Viri Christi



"From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence,
and men of violence take it by force."
Matthew 11:12

Objective: Spiritual Theology has been referred to as the science of the saints. It can also be referred to as the science of Christian perfection. Spiritual theology attempts to guide the soul from the very beginning of the Christian life through the purgative, illuminative, and unitive way. Over the next six months, we will investigate this "science of the spiritual life" as we discover an authentic Catholic male spirituality.

- Unit 1 The Nature and End of Man
- Unit 2 Sin & Salvation
- Unit 3 Fundamentals of the Spiritual Life
- Unit 4 The Purgative Way
- Unit 5 The Illuminative Way
- Unit 6 The Unitive Way

Unit 4 Podcast Schedule

- Episode #13: Introduction to the Purgative Way
- Episode #14: The Prayer of the Apprentice
- Episode #15: Penance
- Episode #16: Mortification
- Episode #17: Warfare Against Deadly Sins

Episode #13 – Introduction to the Purgative Way

I. Introduction

1. Opening Question:

2. Last month, we discussed the general means of perfection that are common to all souls that desire spiritual progress. Over the next three months, we will discover the special means that are proper to the different stages of the spiritual life.

3. This week, we will discuss the nature of the Purgative Way by looking at the different categories of beginners and the first task of beginners, namely, the purification of the soul.

II. Introduction to the Purgative Way

1. Who is a beginner?

    a. "In the spiritual life, beginners are those that habitually live in the state of grace and have a certain desire for perfection, but who have still attachments to venial sin and are exposed to fall now and then into grievous faults."

    b. "We therefore rule out of the class of beginners those that frequently commit mortal sin and do not avoid its occasions . . . They are sinners, worldlings, who must first of all be helped to sever their attachment to mortal sin and to part with the occasions of sin." (Tanquerey, 305)

2. Different Categories of Beginners

    a. Innocent Souls – Young men and women who desire to grow in the spiritual life.

    b. Converts – Persons who have sinned grievously, but return to God in all sincerity and press on toward perfection.

    c. Lukewarm Souls – Persons who have given themselves to God and advance in the spiritual life, but have fallen into a state of tepidity.

III. Application: The First Task of Beginners: Purification of the Soul

1. "Perfection consists essentially in union with God through love. But . . . We cannot be united to Him unless we are clean of heart – a state implying a twofold condition: atonement for the past and detachment from sin and the occasions of sin for the future." (Tanquerey, 308)

2. Purification of the soul can be imperfect or perfect.

    a. Imperfect purification is inspired by motives of fear and hope – fear of hell and hope for heaven.

    b. Perfect purification does not exclude fear and hope, but has for its ruling motive the love of God and the desire to please Him.

Episode #14 – Prayer of the Apprentice

I. Introduction

1. Opening Question: Prayer, what is it good for?

2. Last week, we discussed the nature of the Purgative Way by looking at the different categories of beginners and the first task of beginners, namely, the purification of the soul.

3. This week, we are going to discuss role of prayer in the life of the apprentice.

II. Prayer of the Apprentice

1. The Necessity of Prayer

    a. "The necessity of prayer is based on the necessity of actual grace. Without grace we are utterly incapable of obtaining salvation, and still more of attaining perfection. Prayer is the normal means through which God wills that we obtain all actual grace." (Tanquerey, 310-311)

    b. "God will not refuse grace to him who prays for it with the proper dispositions, for it is the divine will that all men be saved. For this reason spiritual writers have listed the faithful practice of prayer as a sign of predestination and the lack of prayer as a sign of reprobation." (Aumann, 239)

    c. The twofold end of prayer is worship and petition which clearly identifies its necessity. The necessity can be expressed through the acronym ACTS:

        i. Worship: Adoration, Contrition, Thanksgiving

        ii. Petition: Supplication

2. Four Types of Prayer (Aumann pp. 316-329)

    a. Vocal Prayer (Purgative Way) – Any form of prayer expressed in words, whether written or spoken. Two requirements for vocal prayer are attention and devotion.

    b. Meditation (Purgative Way) – A reasoned application of the mind to some supernatural truth in order to penetrate its meaning, love it, and carry it into practice with the assistance of grace. Whatever length of time given to meditation, its influence should be felt throughout the whole day. In this way, as St. Thomas suggests prayer can be constant.

    c. Affective Prayer (Illuminative Way) – A type of prayer in which the operations of the will predominate over the intellect. Meditative and affective pray may happen simultaneously.

    d. Prayer of Simplicity (Unitive Way) – A simple loving gaze upon some divine object, whether on God himself or one of his perfections, on Christ or on one of his mysteries, or on some other Christian truth. The prayer of simplicity is the bridge between ascetical and mystical prayer.

