplorable custom of the times. But a great intellectual and moral crisis stifled for a time all these Christian sentiments. The heart was the first point of attack. Patricius, proud of his son's success in the schools of Tagaste and Madaura, determined to send him to Carthage to prepare for a forensic career. But, unfortunately, it required several months to collect the necessary

means, and Augustine had to spend his sixteenth year at Tagaste in an idleness which was fatal to his virtue; he gave himself up to pleasure with all the vehemence of an ardent nature. At first he prayed, but without the sincere desire of being heard, and when he reached Carthage, towards the end of the year 370, every circumstance tended to draw him from his true course: the many seductions of the great city that was still half pagan, the licentiousness of other students, the theaters, the intoxication of his literary success, and a proud desire always to be first, even in evil. Before long he was obliged to confess to Monica that he had formed a sinful liaison with the person who bore him a son (372), “the son of his sin” (called Adeodatus) — an entanglement from which he only delivered himself at Milan after fifteen years of its thralldom.

It may be said that, even in his fall, Augustine maintained a certain dignity and felt a compunction which does him honor, and that, from the age of nineteen, he had a genuine desire to break the chain. In fact, in 373, an entirely new inclination manifested itself in his life, brought about by the reading Cicero's “Hortensius” whence he imbibed a love of the wisdom which Cicero so eloquently praises. Thenceforward Augustine looked upon rhetoric merely as a profession; his heart was in philosophy.

Unfortunately, his faith, as well as his morals, was to pass through a terrible crisis. In this same year, 373, Augustine and his friend Honoratus fell into the snares of the Manichæans. Augustine himself tells us that he was enticed by the promises of a free philosophy unbridled by faith; by the boasts of the Manichæans, who claimed to have discovered contradictions in Holy Writ; and, above all, by the hope of finding in their doctrine

a scientific explanation of nature and its most mysterious phenomena. Augustine's inquiring mind was enthusiastic for the natural sciences, and the Manichæans declared that nature withheld no secrets from Faustus, their doctor. Moreover, being tortured by the problem of the origin of evil, Augustine, in default of solving it, acknowledged a conflict of two principles. And then, again, there was a very powerful charm in the moral irresponsibility resulting from a doctrine which denied liberty and attributed the commission of crime to a foreign principle.

Once won over to this sect, Augustine devoted himself to it with all the ardor of his character; he read all its books, adopted and defended all its opinions. His furious proselytism drew into error his friend Alypius. It was during this Manichæan period that Augustine's literary faculties reached their full development, and he was still a student at Carthage when he embraced error.

His studies ended, he should in due course have entered law, but he preferred the career of letters, and he returned to Tagaste to "teach grammar." The young professor captivated his pupils, one of whom, Alypius, hardly younger than his master, loath to leave him after following him into error, was afterwards baptized with him at Milan, eventually becoming Bishop of Tagaste, his native city. But Monica deeply deplored Augustine's heresy and would not have received him into her home or at her table but for the advice of a saintly bishop, who declared that "the son of so many tears could not perish." Soon afterwards Augustine went to Carthage, where he continued to teach rhetoric. His talents shone to even better advantage on this wider stage, and by an indefatigable pursuit of the liberal arts his intellect attained its full maturity. Having taken part in a poetic tournament, he carried

off the prize.

It was at this moment of literary intoxication that he began to repudiate Manichæism. He himself gives the reason for his disenchantment. First of all there was the fearful depravity of Manichæan philosophy — “They destroy everything and build up nothing”; then, the dreadful immorality in contrast with their affectation of virtue; the feebleness of their arguments in controversy with the Catholics, to whose Scriptural arguments their only reply was: “The Scriptures have been falsified.” But, worse than all, he did not find science among them, that knowledge of nature and its laws which they had promised him. When he questioned them concerning the movements of the stars, none of them could answer him. “Wait for Faustus,” they said, “he will explain everything to you.” Faustus of Mileve, the celebrated Manichæan bishop, at last came to Carthage; Augustine visited and questioned him, and discovered in his responses the vulgar rhetorician, the utter stranger to all scientific culture. The spell was broken, and, although Augustine did not immediately abandon the sect, his mind rejected Manichæan doctrines. The illusion had lasted nine years.

But the religious crisis of this great soul was only to be resolved in Italy, under the influence of Ambrose. In 383, Augustine, at the age of twenty-nine, yielded to the irresistible attraction which Italy had for him, but his mother suspected his departure and was so reluctant to be separated from him that he resorted to a subterfuge and embarked under cover of the night. He had only just arrived in Rome when he was taken seriously ill; upon recovering, he opened a school of rhetoric, but, disgusted by the tricks of his pupils, who shamelessly defrauded him of their

tuition fees, he applied for a vacant professorship at Milan, obtained it, and was accepted. Having visited Bishop Ambrose, the fascination of that saint's kindness induced him to become a regular attendant at his preachings.

At Milan, he began to dream that he and his friends might lead a life dedicated to the search for Truth, a life purged of all vulgar aspirations after honors, wealth, or pleasure, and with celibacy for its rule. But it was only a dream; his passions still enslaved him.

Monica, who had joined her son at Milan, prevailed upon him to become betrothed, but his affianced bride was too young, and although Augustine had dismissed his former mistress, her place was soon filled by another. Thus did he pass through one last period of struggle and anguish. Finally, through the reading of the Holy Scripture light penetrated his mind. Soon he possessed the certainty that Jesus Christ is the only way to truth and salvation. After that resistance came only from the heart. An interview with Simplicianus, the future successor of St. Ambrose, who told Augustine the story of the conversion of the celebrated neo-Platonic rhetorician, Victorinus prepared the way for the grand stroke of grace which, at the age of thirty-three, smote him to the ground in the garden at Milan (September, 386). A few days later Augustine, being ill, took advantage of the autumn holidays and, resigning his professorship, went with Monica to Cassisiacum, the country estate of Verecundus, there to devote himself to the pursuit of true philosophy which, for him, was now inseparable from Christianity.

To learn more about St. Augustine's life and conversion, we

recommend you read The Confessions of St. Augustine.

