St. Anthony Mary Claret

THE IMITATION OF CHRIST IN HIS PATIENCE

Imitación de Cristo paciente

From the Spanish of Camino recto (from 1848)

English translation

Contributed to Mind of the Church by a friend of the library who wishes to remain anonymous

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About this translation

Translated from the *Imitación de Cristo paciente*, first published in Catalan in 1846 and from 1848 part of the *Camino recto*. The translation is complete.

The notes give the references to Claret's sources and the notes he printed himself; the modern editors' commentary and the translator's own remarks are not reproduced.

The Imitation of Christ in His Patience

A Practical Way of Imitating Jesus Christ Carrying the Cross, in a Spirit of Mortification

The Christian who desires to follow Jesus Christ carrying the cross[1] must bear in mind that this name *Christian* means "man of Christ," the same as disciple or imitator of Christ; and that, if he wishes to bear with full propriety so honourable and noble a title, it is indispensable to do what Jesus charges us in his holy Gospel, namely, that if we wish to imitate him or follow him, we must oppose ourselves or deny ourselves, take up the cross and follow him. With these words, as the commentators explain, Jesus Christ asks of us interior and exterior mortification if we wish to follow him. Interior mortification is contained in these words:[2] *let him deny himself*, that is, let him have no will of his own; and exterior mortification in these others: *let him take up his cross*. Mortification, according to the beautiful comparison of St. Francis de Sales, is as necessary to us as salt is for preserving meat; so that, just as without salt dead meat goes bad, ferments and soon becomes food for worms, and with salt it keeps all year, so we, with the salt of mortification, will keep ourselves in virtue, and without it we will be the prey of every vice and in the end will be lost altogether.[3] And that is why St. Paul said with such certainty: *Brethren, if you live according to the flesh*, pampering it and not mortifying it, *you will die*, you will be damned; *but if you mortify* the flesh, *you will live*, you will be saved.[4] Therefore, desiring your spiritual profit, I have judged it very much to the purpose to sketch what we understand by the word *mortification* and the way of practising it, so as to be able to help Jesus carry the cross.

To mortify, then, does not mean to kill, but to subdue and to bridle; and so the word *mortification* means the same as an ordering, harmonizing and regulating of the movements of the lower part of man, so that it may always be in harmony with the higher part, done by reason enlightened by faith.

Mortification, then, is of two kinds: one of obligation, the other of devotion. That of obligation has as its object to restrain or remove everything that could be an obstacle to fulfilling the precepts of the law of God and the obligations of one's state. That of supererogation or devotion tends to deprive oneself of those things which, even though doing them is not evil or sinful, it is nevertheless of great profit to abstain from, so as to offer the Lord a sacrifice very pleasing to him; for example, looking at a pleasant garden or drinking a glass of cool water is not in itself a sin, and yet the benefit that depriving oneself of it for love of God and of Mary brings to the spirit is incalculable.[5] And I said that the benefit of this kind of mortification is incalculable because it almost borders on necessity; for it is an established fact that one who does not know how, or does not wish, to mortify himself in matters of supererogation or devotion will not know how, or be able, to do so in matters of obligation either.[6]

This mortification of devotion is divided into active and passive. Active mortification consists in seeking, by one's own choice and out of the great love one has for God and for the Most Holy Virgin, things that cause pain and humiliation, so as to offer them a gift. Passive mortification consists in suffering with patience, resignation and conformity to the will of God everything that causes us pain without our having sought or intended it, such as persecutions, slanders, insults, thefts, illnesses, cold, heat and other similar things. Although interior mortification is the best and noblest, since it is the soul of all the others, in order to proceed with method and go from what is better known to what is less so, we shall first give some notions of exterior mortification, by which we shall open the way to the rest.[7]

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[1] Cf. Mt 16:24; Mk 8:34; Lk 9:23.

[2] Cf. *Escritos autobiográficos* \[BAC, Madrid 1981\] pp. 527–528.

[3] Quoted by St. Alphonsus (cf. *Selva de materias predicables* \[BAC\], ed. cit., vol. 2, p. 270).

[4] Rom 8:13.

[5] Cf. ibid., p. 72.

[6] Cf. ibid., p. 52.

[7] Cf. ibid., pp. 54–55.

