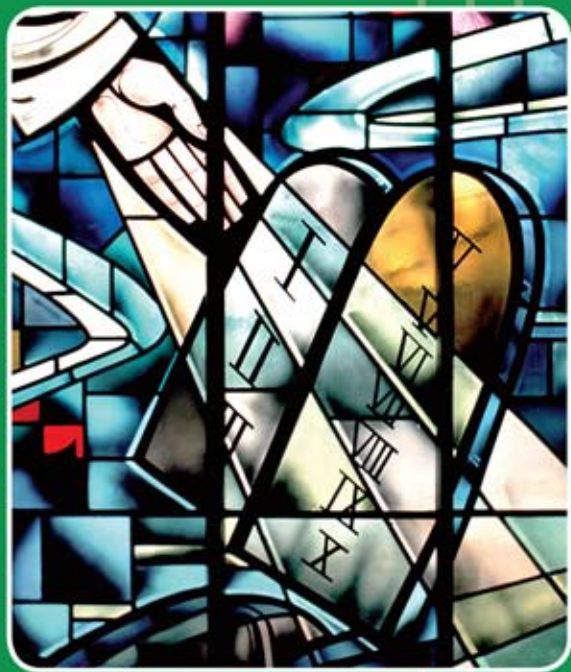


saint mary's press

Christian Moral Life

A Primary Source Reader



Ann Nunes

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The publishing team included Gloria Shahin, editorial director; Jeanette Fast Redmond, development editor. Prepress and manufacturing coordinated by the production departments of Saint Mary's Press.

Cover Image @ The Crosiers / Gene Plaisted, OSC

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Printed in the United States of America

1363

ISBN 978-1-59982-140-5, print

ISBN 978-1-59982-472-7, Kno

ISBN 978-1-59982-260-0, Saint Mary's Press Online Learning Environment

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Introduction

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith. (Hebrews 12:1–2)

Imagine that you are running a race in a crowded stadium. Feel the pounding of your feet against the track. Just a quarter of the way into the race, you start to feel tired and wonder if you can even make it to the finish line.

Suddenly you begin to hear your name called from the stands. People are cheering you on, but you do not know who they are. They are calling your name, saying: “You can make it! It’s in you! Keep going! You can win!” Who *are* these people? How do they even know your name? Why are they so confident that you can even finish the race, much less win?

It is working, though. You can feel their confidence in you, as if the wind is at your back. You can make it. You might even win!

In the moral race too—the race to overcome sin and be a faithful follower of Christ—there is a crowd cheering us on. The Letter to the Hebrews calls this cheering crowd a “cloud of witnesses” (12:1). They are the voices of the holy men and women throughout history who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith. They have persevered. They have run the good race. They have claimed their prize and are now cheering us on as we run life’s race. They are calling us to victory.

This cloud of witnesses is part of a larger community that the Church calls the Communion of Saints. We are one family that looks out for one another: asking for help from those who can give it, and giving help to those who need it. Heaven and earth are united in this familial reality, the Communion of Saints.

All the members of this family have your back as you run life’s moral race. You do not have to run it alone. The Christian moral

life is defined by loving relationships. Human relationships are not always the image of perfect love, and we sometimes feel discouraged and disappointed by people in our lives. We may feel weary with our relationships and think we have no one to turn to. But we have God. God is always there and wants us to know that we have many more friends than social networks could ever count—for we are part of the Communion of Saints. We are supported by faithful people—living and dead—who can offer us insight about running life’s moral race.

This primary source reader, *Christian Moral Life*, includes letters, sermons, and other writings of many holy people. Each of the reader’s four parts begins with a reading from a contemporary moral theologian. These modern authors are then followed by others in the cloud of witnesses, that great crowd of faithful men and women who are cheering you on.

- Part 1 considers what we mean when we talk about “life in Christ.” In these readings Blessed John Paul II, Julian of Norwich, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and others examine the fulfillment of God’s promises in Christ and what it means to respond with love, just as Mary said yes to God’s plan.
- Part 2 goes on to discuss how God taught us to live this new life in Christ. The Two Great Commandments and the Beatitudes are among the topics explored here by Blessed John Henry Newman, Blessed Teresa of Calcutta, Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, Pedro Arrupe, SJ, and others.
- Part 3 examines how this new life in Christ and the Gospel message are at the heart of Catholic moral teaching. Selections from Hildegard of Bingen, Saint Thomas More, Saint Alphonsus de Liguori, and others talk about the virtues, the importance of developing and following one’s conscience, and the role of prayer in making moral decisions.
- Finally, Part 4 explores the reality of sin through the writings of self-professed sinners like Saint Augustine and Saint Teresa of Ávila. But their readings, as well as sermons from Saint John

Vianney and Archbishop Oscar Romero, also call us to conversion and cheer us on with the hope of redemption.

Two thousand years of Church history are represented through these writings. Although each author reflects the period of time in which he or she wrote, every author shares wisdom that transcends time and place, wisdom that is relevant to your moral life today.

Although many authors in this book have departed this life, they are very much alive and present to you in spirit. If you open your ears and your heart, you will know they are cheering you on. They really do have your back. They can help you run life's moral race with your eyes fixed on Christ.

Part 1

Created in the Image of God, Who Is Love

1 Loving the Good Life

Introduction

“The good life”—what images come to mind when you think of that phrase? The reading in this chapter comes from a book called *The Good Life: Where Morality and Spirituality Converge*, by Fr. Richard Gula, a moral theologian, professor, and author known for considering modern questions and dilemmas through the eyes of faith in Jesus Christ. While writing *The Good Life*, Gula took an informal survey that posed a similar question about this phrase. As you read the selection in this chapter, see how your idea of “the good life” lines up with that of others.