DAY THIRTY-FOUR

Today being the sixth day of the week, we will offer subject-matter for meditation. If you are able, go to the chapel with the *Imitation of Christ* and spend 10-15 minutes considering them. At the end, ask God for the graces you desire. If you are unable or do not wish to meditate on this, feel free to choose something else, or just to spend 10-15 minutes in the chapel in silence, adoring Christ present in the tabernacle.

Today, the subject-matter for the meditation is taken from the *Imitation of Christ*, Part Two, Chapter 12, “THE ROYAL ROAD OF THE HOLY CROSS.” To meditate on this, read a few lines of the chapter slowly, pausing where you wish and considering what you are reading. The goal is for this thinking to push also to a desire to imitate Christ and therefore to the desire to ask for these graces.

DAY THIRTY-FIVE

Recommended Spiritual Reading: *Imitation of Christ*, Part Two, Chapter 11: “Few Love the Cross of Jesus”

-or-

Consecration to Mary, Introduction to Week 3: Day 7 (pp.200-204)

We are well on our way through the program of *Reconquista!*

Today marks another “shift” in the focus of our program. Having looked at the human soul and the operations of grace and nature, we are now going to look to our divine model, Christ, to understand how we are to live.

To prepare for this, which we will begin in this next week, make sure you have a copy of Scripture. For today, begin to think about Christ: what do you know about Him? What attracts you to Him? Who is He, in fact? What role has He played in your life, and what role would you like Him to play in your life?

WEEK SIX

Theme: Christ (Part One)

Goal for the Week:

Begin meditation: part of the time spent in the chapel dedicated to silent consideration and prayer (focus is the life of Christ)

Challenge of this Week:

1) **Tiredness:** It's long and we've been doing it for awhile. The weather is hot, etc. Naturally, our efforts decrease and we do not put ourselves out enough to really profit from this time.

Response: Go to Christ! Unite our tiredness with His weariness in working out our salvation...

About this Week:

What you need: Scripture, and to pay attention to the daily readings, which will step us through Christ's life.

What could be helpful, if you want: get a chronological harmony of the gospels.

What NOT to do during this week: turn off because we've read the gospel a million times – it is the Holy Ghost speaking to us today and now! Dom Marmion: Christ's mysteries are our mysteries.

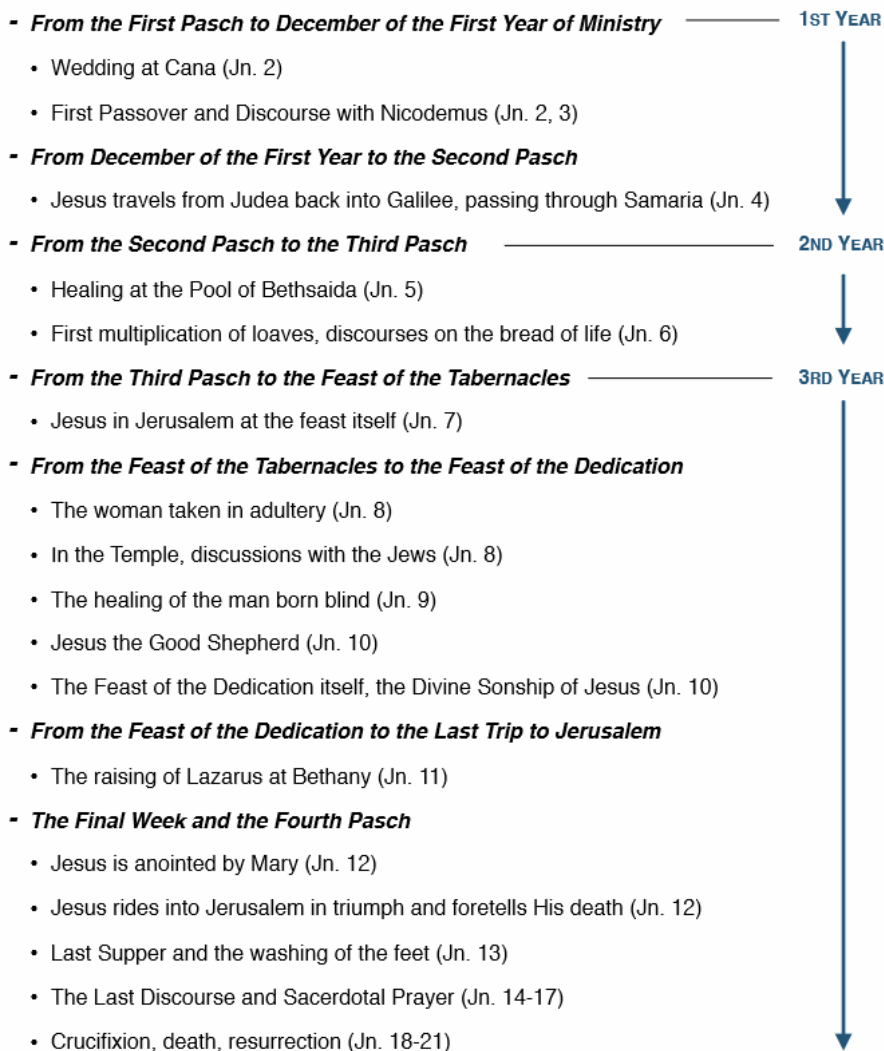
Fact: Christ is the fountainhead of all grace; everything comes to us through Him, with Him, and in Him. He is enough by Himself,

“looking up they saw no one, but only Jesus.”

Abp. Lefebvre: “It is always our Lord who is the center and heart of our life, and Who will be so eternally. For **it is by Him and in Him that we are able to live by grace, live in charity, and prepare our eternity.** There is no other way.”

This time is an invitation to get to know Our Lord, especially now that we have followed Him already by making sacrifices. So, continue your sacrifices, but focus specifically on knowing Our Lord, even if some things are not working properly. We are going for grace, and a lot of it!

Chronology of St. John's Gospel



+ MARIAN RECONQUISTA +



DAY THIRTY-SIX

Today begins our focus on Christ and His life. We want to use Scripture to get to know Christ more intimately. As discussed, this will happen by meditating on the Scripture verses given. If possible, read the points to guide your reflection first, then take your copy of Scripture to the chapel and read through the verses given slowly and meditatively.