Exterior Mortification

Mortification of the Sight

"It is part of innocence to be blind," said Seneca;[1] and indeed we know by sad experience that thousands upon thousands have plunged into vices and crimes, losing their innocence through the sight. This consideration drove a pagan philosopher to tear out his own eyes with his own hands, as Tertullian relates.[2] It is true that a Christian cannot and must not imitate this unhappy man, who sought to avoid crimes by a crime; but he must mortify his sight, in imitation of Jesus Christ our Lord, who always kept it modestly lowered, for which reason the evangelists record the times he raised it, as being something singular and unusual in him.[3] So you will try to mortify it in the following cases:

1. You will abstain from looking at those objects that could stir up sinful thoughts in your soul, such as indecent pictures and improper plays, especially if they are accompanied by dancing, which, because of the dress and the leaping customary in it, must be considered a provoking cause of foul thoughts. And indeed very many who throughout the whole play had kept concupiscence as if asleep, felt themselves assailed, when the dancing broke out, by a throng of impure thoughts which, setting them ablaze in the fire of morose delectations \[*delectación morosa*: deliberately lingering pleasure in an impure thought, a term of moral theology\], made them commit as many mortal sins. Many experience what happened to Alypius, of whom St. Augustine tells us that he went to the theatre resolved not to look at anything evil; but once there, he looked, he sinned, and he made others sin.[4] Do not go, then, to those gatherings at which those present dress immodestly, to dances, I mean, and soirées; and when you go through the streets and squares, never fix your eyes on persons of the other sex, especially if they are less decently dressed. And so that your care and wariness may be greater, it is my duty to tell you that there are certain persons whom the devil uses as recruiting flags \[*banderas de enganche*: the flags of army recruiting-sergeants\], whose job is to enlist souls for hell.

2. You will also turn your eyes away from vain, curious and unnecessary things, saying with the prophet: *Turn away my eyes, Lord, that they may not behold vanity*.[5] To know how to mortify oneself in these and other things, however innocent and decent they may be in themselves, is a most powerful means of advancing in perfection. We read of St. Francis Borgia that when he hunted with falcons, at the moment they stooped on the prey he lowered his eyes and denied himself the sight of it;[6] and the life of St. Aloysius Gonzaga tells that he denied himself the sight of the most curious spectacles at which he was obliged to be present.[7] Do the same yourself sometimes, not always; for to demand that you always do it would be to achieve nothing by asking too much. It will cause you some reluctance at first, I know, but afterwards you will find it very easy, and with that ease, peace, joy and merit in this world and a great reward in the next.[8]

3. When you do not wish to mortify yourself but to give some recreation and refreshment to your eyes by looking at flowers, trees, gardens, buildings and other decent things of that kind which involve no danger of sin, get used to raising your spirit to the Creator, thinking that he is the spring and source of all beauty, loveliness and order, and that from him those creatures or objects have received whatever beauty, grace and order you see shining in them; and, going a step further, say: If the beauty of the things of the world, which is an exile, is so great, what will that of the heavenly homeland be?

Mortification of the Hearing

1. You must try to mortify your hearing by never listening to impure stories or to indecent conversations or songs, which, as St. Paul says, corrupt good morals,[1] and which, unhappily, abound so much in our unhappy days. The devil uses these indecent and foul-mouthed people as a hook to fish for souls, or, like the bird-catcher, as a decoy to catch innocent and unwary little birds. Oh, how many men and women are heard exclaiming every day: I would never have sinned or known of such indecencies if I had not heard such a conversation, song, expression, etc.! Flee, therefore, from the indecent and foul-mouthed.

2. You will also take care not to listen to gossip, to the faults of people and to worldly affairs, which, even if they did you no other harm, will at least fill your head with a thousand irrelevant things that, coming in a crowd at the time of prayer, Mass and your other devotions, will disturb and distract you to the utmost. When you find yourself among people who talk like this, try, if you can, to divert them by changing the conversation or by asking them some useful question; and if this stratagem does not have the desired effect, leave, if you can; and if not, with a serious and stern face let them understand that such conversations do not have your approval. And do not doubt it: they will correct themselves, for the Holy Spirit says: *The north wind drives away the clouds, and a sad face restrains the tongue of the backbiter*.[2]

Mortification of the Sense of Smell

You will mortify your sense of smell by fleeing from vain scents, such as essences, pastilles, balms, scented waters, etc., because whoever takes pleasure in such things, which are proper to the effeminate, shows himself a sensual person.[1] That God, as supreme Lord, should be honoured with incense and other aromatic things is very much in accord with reason; but that a mortal who will soon be food for worms, fetid, loathsome and abominable, should use them is reprehensible in the extreme. Leave scents alone, then; rather try to bear patiently the bad smells of hospitals or sickrooms, prisons, etc., not giving up visiting them on their account, for God will reward you for it, as he promises in his holy Gospel.[2]

Mortification of the Tongue

You must take great care to mortify your tongue, so that it does not slip into vain, useless, self-praising or foul words, or into curses, blasphemies or other things that may be injurious to God or harmful to yourself or to your neighbour. *He who does not sin with the tongue*, says the apostle St. James, *is already a perfect man*;[1] and, explaining these words, Origen says that of one who has the happy lot of being free from the sins of the tongue it can be affirmed that he is truly perfect; and it can be presumed that one who has managed to tame his tongue will easily direct and govern his affections.[2] And indeed experience teaches us that the tongue is a university of wickedness, and that even spiritual persons are caught by the devil in the snares of the tongue. That is why it is indispensable to take exquisite care in governing it, and to this end to use the counsel St. Bernard gives, saying: *Bis ad limam, quod semel ad linguam*: "Pass twice under the file what the tongue is to utter only once"; meaning that before you speak you must consider carefully whether what you are going to say is or is not according to the will of God, and whether it will be of profit or harm to your neighbour. With this reflection you will avoid many words that you would have regretted once said. Speak little, then, according to the advice of Seneca, who said: I have never regretted having kept silent, but I have regretted having spoken.[3] And the Holy Spirit assures us that *in much speaking sins are not lacking*.[4] Be silent, then, I repeat, and do not speak except out of necessity, charity and obedience; and to this end you can use the following counsels:

