

Twelve Preliminary Days

The first part of the preparation should be employed in casting off the spirit of the world, which is contrary to that of Jesus Christ.

The spirit of the world consists essentially in the denial of the supreme dominion of God, a denial which is manifested in practice by sin and disobedience; thus it is principally opposed to the spirit of Christ, which is also that of Mary.

It manifests itself by the concupiscence of the flesh, by the concupiscence of the eyes and by the pride of life; by disobedience to God's laws and the abuse of created things. Its works are, first, sin in all its forms; and then all else by which the devil leads to sin; works which bring error and darkness to the mind, and seduction and corruption to the will. Its pomps are the splendor and charms employed by the devil to render sin alluring in persons, places and things.

The following prayers are to be said daily during this initial period: Veni Creator, Ave Maris Stella and the Magnificat.

Veni Creator

Come, O Creator Spirit blest!
And in our souls take up Thy rest.
Come with Thy grace and heavenly aid,
To fill the hearts which Thou hast made.

Great Paraclete! To Thee we cry,
O highest gift of God most high!
O font of life! O fire of love!
And sweet anointing from above.

Thou in Thy sevenfold gifts art known,
The finger of God's hand we own;
The promise of the Father, Thou!
Who dost the tongue with power endow.

Kindle our senses from above,
And make our hearts overflow with love;
With patience firm and virtue high
The weakness of our flesh supply.

Far from us drive the foe we dread,
And grant us Thy true peace instead;

So shall we not, with Thee for guide,
Turn from the path of life aside.

Oh, may Thy grace on us bestow
The Father and the Son to know,
And Thee, through endless times confessed,
Of both, the eternal Spirit blest.

All glory while the ages run
Be to the Father and the Son
Who rose from death; the same to Thee,
O Holy Ghost, eternally. Amen.

Ave Maris Stella

Hail, bright star of ocean,
God's own mother blest,
Ever sinless Virgin,
Gate of heavenly rest.

Taking that sweet Ave
Which from Gabriel came,
Peace confirm within us,
Changing Eva's name.

Break the captives' fetters,
Light on blindness pour,
All our ills expelling,
Every bliss implore.

Show thyself a Mother;
May the Word Divine,
Born for us thy Infant,
Hear our prayers through thine.

Virgin all excelling,
Mildest of the mild,
Freed from guilt, preserve us,
Pure and undefiled.

Keep our life all spotless,
Make our way secure,
Till we find in Jesus
Joy forevermore.

Through the highest Heaven
To the Almighty Three,
Father, Son and Spirit,
One same glory be. Amen.

Magnificat

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord.
And my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.
For He has looked with favor on His lowly servant.
From this day all generations will call me blessed.
The Almighty has done great things for me and
holy is His name.
He has mercy on those who fear Him in every
generation.
He has shown the strength of His arm.
He has scattered the proud in their conceit.
He has cast down the mighty from their thrones and
has lifted up the lowly.
He has filled the hungry with good things and the
rich He has sent away empty.
He has come to the help of His servant Israel for
He has remembered His promise of mercy.
The promise He made to our fathers, to Abraham
and his children forever. Amen.

*These 3 prayers should be said after the reading
for each day.*

First Day (Tues July 13th)

Gospel of Matthew Chapter 5 verses 1-19.

Second Day (Wed July 14th)

Gospel of Matthew Chapter 5 verse 48 and chapter
6 verses 1-15.

Third Day (Thurs July 15th)

Gospel of Matthew Chapter 7 verses 1-14.

Fourth Day (Friday July 16th)

Imitation of Christ Book 3, Chapters 7 and 40

**That man has no good of himself, and that he
cannot glory in anything.**

Lord, what is man, that Thou art mindful of
him; or the son of man, that Thou visit him? What
has man deserved that Thou should give him grace?
Lord, what cause have I to complain, if Thou
forsakest me, or what can I justly allege, if what I
petition Thou shalt not grant? This most assuredly,
I may truly think and say: Lord I am nothing, I can
do nothing of myself, that is good, but I am in all
things defective and ever tend to nothing. And
unless I am assisted and interiorly instructed by
Thee, I become wholly tepid and relaxed, but Thou,
O Lord, art always the same, and endure unto
eternity, ever good, just and holy doing all things
well, justly and holily and disposing them in
wisdom.