Life of Christ: John chapter 1, verses 1-18

-or-

Consecration to Mary, The Most Holy Rosary (pp.205-242) [This is a long section, which will be read over the course of the next few days]

Points to guide reflection:

- Christ is God, from all eternity united to the Father and the Holy Ghost in the Blessed Trinity. He came to earth in order to bring us back to God and to introduce us into the very life Trinity: “I am come that they may have life and may have it more abundantly.”
- John the Baptist is a model for us: we are not ourselves the light, but we are to be witnesses to the Light. Christ wants us to reflect Him and so to spread that same Light to the darkness of the world.
- The world rejected Christ *because it did not know Him*. And due to this rejection, *the world will never understand Christ*. We must seek to know Christ, then to accept Him... then we will understand Him and His action in our lives.

DAY THIRTY-SEVEN

Life of Christ: John chapter 1, verses 35-51

-or-

Consecration to Mary, continue section on The Most Holy Rosary
(pp.205-242)

Points to guide reflection:

- John the Baptist, according to his mission, points out Christ to his disciples. These disciples begin to follow Christ, and it is interesting what they ask Our Lord first: “Where dwellest thou?” And Christ responds: “Come and see.” This dwelling is the Trinity and Christ shows this dwelling place to those who are willing to follow Him.
- Christ acts as a Master: He names Simon, thereby giving him a special mission; He uses His perfect knowledge to show Nathaniel that He knows him perfectly. Christ also has a “mission” to give us, and He wants to show us that He knows us intimately. Again, we must, like Nathaniel, listen to the advice (this time expressed by Philip): “Come and see!”
- “Greater things than these shalt thou see.” This is no idle promise. Those who follow Christ will experience greater joys than the world can know. This is obvious! Christ is God and He wants to share the infinite treasures of His divine nature with us.

DAY THIRTY-EIGHT

Life of Christ: John, chapter 2

-or-

Consecration to Mary, continue section on The Most Holy Rosary
(pp.205-242)

Points to guide reflection:

- What is the relationship between Christ and His Mother? There is a conversation going on here that is difficult of access, but it shows how much Christ and Mary understood each other. Both are clear: Christ is come for His “hour,” or the Passion and death. Mary understands that and urges Christ to begin His public life with this first miracle.
- Put yourself in the place of the waiters: what are they thinking of Christ? The magnitude of the miracle is not to be overlooked. If Christ can operate such a transformation instantaneously at a word, what can hinder Him from transforming our lives and our hearts if we allow Him free reign to do so?

DAY THIRTY-NINE

Life of Christ: John, chapter 3, verses 1-21

-or-

Consecration to Mary, continue section on The Most Holy Rosary
(pp.205-242)

Points to guide reflection:

- The language that Christ uses is strong: baptism is a true “rebirth.” We are “born again” not to a carnal life, but to a spiritual life. At our carnal birth, we receive our human nature and our identity (we are given a name and a “place” in the world through our parents). Just so, by baptism we are given a share in the divine nature and we are given our new identity: our name is now “Christian” – another Christ, or a Christ in miniature; our “place” in the world is to be a reflection of the light of Christ.
- “Art thou a master in Israel and knowest not these things?” Nicodemus should be in a position to understand the things that Christ says, and yet he struggles to grasp them. We are even more able to see and understand, since we have the fullness of knowledge of these mysteries. Yet we too will remain in ignorance unless we take the time to look more deeply into them. Here, the truths of our baptism are strongly presented, and we have to take the time to understand the transformation that has taken place in our souls.
- “For God so loved the world...” In the end, charity alone matters. What has been God’s love for us? What is our love of Him? “He that believeth in Him is not judged” – God does not condemn those who put all of their trust in Christ and strive to love Him. This is our vocation, to believe in the charity of God and to love God: “*Nos credidimus caritati*” – “We have believed in charity.”

DAY FORTY

Life of Christ: John, chapter 4, verses 1-43

-or-

Consecration to Mary, The Brown Scapular (pp.243-270) [This is a long section, which can be read over the course of the next few days]

Points to guide reflection:

- Pay close attention to the *questions* Christ asks in this dialogue with the Samaritan woman. Christ is God, and so He does not need to ask questions to learn the answers. He knows everything already! Why does He ask? What does He want of the woman? “Give me to drink” – St. Augustine famously said, “Deus sitit sitiri” or “God thirsts to be thirsted for.” Christ wants the woman to ask Him for the water that He has to give. It is same in our lives: Christ wants us to come to Him, not just for one thing, but for everything.
- “The true adorers shall adore the Father in spirit and truth.” This is again our vocation, to be worshippers of God. What does it mean to be a worshipper or an adorer of God? It means to understand *who* God is and to understand that *everything* depends upon Him and His Providence. We can and must receive everything as coming from Him and use it as an occasion to turn to Him. This is to be a true adorer.
- Once the woman is converted, she becomes an apostle: “Come and see.” This refrain of “Come and see” keeps occurring in John’s Gospel! What is necessary? To come

to Christ and to look at Him. That is all, and it is enough to receive the grace of conversion and sanctity of life.

DAY FORTY-ONE

Life of Christ: John, chapter 6, verses 1-21

-or-

Consecration to Mary, continue section on The Brown Scapular (pp.243-270)

Points to guide reflection:

- “This he said to try him, for He Himself knew what He would do.” Christ here “tries” or “tests” His disciples, not to have them fail, but to show them again the spirit they are meant to have, which is His own spirit. What is this spirit? One of charity and of complete confidence in His Father, as we see through the miracle He is here pleased to perform.
- In two ways, Christ prepares the disciples for the great truth of the Eucharist which will follow later in this chapter: first, He multiplies the loaves, to show that He has complete power over material creation; second, He comes to them walking upon the sea, to show them that He has complete power over His body as well.
- Christ refuses the kingship that is offered to Him because the crowd wants to make Him a temporal king and wishes to do so out of concupiscence. They are laboring for the “meat which perisheth.” This is not why Christ is come: He is come to introduce us into a spiritual kingdom. “Labor

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for that which endureth unto life everlasting.”