1. Think that God notes down the words you say and will ask you to account for all of them on the day of judgment, even for idle ones, as he tells us in his holy Gospel.[5]

2. Before speaking, raise your heart to God and ask him for grace not to go too far, saying with the prophet: *Set a guard, Lord, before my mouth, and a door round about my lips* to close them, so as to speak according to due circumstances.[6]

3. Flee from those conversations, persons and places in which you know by experience that you slip in your speech or your spirit is poured out \[*se derrama tu espíritu*: you become dissipated\].

4. Do not engage in banter, or provoke rough jokes, or use double meanings that could be taken in a bad sense or that could distress your neighbour.

5. Speak with simplicity and candour and without pretence; but never bring your neighbour's faults out into the open \[*sacar a plaza*, literally "bring out into the town square"\]; and even when they are already public and known, or are natural defects, it will always be good for you to take the better course, which is to keep silent, because nobody likes his defects to be published or talked about.

6. Abhor disputes and digging in your heels \[*sostenerte terco en tus trece*, literally "holding stubbornly to your thirteen": refusing to budge from one's opinion\]. When you have to give your opinion, do it with modesty and gentleness, wishing that the truth may triumph, and never so as to get your own way or out of an itch to have your whims carried out. Quite the contrary: if conscience allows, prefer to accommodate yourself to the opinion of others rather than argue, for this is of great spiritual profit, since it is well known that it is better to be modest than obstinate. How many quarrels, divisions and sins you will avoid by practising these counsels!

7. Never say words that redound to your own praise, or recount what you have said or done in order to be thought wise, brave or virtuous; for precisely because praise does not sit well in one's own mouth, you would make yourself contemptible. So as not to fail, then, in a matter of such importance, remember that God sees you, hears you, and will ask you to account for everything you say.

Mortification of the Taste

The mortification of taste can be practised in a thousand ways; and it is of such importance that St. Gregory does not hesitate to affirm that whoever does not first try to conquer gluttony will vainly expect to conquer the other vices.[1]

Let it be held, then, as an unshakeable maxim or fundamental principle that man must not live to eat and drink, but must eat and drink to live.[2] One must eat and drink to sustain nature and not to pamper the senses; and these principles are what must regulate the quantity and quality of food. One who does not mortify himself in eating, said St. Catherine of Siena, cannot possibly keep his innocence, since it was through gluttony that Adam was lost.

All intemperance in food and drink is harmful to body and soul. It is no longer doubted that most illnesses are the effect of gluttony. Apoplexies, diarrhoeas, obstructions, stomach pains, pains in the side and other ills that it would take long to list commonly have no other cause than excessive food. But these bodily illnesses, though great evils, are very insignificant in comparison with the spiritual evils that gluttony brings.

It is impossible, said Cassian, it is impossible for one who is glutted with food not to experience impure temptations;[3] and that is why the saints, who held chastity in such high esteem, curbed gluttony with such care. St. Thomas says that when the devil tempts a person with gluttony and is defeated, he stops tempting him with impurity.[4] St. Jerome, writing to the virgin Eustochium, told her: Wine and youth are a double incitement to the desire for unlawful pleasures. And among other things he told her: I warn you that, as the bride of Jesus Christ that you are, you should flee from wine as from a poison.[5] And Solomon in the Proverbs says: *Wine is a luxurious thing*; it is a *fomes* \[tinder\] of incontinence;[6] and then he asks: *Who shall have woe? Is it not true that it shall be for those who are given to wine and who make it their business to drain cups?*[7] Because the devil knows all this, who rejoices in our misfortunes in this world and the next, he has had so many taverns, eating-houses, cafés and liquor factories opened, which are like so many gunpowder factories for making war on chastity and the other virtues; for from impurity all evils are born, even heresy,

according to our proverb: There is no heretic without a woman.