This introductory reading begins with the idea that love makes the good life possible. According to Gula, despite what popular culture may tell us, the good life is one of communion with God, who is always extending his divine hand in love and friendship. Jesus Christ is God’s love in the flesh; Christ shows us how to be good friends with God the Father. Throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus calls his disciples “friends” and instructs them, “As I have loved you, love one another” (John 13:34). The good life is therefore a life of giving and receiving love.

Although abundance does mark the good life, constantly changing media images and values surround us with only an illusion of abundance. Gula reminds us that the steadfast and abundant love of God is already within us. If we are open to it, this love becomes a wellspring to help us live authentically as people of character and virtue. When we live authentically in the image of God, in whom we are created, and when we embody the love of God in the world today, we walk the moral path. Rooted in this reality of divine love, our moral actions flow from the es-

sense of who we are—or rather, whose we are. God invites us to be his friends. If we accept this invitation, our morality is defined by this friendship. Morality is relational; that is, our relationships with God, with others, and with ourselves inform our moral choices.

As a professor of ethics and moral theology, Gula has taught that this relational understanding of morality is central. Any student who has walked into his introductory class on moral theology anticipating a dry recitation of regulations and rules in the Catholic Church has been pleasantly surprised to discover that he really teaches guidelines about being in **right relationships** that are rooted in the love of God as revealed in the life of Jesus Christ. Through his **vocation** as a priest, as well as his speeches, classroom teaching, and many published books, Gula has guided people of all ages to recognize God’s love at work in their lives and to respond with character, virtue, and moral integrity—in essence, to lead good lives.

Morality, the truly good life, is rooted in love. Christian morality is synonymous with life in Christ. As Gula explains in the following excerpt, “The good life for a Christian takes its shape from our allegiance to Jesus the Christ” (p. 6). This allegiance forms and transforms our character so that we truly love living the good life.

right relationships Relationships aligned to help each human being to thrive in mind, body, and spirit.

vocation A call from God to all members of the Church to embrace a life of holiness.

Excerpt from *The Good Life: Where Morality and Spirituality Converge*

By Richard M. Gula, SS

“Someone in Nebraska loves me.” So read the bumper sticker on the car in front of me while I was driving along one of California’s freeways this afternoon. I thought, what a great way to begin this short book on the

moral life. After all, being loved makes the moral life possible! For the moral life is really about living out of the abundance of being loved in ways that make life richer for everyone. How are we ever going to live in ways that promote the well being and full flourishing of ourselves and others, as well as the whole environment, if we do not first feel the love of another for us?

Now, Nebraska is a long way from California, but that distance quickly shrinks with the thought that someone there holds us close to their heart. To know that someone loves us, that we are special to them, not only brings them close to us but also strengthens, consoles, and empowers us to live out of the gifts that are ours. It is so much easier to take the risk to love another, even a stranger, when we know that someone, somewhere, loves and cherishes us.

As the experience of lovers tells us, loving another and being loved by another creates a dynamism that opens us beyond the particularity of the one we love and moves us outward toward the goodness and lovable-ness of all people—in fact, of all creation. The moral life depends on the experience of being loved and on the dynamic pull that draws us to love all things, and ultimately to love God.

. . . Spiritual masters throughout the ages have told us in a variety of ways that God’s love for us does not compete with the relationships we have with other people or creation. We do not have to step over or around them in order to get to God. Rather, God comes to us in and through our relationships with all things.

But to say “God loves you!” may seem trite. We have heard it so many times that it may very well suggest an empty piety. Yet, the good news of the Christian faith is that God’s love is real, creative, constant, and undefeatable. God’s loving us is the supreme truth, the rock bottom foundation, the **first principle** on which we build a moral and spiritual life. As with any first principle, we cannot prove it but we can deduce from it.

Once we accept it, we can see how much follows from it. We can see that all of life is lived in the presence of God, is a response to God, and has value in relation to God’s love.

first principle A foundational principle from which other truths can proceed.

The good life, then, is a graced life—a life that expresses the divine love within us. But is that what you really think of when you hear the expression “the good life”? . . . I took an informal survey of spontaneous associations of the good life. Images that most frequently surfaced were all influenced by the commercialism of our popular culture—owning a luxury car or a mountain villa, taking an exotic vacation or a cruise, being treated with first class service, dining in gourmet restaurants, and drinking fine wine.

These images came as no surprise because television and commercial ads are usurping the role of religion and the church in shaping our imaginations and our system of values. The kind of life they promote is often based on anti-Christian values such as greed, consumerism, and elitism. These contradict Christian teaching about **solidarity**, about standing with the poor, and about being a beatitude people. Christians, however, believe that the images that come to us in our religious stories provide truthful ways of seeing the world and ordering our values and that to use religious stories and images for interpreting what is going on can help us to engage the world as a people formed by Christian faith.

The good life . . . is fundamentally a vocation—a response to what we hear God speak to us. What we hear and how we respond are influenced by Christian stories and images. The good life is possible because God has made the first move. Our moving toward God begins with God moving outward into creation toward us, preeminently in Jesus but also in and through all the people and events of our lives. From the perspective of vocation, wherein God calls and we respond, the basic question governing the good life is “What is God calling us to be and to do?” The relationship we establish with God in and through our responses to all things becomes the center of the good life. The mystery of grace assures us that divine love is always with us, inviting us and leading us toward the realization of the fullness of life in communion with God. Living the good life, simply put, is graced living expressing the divine love within us.

solidarity Union of one’s heart and mind with all people; a principle of Catholic social teaching based on the well-being of all people and the concept of the common good.

Morality and Spirituality

Can you be a moral person but not spiritual? Can you be a spiritual person but not act morally? Morality refers to the goodness or evil of human acts. Moral decisions can be made based on principles other than those guided by faith and a particular spirituality. And some people who claim to be spiritual do not necessarily make moral choices guided by their faith. When we live an authentically Christian life, however, spirituality and the gospel of Jesus Christ do inform our morality.