DAY FORTY-TWO

Life of Christ: John, chapter 6, verses 22-72 [This is a long passage, so choose a section to focus on]

-or-

Consecration to Mary, continue section on The Brown Scapular (pp.243-270)

Points to guide reflection:

- *Christ's initial discussion with the multitude (verses 22-34):* The people here are so fixed on material goods, and, as a consequence, they miss out completely on the spiritual truths that Christ wants to show them. Christ is trying to lift them higher, but they can only think of the food they received: “Their god is their belly.”
- *Christ is the bread of life (verses 35-46):* The contrasts throughout the passage are important. The Father gives the true bread from heaven, which will be a spiritual bread, giving life to those who approach in faith. Man is body and soul, but the food of the soul is much more important than that of the body. Christ is trying again and again to lift our minds to this spiritual level. It is not simply that these are on a equal level with material realities – spiritual things are *much more real* than the others.
- *Announcement of the Eucharist and disbelief of the crowds (verses 47-72):* “Will you also go away?” Christ has announced the most surprising truth here, the *mysterium*

fidei. And yet many of His disciples cannot receive this word and leave. Why? They fail to understand who Christ is and who God is. They are scandalized because they are so materially-minded. When we have difficulty accepting the will of God, we must ask ourselves first of all: is it because I am too earthly-minded? Am I too attached to my material goods and comforts? Am I blinding myself?

WEEK SEVEN

Theme: Christ (Part Two)

Goals for the Week:

Renewed energy, now that the “finish line” is in sight.

Meditation (or mental prayer) on Christ’s life and Passion – be disciplined; choose a number of days, then choose those days; schedule it.

Challenges of this Week:

1) Giving up the ship: All sense of “progress” has stopped; the initial idea has long since lost its glamor; nothing makes sense anymore; we just “throw in the towel.”

Response: Go to Christ’s Passion! This isn’t about us at all. It is about our identification with Christ, especially in His sufferings.

2) Lying in the dust: We haven’t been faithful to the program, we’ve been cutting corners, or we just haven’t been making any efforts at all.

Response: First, reflect how close we are to the finish line! Second, go to Christ again. Sometimes fidelity is about always getting up after a Fall. Remember how many times the Canaanite woman had to ask Christ before He even spoke to her. Let us be insistent about the graces we need!

About this Week:

All the saints speak about the Passion. Reflection on the Passion

is *the* means of removing ourselves from sin, of deeper union with Our Lord, and of sanctity.

St. Thomas speaks about the Passion as being what precisely caused our salvation. The whole of Our Lord's life, of course, was meritorious, but the Passion has a special power in our regard because of what it is, viz. the sufferings of Our Lord which inevitably move our heart.

Dom Chautard says this: "Were I to have the misfortune to fall into this tepidity (and *a fortiori* if I were to go lower still), I would have to make every effort to get out of it. 1) I would have to revive the *fear of God* in my soul by imagining myself, as vividly as possible face to face with my last end, with death, with the judgment of God, with hell, eternity, sin, and so forth. 2) And to revive *compunction* by the sweet science of Thy wounds, O my merciful Redeemer. Going, in spirit, to Calvary, I would throw myself down at Thy holy feet and let Thy living Blood run down upon my head and heart to wash away my blindness, melt the ice in my soul, and drive away the torpor of my will."

We are going to discover the Passion this week in the daily readings: the "lead up" to things and then the Passion itself. If possible, take time to think and pray about the Passion. If the mental prayer is not working for you, or even if you need a different subject for it, try to do the Stations of the Cross.

The Stations are a powerful devotion! We don't want to be superstitious; and yet it seems that the Stations are one of the most effective means we have of conquering sin. Why? Because in essence they are meditation on the Passion.

We are not speaking here only of a “natural” effect – we certainly pity one who has to undergo great hardships and tortures. But the Passion is much more than this. It is “the power of God.” There is a power in these sufferings of Our Lord, and we are uniting ourselves with them, to receive their fruit.

At the same time, this week, unite your sacrifices with those sufferings of Christ in His Passion. If you are tired, unite that with Christ’s weariness. If you are suffering from the cold showers, unite that with the scourging. If you are sad because you cannot have more than one drink or more food, unite that with Christ’s sorrow.

We must believe in Christ and in His Passion. And this is the week to make it the cornerstone of our life!

DAY FORTY-THREE

This week we will continue the meditations on Our Lord's life, now leading up to the Passion of Christ. During this week, make time for some mental prayer. Or, if that is too much, at least pray the Stations of the Cross. For the Stations, all that is required is to pause for a few moments at each station and meditate on the station. No vocal prayers need be said. If you can spend 10 minutes doing the Stations, spend that time. If you can spend 20 minutes, spend that time. Be honest with yourself. We are after grace, and a lot of it!

Life of Christ: John, chapter 8, verses 31-59

-or-

Consecration to Mary, Introduction to Week 4: Knowing Jesus (pp.271-283)

Points to guide reflection:

- We see here the growing hatred for Our Lord and, at the same time, Christ's insistence on Who He is, "Before Abraham was, I am." We can never forget Christ's two natures: divine and human. He is true man, but He is also true God. As we approach the Passion, we must make this act of faith in His divinity. He knows everything and can do anything, and yet He chooses to go to His Passion.
- Why do the people not understand? Why are they blind? "He that is of God, heareth the words of God." If we are to hear the words of God, we must be "of God," which is to say, we must believe. This belief goes far! What is there that God cannot do? What limits would we place to His

power? Even our own nothingness and corruption can be transformed by God's creative power into sanctity and a pure reflection of Him.

- "I know Him" – Christ knows God the way God knows Himself because Christ is God. It is only through Christ that we receive the genuine knowledge of God. It is through Christ that we learn the ways of God. And what does God want? He wants to suffer, to die, for us. "I do know Him and I keep His word."