And so, to free yourself from such great evils, be on the alert with food and drink. Never go into a tavern, café or eating-house except out of necessity; do not eat or drink except at the customary hours, and then bless the food before you begin to eat and, when you finish, give God thanks for it. Do not make yourself like those unclean animals which, standing under the oak, gulp down the acorns without raising their heads to see who lavishes the treat on them; rather, when you begin to take food, raise your thought to God and from time to time say to him inwardly: Lord, I neither eat nor drink to take delight in these things, but to nourish myself and to have strength to serve You. But by this I do not mean that it is a fault to feel pleasure in food, for that is natural and well ordered by God; but it would be one if one ate for the pleasure as an end. It is not the same thing to eat with pleasure and to eat for pleasure. The first is lawful, because without the incentive of pleasure, who would eat? The second is a sin or a defect, because it is inverting the order, placing the end in what is only a means or instrument; it is enjoying what should only be used \[the Augustinian distinction between *frui*, "enjoy," and *uti*, "use"\]; it is, in short, destroying the maxim we laid down, namely, that man must not live to eat and drink, but drink and eat to live.

It is a very praiseworthy act of mortification never to complain about food or drink. That the superior should look out for the others is very reasonable; but a private individual should never say that it is underdone or overdone, cold or hot, insipid or salty, but should eat what is brought and as it is brought, unless he knows it to be harmful to body or soul, as if it were something that would make him unwell or that went against some precept. St. Thomas never asked for any particular food, and always said he was satisfied with what was set before him.[8] St. Ignatius never refused any dish, nor complained even if it was badly cooked or badly prepared.[9] St. John Climacus also ate of everything, and waited, eating very slowly, for the others to go on eating so as to finish together.[10] It is also an excellent mortification to deprive oneself of or abstain from those dishes or fruits that most suit one's own taste; and, by doing so unobtrusively, one can practise many acts of virtue,[11] presenting or offering these sacrifices or tributes to God, carrying the cross of Christ, and not being like those of whom St. Paul laments with tears that they are enemies of the cross of Christ and their god is their belly.[12]

Mortification of the Touch

Never do or touch anything foul, for you already know that that is a horrendous sin. You will also abstain from that indecent and low habit some people have of horseplay, grabbing one another and other such tangles, since it is intolerable and unseemly. Do not forget that proverb: "Horseplay is clowns' play" \[*Juego de manos, juego de villanos*, literally "hand-games are villeins' games"\]. You must not do it, then, not only with persons of the other sex, but not even with those of your own; and not only because it is against good manners, but also because it is against chastity.

Mortification of the Whole Body

The fiercest and cruellest enemy of our soul, and the most to be feared, is our body, or the flesh: both because it is always beside the soul and because it is the most tenacious, so that it can be said to lay snares for it every day to make it fall into sin. It is an unbroken colt that easily bolts, hardly obeys the bit or submits to serving the spirit for which it was made; so that if the bridle is slackened ever so little, it will not only demand what is just and what we must reasonably grant it as necessary, but will drag us into passion.[1]

We must not forget that we are to look after the body as we would look after a farm animal, to which we would give what it needs for us to make use of it and not to pamper it, lest, growing too frisky, it refuse the yoke or throw off its load. We must do the same, then, with the body: we must give it what it needs in order to live and work, but not to pamper it, lest it too, frisking about, become unmanageable and drag us into every disorder, making us live not according to reason but according to passion, like irrational animals, and

even worse, since they are endowed with and governed by natural instinct, which, beyond dispute, comes to be lacking in the person who lives according to passion.

As the physician, on taking charge of a sick man, at once prescribes a diet for him, that is, that he deprive himself of eating and drinking not only as to quantity but also as to the quality of certain foods he knows to be harmful to him, ordering him also to keep away from unhealthy air and from company, and at the same time prescribing the medicines he judges most suitable and fitting for the restoration of health; just so, neither more nor less, must we treat our body, sick with the passions and with evil inclinations. We must begin with the diet, depriving it of, or moderating for it, those foods or drinks that can irritate or spur on the passions; keep it away from those persons and places that can bring it some spiritual harm; and at the same time administer certain mortifications to it, like so many medicines, under the advice of a prudent and wise director; or at least suffer patiently and without complaint those things that mortify us without our seeking them, whether they come from our neighbours, from animals and insects, or, lastly, from the elements or nature: for example, enduring with patience and in a spirit of penance the cold, and not being able to warm oneself or draw near the fire in winter; headache in spring; heat, flies, fleas, etc., in summer; mosquitoes or bedbugs in autumn, and so on.

I know a certain person[2] who, when the fleas bite him, talks to himself in this way: Look, these creatures bite mortals like this because the first of them, their father, committed a single sin; if, then, for one man's single sin they bite all mortals, with how much more reason should they all bite you, who have committed so many sins? And he lets them do their duty, biting and feasting on him, enduring this mortification with the greatest patience and in a spirit of penance. If you do not reach so far, because you have less virtue, be at least a little more long-suffering than until now. Think that you will suffer more in hell, where you will go if you have the misfortune to die in mortal sin, or in purgatory, where you will inevitably go if you do not mortify yourself now or do penance for venial faults or for the debt of punishment \[*reato*, the *reatus poenae*, the temporal punishment still due\] of mortal ones, even when they have already been confessed; for you will remember that the catechism says that by the sacrament of Penance the pains of hell are forgiven, but not all those of purgatory that the sinner deserves.

