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Advantages  
of  
Living by a Religious Rule



*Blessed is he whom Thou hast chosen, and  
taken to Thee: he shall dwell  
in Thy courts. Ps. 64*



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# Advantages of Living by a Religious Rule

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## THE KNOWLEDGE TO BE HAD IN A RELIGIOUS RULE

Religious have reason to rejoice at many things. There is one thing, however, that gives them more cause for rejoicing than anything else—that they have a Rule whereby to live honestly and virtuously. What is it else to them but God Himself, since it leads them to Him so surely?

Behold how worldlings show their irksomeness at God's holy service, by not loving to read of and consider their religious duties. But a good religious loves his Rule and it is often found in his hands.

Water to soak the ground, and reading to soften the heart. As the enemy of uncleanness is water; so that of ignorance is knowledge. A religious must every day read something of how to serve God and become perfect and happy. How can he fail therefore to reach more and more the state of Adam's innocence?

The Rule of a religious person is, as it were, the Gospel for him; for it teaches him the Gospel in a masterly way. This is why he often reads and studies it. The good pupil re-

veres and loves his master. So does the good religious his Rule; he knows that love is all-powerful, that wisdom is its companion and innocence its inseparable effect.

O how they who learn the arts and sciences, search for the knowledge which they need! How many hours they give to its acquisition! How many distractions they avoid for its sake! How many pleasures they despise for love of it! How they persevere and hold on through all difficulties and hindrances till they have perfected themselves therein! O would that many of these were instead students of the divine law! Would that they might choose it as their art, their profession, their science, their everything! And indeed what will all else profit them if they have not that life-blood of the soul—the knowledge of God and His ways?

## THE PURPOSE OF THE VARIOUS RELIGIOUS RULES

Every religious Rule has a purpose—O what a different one from that of vain men and their writings! Every word therein reaches, as it were, to the very soul, teaching, correcting, ex-



horting, and leading to heaven! Who can find vanity in any of them?

O how men ought to love and follow that which leads them to God! Its value is His own worth! To a religious his Rule is his friend indeed, his passport to heaven, his whole and certain hope. What power there is in a purpose which being good is well carried out! This is indeed true greatness!

See the long rows of holy religious men and women who have sanctified themselves by observing perfectly their several Rules! How happy they now are in heaven!

An exemplary religious has more ends than one in view. But there is one that governs all the rest; it alone shall last in its effects for all eternity—the perfect observance of his Rule. For it at last can make him a saint.

All the occupations, the duties, the ambitions of the Saints have fallen to the lot of other men; but the performance of the Will of God has remained with them for ever and ever. For the Will of God perfectly performed makes saints on earth and rulers in heaven.

There are many things required for a journey; but most necessary of all is a guide to show us the way. Heaven is our goal. O that all men would desire to reach their goal more! Then would they also increase in their appreciation and love of the many religious Rules approved by our holy Mother the Church.

What tiny little books these Rules are! Yet they have changed the lives of more men and women than all the bulky volumes of the philosophers. What has Cicero done for our souls?

His admirable writings have not changed our hearts; but the teachings of the various religious Rules have converted myriads from sin and vice! Powerful little books, how many owe their souls to you!

#### THE RELIGIOUS RULES HOLD TO THE GOLDEN MIDDLE WAY OF THE GOSPEL

Religious can well thank God that by His grace they are not among the victims of the modern religious sects, which spring up in a day and have no ancestry to look back upon! God has not done for everyone what He has done for religious!

Humanly devised religions are either too lenient or too severe. Christ's Gospel alone keeps the golden middle way. And the Founders of the religious Orders, themselves following the Gospel perfectly, have said to others: 'Come, do likewise!' A religious has all things necessary written down for him. He need not search for the truth.

Man has a body and a soul. His willing soul must be encouraged with loving exhortation and consideration; his body, however, must be kept in servitude, because it is stubborn and slothful. But the religious can say in all truth: 'My holy Rule cares well for both my body and my soul.'

#### THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE SPIRIT OF THE RELIGIOUS RULES AND THAT OF THE WORLD

One of the oldest religious Rules, in closing its exhortations, speaks thus: "Whosoever thou art, who hastenest to the heavenly fatherland, accomplish with the help of Christ this Rule which we have marked out."

Now read what the worldling says: "Come therefore, and let us enjoy the

good things that are present, . . . let us fill ourselves with costly wine, and ointments, . . . let us crown ourselves with roses, before they be withered: let no meadow escape our riot. Let none of us go without his part in luxury." (Wis. 2:6-9)

These words are to the foregoing text what a falling rock is to a soaring eagle; the one rises, the other hastens downward. The one is like a king's sceptre which wields power; the other like a grave which is the picture of impotence. The one resembles a magnificent banquet, where all good things are spread out to eat; the other a corpse, which excites only disgust and nausea.