Christian spirituality and Christian morality converge in the good life. Spirituality is concerned with the wellspring of our actions. If we focus only on the actions that get done, then we neglect what nourishes and sustains those actions. There is more to us, and more to life, than what we do. Our interior life affects our exterior behavior. If we understand that the purpose of life is to live in friendship with God, then there can be no real separation of the moral and spiritual life. Our searching for meaning, hungering for love, yearning to connect, or seeking fulfillment are, themselves, responses to God's self-giving love.

For many people, however, the moral and spiritual life remain in two separate spheres. Some locate the spiritual life in the world of devotions, such as taking time for prayer or fasting. A spiritual life of this sort can easily become a substitute for vital moral living. But spirituality is much more about our fundamental commitment to God in Christ; it is an outlook on life and the very style of life that such a commitment nurtures in us.

When we separate morality and spirituality into separate spheres of life, we begin to reduce the moral life to sins or individual acts of virtue in specific areas of life—business dealings, sexual relations, making life-and-death decisions, and the like. We expect morality to provide a set of rules or principles that we only need to apply in order to determine the right way to act. In fact, so many books about morality still put the spotlight on individual acts, rules, principles, problems, and strategies for resolving them and then leave the nobler life to spirituality. But so much of our everyday moral living does not fall within those realms marked off by clearly defined rules or principles for direct action.

. . . Just as one's spirituality cannot be reduced to one's discipline of prayer, so the moral life cannot be reduced to acts or summed up in the decisions we make and the justifications we give to support the way we solve our problems.

Our ability to identify a problem, and even more to solve it, is a measure of who we are and how we

“When it comes to living the good life, character and virtue matter.”

live in the meantime. . . . [My teaching concerns] the kind of persons we ought to become and the kind of life we ought to live from day to day by virtue of our commitment to God in Christ and through the Spirit. In this sense, the moral life has to do with what also pertains to spirituality—a deeper vision of life, basic attitudes toward life, and the style of life that is grounded in our commitment to God. . . . When it comes to living the good life, character and virtue matter; that is to say, the moral life and spiritual life converge when we begin to explore the sort of persons we ought to become and the sort of lives we ought to live in order to flourish as authentic human beings.

While emphasizing character and virtue, I am not advocating that the normative **morality of duty** and principles be dismissed. Virtue, duty, and principles are complementary aspects of the same morality. Virtues express those habits, affections, attitudes, and convictions that lead to genuine human fulfillment, that is, to being one with God and so with one another and with the environment. With virtue, we carry out religious devotions or do our moral duty not because someone is commanding us to do them or is keeping a watchful eye over us to assure that we do them. Rather, with virtue, we act out of an internal, self-directing commitment to the values at stake. Virtue ethics stresses that who we are overflows into what we do. Virtues link us to action by providing a sensitivity to what is right and a motivation to do what human well-being demands. Whether or not an obligation is prescribed by duties or principles, and whether or not anyone is watching, virtue makes us alert and responsive to the

morality of duty Actions based upon moral obligations rather than virtue or love.

moral claims of situations, often with little attention to rationalizing, calculating, or counting the cost. With virtue, we act naturally. We do not ponder, argue, or fuss. We simply move.

What is making a perspective from character and virtue so necessary? For one thing, our world is changing very rapidly. There is no way we could ever have answers today to questions and issues that we will have to face in the future. We don't even know what those questions and issues are going to be. Think back only thirty years or so. Who would ever have thought that we would now be facing what to do with frozen embryos, whether we ought to clone humans, or how to protect privacy or prevent harassment over the Internet? But by directing our attention to virtuous character, we may become the sort of people who will be able to make right decisions on matters that we have never anticipated. To this end, we will have to illuminate the background issues of the moral life, such as our moral vision, attitudes, motivations, affections, intentions, convictions, and habits that give a particular shape to our lives. When we highlight these aspects of our selves, we are illuminating our spirituality as well.

. . . [My] conviction is that the good life is a life of friendship with God and that we will become friends with God and with one another to the extent that we develop our character and virtues. . . . The good life for a Christian does not derive from some general concept of the good, such as what is pleasurable or useful. Rather, the good life for a Christian takes its shape from our allegiance to Jesus the Christ, whom we believe to be the decisive revelation of God's love for us and the fullest human response to that love. By freely entering into relationship with Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit, we become disciples today. As such, we share in the life of love offered by God the Father. Every love changes us, but only God's love for us changes us into God's friends. This friendship with God will only be completely realized in heaven, that is, when the reign of divine love comes in its fullness.

Among the deepest questions we face in the meantime are questions about the meaning of life, about the sort of person we ought to become, and about how we ought to conduct our lives. In and through the biblical witness, especially the preaching, teaching, and works of Jesus, we see what life looks like when pointed in the direction of being a friend of God and of one another.

For Reflection

1. According to Gula, what is the “supreme truth,” the “first principle,” on which a Christian moral and spiritual life is built? Why might this be considered a first principle?
2. Compare and contrast the moral and spiritual life, as explained in this excerpt.
3. Based on what Gula says in this reading, what is replacing religion in shaping our values? What kind of life do these replacements promote, and how do they compare to Christian teachings? Do you agree or disagree with the author?
4. From the perspective of vocation, what does Gula say is the basic question governing the good life? How would you answer that question?

2 The Divine Embrace

Introduction

“We love you, John Paul Two! We love you!” chanted a crowd of Catholic university students during Pope John Paul II’s first visit to the United States. Spontaneously he responded, “John Paul Two, he loves you!” The 263rd successor to Saint Peter has been called the “Pope of the Youth.” The world’s youth were near to his heart; he frequently called young people his dear friends.

