



Veritas Christi

The Truth of Christ

Religious Spirituality: Benedictine, Carmelite, Dominican, Franciscan & Jesuit

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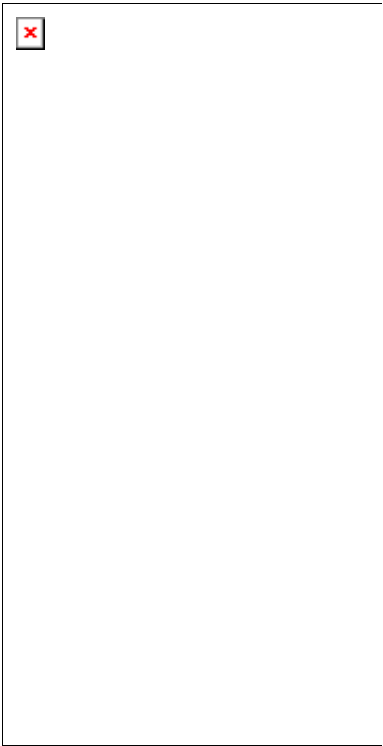
Everyone has probably heard about the need to have a well-balanced diet. Well, what about having a well-balanced approach to your Christian spiritual life? Such balance is important. Just as people can diminish their physical health by not eating a well balanced diet, people can also diminish their spiritual health by not keeping a balanced approach. The good news is that we do not have to "reinvent the wheel" to find such a balanced approach. Instead, we can look to St. Benedict's rule for a guide.

Rather than being a priest, St. Benedict, like the majority of his followers, was a layperson. Unlike the laypeople in our parish, however, Benedict and his followers lived together in a large community (in monasteries) and were referred to as monks. As monks, they also had the responsibility of devoting a significant amount of time each day to formal prayer, unlike the laity, who often must devote much time to work, family and/ other responsibilities.

Despite these differences, Benedict's rule can still be helpful for lay people too like Benedict's monks, are called to service for the praise and glory of God through labora (work and prayer).

Although St. Benedict lived in the sixth century (c. 480-c.547), his monastic rule stood the test of time, not being surpassed due to its excellent synthesis of the monastic tradition, its practicality, and its moderate and flexible style. His rule offered a harmonious balance of liturgical prayer, lectio divina, and manual labor in one. One of the main responsibilities for the monks was to pray the divine office (the Office of the Hours), which Benedict considered to be the "Work of God," or Opus Dei. Time was also spent in lectio divina, a careful reading and quiet reflection on Sacred Scripture. A good part of the day was also devoted to various forms of manual labor. The monks promised stability (lifelong commitment to their responsibilities), conversatio morum (ongoing conversion to the monastic way of life), and obedientia (obedience to the abbot).

The lay people in our parish do not have an abbot to be obedient to, yet all are called to obedience to God, an ongoing conversion for one's personal vocation, and to



commitment to the responsibilities that vocation necessarily entails. One must in a balanced way that suits those responsibilities so as to have a healthy spirit. St. Benedict's balanced rule of liturgical prayer, *lectio divina*, and labor does just that, providing a guide for lay people who, like Benedict's monks, are to serve the Lord.

Carmelite Spirituality

No, Carmelite spirituality does not have anything to do with caramel candies, those who authentically practice such spirituality did find doing so "sweet." Among those who are included in this group are such holy people as St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, and St. Therese "the Little Flower."

St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) is among the most exceptional women ever in the history of spirituality. As a great mystic, she also holds the distinction of being a Doctor of the Church, therefore being included among the likes of others known for their insight and understanding regarding Catholic Christian doctrine. St. Teresa acquired much insight and understanding from intellectual and imaginative visions that accompanied her other gifts of mystical prayer and union with God. Her teaching and writing primarily came from such mystical experiences of God rather than from other sources.

Teresa's basic teaching focuses on the second person of the Triune God, Jesus Christ. Friendship with Christ is at the heart of her spiritual thought. She speaks of mystical prayer as being an intimate sharing between friends. Another type of prayer she describes, the prayer of recollection, is when one seeks to be near and present to God, Christ, who is near and present to us. Teresa holds that Christ must always be kept before one's eyes, making her way of prayer one of light. This is one aspect in which Teresa differs from her contemporary, St. John of the Cross (1542-1591) who advocates in prayer the way of emptying and darkness. It is by entering into this way of prayer that one frees oneself of everything created while holding fast to faith and love of God. When one comes into mystical prayer and union with God. Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross both wrote extensively on the progression toward this union with God, using terms such as "Spiritual" or "Mystical Marriage" to describe the final stage of mystical union. It is in this stage that one receives an intellectual vision (a clear grasp or knowledge) of the Blessed Trinity as well as accompanying visions of Christ's face. Such a vision is also accompanied by a deep and intense knowledge of God's love and love.

A more recent figure in Carmelite spirituality, St. Therese "the Little Flower" (1874-1897), did not have the mystical visions of her predecessors. However, she did have a deep awareness of God's presence and love in her life. Recognizing herself to be too small to scale the heights of Christian perfection as others had before her, she concluded that the only way she could reach such heights was to throw herself into the arms of a God who is love. Her way of Christian perfection would then be the "way of love," the way of love in which God's love would permeate the whole of her life, transforming ordinary works into extraordinary works of virtue for both the sake of her own soul and for the benefit of others. Although all of us may not receive mystical visions, but all of us can receive God's love and allow that love to permeate our lives and the lives of others. St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, and St. Therese "the Little Flower" - pray for us.