Shall the eagle cease to soar because the rock is heavy? Shall the sceptre cease ruling because the grave is weak? Shall the banquet be abandoned because a corpse is near? The eagle can soar without the rock; the sceptre can rule without the grave; the banquet can take place without the corpse.

Let us think on these things. They contain deep truths.

#### HOW GOOD IT IS FOR FALLEN NATURE TO OBSERVE A RELIGIOUS RULE

The observance of law is order; and order brings peace. A well-ordered conscience is the assurance of a happy interior. Ought not then the joy of a good conscience move men to embrace one or the other of these holy religious Rules, which make for the highest order possible on this earth?

The miser gloats in his heart over both the money which he is already in possession of, and that which is yet coming to him. So does the good religious person glory silently within himself, and in God, asking Him for

still greater innocence. For an upright conscience is the secret of all happiness.

All good religious, having actually professed one of the approved Rules, are actually observing it. Their life is indeed a living Rule. The least regulations of that Rule are to them nothing less than the most adorable Will of God; for they are such in very fact.

Religious are busy fleeing from privileges, which deceive men so often; from excuses, that lay so many low; from the inspirations of the devil, that prove the obstacles to so many graces.

O sloth of fallen nature, which leaves worldlings nothing at sundown but their own misery, lack of interior peace, distaste for prayer, and general poverty of soul!

#### HOW GOOD RELIGIOUS LOVE THEIR HOLY RULE

What is more indelibly imprinted on the memory of a good religious than the discipline of his Rule? What is more deeply imbedded in his heart? To what is he more willing to give his time, his energy, and his life? With the pious Ruth, he says to his Rule: The Lord do so and so to me, and add more also, if aught but death part me and thee! (Ruth 1:17) Or thus he cries out in the burning words of the prophet: If I forget thee, O my holy Rule, let my right hand be forgotten! (Ps. 136)

You have not chosen me, said our Savior, but I have chosen you. Hence it is no little thing to have received so high a vocation. Unfortunate he who follows not the call! The greater the gift, the more culpable and shameful the ingratitude.

A good religious hates all faults against his Rule; because they hate God. Did not the royal prophet address God thus: Have I not hated them, O Lord, that hated thee? (Ps. 138) He adds: I have hated them with a perfect hatred: and they are become enemies to me.

A good religious feels downcast if his Rule is not observed, or if its spirit begins to grow cold. It is as if part of his own body was losing its warmth and life.

TO OBSERVE A RULE IS BETTER THAN  
TO FOLLOW ONE'S WHIMS

What is better than obedience? King Saul was not rewarded for the sacrifice he offered, because it was contrary to God's wishes; therefore he was blamed by the Prophet Samuel for doing what God had not told him to do.

Thus there are many that serve themselves rather than God. For pride is always at the root of self-will. Worldlings often throw off God altogether. But a humble religious man does what is told him, each day as well as he can. His wages are always increasing.

Some think that God is only pleased with extraordinary things. How foolish! He never did command these in the Scriptures; but the easy, ordinary ones He did command, and insisted on them. The interior quality is what He considers. Thus our Lord said that to give a thirsty person a drink of water for love of Him would reap a very rich reward. Is it not therefore better for a man to observe a religious Rule exactly in every particular, even though he do no more, than to perform extraordinary deeds

for his own glory in the world and to the detriment of his soul?

THE OBSERVANCE OF A RELIGIOUS RULE  
AND ACTIVE WORKS

If a religious observes his Rule perfectly, it is much; but still greater it is, if he performs active work every day, and still observes his Rule perfectly. And such magnanimous servants of God there are many! By observance of their Rule they sanctify all their active works.

Those who first gain a reputation for activity, are scarcely known to sanctify themselves afterward; but they who are first known as holy men, develop by and by a most indefatigable activity. Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you, said Jesus. Why do we not believe His words?

Why is it that some prefer active works, as laymen outside of religion, to the observance of a religious Rule? Often because they are wanting in the inner spirit of all religious Rules, which is prayer. A true religious is glad to have a frequent opportunity to pray.

Did not our Lord tell us to pray all the time? This is the contemplative or mystical life. With a religious the contemplative element—prayer, is the secret of the active element—labor. O how zeal for prayer can make a man work! Why? Because prayer means the death of sloth! Activity gives to contemplation only a more wholesome flavor. For to work is natural to man. "Homo nascitur ad laborem." (Man is born to labor). Yet what is work without prayer? Even heathens and sinners work most assiduously, but do they pray? The religious, how-

ever, could never be a religious without praying.