Named Karol Wojtyła at his birth in 1920, Blessed John Paul II was destined to live a **cosmopolitan** life in every sense. The most traveled Pope in history, he visited 130 countries during his pontificate and spoke at least seven languages fluently. At his invitation 160 religious leaders of various faith traditions worldwide came to

World Youth Day

In 1986 young people from around the world accepted Pope John Paul II’s invitation to come celebrate their faith with him in Rome. World Youth Day was born. Each year since, young people of faith have gathered for WYD either in their dioceses for a day or on weeklong pilgrimages in host cities around the world. The world’s youth who embark on the WYD journey joyfully share the diversity of their cultures and the unity of their faith.

Assisi, Italy, for the first World Day of Prayer for Peace. And he initiated World Youth Day, inviting young people from around the world to gather in host cities (such as Denver, Paris, Manila, Sydney, and Madrid) for a joyful celebration of faith and culture.

This chapter’s excerpt comes from Pope John Paul II’s message to young people at the fifteenth World Youth Day, held in 2000 in Rome. The scriptural theme running through all the events of that World Youth Day was adapted from the Gospel of

John: “The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us” (1:14). The theme was a reminder that God’s promise and plan are to dwell among us, lovingly embrace us, and share with us the happiness of Heaven.

In this reading Pope John Paul II encourages us to open our hearts to God’s plan of love, revealed most fully in the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus. He seeks to inspire us to be faithful to the Christian message, to live in solidarity, and to be cosmopolitan in the Christian sense—united with people of every culture through God’s redemptive love. He reminds us that the cross of Christ—the symbol of Christian **redemption**—brings together Heaven and earth. The outstretched arms of Jesus on the cross envelop all of humanity and tenderly hold the cosmos “in a divine embrace” (2). The Passion of Christ demonstrates this divine love and reminds us that God intimately knows our human suffering. Through our own sorrows and suffering, we too can know Jesus Christ.

Pope John Paul II calls us to be **saints**: “May it be your holy ambition to be holy, as He is holy” (3). As God is holy, we are called to be holy, to be *sancti*, to be saints. Just as Christ sent forth the Apostles to proclaim his Good News two thousand years ago, the Pope sends us forth to build a new humanity founded on the love and forgiveness received in the divine embrace of Christ.

cosmopolitan Having a worldly outlook or broad cultural frame of reference.

redemption From the Latin *redemptio*, meaning “a buying back,” referring, in the Old Testament, to Yahweh’s deliverance of Israel and, in the New Testament, to Christ’s deliverance of all people from the forces of sin.

saints From the Latin *sanctus*, meaning holy; someone who has been transformed by the grace of Christ and who resides in full union with God in Heaven. In this reading, it refers to being saintly or holy people here and now.

Excerpt from “Message to the Youth of the World on the Occasion of the Fifteenth World Youth Day”

By Blessed John Paul II

2. . . . I make again to you my pressing appeal to open wide the doors to Christ who “to those who received him, gave power to become children of God” (*Jn* 1:12). To receive Jesus Christ means to accept from the Father the command to live, loving Him and our brothers and sisters, showing solidarity to everyone, without distinction; it means believing that in the history of humanity even though it is marked by evil and suffering, the final word belongs to life and to love, because God came to dwell among us, so we may dwell in Him.

By his incarnation Christ became poor to enrich us with his poverty, and he gave us redemption, which is the fruit above all of the blood he shed on the Cross (cfr *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 517). On **Calvary**, “ours were the sufferings he bore . . . he was pierced through for our faults” (*Is* 53:4–5). The supreme sacrifice of his life, freely given for our salvation, is the proof of God’s infinite love for us. Saint John the Apostle writes: “God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son so that everyone that believes in him may not be lost but may have eternal life” (*Jn* 3:16). He sent Him to share in every way, except sin, our human condition; he “gave” him totally to men, despite their obstinate and homicidal rejection (cfr *Mt* 21:33–39), to obtain, through his death, their reconciliation. “The God of creation is revealed as the God of redemption, as the God who is ‘faithful to himself’ and faithful to his love for man and the world which he revealed on the day of creation . . . how precious must man be in the eyes of the Creator, if he gained so great a Redeemer” (*Redemptor hominis* 9.10).

Jesus went towards his death. He did not draw back from any of the consequences of his being “with us,” *Emmanuel*. He took our place, ransoming us on the Cross from evil

Calvary The place outside the city walls of Jerusalem where Jesus was crucified.

and sin (cfr *Evangelium vitae* 50). Just as the Roman Centurion, seeing the manner in which Jesus died, understood that he was the Son of God (cfr *Mk* 15:39) so we too, seeing and contemplating the Crucified Lord, understand who God really is, as he reveals in Jesus the depth of his love for mankind (cfr *Redemptor hominis* 9). “Passion” means a passionate love, unconditioned self-giving: Christ’s passion is the summit of an entire life “given” to his brothers and sisters to reveal the heart of the Father. The Cross, which seems to rise up from the earth, in actual fact reaches down from heaven, enfolding the universe in a divine embrace. The Cross reveals itself to be “the centre, meaning and goal of all history and of every human life” (*Evangelium vitae* 50).

“One man has died for all” (2 *Cor* 5:14): Christ “gave himself up in our place as a fragrant offering and a sacrifice to God” (*Eph* 5:2). Behind the death of Jesus there is a plan of love, which the faith of the Church calls the “mystery of the redemption”: the whole of humanity is redeemed, that is, set free from the slavery of sin and led into the kingdom of God. Christ is Lord of heaven and earth. Whoever listens to his word and believes in the Father, who sent him, has eternal life (cfr *Jn* 5:25). He is the “Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” (*Jn* 1:29.36), the high priest who, having suffered like us, is able to share our infirmity (cfr *Heb* 4:14) and “made perfect” through the painful experience of the Cross, becomes “for all who obey him, the source of eternal salvation” (*Heb* 5:9).