But I who am more inclined to go back,
than to go forward, continue no always in one state,
for I am changed, seven different times. But it
quickly becomes better when it pleases Thee, and
Thou stretchest out Thy helping hand: for Thou
alone, without man's aid can assist me and so
strengthen me, that my countenance shall be more
diversely changed: but my heart be converted and
find its rest in Thee alone.

He who would be too secure in time of
peace will often be found too much dejected in
time of war. If you could always continue to be
humble and little in your own eyes, and keep your
spirit in due order and subjection, you would not
fall so easily into danger and offense. It is good
counsel that, when you have conceived the spirit of
fervor, you should meditate how it will be when
that light shall be withdrawn.

Fifth Day (Sat July 17th)

Imitation: Continued: Book 3, Ch. 40

Wherefore, but I did know well, how to cast
from me all human comfort, either for the sake of
devotion, or through the necessity by which I am
compelled to seek Thee, because there is no man
that can comfort me. Then might I deservedly hope
in Thy favor, and rejoice in the gift of a new
consolation. Thanks be to Thee from Whom all
things proceed, as often as it happens to me, I,
indeed, am but vanity and nothing in Thy sight, an

inconstant and weak man. Where, therefore, can I glory, or for what do I desire to be thought of highly?

Forsooth of my very nothingness; and this is most vain. Truly vain glory is an evil plague, because it draws away from true glory, and robs us of heavenly grace. For, while a man takes complacency in himself, he displeases Thee; while he looks for human applause, he is deprived of true virtues. But true, glory and holy exultation is to glory in Thee, and not in one's self; to rejoice in Thy Name, but no in one's own strength. To find pleasure in no creature, save only for Thy sake. Let Thy Name be praised, not mine; let Thy work be magnified, not mine; let Thy Holy Name be blessed, but let nothing be attributed to me of the praise of men. Thou art my glory; Thou art the exultation of my heart; in Thee, will I glory and rejoice all the day; but for myself, I will glory in nothing but in my infirmities.

Sixth Day (Sun July 18th)

Imitation: Book 1, Ch. 18

On the examples of the Holy Fathers

Look upon the lively examples of the holy Fathers in whom shone real perfection and the religious life, and you will see how little it is, and almost nothing that we do. Alas, what is our life when we compare it with theirs? Saints and friends of Christ, they served our Lord in hunger and in thirst, in cold, in nakedness, in labor and in weariness, in watching, in fasting, prayers and holy meditations, and in frequent persecutions and reproaches. Oh, how many grievous tribulations did the Apostles suffer and the Martyrs and Confessors and Virgins, and all the rest who resolved to follow the steps of Christ! For they hated their lives in this world, that they might keep them in life everlasting. Oh, what a strict and self-renouncing life the holy Fathers of the desert led! What long and grievous temptations did they bear! How often were they harassed by the enemy, what frequent and fervent prayers did they offer up to God, what rigorous abstinence did they practice!

What a valiant contest waged they to

subdue their imperfections! What purity and straight forwardness of purpose kept them towards God! By day they labored, and much of the night they spent in prayer; though while they labored, they were far from leaving off mental prayer. They spent all their time profitably. Every hour seemed short to spend with God; and even their necessary bodily refreshment was forgotten in the great sweetness of contemplation. They renounced all riches, dignities, honors, and kindred; they hardly took what was necessary for life. It grieved them to serve the body even in its necessity. Accordingly, they were poor in earthly things, but very rich in grace and virtues.