#### HOW A RELIGIOUS RULE PROTECTS A MAN EVEN IN THE MIDST OF THE WORLD

The religious, when he leaves his chosen home and goes on necessary business into the world, does not leave his weapons behind. His poverty, his piety, his obedience, etc., go along with him everywhere.

His poverty is a weapon for him on his journeys, because it shields him from the first great evil of the world—avarice; because it keeps him among the poor and lowly; because it prevents him from seeking the company of the rich and worldly, with all their vanities; because it hinders him from obtaining passing pleasures.

Piety is especially a weapon for him while abroad, because it preserves his recollection of spirit, nourishes his prayer, keeps alive his devotion, and, by regulating his senses, particularly the eyes and ears, shields him against the second great evil in the world—the lust of concupiscence.

Obedience is above all a weapon for him when in the world, because it regulates his every step; holds him gently to his duty; keeps him from wasting time on vanities; and precludes effectually the third great evil of the world—the pride of life, or the desire of passing honors and unbridled liberty.

Behold then, how good God is to religious, and how well armed they are against the onslaughts of the enemies of salvation!

#### A RELIGIOUS RULE ENJOYS THE HIGHEST AUTHORITY

True obedience asks no questions! True obedience is zealous for the com-

mand, not for an excuse against it. True obedience ascends to the fountain-head of all authority, considering the divine source.

The water is good as it bubbles out of the earth, and we care not for the passages through which it has flowed. So does the true religious subject himself to the authority of Christ, no matter through what instrumentality it comes to him. For superiors are only enforcers of the Rule they represent.

A good religious does not stir the water, lest it become muddy. For he knows that when a man begins to ask questions and to hesitate, then does the sweet water of obedience turn into bitterness, as so often happens in the world.

O what happiness is hidden in the love of right authority! What joy is waiting to fill and inebriate a man when he leaves the world, and begins to empty himself of self-love, shaping himself on a pattern—a Rule!

If men could only appreciate the truth of this matter, they would then realize how foolish they are for not valuing as they should the treasury of wise instructions and holy directions contained in the Rules which the holy Founders of the Religious Orders have given us. But thus it often is; we look upon our best friends as bores!

#### WHAT GREAT PERFECTION CAN BE AC- QUIRED BY OBSERVING AN APPROVED RULE

A pattern for a coat, and a Rule for a religious. Every line is measured, every point taken into consideration.

Artists, if they wish to copy the great masterpieces, must make them

either smaller or larger than the original; for fear that afterward there should arise a doubt which is the original. We also see actors on the stage, who impersonate their characters so well, that we cry or laugh with them, just as they please. Thus a good religious is an exact copy of his holy Founder. When he comes to heaven, the resemblance between him and his Founder will be very marked. For he who observes one of the religious Rules perfectly, inevitably becomes like to him who wrote that Rule, who himself had become like to Christ before he even thought of writing a Rule.

How good religious long for perfection! They consider nothing more worthy of their love. They have chosen once and for all between perfection and vanity. Nay, they have betrothed themselves to perfection.

The live-long day of a good religious is filled with prayers, lest he ever begin to go backward in his resolve. For he knows that sanctity, without prayer, is an exceedingly high mountain; but that with prayer, it is a little hill.

Does not St. Teresa say that prayer is the short road to sanctity? Blessed are they who find this road. In the world it is hard to find; under a Rule comparatively easy.

Without Me you can do nothing, said our Lord. But if we pray not, can we say our Lord is with us? Hardly, because we are not with Him.

It is barely possible to pray much and become perfect in the world; but it is far from probable! Because in the world a man has no Rule to keep him to the road!

#### THE HIGH ASCETICAL PERFECTION OFFERED BY A RELIGIOUS RULE

Good religious learn habitually, faithfully, and tenaciously to observe not one but all of the regulations contained in their Rule, so that it becomes a second nature to them.

A carnal man can not enjoy a spiritual book; so also a man who is weak in any particular, so that he fails to overcome himself when the occasion offers, can not enter into the secrets of mystical theology. No one but a strong man can climb a high mountain! But in the religious state a man can become spiritually very strong.