It would also be good and very useful for you to practise some other voluntary mortification, in imitation of St. Paul, who said: *I chastise my body to bring it into subjection* to the spirit;[3] but before practising voluntary mortifications, consult your director about it with humility and docility, and he, taking account of your health, occupations and other circumstances that it is his business to weigh, will tell you what you can do that will be pleasing to God.

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[4] "*Pars innocentiae est caecitas*" (*De remediis fortuitorum*: *Opera* IV \[Augustae Taurinorum 1829\] p. 422; *Excerpta Senecae falso tributa*). Quoted by St. Alphonsus (*Selva de materias predicables* \[BAC\], ed. cit., p. 292).

[5] Cf. *Apologeticum* XLVI, 11; FE 1, 576. Quoted by St. Alphonsus (*Selva de materias predicables*, ed. cit., p. 210).

[6] Cf. Molina, A. de, o.c., p. 72.

[7] Cf. *Confessions* VI, 8.

[8] Ps 119:37.

[9] Cf. Rodríguez, A., *Ejercicio de perfección y virtudes cristianas* \[LR, Barcelona 1861\] part 2, p. 44.

[10] Cf. Ribadeneira, P. de, *Flos sanctorum* (Madrid 1761) vol. 2, p. 259.

[11] Cf. *Aut.* no. 336; Molina, A. de, o.c., p. 73.

[12] Cf. 1 Cor 15:33.

[13] Prov 25:23 \[the Spanish edition prints "Prov 25,33," a misprint\].

[14] Cf. Molina, A. de, o.c., pp. 73ff.

[15] Cf. Mt 25:36.

[16] Jas 3:2.

[17] A note taken from Scío de San Miguel, F., *La Santa Biblia* (LR, Barcelona 1854) vol. 2 of the NT, p. 274, n. 4.

[18] Letter 105.

[19] Prov 10:19.

[20] Cf. Mt 12:36.

[21] Ps 141:3.

[22] *Moralia* XXX, 13: PL 76, 555. Quoted by Molina, A. de, o.c., p. 74.

[23] Cf. St. Alphonsus Mary de Liguori (*Selva de materias predicables*: *Obras ascéticas* \[BAC, Madrid 1954\] vol. 2, p. 296), who attributes it to St. Francis de Sales.

[24] Cf. *De coenobiorum institutis* V, 5–6: PL 49, 215ff.

[25] Quoted by St. Alphonsus (o.c., p. 216).

[26] *Epist.* 22 *ad Eustochium* n. 8: PL 22, 309; *Cartas* (BAC, Madrid 1962) vol. 1, pp. 164–165.

[27] Prov 20:1.

[28] Prov 23:29–30 \[the Spanish edition prints "Prov 32,29-30," a misprint\].

[29] Cf. *Aut.* no. 29.

[30] Cf. Ribadeneira, P. de, *Flos sanctorum*, vol. 2, ed. cit., p. 445; Lohner, T., o.c., vol. 2, p. 147.

[31] Cf. *Aut.* no. 760.

[32] Cf. *Aut.* nos. 414–415.

[33] Cf. Phil 3:18–19.

[1] St. John of Ávila found it already in St. Hilarion (cf. *Audi filia* c. 5: *Obras* \[Madrid 1759\] vol. 3, pp. 45, 74).

[2] Cf. Clotet, J., *Resumen de la admirable vida...* \[Barcelona 1882\] p. 97.

[3] 1 Cor 9:27.

Interior Mortification

The Sensitive Appetite

The sensitive appetite contains two powers: one is called the irascible, the other the concupiscible; these two powers are the seat of the passions. By this word *passion* we understand the disordered movements of the sensitive appetite, which, being carried away towards objects with a certain impression on the senses, cause such a movement to be called a passion.

The passions are eleven: six of the concupiscible part and five of the irascible part. The first six are: love, hatred, desire, aversion, joy and sadness. The five of the irascible part are: hope, despair, fear, daring and anger.[1]

The passions in themselves are neither good nor bad. They can be compared to the humours of the body, which, if they are well balanced, cause or preserve bodily health, but if they fall into disorder result in illnesses and finally in death. So the passions, if they are ruled and ordered by reason, are a mine of moral virtues; but if they fall into disorder, they are a spring of vices, faults and sins. For this reason it is greatly to the purpose to keep them wholly subject to the laws of reason, and if perhaps, without our noticing it, they rise up against it like unbroken horses, as soon as we notice it to subdue them with the reins of that same reason. From keeping the passions mortified in this way follows the priceless good of tranquillity of mind and peace of heart, and already in this world one enjoys a foretaste of heaven.

Mortification of the Imagination

The imagination cannot be idle; it is advisable, therefore, to keep it always occupied with useful things, and to this end the following counsels will serve you:

1. You will try to give it food of useful and profitable thoughts, taking great care to dismiss evil thoughts as soon as possible, because if you once let them in, you will not throw them out afterwards as easily as you would like.