3. Dear young people, faced with these great mysteries, learn to lift your hearts in an attitude of contemplation. Stop and look with wonder at the infant Mary brought into the world, wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger: the infant is God himself who has come among us. Look at Jesus of Nazareth, received by some and scorned by others, despised and rejected: He is the Saviour of all. Adore Christ, our Redeemer, who ransoms us and frees us from sin and death: He is the living God, the source of Life.

Contemplate and reflect! God created us to share in his very own life; he calls us to be his children, living members of the mystical Body of Christ, luminous temple of the Spirit of Love. He calls us to be his: he wants us all to be saints. Dear young people, may it be your holy ambition to be holy, as He is holy.

You will ask me: but is it possible today to be saints? If we had to rely only on human strength, the undertaking would be truly impossible. You are well aware, in fact, of your successes and your failures; you are aware of the heavy burdens weighing on man, the many dangers which threaten him and the consequences caused by his sins. At times we may be gripped by discouragement and even come to think that it is impossible to change anything either in the world or in ourselves.

Although the journey is difficult, we can do everything in the One who is our Redeemer. Turn then to no one, except Jesus. Do not look elsewhere for that which only He can give you, because “of all the names in the world given to men this is the only one by which we can be saved” (*Acts* 4:12). With Christ, saintliness—the divine plan for every baptized person—becomes possible. Rely on Him; believe in the invincible power of the Gospel and place faith as the foundation of your hope. Jesus walks with you, he renews your heart and strengthens you with the vigour of his Spirit.

Young people of every continent, do not be afraid to be the saints of the new millennium! Be contemplative, love prayer; be coherent with your faith and generous in the service of your brothers and sisters, be active members of the Church and builders of peace. To succeed in this demanding project of life, continue to listen to His Word, draw strength from the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Penance. The Lord wants you to be intrepid apostles of his Gospel and builders of a new humanity. In fact, how could you say you believe in God made man without taking a firm position against all that destroys the human person and the family? If you believe that Christ has revealed the

Pope John Paul II and the Saints

During his twenty-six-year pontificate, Blessed John Paul II canonized more saints than any other Pope in modern history. He wanted the people of our time and of all nations to have models of faith and spiritual friends for life's journey. During his own lifetime, John Paul II touched the hearts of so many that when he died in 2005, people around the world spontaneously cried out, “*Santo Subito!*” (“Sainthood now!”) He was beatified in 2011, the first step toward possible canonization.

Father's love for every person, you cannot fail to strive to contribute to the building of a new world, founded on the power of love and forgiveness, on the struggle against injustice and all physical, moral and spiritual distress, on the orientation of politics, economy, culture and technology to the service of man and his integral development.

4. . . . From the whole Church may there rise up “a hymn of praise and thanksgiving to the Father, who in his incomparable love granted

us in Christ to be ‘fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God’” (*Incarnationis Mysterium* 6). May we draw comfort from the

“ *With Christ, saintliness—the divine plan for every baptized person—becomes possible.* ”

certainty expressed by Saint Paul the Apostle: If God did not spare his only Son but gave him for us, how can he fail to give us everything with him? Who can separate us from the love of Christ? In every event of life, including death, we can be more than winners, by virtue of the One who loved us to the Cross (cfr *Rom* 8:31–37).

The mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God and that of the Redemption he worked for all men, constitute the central message of our faith. The Church proclaims this down through the centuries, walking “amidst the misunderstandings and persecutions of the world and the consolations of God” (*S. Augustine De Civ. Dei* 18, 51, 2; PL 41,614) and she entrusts it to her children as a precious treasure to be safeguarded and shared.

You too, dear young people, are the receivers and the trustees of this heritage: “This is our faith. This is the faith of the Church. And we are proud to profess it, in Jesus Christ Our Lord” (Roman Pontifical, *Rite of Confirmation*).

For Reflection

1. According to the Pope, what proves the infinite love God has for us? In your own words, explain why this is considered proof of God's love. How does he say we should respond to this proof?
2. John Paul II calls all of us to be "the saints of the new millennium." What are we called to do? How can you personally respond to this summons?
3. Based on this reading, what is the central message of our faith?

3 Our Divine Dignity

Introduction

What does a boomerang do when it is thrown? It returns to its starting point. Saint Athanasius could be considered a human boomerang. Five times he was exiled for his unrelenting defense of the Council of Nicaea’s teaching that Jesus Christ was both true God and true man. This was a perilous effort in fourth-century Alexandria, Egypt, where he was bishop, but he would not give in to the **heretical** religious pressures of his day. The Nicene Creed, the great Christian proclamation of faith that came out of the Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople, affirms the teaching of Nicaea and Athanasius’s defense of it. Through this creed we avow that the Son is both true God and true man, and we profess belief in one God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

At the heart of the mystery of the **Trinity** is the truth that the Father (the Creator), the Son (the Redeemer), and the Holy Spirit (the **Sanctifier**) are in perfect communion with one another and that their work and mission are inseparable. Each acts to create us in love, redeem us, and make us holy. However, “each divine person performs

heretical Related to a conscious and deliberate rejection of a dogma of the Church.

Trinity From the Latin *trinus*, meaning “threefold,” referring to the central mystery of the Christian faith that God exists as a communion of three distinct and interrelated divine Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the Trinity is a mystery that is inaccessible to human reason alone and is known through Divine Revelation only.

Sanctifier One who makes something or someone holy; another title for the Third Person of the Trinity.

the common work according to his unique personal property” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 258).