Now, how does a religious strengthen himself? Every time he feels any repugnance to a duty, he prays fervently that God may deign to turn his sloth into love, and then he overcomes the repugnance. The next time he finds that he is stronger, and he experiences less difficulty; the next time he is still stronger and finds much less difficulty; until at length he begins actually to feel great ease and even delight in observing each and every duty, not only at the right time, but also at the right place, and—what is most perfect of all—in the right manner! Nor does he do this only when he feels inclined thereto. Nothing can withhold him. He cries out truly with St. Paul: What shall separate me from the love of Christ? And he means every word he says. For his Rule is Christ to him. Sickness only increases his merit. Difficulties and hindrances serve only to render his will more firm and unshaken. Prayer and self-conquest are his two arms!

Behold the short way to the mystical things of God—the royal way! Shall



God give His wonderful things to weaklings? God looks for strong men to wield His own strength and power; He will not give it to weaklings.

#### THE GOOD EXAMPLE OF OBSERVING A RULE

Good example takes a very important part in the building up of anything noble and valuable. For as the younger observe their elders to do, so do they also.

How beautiful, how moving, how pleasant, how worthy of all imitation is the good example of a pious religious, who in all things exhibits his holy Rule to those about him, yea, where-soever he goes!

If men have a saint in the midst of them, who often can be seen in the depths of prayer, and whose virtues can be experienced by all—his charity, his obedience, his humility, his self-denial, how all look up to him! And if the very pictures or images of the saints wring tears from men's eyes, what would the reality do?

#### THE BAD EXAMPLE OF WORLDLINGS WHO HAVE NO RULE TO GUIDE THEM

Lovers of the world are in many things miserably out of accord with the true spirit of their duties. The older they grow, the more liberties they take; so that it is almost better to keep silent about them than to speak of them, lest the little ones take scandal! They even live a life in disagreement with their own convictions, or principles. And after a while, those principles themselves become infected, so that very little good can be expected.

Vain worldlings ever belittle the Gospel, and twist its teachings to suit their own whims! They never trem-

ble at the thought of the mill-stone!

Many a one in the world would embrace a Rule and grow virtuous and happy, were it not for evil companions. But alas, they follow suit, and themselves begin sowing cockle in the fields of wheat. And what is the result? Evil grows greater and greater in the world, happiness less and less.

Much of the evil complained of in the world is perhaps traceable to many whom God wanted in the religious state, but who have chosen to follow their own way in the world, out of place, like a trouble-causing cog in a machine. O what different men they could have become!

#### REFUSING AND ACCEPTING A LIFE UNDER A RULE

Those who refuse to follow a divine call to live under one of the religious Rules are invited to penance; but, turning away, they find nothing but their miserable heart, with all its faults and vices. They are called to a great reward; but they reap instead, not one, but many terrible punishments.

Judas was called well; but he did not cooperate well with the call; which is a sad picture of many!

But, on the contrary, how the careful choosing and observing of a Rule has sent thousands and thousands to heaven! They came for a purpose, and they clung steadfast to that purpose; and when they died, that purpose was still alive. They passed from time to eternity, as a man passes from one pleasant garden to another.

#### LIVING BY A RULE ARMS A MAN AGAINST MORTAL SIN

How weak is the faith of worldlings, who commit so many mortal

sins! Why is it weak? Truly, because they are not men of prayer. Prayer alone can strengthen faith. The lack of prayer, however, is the death of faith. Even good men, if they neglect prayer, grow worse from day to day. But even faulty men, if they practice prayer, will grow better and better until they perform the very deeds of the saints. St. John Chrysostom declares this with the words: When I see someone counting the neglect of assiduous prayer among his greatest losses, I judge that man to be a most zealous practicer of all virtues, and a temple of God. (Homily 67) Why does he say: Temple of God? To show that in such a man mortal sin has no shadow of habitation. And this is the happy prerogative of good religious.

LIVING BY A RULE ENABLES A MAN TO  
AVOID EVEN VENIAL SINS MORE EASILY

Who would not fear for a man who was travelling on a road where there lay hidden deep beds of quicksand? His intention of avoiding the danger would not make him very secure! And this is a picture of the world, with all its deceitful pitfalls. How many a grievous sin was never intended beforehand, yea even abhorred!

Good religious watch over themselves every day, lest they offend God in anything. And what causes them to do this? In the first place, they fear for their eternal salvation, knowing that a little spark can end in a burnt city. In the second place, they keep before themselves the great and ineffable reward of the innocent. In the third place, they seek to please Him who sought to please them so much.

If an artist wished to paint an allegorical picture of the fear of sinning in the least matter, one of the best representations he could make choice of would certainly be this: A person with an inflamed eye asking another if he could see anything therein.