DAY FORTY-FOUR

Life of Christ: John, chapter 11 (raising of Lazarus)

-or-

Consecration to Mary, Week 4: Day 1 (pp.284-289)

Points to guide reflection:

- "I am the resurrection and the life." We do not believe in some vague and abstract truth; we believe in a Person, the Person of Christ. He shows us again and again that He is everything; that without Him, we can do nothing, but that with Him, all things are possible. We must make this act of faith along with Martha and Mary: "I have believed that Thou art Christ the Son of the living God."
- "Take away the stone." This is our work: we must remove the obstacles to the divine action of Christ. The Passion will help inspire us to remove these obstacles in our heart: weakness, sloth, attachment to creatures. We have to be generous in sacrificing ourselves, and then the grace of

God will have free reign in our hearts.

- The blindness of the chief priests is almost unbelievable: in front of an evident and stupendous miracle, they can only think about murdering Christ. Yet they did not arrive at this state of blindness and hatred in one day. This is the result of repeated infidelity and making peace with tepidity. Let us not fall into this trap, but rather go to Christ when it threatens and ask Him to renew our courage! He cannot refuse one who comes to Him in faith and hope.

DAY FORTY-FIVE

Life of Christ: John, chapter 13

-or-

Consecration to Mary, Week 4: Day 2 (pp.289-293)

Points to guide reflection:

- **Washing of the feet:** Reflect on the humility of Christ. God stoops to cleanse the feet of His creatures. How can we ever think that He will not receive us in the confessional to wash the sins from our soul? How can we fail to believe in His infinite mercy, which always calls out to us at all times?
- **Betrayal of Judas:** In becoming man, the immutable God opens Himself up to be hurt. Christ is true man and He feels this betrayal of Judas keenly. And yet it is not too late for Judas, if only he believed in the Heart of His Savior. Later, Christ will still call him “friend.” Whatever have been our betrayals of Christ in the past, we must not stop

in returning to Him and asking Him for a share in His blessed Passion so that we might cooperate in our redemption.

DAY FORTY-SIX

Life of Christ: John, chapter 14, verses 1-15

-or-

Consecration to Mary, Week 4: Day 3 (pp.293-299)

Points to guide reflection:

- **“Let not your heart be troubled.”** Walking alongside Christ, even during His Passion, there is nothing that can disturb us, not even our sins. Christ is preparing our place and wants to spend all of eternity with us in His Father’s house. Founded on this promise, our confidence in Him must be unshakeable. With that confidence, we can prepare our minds to look at the events of the Passion and understand them the way Christ does. These are so many sufferings to prove His love for us and to invite us to join Him.
- **“I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.”** To quote the author of the *Imitation*, “Without the way there is no going, without the truth there is no knowing, without the life there is no living.” Christ is everything for us and outside of Him, there is nothing.
- **“He that seeth Me, seeth the Father also.”** Looking at Christ and meditating on Him, we see the Father, and we understand God. That is why the Gospel and the Passion

specifically must be frequent subjects of thought for us. We can always return to these sources and draw from them.

DAY FORTY-SEVEN

Life of Christ: John, chapter 18 (first part of the Passion)

Choose a scene or scenes of the Passion to meditate on, or else do the Stations of the Cross.

-or-

Consecration to Mary, Week 4: Day 4 (pp.299-304)

The text below is taken from Cardinal Wiseman's *Meditations on the Sacred Passion of Our Lord*, on the subject of Peter's denial of Christ:

“Reflect what a cruel blow to the Heart of our dear Saviour was given by the denial of Peter. He had been abandoned, indeed, by all His Apostles. Even John, the beloved, who was to display singular courage at the foot of the cross, and thereby to win the guardianship of Mary, was now at a distance; and it was evidently a part of the sufferings of Jesus in this stage of His blessed Passion to be utterly abandoned by all. Still Peter, the most courageous of the number, as he had shown himself in the Garden, draws nigh, and ventures into the crowd. Surely it must be to bring his loving Master some comfort; to give Him an assurance that his heart and those of his companions remain faithful to Him in spite of His present ignominy. He is come, surely, to die with Him, if need be. Alas! he is come to disown and to deny Him! To forswear himself by a dreadful and a treacherous

untruth, saying that he knew not the man. Such is the errand on which Peter is come; to do his kind Master no better service than publicly to disavow all connection with Him! Such is the only comfort brought to Jesus, on that last night, by the most courageous and the most zealous of His chosen followers. But then, what a wreck of the labours, lessons, and examples of three years! In vain has He been toiling to convince His Apostle that the Son of Man must suffer, and thus enter into His glory; that He must be delivered into the hands of sinners, mocked, and spit upon, and put to death. All these lessons have been thrown away. Peter does not know the man! There are all the protestations of the courageous Apostle, that even if all were to be scandalized in Jesus, he would not – evaporated at the sound of a foolish servant's voice. Yes, and there is the solid foundation of Christ's Church, the rock on which He willed to build it, melted, like wax, before that fire of the High Priest's hall! Oh, what a cruel sight for our Blessed Lord! what an aggravation of His sufferings! How much more poignant an infliction than the strokes upon His cheek! How much deeper an insult than the spitting upon His face! Truly, He looked on His right hand and on His left, and not only were there none to know Him, but there were some to abjure Him!"

DAY FORTY-EIGHT

Life of Christ: John, chapter 19 (second part of the Passion)

Choose a scene or scenes of the Passion to meditate on, or else do the Stations of the Cross.

-or-

Consecration to Mary, Week 4: Day 5 (pp.305-312)

The text below is taken from *The Spiritual Realism of St. Therese of Lisieux* by Père Victor de la Vierge:

“Dying, Jesus had nothing left to give: He had given us all the secrets of the Son. But He gave us something further still: the secret of His mother, her love and her transparency. He gave to us His mother, not to look *after* but to look *at*, for in seeing her we will see how she saw God, and that alone matters. God offers to us in His Servant the model of humility, and in the Virgin the model of abandonment. She who introduces God into the world receives the mission to introduce us into the world of God, and to mold us into the child that she was, and the Child that she bore. Without a doubt we will never see the traits of Jesus better than through the eyes of her who called Him, ‘My Son.’ The first-born of a multitude of brothers...”

DAY FORTY-NINE

Life of Christ: John, chapters 18/19

Choose another part of the Passion to meditate on, or else do the Stations of the Cross.

-or-

Consecration to Mary, Week 4: Day 6 (pp.312-325)

The text below is taken from *The Mass of All Time*, by Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre:

“What does this Blood signify? It was not simply to shed blood that Our Lord came to earth. It was because this Blood is charity.