The three readings in this chapter are from three of the Greek Church Fathers of the third and fourth centuries: Saints Athanasius (297–373), Gregory of Nazianzen (329–374), and Basil the Great (329–379). Gregory and Basil, lifelong friends and intellectual giants in the Eastern Church, followed in the footsteps of Athanasius as champions of Church teaching on the Persons of the Blessed Trinity. Recall how the Book of Genesis reveals our creation in the image of God—in Latin, *imago Dei*. The **Incarnation** and the sending of the Holy Spirit reveal that God is a Trinity of Divine Persons. More accurately, then, we are created in the image of the Trinity, *imago Trinitatis*. Each of these readings from the Greek Fathers explores the unique properties of one of the Persons of the Trinity.

The first excerpt comes from *On the Incarnation of the Word*, Saint Athanasius’s best-known **apologetic** writing. In this selection he defends teachings on the eternal existence of the Word of God; and he explains how, in the Incarnation, the Word became human for our redemption. Through Jesus Christ’s life, death, and Resurrection, “the law of corruption” is destroyed, meaning that death and bodily decay do not have the final word. Rather than signifying the end of life, death has become the beginning of life eternal because Christ on the cross restored the immortality and glory of humanity, as seen in his Resurrection. In short, Jesus Christ became man so that we might share in his divinity.

Incarnation From the Latin, meaning “to become flesh,” referring to the mystery of Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God, becoming man. In the Incarnation, Jesus Christ became truly man while remaining truly God.

apologetic Refers to a literary form in which one defends a position, often religious in orientation.

The second reading in this chapter is from a sermon by Saint Gregory of Nazianzen, who calls us to appreciate the manifest generosity of God the Father, the First Person of the Trinity, to whom we owe our very existence. When he created us in his

image, God granted us an abundance of beauty and the blessings of the earth as divine gifts to be enjoyed and shared with others. Gregory reminds us, as children of God and “coheir[s] with Christ,” that we are called to be generous with these divine gifts and not to abuse them.

Saint Basil the Great is the author of the last reading in this chapter, from his treatise on the Holy Spirit. The Spirit, he reminds us, is the source of all holiness and is the light of truth that empowers us to grow in God’s grace. By becoming more perfect windows into the divine presence within us, we become channels of the Holy Spirit. Like Athanasius, Basil speaks of our own divinity when he explains that we become God through the Spirit.

As you read these selections, consider the significance of your identity as a human being created in the image of God. Think about how your life is affected by the grace of the Resurrection, how you express generosity toward creation, and how you are a source of grace for others. Christian morality means living out our capacity to act in the image of God and to share in the life of the divine Trinity.

Excerpt from a Discourse, *On the Incarnation of the Word*

By Saint Athanasius

The Word of God, incorporeal, incorruptible and immaterial, entered our world. Yet it was not as if he had been remote from it up to that time. For there is no part of the world that was ever without his presence; together with his Father, he continually filled all things and places.

Out of his loving-kindness for us he came to us, and we see this in the way he revealed himself openly to us. Taking pity on mankind’s weakness, and moved by our corruption, he could not stand aside and see death have the mastery over us; he did not want creation to perish and his Father’s work in fashioning man to be in vain. He therefore took to himself a body, no different from our own, for he did not wish simply to be in a body or only to be seen.

The Word of God

Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, is the perfect and complete Word of God (see John 1:1–5). Saint Athanasius names attributes of the Word of God from before Jesus Christ took on a human nature and entered the world: incorporeal (without a body), incorruptible (not subject to death and decay), and immaterial (not physical).

If he had wanted simply to be seen, he could indeed have taken another, and nobler, body. Instead, he took our body in its reality.

Within the Virgin he built himself a temple, that is, a body; he made it his own instrument in which to dwell and to reveal himself. In this way he received from mankind a body like our own, and, since all were subject to the corruption of death, he delivered this body over to death for all, and with supreme love offered it to the Father.

He did so to destroy the law of corruption passed against all men, since all died in him. The law, which had spent its force on the body of the Lord, could no longer have any power against his fellowmen. Moreover, this was the way in which the Word was to restore mankind to immortality, after it had fallen into corruption, and summon it back from death to life. He utterly destroyed the power death had against mankind—as fire consumes chaff—by means of the body he had taken and the grace of the resurrection.

This is the reason why the Word assumed a body that could die, so that this body, sharing in the Word who is above all, might satisfy death's requirement in place of all. Because of the Word dwelling in that body, it would remain incorruptible, and all would be freed for ever from corruption by the grace of the resurrection.

In death the Word made a spotless sacrifice and oblation of the body he had taken. By dying for others, he immediately banished death for all mankind.

In this way the Word of God, who is above all, dedicated and offered his temple, the instrument that was his body, for us all, as he said, and so paid by his own death the debt that was owed. The immortal Son of God, united with all men by likeness of nature, thus fulfilled all justice in restoring mankind to immortality by the promise of the resurrection.

The corruption of death no longer holds any power over mankind, thanks to the Word, who has come to dwell among them through his one body.

Excerpt from a Sermon, “Let Us Show Each Other God’s Generosity”

By Saint Gregory of Nazianzen

Recognize to whom you owe the fact that you exist, that you breathe, that you understand, that you are wise, and above all that you know God and hope for the kingdom of heaven and the vision of glory, now darkly and as in a mirror but then with greater fullness and purity. You have been made a son of God, coheir with Christ. Where did you get all this, and from whom?

Let me turn to what is of less importance: the visible world around us. What benefactor has enabled you to look out upon the beauty of the sky, the sun in its course, the circle of the moon, the countless number of stars, with the harmony and order that are theirs, like the music of a harp? Who has blessed you with rain, with the art of husbandry, with different kinds of food, with the arts, with houses, with laws, with states, with a life of humanity and culture, with friendship and the easy familiarity of kinship?

Who has given you dominion over animals, those that are tame and those that provide you with food? Who has made you lord and master of everything on earth? In short, who has endowed you with all that makes man superior to all other living creatures?