2. Guard the doors of the bodily senses, keeping them shut to whatever can harm the soul; for you must know that one who does not first try to mortify the bodily senses labours in vain to mortify the imagination.

3. Never be idle; try always to be occupied with things of the service of God, of the good of your neighbour and with what the duties of your state require; because, the imagination being so occupied, it will not wander off into useless or harmful things.[1]

4. Think that you are in the presence of God, who is that judge who is to judge not only your words and works but also your thoughts. And before this Judge who is God will you dare to think what you would not dare to think before a man who could see into your thoughts?

Mortification of the Understanding

The understanding is the root of all the good and evil there is in man. One who surrenders his own understanding or judgment to God makes him a great sacrifice, especially in the following cases:

1. In putting away or overcoming sloth or negligence in learning the things of one's obligation, which each one must know perfectly so as not to incur the indignation and reprobation of God, as the Apostle says in these words: *He who is ignorant shall be ignored*.[1]

2. In submitting one's own opinion or judgment to that of one's superiors, judging right what they command and always obeying, unless it is certainly established that what is commanded is against the law of God.

3. In submitting one's own judgment or opinion to the opinion of another, even when he is not so learned or is not a superior, except in evil things, because in that case one neither can nor should submit it; but, apart from that case, trying not to dispute or argue, but to give way, because condescension, as St. Francis de Sales says, is the daughter of charity, and it begets and nourishes peace and love in families and among all one's neighbours.[2]

4. In mortifying the desire to know harmful and useless things, whether what forbidden books teach or what is said by gossiping people, who have an itch and relish for telling other people's lives or what goes on in the houses and the town.

5. In not judging other people's works or words, unless the office of superior obliges one to it, for he must watch over and be wary of what the persons subject to him say, do or may do, either to correct them if they have acted or spoken badly or to forestall or prevent it; but, as for others, always to judge of them as well as one can, and in things evidently bad always to judge with compassion, thinking that we have defects enough of our own, and that if we found ourselves in our neighbour's situation and God did not hold us back, we would do worse than he.

Mortification of the Memory

The memory is to be mortified in the following things:[1]

1. Restraining vicious thoughts and trying to forget the injuries our neighbour may have done us; doing the same with lewd things one has seen or heard and any other evil thing that comes to the memory.

2. Shutting the door on all vain and useless thoughts, which fill the soul with fancies and prevent attention in prayer.

3. Not giving room to thoughts, however good they may be, if they come out of season, as, for example, in prayer, at Mass and in one's other devotions, if they are not in keeping with these same works. And so that the memory may always be well occupied, there is nothing like practising being always in the divine presence.

Mortification of Self-Love and of One's Own Will

The Venerable Blosius, speaking of the mortification of the will, says that no sacrifice more pleasing than that of one's own will can be offered to God;[1] and elsewhere he says that one who mortifies his own will to do that of others for the glory or love of God pleases the Lord more than if he fasted a long time on bread and water and scourged himself most rigorously with the discipline.[2] And, on the contrary, so great is the harm that an unmortified self-will causes the soul that St. Bernard says there would be no hell if there were no self-will.[3]

The mortification of one's own will is to be practised in the following cases:

1. Finding out, or taking great care to know, what the will of God is in each work that is to be done.

2. Asking God for this mortification, distrusting oneself and placing one's confidence in him, thinking that everything is possible with his holy grace.

3. Saying frequently these or similar ejaculations: *My God, what do you want me to do?*[4] Teach me, Lord, to deny my own will and to do yours. *Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*[5] I want nothing, my God, but what You want. Do with me, Lord, whatever pleases you.[6]

4. Trying to do the will of others rather than one's own in indifferent things, which can lawfully be done or left undone, or done in this way or that, submitting oneself to all for love of God. This holy practice is of great profit, because acts of self-submission are accompanied by those of other virtues; and if one carefully takes advantage of the occasions that will very often present themselves, one will please God greatly and run very swiftly along the road of perfection. Many persons fail in this who are reputed to be spiritual and lovers of perfection, and in reality are very little so: excellent people and very good as long as they can do what they want and in the way they want, without the least subjection or contradiction; but offer them a little resistance, cross their will, and you will see them at once throwing off sparks of fire and cutting words, pouting \[*poner hocico*, literally "putting on a snout"\], showing their annoyance with a scowl, ready for outbursts, and quicker to flare up in anger at the first encounter than a match struck against something rough. To these one can apply that saying which fits them so well: Saints in the square and devils at home \[*Santos en plaza y diablos en casa*: holy in public, impossible at home\]; for they are unbearable, since nobody can work out how to win them or how to lose them. Unhappy people!

5. Practising making many acts contrary to one's own will, not only in those things to which the will is viciously inclined or which it desires, but also in indifferent things for which one has some liking; and this, with full propriety, is denying oneself.