The Holy Ghost made the Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ flow; it is His love. It is the sign of His charity for us. That is what Our Lord's Blood is; the effusion of Blood signifies that Our Lord pours forth His love in us, His Holy Spirit. This Holy Spirit leads us to God, it inclines us to do our duty, to keep the law of God, which is nothing else than the law of charity, a law of love: love God, love your neighbor – that is our law. The Blood of God is nothing other than a source of love.

“It is also the sign of penance, the sign of sacrifice. Henceforth, God wanted it so, we can no longer love without self-sacrifice. Indeed, to love, we must efface ourselves, forget ourselves. So long as we still love ourselves with a disordered love, so long as we still seek ourselves, charity is not in us; we are full of egoism, we seek only ourselves, our own advantages, our own self-love, and our own pleasure. That is what St. Paul tells us: ‘Charity seeketh not her own, is patient, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things’ (I Cor. 13:4-7). This is what charity is; this is what Our Lord's Blood gives us, signifies for us, and produces in us.”

WEEK EIGHT

Theme: The Interior Life (and life after *Reconquista*)

Goals for the Week:

Continue mental prayer (whatever we are able), focusing now on certain “master truths” of the interior life.

Begin to think about “life after *Reconquista*” and resolutions we will take going forward.

Challenges of this Week:

1) *Relaxing discipline:* since we are so close, letting certain things slide; dropping into a lukewarmness; ignoring vigilance over self.

Response: Insisting on “finishing strongly”; thinking about building strength for the battles that will come after the program; remembering eternal life and treasures stored there.

2) *Taking no time for reflection:* too much focus on the finish line as the end of the battle; resting in the idea that everything will be better when this is all over; closing eyes and “bearing it” until it goes away.

Response: Slow down! Take a bit of time to go through the detail of what we have accomplished, where we are weak, etc. Insisting that this program is going to benefit us even beyond the 60 days.

About this Week: The Interior Life (and life after *Reconquista*)

The starting point: God calls *everyone*, without exception, to a

close and deep life of union with Him. In other words, God calls everyone to have a developed and strong “interior life” or “spiritual life.”

An “interior life” should not be something different from our “life” in general. Indeed, it is our unique happiness; it is what gives “color” and meaning to everything else.

God’s will is clear, but He will not force this upon us; rather, He wants us to choose it freely and to cooperate with Him to bring it about in our own lives.

Therefore, the beginning of our own “conversion” has to be **desire for this life.**

It can take many forms: desire to be rid of a certain sin or fault; desire to be less affected by certain cares and concerns; desire to be like a certain saint; or, simply, a desire to be happier.

But all of these desires have to be directed to the desire for a life with God and close to Him.

We are not yet talking about the Cross, by the way! We have to start with a desire for what is positive and the goal of this life. And that is simply happiness, joy, peace, and so forth. All of these things are the unique inheritance of the saints.

It is this desire, especially, that we want to work on during these last days of *Reconquista*. We are going to do that in two ways:

First, we are going to look at and meditate on different aspects

of the interior life. These are truths that we *know*, but that we perhaps have not yet *reflected on* adequately. We are going to follow the Archbishop in this.

Second, we are going to protect our progress gained in this program and further it by considering seriously what we want our life to be like *after* the program finishes. Just as on a retreat we take resolutions, so also after a program like this we have to take some resolutions.

For most of us, it will be too much to continue everything in the program – that would not be practical, nor would it be effective. Nevertheless, some things should be continued, though perhaps in a mitigated form.

One way to begin this thought process this week is to take a little bit of time for reflection (this can be some of your time in the chapel, for example; or again some time right before/after night prayers). Write down a few thoughts about what has worked and what has not worked. What has been most helpful for you? What have you been most happy about the “new you”? What would you still like to change?

Sixty days is already a good start, but it is not the end of the story. It can be a great beginning for us, and it *should* be. We don’t want to throw away the progress of 60 days of our life. Let’s make this a powerful step forward on the road to happiness.

A final word: it is good, this week and next week, to come back to a real discipline. It is almost like we have to be a bit stricter on ourselves (I don’t mean doing more, but insisting on continuing

the sacrifices). This is important because otherwise, relaxing the discipline too soon, we risk losing the fruit of our labor. During these last two weeks it is “harvest time” – the planting and growing is done and now the fruits are there for the picking.

DAY FIFTY

In this week of *Reconquista*, we are going to take a “survey” of the interior or spiritual life of a Catholic soul, following the direction of Archbishop Lefebvre in his book *The Spiritual Life*. We are aspiring to become souls whose regular life is also an intense *interior* life. This is what *Reconquista* has prepared us for. It is entirely possible, and God wants this for each one of us! Let us open our minds to the direction of the Archbishop in order that our hearts also might be open to receive God’s grace.

As you go through the readings this week, try sometimes to pause and reflect. We do not want to lose a budding habit of mental prayer. A beautiful way to pray is the meditative reading of some of these texts. So, set the time aside or else do your reading in the chapel with this intention!

Recommended Spiritual Reading: *The Spiritual Life* (Archbishop Lefebvre), General Introduction, 1. What is the Interior Life?, 1. A Conversation with God (pp. 33-34) [If you don’t have this book, then during this week please read the recommended passages from *Consecration to Mary*]

-or-

Consecration to Mary, Week 4: Day 7 (pp.325-332)

DAY FIFTY-ONE

Recommended Spiritual Reading: *The Spiritual Life* (Archbishop Lefebvre), General Introduction, 1. What is the Interior Life?, 2. Its Enemies / 3. The Interior Life Open to All (pp. 35-36)

-or-

Consecration to Mary, Week 4: Day 7 (pp.325-332)

Especially at this stage of our program, we cannot be afraid of seeing and facing the faults we find in ourselves. We make peace with these faults through laziness and through selfishness. God invites us to step outside ourselves and see what we are; then, He gives us the grace to fight generously for His reign in our lives. There is no one who is not called to this deeper and better life: “I am come that they may have life and have it more abundantly,” Christ said.