For the eye is the neatest organ of the body. It can not bear the presence of the merest particle of dust, but complains till it is removed. When the wind blows, it shuts itself; when danger threatens, it turns quickly away; when, despite its care, it has unfortunately received the least hurt, it has no rest until the same has been remedied. How smooth and shining is its surface! How delicate its nerves! How well defined its parts! In one word, it is necessary that we often wash ourselves, but never our eyes. They are too particular, and do that work themselves long before we even think of it. Now the soul of a good religious is like the little eye,—always fearing the least sin, hence always avoiding the smallest imperfections more and more.

HOW A RELIGIOUS RULE PROTECTS A  
MAN FROM BAD HABITS

Alas, how must many people in the world be frightened into God's sweet service; how they fall back again and again into their abuses! Sin becomes such a habit to them that they at last reach a stage where they no longer are even frightened by the consequences; and then who will pull them out of the mire?

A religious, however, by reason of his delicately trained conscience, needs but a word to remind him of his duty; it is true, he may forget himself occasionally, but, if he is an

earnest man, he will make good the evil and resolve on doing it no more. For as a religious he is bound to strive after perfection; the thought of this duty goads him on, and prevents any bad habit from easily getting a foothold in his soul. Living by a Rule, he must be busy spiritually; and thus it comes, that, even though he had contracted bad habits in the world, yet after his conversion those bad habits are replaced by good habits; and not only by good habits, but even by holy habits. He is forced, as it were, to put on the new man, that is, to convert himself according to the norm of norms—the Lord Jesus Christ.

A man's character is that phase of himself which gives to others a panorama of his own customs and habits. But a perfect religious has a better character than worldlings; not because of himself, but because he follows Christ better than worldlings.

A RELIGIOUS RULE ENABLES A MAN TO  
MAKE AMENDS MORE EASILY FOR HIS  
SINS

Neglect of penance is the great danger of the soul. For it leads to self-will. It is sad enough in a worldling, if he is not impressed beforehand with his duty; but far worse is it if, even after he has neglected it, his guilt escapes his notice. The neglect of duty is indeed bad; but the neglect of penance doubles one's guilt.

Or would a man be so presumptuous as to think that God could forget? God can not forget. His mind is perfect and His justice infinite.

In religion a man can not easily do evil without the Rule immediately requiring some penance of him; thus he does not go from bad to worse, but

applies the remedy in time. Moreover, he also possesses in this a good preventative.

In the world people are always postponing their penitence; until often God withdraws His grace altogether. In the religious life, however, penance is not allowed to be postponed, so that the forgetful individual regains the grace of God in a short time.

The devil loves nothing more than to see men sin and then neglect to do penance for the transgression. On the other hand he hates nothing more than to see religious continually making good their weaknesses by prompt penitence.

TO LIVE BY A RULE PREVENTS A MAN  
FROM BEING PUFFED UP BY ANY DIGNITY

In the world honor easily leads to pride; but the religious is bound by his Rule to strive for humility; therefore, when he is honored, he gives all the glory to God. His flame does not go out when it is placed on a candlestick!

Tyrants, because they are above, despise everything beneath. Not so in the religious life, where a Rule binds both the superiors as well as the inferiors. The inferiors must be dutiful; but the superiors are never allowed to exceed!

THE PLEASURE OF LIVING UNDER A RULE

The psalmist says: Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! These words are a perfect picture of a religious community. For there we find two things—the observation of a Rule, and fraternal charity; the former representing the first great commandment—love for God, the latter the second—love for our neighbor.

He who pays a visit to a community where the religious Rule there followed is kept in an exemplary manner, carries away with him a memory full of edifying incidents and impressions:—how kindly he was received and treated; how joyful, content, and humble all the religious seemed; how faithfully they went about their duties; how orderly they prayed together and observed the ceremonies of holy Mother Church; how they loved one another; how exact they were in all the religious exercises; how, finally, each one seemed a living copy of the Rule there professed, an animate Gospel, an angel of prayer clothed in mortal flesh!

Thus we read in very fact of the great edification which the religious of St. Bernard's monastery gave. All who saw them were highly edified. And why? Because of the two above-mentioned things—the perfect observance of their Rule, and the fraternal charity that reigned among them.

#### HOW A RULE CONTINUALLY STIRS UP ONE'S FERVOR

When the fire goes out, or burns low, the room grows cold. Thus do so many people in the world allow their hearts to grow cold. They neither have any fervor, nor do they possess special means of stirring their hearts. They have no Rule to remind them and to goad them on. Therefore they shiver in their exterior and freeze in their interior. They are both bad and unhappy.