6. Trying in everything to take Jesus Christ as one's model, fixing within one's heart a great desire to be humbled and despised by all, and therefore fleeing offices of authority and honour and embracing those that are despised and lowly. Never relating anything that redounds to one's own praise, unless the glory of God and the profit of one's neighbour require it.[7] When reprimanded, even if one is innocent, keeping silent and not excusing oneself, offering it all to God and considering that one's own sins, present or past, deserve this and much more;[8] and in all of it not desiring to be thought humble and virtuous, but guilty and imperfect.

7. Having a will prompt and determined to do not only what superiors command, but also what one knows they want, without waiting for them to express it or command it.[9]

8. Tearing out of the heart every attachment to created things, so that one loves nothing but God or for God. This detachment from created things is most useful for advancing in perfection. Therefore great care must be taken not to become attached to anything, however small, or even if it is worthless, because sometimes these things occupy the heart as much as or more than great things and those of great price, brilliance and rarity. Hence, the moment one feels attached to such little things, or, if you like, trifles in themselves, it is indispensable to deprive oneself of them before the heart sticks to them; for every disordered attachment to

creatures shuts the door to the love of God and opens it to self-love. And it must be understood that whatever one possesses or uses in this world is to be held without attachment or clinging, being always ready to leave it all whenever this is judged fitting, and valuing things only in so far as they are useful for serving God.[10]

9. Embracing labours, pains, injuries, affronts and insults with entire resignation to the will of God; and to walk towards perfection this is to be done in the following four ways:

First: suffering things with patience, however arduous and difficult they may be, according to the saying of St. Paul: *In tribulatione patiens*, "Patient in tribulation."[11]

Second: suffering not only with patience but giving thanks to the Lord for the benefit he grants, letting us taste the chalice that he reserved for himself and for his most chosen friends.[12]

Third: suffering not only with patience and thanksgiving, but also with joy, in imitation of the apostles, of whom we read that they went out rejoicing from the presence of the Council because they had had the happiness of suffering contempt for the name of Jesus.[13]

Fourth: suffering not only with patience, thanksgiving and joy, but also with the desire to suffer more and more for love of Jesus Christ, in imitation of him who, nailed to the cross, with so many bitter griefs, insults and the pains of death, still burned with thirst to suffer more.[14] And in those who truly love God, in proportion as their love is lively, so the desire to suffer is also vehement, counting adversities as glories, as St. Paul affirms of himself: "Far be it from me to glory in anything but the cross of my Lord Jesus Christ."[15]

Here, O most beloved Christian, you have what you must do if you wish to follow Jesus Christ: you must deny yourself, take up the cross and go after him.[16] Whoever does not practise this will never be perfect. Even though our nature recoils from it, it is indispensable to make it give way. But, oh what sorrow! this is what is not done. Jesus Christ has many who follow him to go to Tabor, but to go to Calvary, how few! I mean that when he sends prosperity and glories, everyone is a friend of God; but when he sends illnesses, misfortunes or other evils, then they turn their backs on him. Do not be one of their number, but take what he gives you. If he sends you prosperity, give him thanks continually, wondering at his goodness; and if he tries you with misfortunes, conform yourself to his will, believing that this is good for you and that he suffered still more for you without deserving it; and in this way you will at last be able to reach the heavenly glory that I so truly wish you. Amen.

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[17] Cf. St. Thomas, *Summa theol.* I-II, q. 23, a. 4. Quoted by Scaramelli, J. B., *Directorio ascético* vol. 2, p. 237.

[18] Cf. 1 Tim 6:9.

[19] 1 Cor 14:38.

[20] Cf. *Epistolario* fragm. 77: *Obras selectas* (BAC, Madrid 1954) vol. 2, p. 711.

[21] Cf. Molina, A. de, *Exercicios espirituales* (Barcelona 1776) p. 66.

[1] Blosius, L., *Obras* (Barcelona 1609).

[2] Cf. ibid., p. 506. Also quoted by Molina (o.c., ibid.).

[3] St. Alphonsus also quotes the same phrase (cf. *Selva...*, ed. cit., p. 285).

[4] Acts 9:6.

[5] Mt 6:10.

[6] Cf. *Aut.* no. 755.

[7] Cf. Ribadeneira, P. de, *Flos sanctorum* \[Madrid 1761\] vol. 2, p. 444. St. Gregory already attributed the same rule to St. Paul (cf. *Moralia* I, 7: PL 76, 44, and XXII, 3: ibid., p. 345).

[8] Cf. *Constituciones CMF* part 2, c. 5, n. 12, 1866 ed.

[9] Ibid., c. 8, n. 19.

[10] Cf. Molina, A. de, o.c., pp. 61ff.

[11] Rom 12:12.

[12] Cf. *Aut.* nos. 752, 785.

[13] Acts 5:41.

[14] Cf. Jn 19:28.

[15] Gal 6:14.