DAY FIFTY-TWO

Recommended Spiritual Reading: *The Spiritual Life* (Archbishop Lefebvre), General Introduction, 2. The Conditions of the Spiritual Life, 1. Be a Soul of Desire (pp. 37-40)

-or-

Consecration to Mary, Introduction to Week 5: Final Preparations (pp.361-375) [Especially be sure to read the *Act of Consecration* on p. 374)

As the Archbishop explains, an essential disposition for us is to be a *soul of desire*. We must *want* to live in closer union with God;

we must *want* to rid ourselves of our faults. This is the beginning of a complete gift of self. There is nothing else to add here! Read the Archbishop – nearly all spiritual writers make this same point.

DAY FIFTY-THREE

Recommended Spiritual Reading: *The Spiritual Life* (Archbishop Lefebvre), General Introduction, 2. The Conditions of the Spiritual Life, 2. Love Silence / 3. Answer the Call of God (pp. 40-41)

-or-

Consecration to Mary, Week 5: Day 1 (pp.376-382)

God is not asking us to become hermits or Fathers of the desert. He is asking us for our heart, for our desire to be with Him, even in the midst of the world. This is the call of God and we have to answer it, as the Archbishop explains so well.

DAY FIFTY-FOUR

Recommended Spiritual Reading: *The Spiritual Life* (Archbishop Lefebvre), General Introduction, 3. The Fruits of the Interior Life (pp. 42-43)

-or-

Consecration to Mary, Week 5: Day 2 (pp.383-389)

The thoughts which the Archbishop expresses here we must frequently put before our eyes! We are aiming for a deep and

lasting *peace*; a real *stability*. Crosses and trials will come; weakness will sometimes be present. But we accept everything and we bear all because we have Christ and His strength. Christ is the rock to which we must always cling!

DAY FIFTY-FIVE

Recommended Spiritual Reading: *The Spiritual Life* (Archbishop Lefebvre), Book One, III. The Life of God in Us, 1. The Two Modes of God's Presence, 3. God Present in the Souls of the Just (pp. 134-136)

-or-

Consecration to Mary, Week 5: Day 3 (pp.389-393)

The heart and the real joy of the interior life is certainly this indwelling of the God in our soul when we are in a state of grace. We possess God in the depths of our being and we have with him a friendship, or a sharing of life, that is real. We have to meditate on this truth often, since it can inspire us with a great desire to guard that presence of God and to strengthen it.

DAY FIFTY-SIX

Recommended Spiritual Reading: *The Spiritual Life* (Archbishop Lefebvre), Book One, III. The Life of God in Us, 3. Sanctifying Grace, 4. Child of God by Grace / 5. Invitation to Live in the Presence of God (pp. 158-162)

[This reading speaks for itself! If it is too long, then focus on section 5, "Invitation to Live in the Presence of God."]

-or-

Consecration to Mary, Week 5: Day 4 (pp.393-400)

WEEK NINE

Theme: Life after *Reconquista*

Goals for the Week:

Hold strong until the end: During the last few days, stay faithful and vigilant to the practices of the program. One good way to do this might be to write down the days remaining (Monday-Thursday) and what we would like to accomplish during those days. Then, as we go through, check off each item.

Take resolutions to keep after *Reconquista*: In order to make the fruit of this program last in our lives, we want to take some resolutions that we can keep as we go forward. This is similar to a retreat: we take resolutions in order to help the retreat bear fruit in our “normal” lives.

Challenges of this Week:

1) **“Devil of the suitcase”:** Leaving or stopping the program before it is actually finished, perhaps with the rationale that “we have done enough anyway.”

Response: Anyone can be patient for four days! “The game isn’t over until it is over.” Let’s complete everything and do the full 60 days, just as we have committed to.

2) **“Relapse”:** As soon as the program is over, throwing off all restraint and granting to ourselves what we would even have avoided before starting the program. We risk losing a lot, or even everything, if we have this attitude.

Response: Friday has to be “day 61” in our minds – as if we are continuing, but in a mitigated form. This does not mean that the program continues, but rather that, in our mind, we have made a separation and a clean break from our previous bad habits. Thinking about this transition when we take resolutions is also helpful.

About this Week:

This week, as mentioned, one of our goals is to come up with resolutions that we can hold to after the program finishes. There are two important parts to this process.

A) First, reflection on the self-knowledge we have gained holding to these penances. I would suggest making two lists on a piece of paper:

1) The first list: go through the various commitments and put them into one of the following categories...

- a) Easy things (these were really no problem throughout the program)
- b) Difficult things (these were hard, and remained hard no matter how far in we were)
- c) Things that became easy with time (these started out being intimidating, but in the end were not really a problem, even if we still had to make an act of the will to do them)
- d) Things that became difficult with time (these started out fairly easy, but after time they started to wear us down)

2) The second list: take any notes you have made while going through the program and reflecting on those and your experience, write down what you have learned about yourself.

Like this:

- a) What strengths have I noticed in myself while doing the program? Ex. enthusiasm, desire to complete it, tenaciousness, etc. Or again, what goals have inspired me?
- b) What weaknesses have come to the foreground? Ex. Lack of perseverance, losing sight of the goal, lack of fervor, etc. Or again, what challenges rang true the most for me?

B) Second, reflection and decision about resolutions to take. There are two things to be noted here:

1) **First of all**, one of the most effective ways to take resolutions from a retreat is to come up with TWO categories of resolutions: “positive” and “negative”:

a) Positive, that is, taking upon ourselves some practice that we are going to be faithful to. For example, making a visit to the chapel every day, or a few times a week. Or else, cultivating friendships. Or else, a particular hobby we have taken up, and so on.

b) Negative, that is, eliminating something as a sacrifice. For example, choosing certain days not to drink. Or else, not snacking between meals. Or else, eliminating certain internet or phone usage.