Is it not God who asks you now in your turn to show yourself generous above all other creatures and for the sake of all other creatures? Because we have received from him so many wonderful gifts, will we not be ashamed to refuse him this one thing only, our generosity? Though he is God and Lord he is not afraid to be known as our Father. Shall we for our part repudiate those who are our kith and kin?

Brethren and friends, let us never allow ourselves to misuse what has been given us by God’s gift. If we do, we shall hear Saint Peter say: *Be*

ashamed of yourselves for holding on to what belongs to someone else. Resolve to imitate God's justice, and no one will be poor. Let us not labor to heap up and hoard riches while others remain in need. If we do, the prophet Amos will speak out against us with sharp and threatening words: Come now, you that say: *When will the new moon be over, so that we may start selling? When will sabbath be over, so that we may start opening our treasures?*

Let us put into practice the supreme and primary law of God. He sends down rain on just and sinful alike, and causes the sun to rise on all without distinction. To all earth's creatures he has given the broad earth, the springs, the rivers and the forests. He has given the air to the birds, and the waters to those who live in water. He has given abundantly to all the basic needs of life, not as a private possession, not restricted by law, not divided by boundaries, but as common to all, amply and in rich measure. His gifts are not deficient in any way, because he wanted to give equality of blessing to equality of worth, and to show the abundance of his generosity.

Excerpt from a Treatise, *On the Holy Spirit* By Saint Basil the Great

The Work of the Holy Spirit

The titles given to the Holy Spirit must surely stir the soul of anyone who hears them, and make him realize that they speak of nothing less than the supreme Being. Is he not called the Spirit of God, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, the steadfast Spirit, the guiding Spirit? But his principal and most personal title is the Holy Spirit.

To the Spirit all creatures turn in their need for sanctification; all living things seek him according to their ability. His breath empowers each to achieve its own natural end.

The Spirit is the source of holiness, a spiritual light, and he offers his own light to every mind to help it in its search for truth. By nature the Spirit is beyond the reach of our mind, but we can know him by his good-

ness. The power of the Spirit fills the whole universe, but he gives himself only to those who are worthy, acting in each according to the measure of his faith.

Simple in himself, the Spirit is manifold in his mighty works. The whole of his being is present to each individual; the whole of his being is present everywhere. Though shared in by many, he remains unchanged; his self-giving is no loss to

“ Through the Spirit we acquire a likeness to God; indeed, we attain what is beyond our most sublime aspirations—we become God. ”

himself. Like the sunshine, which permeates all the atmosphere, spreading over land and sea, and yet is enjoyed by each person as though it were for him alone, so the Spirit pours forth his grace in full measure, sufficient for all, and yet is present as though exclusively to everyone who can receive him. To all creatures that share in him he gives a delight limited only by their own nature, not by his ability to give.

The Spirit raises our hearts to heaven, guides the steps of the weak, and brings to perfection those who are making progress. He enlightens those who have been cleansed from every stain of sin and makes them spiritual by communion with himself.

As clear, transparent substances become very bright when sunlight falls on them and shine with a new radiance, so also souls in whom the Spirit dwells, and who are enlightened by the Spirit, become spiritual themselves and a source of grace for others.

From the Spirit comes foreknowledge of the future, understanding of the mysteries of faith, insight into the hidden meaning of Scripture, and other special gifts. Through the Spirit we become citizens of heaven, we are admitted to the company of the angels, we enter into eternal happiness, and abide in God. Through the Spirit we acquire a likeness to God; indeed, we attain what is beyond our most sublime aspirations—we become God.

For Reflection

1. Saint Athanasius reminds us that Christ “took to himself a body, no different from our own.” According to Athanasius, why did Christ take a human body?
2. What are some of the gifts of God that Saint Gregory names? How are we called to respond to those gifts?
3. Saint Basil compares the Holy Spirit to the sun to describe how the Spirit works in every human person. In your own words, explain your understanding of the truth that Basil is communicating with this analogy.

4 Christ's Lovers

Introduction

"Here is a vision shown by the goodness of God to a devout woman, and her name is Julian, who is a recluse at Norwich and still alive, A.D. 1413, in which vision are very many words of comfort, greatly moving for all those who desire to be Christ's lovers" (chapter 1).

So begins *Showings*, Julian of Norwich's written account of visions that God granted her during a severe illness. Her sixteen visions, or "showings," were mystical revelations about the nature of God's divine love for humanity. From a literary standpoint, *Showings* is thought to be the first book written in English by a woman. Little is known about Julian's life, but historians believe that she was a Benedictine **contemplative** nun who took her name from Saint Julian Church in Norwich, England, where she lived.

Throughout her writings Julian of Norwich expresses a desire that we experience a God who created, loves, and protects each of us. With such an experience, our response must naturally be to love God in return.

The perfect model of a loving response to God is our Lady, the Blessed

Love and Agape

Julian writes much about love—God's love for us, and our love for God and others. Julian was influenced by a biblical understanding of love. The word for love used most frequently by Jesus in the Gospel narratives, which were written in Greek, is *agape*, a word that means unconditional and selfless love of others.

contemplative Member of a religious order devoted to prayer, personal sacrifice, and solitude.

Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus. In the first vision described in these excerpts, Julian sees Mary and the “reverent contemplation with which she beheld her God” (chapter 4).

The role of contemplation in our human life is important to Julian. As you read, keep in mind that God is speaking to you through her. Although the life you live is very different from hers, and the distance of time and place is vast, do not dismiss her writings as irrelevant to your own experience. Rather, translate her experience for your life today. You may not be called to abandon the created things of this world out of love for God, as Julian was—but God certainly is asking you to recognize that complete contentment cannot come from created things. It is only in the “love of uncreated God,” as Julian says here (chapter 4), that the deepest desires of the human heart are satisfied. Julian’s writings are one pathway to an encounter with this love.