[16] Cf. Mt 16:24; Mk 8:34; Lk 9:23.

Patience

Means of Acquiring It

Christian! In this valley of tears and sorrows you are an exile; and that is why patience is as essential to you as the bread that nourishes you. Do you truly want it? I promise it to you, without fear that you will prove me wrong, provided that you practise the following counsels:

1. When you are angry, keep silent. You must not do any action or utter any word carried away by anger, because afterwards you would not only regret what you had said or done, but perhaps the evils you had caused by your outbursts would already be beyond remedy.

2. Remember that if God had taken your life when you sinned the first time, you would now be burning in hell, suffering much more there than you suffer here now; and if you were given the choice between what you suffer now and what you would suffer there, would you not prefer this to what is in hell? Well then, realize that God has commuted for you into these pains those that you ought to have suffered there. And will you not bear them?

3. Raise your thoughts to heaven and see how great is the glory that awaits you there if you suffer with patience. The pains of this life cannot be compared with the glory and reward that God will give you for them afterwards; and you must know that, as St. Gregory says, no one can reach the great rewards of heaven except by the road of great labours;[1] and these labours must be borne with patience and in grace; otherwise they are of no use for going to heaven.

4. Think that no one will be crowned with glory without having suffered with patience and in grace;[2] so that St. John saw that all the saints in heaven carried palms,[3] which are the symbol of the martyrdom or patience with which they had suffered the pains of this life. Read the lives of the saints, men and women, and those of Jesus and Mary, and you will see with what patience they suffered slanders, persecutions, robberies and every kind of torment, although they were innocent; and you, miserable sinner, who for so many years ought to have been burning in hell, will you not suffer?

5. Are these examples not enough to quiet you? Then I will set another before your eyes which I think will move you. Come with me; let us go to Calvary. Do you see those two who are beside Jesus? They are two thieves; both are suffering the same kind of punishment; both are being executed there; but what a different end for the two of them! One passes from the gallows to paradise, the other from the cross to hell. And why? Because the latter despairs in his impatience, while the other bears his sentence with patience.[4] Understand, then, that all men carry their cross in this world; but with this difference: that one who carries it with patience, in grace and with humility, persuaded that for his sins he deserves this and much more, will go to heaven with the good thief; but one who carries it raging, blaspheming and despairing will go with the bad thief to rage for an eternity in hell.

6. You will obtain the virtue of patience by asking for it humbly from Jesus and Most Holy Mary, saying to this end every day, in the morning, an Our Father and three Hail Marys. In your trials you will often say: My Jesus, assist me; Most Holy Virgin, help me; let it be for the love of God; let it go in discount and satisfaction for my sins \[*vaya en descuento*: let it be set against the debt\]. At night examine whether you have failed during the day, and if you find that you have failed, say as many Hail Marys as there were faults.

Warning

For patience to be fruitful and meritorious it is indispensable to suffer one's pains in the state of grace; for to one who is in mortal sin much suffering with patience is of no use for gaining heaven; it is of use to him only for earth, I mean for gaining temporal goods. And so that this may be better understood, I wish to use the same simile or example with which Jesus Christ exhorted his disciples to patience, announcing to them that while they lived in this world they would be like a woman in labour, who in the act of giving birth suffers intense pains, it is true, but afterwards counts them well spent for the joy it gives her to see that she has brought a beautiful child into the world.[1] Indeed, true Christians, while they are in this world, are like mothers in labour: the pains and labours inseparable from this valley of tears give them much to suffer and cause them some sadness; but at the end of life they will rejoice to see that they have brought forth such great and good works for the heavenly homeland. But just as that mother who rejoices at the happy outcome of her labour would feel the bitterest affliction if, after so much suffering, she saw the fruit of her womb dead, seeing that instead of being a consolation to her it would serve only as food for worms; in the same way, every Christian brings forth, so to speak, for the heavenly homeland, like so many living children, and the most beautiful, all the good he does and the evil he suffers with patience, if he is in the grace of God. But if he is in mortal sin, the good works he does and the labours he suffers with patience are like so many children that he brings forth amid the pains of this life, but dead children, which serve only as food for the earth, I mean for obtaining earthly and temporal goods, but not heavenly ones, since they are dead works. Therefore, patience and grace; and if at some time there is the frailty of losing this grace or falling into sin, make a fervent act of contrition as soon as possible and go to confession as soon as one can, so as not to have the unhappy lot of bringing forth so many works dead and of no use for the heavenly homeland. Nevertheless, let the sinner not omit good works and the patient suffering of evils, if only to obtain true conversion from God; but let him be persuaded that, even if he does the former and suffers the latter, as long as he is not in the grace of God he will never merit heaven.

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[2] *In I Reg.* V, 3: PL 79, 345.

[3] Cf. 2 Tim 2:5.

[4] Cf. Rev 7:9.

[5] Cf. Lk 23:39–43.

[1] Cf. Jn 16:21.