

PART SEVEN: *Foundation Virtues – Preparation (Section 2 of 2)*

3. Docility to the Holy Spirit: Developing a “Servant” Attitude

Jesus was perfectly docile to the Holy Spirit and thus obedient to the Father. Jesus had no personal projects of his own, except as the perfect “Servant” of Yahweh as described in Isaiah (chapters 42, 49, 50, 53). Because of love, he obeyed eagerly, and his obedience was a source of life and energy. “My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to complete his work” (John 4:34).

Jesus was also our servant in that he rid us of our sin by taking it on himself and expiating it in our stead. To follow Jesus, the Servant, we must develop his attitude of servant toward others: The greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves” (Luke 22:26).

We want to develop this same disposition. We want to be sensitive to all the interior movements of grace and to the exterior indications of Providence, eager to follow them in the spirit of service.

(Luke 4:14, John 16:13-15, Romans 8:5-9, Galatians 5:22-26)

Exercise: We learn to be *docile* to the Holy Spirit in everything by habitually doing the will of others, not by constraint, but by love. This is true especially in regard to human authority. We call this exercise preparatory obedience, because it is the foundation of unhindered action of the Holy Spirit in us. It develops in us the servant attitude of Jesus, which prepares us for mission.

(Philippians 2:24, Matthew 20:24-8)

4. Strength of Character

Strength of character is the fortitude and courage needed to follow Jesus through every kind of difficulty. We will have many hardships, “but the one who stand firm to the end will be saved” (Matthew 10:22).

(Matthew 20:22-23)

Exercise: In spite of whatever happens to us that is disagreeable or painful, the support of ***mortification*** consists in enduring patiently and in God's presence. This develops in us a spiritual toughness so that no difficulty of any kind will prevent the work of Jesus in us. In every discomfort, sadness, or difficulty, we keep our eyes on Jesus, who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection: "for the sake of the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame" (Hebrew 12:2). We support mortification to acquire this attitude of Jesus.

(Luke 21:19, 22-28)

TRIPLE DIRECTION OF MARIANIST DIRECTION

Our growing into the virtues and works of Jesus is always a cooperative effort between God and ourselves. God's part is realized in us through the Holy Spirit united with Mary as mothers. We do our part by three interrelated exercises: *instruction*, *mental prayer*, and *examen*. These three exercises are like a three-legged stool: all three are necessary in order to give stability to our spiritual life. If we neglect any of the three, it does not sit very well with us.

Instruction

To follow Jesus, we must have ***correct ideas*** that will guide us or images that will move us to imitate Christ. Abstractions and general ideas are not sufficient. We seek instruction that will give us ideas, principles, and images which show us the next step to take and incline us to take it. We need instruction that will enable us to grasp with our mind the reality of Jesus in such a way that we can imitate him. Our first step in taking on a virtue of Jesus or doing a work in his name is to state clearly what we want or wish to do.

Where do we get this instruction? Our best sources are ***Scripture***, the teachings of our Founders, the official documents of the Church, and the teachings of the doctors and spiritual masters of the Church. Of course, we read and study this "instruction" in the context of the "signs of the times." Instruction is the teaching of God that is handed on to us through the People of God and understood by us in the light of today's world.

Prayer

The mind alone does not move us to change or to act; it is the ***heart*** that urges to conformity with Christ. Therefore, what we have grasped with our mind through instruction must be embraced by our heart through prayer. It is faith of the heart that moves us to conversion, not arguments of the mind. The common method of prayer explained above insists very much on exercising faith of the heart as an essential part of prayer.

We take our instruction to prayer. Because the heart is so important during prayer, we must give special attention to our interior movements as we mediate on the instruction. Where is our heart taking us? What inclinations or urges do we feel? What are we inclined to do? What desires become clear in us? As we grow in union with Jesus, these movements within us come more and more from the Holy Spirit. *We can sense them.* As we notice them, we exercise them until they become a part of our attitude and our actions.

Father Chaminade stated that mental prayer is the central exercise of conformity with Christ. It is during mental prayer that the most important transformations of our life take place.

Examen

After instruction has given us ideas and images for following Jesus, and after we have assimilated them through the exercise of faith of the heart during prayer, we go on about our life and our work, and we are motivated and guided by what we have acquired through instruction and prayer. The purpose of instruction and prayer is to transform us into zealous ministers of our Lord and of our Mother, Mary.

In order to become aware of the grace at work in us, ***examen*** is a period of recollection sometime after prayer. We review what we have learned by instruction and what has happened to us during prayer. This brief, intense exercise, done in the presence of God, renews and reinforces graces received, and it allows them to take root in us and produce their fruit. Examen increases our consciousness of how God is working in our life, and it opens us to God's call at the present moment. Examen can be quite brief, but we ought to be faithful to it every day at a specific time. This moment with God often reveals to us directions for further instruction, which we in turn will take to prayer.

Here is a *simple method of examen*. Each night before retiring, review the following three points:

- 1- What has *stayed* with me from prayer today? (a word, an image, a feeling...)
- 2- Where or how do I see that particular *grace* expressed in my life or work?
- 3- Make some specific *interior acts* to reinforce the graces just reviewed.