But as for religious, every text of their Rule is, as it were, a little grove, the trees of which they need only fell and split, in order to feed their fire continually. Their books of

prayer, what are they else but fuel for the fire of love and devotion? Their cells are fuel for prayer; their religious garb is fuel for humility. God is exceedingly good to them, for He furnishes them with very many occasions of daily virtue and joy!

#### A RULE IS A CONTINUAL EXHORTATION

How good is the advice which a wise father gives his children! It has only the best motives as its foundation. And besides, it is the fruit of the father's experience, as well as of his intellectual and spiritual progress.

Now every Founder of an approved Order is such a Father, who speaks continually to his children, giving them the soundest, the most practical, the most admirable advice they could find.

And how does this come to pass? By reading, to a great extent, but above all by meditating. People in the world read, oftentimes very frivolous matter, and gain little good out of all the time spent thereon; religious go farther than reading—they meditate. They learn their Rule when they first come to serve God; but for the rest of their life they are busy meditating upon it. Reading requires the intellect, and satisfies curiosity; whereas meditation demands the will above all and an earnest conversion of one's ways—the avoiding of evil and practice of good. And even when a religious does read he rather meditates than reads, because he reads for spiritual profit more than for curiosity.

A religious Rule is not written for literary purposes or for pleasure; it is written alone for changing a man's life. And therefore its effect is *deeds*.

THE FIRST MOTIVE TO BE CONSIDERED BY  
ONE WHO FEELS DRAWN TO A RELIGIOUS  
RULE—GOD'S INVITATION

To some our Lord speaks day after day, inviting them to His sweet service; yet they never have the heart to put their hand to the plow and really begin. They delay and delay, until at last the opportunity passes away forever, and falls to the lot of another, who seizes it with open arms.

Why get no farther than a half-hearted resolution? Is there anything more important than salvation, more profitable than sanctification? Why always have something else to do, when God's voice so sweetly invites?

The irresolute should address themselves thus: Lazy man, when will you at last begin? Why do you delay so foolishly; you will thus never become happy! Seize this present hour of leisure and enter into your soul earnestly! Let nothing else claim your attention, until you have settled this most important affair! Nothing else is so necessary, so useful; no, do not believe it; your soul's happiness is worth more than other things to you! O how such exhortations can help a hesitating soul!

Many a one, by spurring his slothful soul onward, persevering at the same time in prayer in order to obtain God's light and aid, has solved his life's problem in a moment. O happy, happy moment! Like St. Peter, when he left his net, he turned to the light, and never again turned away from it. His turning decided his lot; eternity conquered time!

Our Lord said: He that *will* be perfect, let him deny himself and follow Me. Ah, there's the point—many do not *want* to be perfect!

THE SECOND MOTIVE TO BE CONSIDERED  
BY ONE WHO FEELS DRAWN TO A RELIGIOUS  
RULE—SAFETY FROM THE WORLD  
AND ITS PUNISHMENTS

Lust, avarice, and ambition. Can so much evil be couched in so few words? These three horrors are like three vials that contain poison enough to kill all the inhabitants of the earth. How quickly do they do their work, albeit so hiddenly! If we only breathe their fumes, we already risk our souls. How they deceive by their sweet odor! How they flatter the taste! How they at last torture their victim and tighten their clutches on the immortal soul, which was created for God alone. How they bring even the highest angels to the lowest depths of hell!

An ambitious man assumes an office; then with the wealth it brings him he revels in sensual pleasures. Behold a picture of the world and its maxims! Ambition, avarice, concupiscence—all in one!

But a religious can assume no office, except the lowest. There, he is not in danger of taking to himself things which he does not need; hence also he does not find the occasion of pampering his body; but above all he is thus hindered, as far as fallen nature can be hindered, from falling a victim to animal delights. His vial does not contain poison, but rather wholesome medicine. Obedience, poverty, chastity, these are the three great ingredients of his elixir, which serves him not only for healing his ills, but also for nourishing and strengthening his entire spiritual system, till he is literally bubbling over with health of soul.

THE THIRD MOTIVE TO BE CONSIDERED  
BY ONE WHO FEELS DRAWN TO A RELI-  
GIOUS RULE—A MAN REACHES GOD EVEN  
IN THIS LIFE

How can a man reach God without giving up all things else? All these beautiful and delightful things are not God. We can not reach Him by any of them without deep, interior prayer, sincere and affectionate, frequent and persevering.

God is a pure spirit, with no imperfection whatever. He is omnipotent, He is eternal, He is omnipresent, He is filled with all goodness. O what a difference between Him and these miserable passing temporalities!