The Spirituality of the Dominicans

Like the Franciscans, the Dominicans adopted a life of poverty and simplicity.

placing great emphasis on preaching. In fact, the Dominicans, founded by St. Guzman (c. 1173-1221), are also known by the title Order of Preachers. While Franciscans were able to preach moral exhortations, telling people how to live Christian lives, their Dominican contemporaries were also given Church appro doctrinal preaching,[1] a type of preaching which had otherwise been reserved for priests and bishops. So although there are clearly similarities between Francis' Dominican spirituality, it is also evident that there are differences.

Due to their doctrinal preaching, a life of ongoing study was a central part of Dominican spirituality. This need for study, therefore, also necessarily required doctrinal teaching to be a part of the Dominican life. From their study, the Dominicans would become well grounded in the doctrine of the Church so that they could preach accurately and effectively to the people. Yet the Dominican preaching was also imitative of that of the original apostles, making poverty and simplicity essential elements of their preaching ministry. Despite their ongoing study, it was also necessary for the Dominicans to have a contemplative dimension to their life. This contemplative dimension, allowing one to be transformed by Christ's grace, was achieved through prayer and study so as to bring forth fruits for those to whom they preached. The Dominican emphasis on prayer and study contributed to the development of the Dominican tradition of the ministry of spiritual direction.

Among the most well-known Dominicans are the founder, St. Dominic, and the other two, St. Albert the Great (c.1206-1280) and St. Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225-1274), all known as Doctors of the Church due to their understanding about the truths of the faith. We too can grow in our understanding about the truths of faith that Christ has given us through prayerful study of Church doctrine. In doing so, we will recognize more clearly the appeal of such Church teachings so as to want to incorporate that message into our own life and then share that same message with others.

Living Out a Life of Christian Prayer: Franciscan Spirituality

Many people have probably heard of St. Francis of Assisi (c. 1182-1226) or have seen images of him. The song, "Make Me A Channel of Your Peace," is adapted from Francis' prayers. He is often depicted in a brown Franciscan habit with a bird or other creatures drawn to his peaceful presence. But to think of St. Francis only in this way does not do justice to a man who is often considered to be the most Christ-like man who ever lived. Francis became Christ-like by living out a life of Christian prayer, allowing his prayer to permeate the whole of his life, indeed making him a "channel" of Christ's love and peace for others.

Francis began a life of Christian prayer and penance after going through a conversion experience, a conversion that was initiated by his care of a man with leprosy. His ability to have mercy on the leprous man was seen by him as a sign of God's grace. While in sin, he had found even the appearance of lepers "bitter." Through God's gift of grace, Francis now found what was "bitter" to be "sweet." As a result, Francis also had a taste of the sweetness of the kingdom of heaven, and he decided to live a life more directed toward it. Like Francis, we all have things in life that are difficult or irksome. But by God's gift of grace, these very things can prove to be means of spiritual growth and a greater sharing in God's divine life. Francis' role in this contributed not only to his personal holiness, but also to the Franciscan spirituality that has so remarkably influenced the lives of so many others seeking greater intimacy with God and a share in his kingdom.

Francis' holiness was due to his cooperation with God's grace, which he accepted.

fulfill the mission God gave him of serving the Church by preaching the gospel. His spirituality is evident from his admonition to "preach the gospel always and, v necessary, use words." Francis, therefore, preached the gospel mostly through example, living a life of simplicity and charity grounded in faith and humble love to Christ and the Church. Francis expected anyone who chose to follow his way to be a faithful member of the Church and to be humble and obedient in its service. Due to this, Francis and his followers were able to manifest peace and a degree of charity that could not go unnoticed by others. Let us too, like Francis and his followers, develop our Christian lives so as to be instruments of Christ's love and peace to those we meet. Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam: Jesuit Spirituality "Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam" What does this mean you ask? Well, it is a Latin phrase meaning "for the greater glory of God." This motto of the founder of the Jesuit religious order, St. Ignatius of Loyola (c. 1491-1556), signifies very well his own spirituality, as well as the Jesuit spirituality that flowed forth from his. This Jesuit spirituality places a strong emphasis on apostolic work and a generosity in the service of Christ...a service that is marked by a love and abiding love of Jesus Christ and one that strives to be open and responsive to the call of Christ the King." [2] To do this service for the "greater glory of God" one requires "a spirit of freedom and detachment and self sacrifice," [3] all of which are important characteristics of Jesuit spirituality.

These characteristics of Jesuit spirituality are further understood in respect to the desire to have the members of his order be ready to go anywhere in the world in service to Christ was required. The spirit of freedom, detachment, and self-sacrifice are all the more important when one is sent to places that are quite possibly unfavorable or lacking significant material resources, or even hostile. Often times, it was the case that those places were hostile. As a result, many Jesuits offered the sacrifice of their own lives in service to Christ. They were martyred for sharing the message of the gospel to those who were hostile to it. Nevertheless, the apostolic endeavors of the Jesuits continued. This is because the apostolic work of the Jesuits was not seen as an individual affair. Instead, this active work was carried out by a group of men who, together, shared the heart and mind of Christ, which is why the Jesuits are more properly called the Society of Jesus.

Although there is an emphasis on apostolic work in Jesuit spirituality, there is also an emphasis on having that work carried out with a strong and abiding contemplative dimension. In this way, members allow the work they undertake to be truly transformed by the heart and mind of Christ. By doing so, Jesuits maintain a perspective of faith in their work, seeing it "as part of the unfolding of God's plan as contributing to the spread of God's Kingdom here on earth." [4] The effort by the members, therefore, is truly done "for the greater glory of God."

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