2) **Second**, use the lists you have made above to guide you in taking resolutions:

a) Avoid taking the “easy things” as a resolution. These you should continue, perhaps not in the complete form, but in a mitigated way. For example, if exercising was easy for you, continue to exercise!

b) Look to continue the things that have become “easy with time”

where these are reasonable. Again, perhaps a diminished form of these would be reasonable. For example, if taking cold showers became easy for you, then try to continue this in some manner. (e.g. You could always take cold showers after exercise; or again, always take cold showers in the mornings, provided you are not sick, etc.)

c) Avoid taking the “difficult things” as resolutions. We need to ask ourselves *why* those were so difficult. Can these be linked to any weaknesses we notice in ourselves?

d) Clearly, it did not work to take these difficult things as such, so we need to find out how we could work on our weaknesses through another avenue. For example, if limiting your cell phone usage to simply necessary communication was difficult throughout the program, then you really need to look at the cell phone in your life as a whole. What is missing there? Is there some other resolution you could take about the phone to attack the weakness of, perhaps, being too attached to this device?

For those things that became difficult with time, is it clear why they did become difficult? Two possibilities:

i) If it was just a matter of the length of time with the program, then these are things that could form good resolutions going forward, because naturally relaxing the requirements will enable us to rest a bit. For example, if not watching movies became difficult with time and this was due to tiredness, then this should be an area to focus on for resolutions: can you limit when and how many movies you watch? ***Why do this?*** Because otherwise you are going to lose what you have gained with the excuse of, “the program is over!”

ii) If things became difficult over time because of situations that we ran across or because of other weaknesses we may have had, then ask yourself again, what weaknesses are these linked to? For example, if limiting alcohol became difficult over time, either because we were going to parties, or because we realize that we use it as an “escape” sometimes, then it would be wise to impose some kind of limit on ourselves. This could be as simple as choosing a day or days on which we do not drink. Or else limiting the number of drinks at a party, such as 2 drinks. ***Why do this?*** Because it means we were really making progress on denying ourselves and if we simply drop everything, we will end up relapsing.

DAY FIFTY-SEVEN

As we enter the final week of *Reconquista*, it is time to think seriously about how we will continue our life after this program ends. The few readings we have left from Archbishop Lefebvre will help us to keep the spirit of a crusade, fighting against our weaknesses and conquering ourselves for Christ. We must also reflect and choose resolutions which we can maintain after we have completed *Reconquista*. An effective way to do this is to look at the commitments we made during *Reconquista* and determine which of them, in a mitigated form, would be most helpful for us to continue. These decisions have to be inspired by the self-knowledge we have gained during these past days. What was the most difficult for us? Why was it so difficult?

Today, we begin with a reading on *compunction*, which is an attitude of soul that regrets our past sins and failures. This is an excellent disposition for us to cultivate as we near the end of the program and start again our “regular” lives. Read the Archbishop’s words attentively and ask God for this grace!

Recommended Spiritual Reading: *The Spiritual Life* (Archbishop Lefebvre), Book Two, II. The Spiritual Combat, 3. The Dispositions for Combat, 1. Compunction (pp. 201-203)

-or-

Consecration to Mary, Week 5: Day 5 (pp.401-408)

DAY FIFTY-EIGHT

Recommended Spiritual Reading: *The Spiritual Life* (Archbishop Lefebvre), Book Two, II. The Spiritual Combat, 3. The Dispositions for Combat, 2. The Spirit of Sacrifice / 3. The Offering of Oneself (pp. 203-204)

-or-

Consecration to Mary, Week 5: Day 6 (pp.408-414)

“The crusader is a man sacrificed. A man who goes into combat drops the *impedimenta*, all those things that may hinder him in his combat.” In these past 57 days of committing ourselves to various sacrifices, we have hopefully discovered what are, for us, real obstacles to our combat for a deeper spiritual life. It is exactly here that we must focus when we think about resolutions to take and keep for after the program. It is usually most effective to take two resolutions, one that is **negative** – sacrificing or giving up something – and one that is **positive** – committing ourselves to doing something additional, such as prayer or charitable works. The negative resolution should target something that we struggle with and that we want to overcome. Take inspiration from the sacrifices done in *Reconquista* for this resolution. As for the positive resolution, ask yourself: what has helped me the most in these past days, positively? Is it the daily prayer? Is it the contact with friends? Is it the efficiency I have enjoyed? Not wasting time? Having personal goals? Examine yourself and choose your positive resolution based on that.

We will always be crusaders, *Reconquistadores* – let us go generously to this battle, joining Christ!

DAY FIFTY-NINE

Recommended Spiritual Reading: *The Spiritual Life* (Archbishop Lefebvre), Book Two, II. The Spiritual Combat, 4. Two Aspects Inseparable from the Spiritual Combat, 1. The Struggle against Our Dominant Fault / 2. Conversion by Charity (pp. 204-207)

-or-

Consecration to Mary, Week 5: Day 7 (pp.415-420)

The two aspects that the Archbishop speaks of here line up exactly with our two resolutions: our negative resolution should be an attack on our dominant fault, or one of our main weaknesses; our positive resolution should help us to a greater love of God. Remember to take the time to reflect about these resolutions. When you have made a decision, **write them down** and **pray for the grace to be faithful to them**. This is how the fruit of our sacrifices of the last 60 days can continue to influence our lives.

DAY SIXTY

Recommended Spiritual Reading: *The Spiritual Life* (Archbishop Lefebvre), Book Two, II. The Spiritual Combat, 4. Two Aspects Inseparable from the Spiritual Combat, 3. Conclusion (p. 207)

-or-

Make your Act of Consecration to Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Wisdom, by the Hands of Mary (p. 374)

Day 60! We have made it to the conclusion of our program of

Reconquista! We are justly proud of ourselves for having completed what we started, even if sometimes our progress was slow. At the same time, we must recognize that we have the rest of our lives still to live. Has this program been simply an experiment which will now cease and not influence our life anymore? It would be a waste if that were the case! How can we maintain our momentum and continue to develop habits of virtue? It is certainly through our good resolutions, taken strongly, seriously pursued, and always revisited.

What is the final word we must keep before ourselves as we continue our “regular lives”? It is this word of Our Lord: *Vigilate et orate*. Watch and pray! Watch over yourself, pay attention to what draws you from Christ’s loving care. Pray, ask, beg, demand of Christ the graces that you need to stay near Him and to be enkindled with the flame of charity that burns so strongly in His Sacred Heart.

The Immaculata Spiritual Pilgrimage



Dec 2021 – Dec 2022