What do we understand by things worldly? They are indeed many in number, but very few in quality. If we speak of their number, we must mention money, treasures, silver, gold, precious stones, all sorts of meat and drink, theatres, sports, fine clothes, perfumes, books, pictures, honors and pleasures of all kinds—it is quite impossible to only begin to enumerate them all! But if we speak of their quality, ah! let St. Paul express it in one little word: For whom I have suffered the loss of all things, he says, and count them but as *dung*, that I may gain Christ. (Philip. 3:8)

A religious despises this world's goods when he enters the service of God. He is sick of them, and desires to have nothing to do with them any longer. And, what is best of all, he is truly happy in thus renouncing the world and its ways. And if there are roots still remaining, he quickly pulls out the weeds, as soon as they make their appearance, holding himself diligently in prayer.

O who can put on paper the happy interior joy a religious possesses during the blessed days of his novitiate, when the Lord Jesus makes haste to cleanse his servant's heart from all affection for the miserable vanities of the world! Truly this time is a hidden banquet of the soul!

Vanity of vanities, and all is vanity! Who can add to or subtract from these most true words of the Wise Man? Or who can improve on those others of St. Augustine: We are created for Thee, O God, and we can not rest until we rest in Thee?

THE FOURTH MOTIVE TO BE CONSIDERED  
BY ONE WHO FEELS DRAWN TO A RELI-  
GIOUS RULE—THE DIVINE REWARD

There is one word without which all language would be cold and void, and that is the word 'heaven.' For it is to the mind what flour is to the baker, or wood to the carpenter, or sheep to the shepherd. Take the flour away, and what is left of the baker? Destroy the wood, and how will the carpenter thrive? Scatter the sheep, and what will become of the shepherd? Take away heaven, and what becomes of the immortal soul?

St. Peter himself was anxious to know what reward he was to receive for his service; therefore we who are no saints should not forget about it! Man must be spurred on by the hope of reward even as little children; otherwise he makes little effort, and that which he does make is often drudgery.

And what did our Lord answer St. Peter to the words: Behold we have left all things, and have followed thee: what therefore shall we have? He answered in this wise: Every one that

hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall possess life everlasting!

Therefore the religious not only hopes for a great reward, but he is secure in that hope, and this security excludes both doubt and forgetfulness. For if the day-laborer were to forget all about his wages, he would lie down to sleep, and thus earn nothing after all. But the good religious is always thinking of the wages that are coming to him some day! And the certainty he feels in his heart of obtaining that ineffable reward never ceases! Every good work is, as it were, prefaced, accompanied, and concluded by it. His prayer, full of confidence and hope, never dies! He is filled with that 'glorious frenzy' of which St. Teresa speaks.

O how many good works are daily performed by religious! They are indeed wise, for they keep the eternal recompense perpetually before their sight. They are prisoners, incessantly sighing for their deliverance; heirs, continually longing for their heritage.

Nor will God rob religious of their merits. Nay, He can not, on account of His promise. O wonderful condescension of the all-powerful and independent Ruler of the universe, to bind Himself to repay our miserable services with His own eternal riches!

THE FIFTH MOTIVE TO BE CONSIDERED BY ONE WHO FEELS DRAWN TO A RELIGIOUS RULE—GRATITUDE FOR GOD'S GIFTS

Our very existence is due to God; we must thank Him for our life. Our

Christian heritage is especially God's gift; for which we must indeed be most grateful. But there is another gift God can make a man, which is the complement of these—a vocation to the religious life. A religious counts the steps that led him to God, thus: birth, baptism, holy Communion, confirmation, *the holy vows*. He bows his head in gratitude to God for such an unspeakably great calling, and labors with all his heart to make himself worthy of it.

To all men God gives means sufficient to be saved; but to the religious He gives means in abundance. Whatever the religious sees in his newly-chosen home is only another reminder of the eternal end for which God created him. He looks upon the walls and realizes that nothing less than the desire for heaven has built them! He sees in the simple corridors and quiet cells the habitation of prayer, which the heavenly wisdom and foresight of his Rule have planned! He beholds the kneeling-benches, that recall to his mind the infinite providence of a good God. When he places his holy religious garb upon his body, he is conscious of the friendship with Jesus which it represents.

In a word, when the religious thinks of all God has done for him, he says from the bottom of his heart: O how can I ever repay the least part thereof! And then he repeats the offering of himself, striving to make it more fervent than ever, so that, what he can not attain in reality, he may reach at least in desire, knowing that God looks at the heart above all. His whole life becomes one long act of gratitude.