Seventh Day (Mon July 19th)

Imitation: Book 1, Ch 18

Outwardly they suffered want, but within they were refreshed with grace and Divine consolation. They were aliens to the world; they seemed as nothing and the world despised them; but they were precious and beloved in the sight of God. They persevered in true humility, they lived in simple obedience, they walked in charity and patience, and so every day they advanced in spirit and gained great favor with God. They were given for example to all religious, and ought more to excite us to advance in good, than the number of lukewarm to induce us to grow remiss. Oh, how great was the fervor of all religious in the beginning of their holy institute! Oh, how great was their devotion in prayer, how great was their zeal for virtue! How vigorous the discipline that was kept up, what reverence and obedience, under the rule of the superior, flourished in all! Their traces that remain still bear witness, that they were truly holy and perfect men who did battle so stoutly, and trampled the world under their feet. Now, he is thought great who is not a transgressor; and who can, with patience, endure what he has undertaken. Ah, the lukewarmness and negligence of our state! That we soon fall away from our first fervor, and are even now tired with life, from slothfulness and tepidity. Oh that advancement in virtue be not quite asleep in thee, who hast so often

seen the manifold examples of the devout!

Eighth Day (Tues July 20th)

Imitation: Book 1, Ch 13

Of resisting temptations

As long as we live in this world, we cannot be without temptations and tribulations. Hence it is written in Job “Man's life on earth is a temptation.” Everyone therefore should be solicitous about his temptations and watch in prayer lest the devil find and opportunity to catch him: he who never sleeps, but goes about, seeking whom he can devour. No one is so perfect and holy as sometimes not to have temptations and we can never be wholly free from them. Nevertheless, temptations are very profitable to man, troublesome and grievous though they may be, for in them a man is humbled, purified and instructed. All the Saints passed through many tribulations and temptations and were purified by them. And they that could not support temptations, became reprobate and fell away.

Many seek to flee temptations and fall worse into them. We cannot conquer by flight alone, but by patience and true humility we become stronger than all our enemies. He who only declines them outwardly, and does not pluck out their root, will profit little; nay, temptations will sooner return and he will find himself in a worse condition. By degrees and by patience you will, by God's grace, better overcome them than by harshness and your own importunity. Take council the oftener in temptation, and do not deal harshly with one who is tempted; but pour in consolation, as you would wish to be done unto yourself.

Inconstancy of mind and little confidence in God, is the beginning of all temptations. For as a ship without a helm is driven to and fro by the waves, so the man who neglects and gives up his resolutions is tempted in many ways.

Ninth Day (Wed July 21st)

Imitation: Book 1, Ch 13

Fire tries iron, and temptation a just man. We often know not what we are able to do, but temptations discover what we are. Still, we must watch, especially in the beginning of temptation; for then the enemy is more easily overcome, if he be not suffered to enter the door of the mind, but is withstood upon the threshold the very moment he knocks. Whence a certain one has said “Resist beginnings; all too late the cure.” When ills have gathered strength, by long delay, first there comes from the mind a simple thought; then a strong imagination, afterwards delight, and the evil motion and consent and so, little by little the fiend does gain entrance, when he is not resisted in the beginning. The longer anyone has been slothful in resisting, so much the weaker he becomes daily in himself, and the enemy, so much the stronger in him. Some suffer grievous temptations in the beginning of their conversion, others in the end and others are troubled nearly their whole life. Some are very lightly tempted, according to the wisdom and the equity of the ordinance of God who weighs man's conditions and merits, and preordaineth all things for the salvation of His elect. We must not, therefore, despair when we are tempted, but the more fervently pray to God to help us in every tribulation: Who, of a truth, according to the sayings of St. Paul, will make such issue with the temptation, that we are able to sustain it.

Let us then humble our souls under the hand of God in every temptation and tribulation, for the humble in spirit, He will save and exalt. In temptation and tribulations, it is proved what progress man has made; and there also is great merit, and virtue is made more manifest.

Tenth Day (Thurs July 22nd)

Imitation: Book 3, Ch 10

That it is sweet to despise the world and to serve God.