Julian says that God gave her these visions for “the comfort of us all” (chapter 6). All of us have had times when we have wanted someone to comfort us, to say, “Everything is going to be okay.” *Showings* is a revelation of reassurance. Amid her personal suffering and the general hardships common to her time, God communicated divine care and comfort through the mystical visions she experienced. In an oft-quoted passage from *Showings* (not included in this excerpt), God proclaims to Julian, “But all will be well, and every kind of thing will be well” (chapter 13). Through the **mysticism** of Julian of Norwich, God speaks those reassuring words today to all of us who desire to be Christ’s lovers.

mysticism An intense experience of the presence and power of God, resulting in a deeper sense of union with God; those who regularly experience such union are called mystics.

Excerpts from *Showings*

By Julian of Norwich

Chapter 1

Here is a vision shown by the goodness of God to a devout woman, and her name is Julian, who is a recluse at Norwich and still alive, A.D. 1413, in which vision are very many words of comfort, greatly moving for all those who desire to be Christ's lovers. . . .

Chapter 4

And at the same time as I saw this corporeal sight, our Lord showed me a spiritual sight of his familiar love. I saw that he is to us everything which is good and comforting for our help. He is our clothing, for he is that love which wraps and enfolds us, embraces us and guides us, surrounds us for his love, which is so tender that he may never desert us. And so in this sight I saw truly that he is everything which is good, as I understand.

And in this he showed me something small, no bigger than a hazelnut, lying in the palm of my hand, and I perceived that it was as round as any ball. I looked at it and thought: What can this be? And I was given this general answer: It is everything which is made. I was amazed that it could last, for I thought that it was so little that it could suddenly fall into nothing. And I was answered in my understanding: It lasts and always will, because God loves it; and thus everything has being through the love of God.

In this little thing I saw three properties. The first is that God made it, the second is that he loves it, the third is that God preserves it. But what is that to me? It is that God is the Creator and the lover and the protector.

For until I am substantially united to him, I can never have love or rest or true happiness; until, that is, I am so attached to him that there can be no created thing between my

“ God is the creator and the lover and the protector. For until I am substantially united to him, I can never have love or rest or true happiness. ”

God and me. And who will do this deed? Truly, he himself, by his mercy and his grace, for he has made me for this and has blessedly restored me.

In this God brought our Lady to my understanding. I saw her spiritually in her bodily likeness, a simple, humble maiden, young in years, of the stature which she had when she conceived. Also God showed me part of the wisdom and truth of her soul, and in this I understood the reverent contemplation with which she beheld her God, marvelling with great reverence that he was willing to be born of her who was a simple creature created by him. And this wisdom and truth, this knowledge of her creator's greatness and of her own created littleness, made her say meekly to the angel Gabriel: Behold me here, God's handmaiden. In this sight I saw truly that she is greater, more worthy and more fulfilled, than everything else which God has created, and which is inferior to her. Above her is no created thing, except the blessed humanity of Christ. This little thing which is created and is inferior to our Lady, St. Mary—God showed it to me as if it had been a hazelnut—seemed to me as if it could have perished because it is so little.

In this blessed revelation God showed me three nothings, of which nothings this is the first that was shown to me. Every man and woman who wishes to live contemplatively needs to know of this, so that it may be pleasing to them to despise as nothing everything created, so as to have the love of uncreated God. For this is the reason why those who deliberately occupy themselves with earthly business, constantly seeking worldly well-being, have not God's rest in their hearts and souls; for they love and seek their rest in this thing which is so little and in which there is no rest, and do not know God who is almighty, all wise and all good, for he is true rest. God wishes to be known, and it pleases him that we should rest in him; for all things which are beneath him are not sufficient for us. And this is the reason why no soul has rest until it has despised as nothing all which is created. When the soul has become nothing for love, so as to have him who is all that is good, then is it able to receive spiritual rest. . . .

Chapter 6

Everything that I say about myself I mean to apply to all my fellow Christians, for I am taught that this is what our Lord intends in this spiritual

revelation. And therefore I pray you all for God's sake, and I counsel you for your own profit, that you disregard the wretched worm, the sinful creature to whom it was shown, and that mightily, wisely, lovingly and meekly you contemplate God, who out of his courteous love and his endless goodness was willing to show this vision generally, to the comfort of us all. And you who hear and see this vision and this teaching, which is from Jesus Christ for the edification of your souls, it is God's will and my wish that you accept it with as much joy and delight as if Jesus had shown it to you as he did to me. I am not good because of the revelation, but only if I love God better, and so can and so should every man do who sees it and hears it with good will and proper intention. And so it is my desire that it should be to every man the same profit that I asked for myself, and was moved to in the first moment when I saw it; for it is common and general, just as we are all one; and I am sure that I saw it for the profit of many others. For truly it was not revealed to me because God loves me better than the humblest soul who is in a state of grace. For I am sure that there are very many who never had revelations or visions, but only the common teaching of Holy Church, who love God better than I. If I pay special attention to myself, I am nothing at all; but in general I am in the unity of love with all my fellow Christians. For it is in this unity of love that the life consists of all men who will be saved. For God is everything that is good, and God has made everything that is made, and God loves everything that he has made, and if any man or woman withdraws his love from any of his fellow Christians, he does not love at all, because he has not love towards all. And so in such times he is in danger, because he is not at peace; and anyone who has general love for his fellow Christians has love towards everything which is. For in mankind which will be saved is comprehended all, that is, all that is made and the maker of all; for God is in man, and so in man is all. And he who thus generally loves all his fellow Christians loves all, and he who loves thus is safe. And thus will I love, and thus do I love, and thus I am safe—I write as the representative of my fellow Christians—and the more that I love in this way whilst I am here, the more I am like the joy that I shall have in heaven without end, that joy which is the God who out of his endless love willed to become our brother and suffer for us. And I am sure that anyone who sees it so will