THE SIXTH MOTIVE TO BE CONSIDERED  
BY ONE WHO FEELS DRAWN TO A RELIGIOUS RULE—GOD'S HONOR AND GLORY  
AND THE SALVATION OF SOULS

The motive of God's honor and glory lends the highest purpose to everything a religious does, sees, hears, or touches, yea, to each breath he breathes! It makes everything holy, everything precious, everything deserving of eternal recompense.

The glory of God is the highest motive one can have; for it means that he does all for the pure love of God. A religious has other motives, but this one crowns all the rest.

The religious considers that God expects his homage every day, nay, every moment. He realizes that he belongs to God, and it is for Him that he should live. He knows that God will not care about all the beautiful things in the world when the final dissolution comes, but only for this, that his servants have glorified Him on the earth! For He Himself says, that he is honored by the humble. (Eccles. 3:21)

The true religious gives God his soul, fully and irrevocably, with its virtues as well as the intention and charity with which those virtues are performed. He is a holocaust to the glory of God.

In the world God is dishonored by self-seeking, often of the most shameful and hideous kind; in the religious life He is honored by self-denial, often by the most heroic self-immolation, as we see plainly in the Saints.

In the world men are busy providing for to-morrow, even avariciously gathering all they can, honestly or dishonestly; they think not of their neighbor's salvation, often not even

of their own. In the religious life, however, a man need not bother about his next meal—he is provided for; all he needs to do is to fulfil his duty, and labor with might and main to please God and help his neighbor according to the Rule he has professed. As his fervor increases, his thirst for souls increases, and certainly if there be thirst present, will God refuse to quench it? O the souls that have been saved for heaven by zealous religious! Their name is legion.

THE SEVENTH MOTIVE TO BE CONSIDERED  
BY ONE WHO FEELS DRAWN TO A RELIGIOUS RULE—THE EXAMPLE OF THE  
SAINTS

To read the lives of the Saints fills us with shame and inspires us with fear. We feel shame, because we are so different from them; fear, because we therefore make our salvation so uncertain.

The mode of life followed by saintly religious is spurned by the world; all their simplicity and littleness is deemed but the foolish fanaticism of weak-minded men and women. That they followed Christ perfectly is not considered; for the world overlooks the finest jewels in the Gospel, having neither eyes to see nor ears to hear!

Or perhaps the world says: They were saints, and therefore can not be followed; they were unpractical men. What a sophism! They were men just as we are. They had their passions, but they overcame them; which in the world, men seldom do. They had their temptations, but they fought manfully and came out all the more victoriously; which in the world is a rarity. They had their faults, but



they patiently corrected them, little by little, day by day; which the world does not even think of doing. They felt discouragement, but they remedied it by fervent prayer, and complete trust in God, humbling themselves to the dust for their weakness and lack of love, and begging earnestly for grace; all of which the world passes over as if it were but a dream, unworthy of serious thought. They were naturally slow to virtue, but they spurred themselves onward by the consideration of reward and punishment; which the world foolishly neglects. They were prone to evil, but they made choice of the good and persevered therein against all hindrances; which the world only does when money is concerned! They were inclined to earthly things, but they left vanity to others, and took heaven alone for their portion; for which the world calls them fools. In a word, they were temporal, but they despised time for eternity; which the world will neither understand nor love.

To live by a religious Rule is therefore as practical a thing as can be found on this earth; for experience shows that it can lead any man to perfection.

#### A CONCLUDING EXHORTATION TO THE THINKING SOUL

If a man can bend humbly, as the willow, then the strongest wind can not hurt him; but if he is proud, he will soon be humiliated. Nothing is

too hard for the humble man; but pride is resisted. Many flee away from Christ because they love their own will!

Again, many flee from Christ because He demands of them to become poor. They have no spirit of sacrifice. They weigh not the great reward of poverty, its excellence, its happiness, its nobility. They think only of the giving up, not of its object and effect. Detachment from all things is the secret of ineffable delight; why will men not try and see? Is anything too hard for heaven?

Again, many flee from Christ because they must forego pleasures. How blind are they! Is not the pleasure of virtue above all other pleasures? Is not the delight of prayer the most rare delight possible? They who live according to a Rule enjoy themselves far more than those who plunge into all the oceans of earthly surfeit. Spiritual things inebriate the soul, and always grow sweeter; while temporal things satiate and end in bitterness!

Finally, as to happiness, is not a happy death above all other species of happiness? O how true are those words which were inscribed above the portal of an ancient convent: It is hard to live here, but sweet to die!

Therefore, let Christ Himself conclude the words of this poor human effort: But one thing is necessary. Mary hath chosen the best part, which shall not be taken away from her. (S. Luke 10:42)

THE END

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