Now, I will speak again, O Lord, and will not be silent, I will say in the hearing of my God and my King Who is on high: Oh, how great is the abundance of Thy sweetness, O Lord, which Thou hast hidden for those that fear Thee! But what art

Thou, for those who love Thee? What, to those who serve Thee with their whole heart? Unspeakable indeed is the sweetness of Thy contemplation, which Thou bestowest on those who love Thee. In this most of all hast Thou showed me the sweetness of Thy love, that when I had no being, Thou didst make me, and when I was straying far from Thee, Thou brought me back again, that I may serve Thee. O Fountain of everlasting love, what shall I say of Thee? How can I forget Thee, Who hast vouchsafed to remember me even after I was corrupted and lost? Beyond all hope Thou showest mercy to Thy servant; and beyond all desert, hast Thou manifested Thy grace and friendship. What return shall I make to Thee for this favor? For it is granted to all who forsake these things, to renounce the world, and to assume the monastic life. Is it much that I should serve Thee, Whom the whole creation is bound to serve? It ought not to seem much to me to serve Thee; but this does rather appear great and wonderful to me, that Thou vouchsafest to receive one so wretched and unworthy as Thy servant.

It is a great honor, a great glory, to serve Thee, and to despise all things for Thee, for they who willingly subject themselves to Thy holy service, shall have great grace. They shall experience the most sweet consolation of the Holy Spirit, who for the love of Thee, have cast aside all carnal delight.

Eleventh Day (Frid July 23rd)

Imitation: Book 1, Ch 25

Of the Fervent Amendment of our whole life

When a certain anxious person, who oftentimes wavered between hope and fear, once overcome with sadness, threw himself upon the ground in prayer, before one of the altars in the Church and thinking these things in his mind, said “Oh, if I only knew how to persevere,” that very instant he heard within him, this heavenly answer: “And if thou didst know this, what would thou do? Do now what you would do, and thou shall be perfectly secure.” And immediately being consoled, and comforted, he committed himself to

the Divine Will, and anxious thoughts ceased. He no longer wished for curious things; searching to find out what would happen to him, but studied rather to learn what was the acceptable and perfect will of God for the beginning and the perfection of every good work.

“Hope in the Lord,” said the Prophet, “And do all good, and inhabit the land, and thou shall be fed of the riches thereof.” There is one thing that keeps many back from spiritual progress, and from fervor in amendment, namely: the labor that is necessary for the struggle. And assuredly they especially advance beyond others in virtues, who strive the most manfully to overcome the very things which are the hardest and most contrary to them. For there a man does profit more and merit more abundant grace, when he does most to overcome himself and mortify his spirit. All have not, indeed, equal difficulties to overcome and mortify, but a diligent and zealous person will make a greater progress though he have more passions than another, who is well regulated but less fervent in the pursuit of virtues.

Twelfth Day (Sat July 24th)

Imitation: Book 1, Ch 25

And whatever you see that is worthy of blame, take care that you do not do yourself, or if you have ever done so, study to amend as soon as possible. As your eye observes others, so again, you are observed by others. How pleasant and sweet it is to see brethren fervent and devout, well-mannered and well-disciplined! How sad and afflicting to see them disorderly, and not practicing the things they are called to do. How mischievous it is to neglect that purpose of their vocations, and to turn their minds to what is not their business. Be mindful of the purpose you have undertaken, and place before you the image of the Crucified. Well may you be ashamed when looking into the Life of Jesus Christ, that as yet you have not studied more to conform yourself to Him, long as you have been in the way of God.

The religious who exercises himself earnestly and devoutly in the most holy life and

Passion of our Lord shall find there abundantly all that is useful and necessary for him, nor need he seek out of Jesus, for anything better. Oh, if the Crucified Jesus should come into your heart, how quickly and sufficiently learned would you be. IT is harder labor to withstand our vices and passions than to toil at bodily labors. He that shuns not small defects, little by little, falls into greater ones. You will always be glad in the evening if you spent the day profitably. Watch over yourself, stir up yourself, and whatever may become of others, neglect not yourself. In proportion as you do violence to yourself, the greater progress will you make. (Doing violence would include fasting and various kinds of sacrificial penances).

End of first 12 days!