3. Daily Prayer Routine for Beginners

    a. “The objective is to train souls gradually in the habitual practice of prayer in such a way that their whole life becomes in a measure a life of prayer.” (Tanquerey, 317)

    b. Advice for Beginner: Less Prayers and More Attention

    c. Morning Prayer

    d. Meditation: Mass, Scripture Reading, etc.

    e. Prayers Throughout the Day: Rosary, Visits to the Blessed Sacrament, Informal Prayers, etc.

    f. Evening Prayer: Examination of Conscience

III. Application: How should you deal with difficulties in prayer?

1. Distractions: “In the act of praying, one may focus attention on any one of three elements: the words themselves, the meaning of the words and content of the prayer as a whole, or the one to whom the prayer is addressed and the purpose of the prayer.” (Aumann, 240)

2. Dryness: “An inability to produce the necessary intellectual and affective acts, or in an actual distaste for prayer. Dryness in prayer may be caused by the individual, by God, or by the devil.” (Aumann, 243)

Episode #15 – Penance

I. Introduction

1. Opening Question: Is penance necessary?

2. Last week, we discussed the role of prayer in the life of the apprentice.

3. This week, we are going to discuss the nature, virtue, and practice of penance.

II. Penance

1. The Sacrament of Penance

    a. "The Sacrament of Penance is that Sacrament in which, by the absolution of the priest, sins committed after baptism are remitted to the sinner, who repents of his sins, acknowledges them sincerely, and has the will to render satisfaction for them."[1]

    b. The Council of Trent – "But the Lord instituted the sacrament of penance, principally when after His Resurrection he breathed upon His disciples and said: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" [John 20:22f.]. The universal consensus of the Fathers has always acknowledged that by so sublime an action and such clear words the power of forgiving and retaining sins was given to the apostles and their lawful successors for reconciling the faithful who have fallen after baptism" (DH 1670).

    c. Powers of the Keys and Binding & Loosing

        i. Matthew 16:19 – I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

        ii. Matthew 18:18 – Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

    d. Forgiveness of Sins: John 20:22-23 – And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

2. The Virtue of Penance

    a. The virtue of penance "is that moral virtue, which inclines the will to turn away inwardly from sin, and to render atonement to God for it . . External manifestations of the virtue of penance are the confession of sins, the performance of penitential works every kind, for example, prayer, fasting, almsgiving, mortifications, and the patient bearing of all trials sent by God."[2]

[1]Ludwig Ott. *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*. (London: Baronius Press, 2018), 438.

[2]Ott, 439.

b. “A supernatural virtue, allied to justice, which inclines the sinner to detest his sin because it is an offence against God, and to form the firm resolve of avoiding sin in the future, and of atoning for it.” (Tanquerey, 341)

i. Matthew 3:2 – “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

ii. Luke 5:32 – “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

iii. Luke 13:5 – “I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.”

III. Application: The Practice of Penance

1. Willfully and joyfully accepting the crosses that God may see fit to send us

2. Faithfully discharging the duties of our state in life

3. Fasting & Almsgiving

Episode #16 – Mortification

I. Introduction

1. Opening Question: What is mortification?

2. Last week, we discussed the nature, virtue, and practice of penance.

3. This week, we are going to discuss role of mortification in the purgative way.

II. Mortification

1. The Nature of Mortification

    a. "The struggle against our evil inclinations in order to subject them to the will, and the will of God." (Tanquerey, 364)

    b. "Mortification must include the whole man, body and soul; for each of our faculties unless well-disciplined may be the cause of sin . . . Mortification is the enemy of pleasure . . . however, [it] must be practiced with prudence and discretion." (Tanquerey, 370-1)

2. The Practice of Mortification (Aumann pp. 178-194)

    a. Purification of the Passions (Concupiscible & Irascible)

        i. "Passions are vehement movements of the sensitive appetite toward sensible good, reacting more or less strongly on the bodily organism" (Tanquerey, 378).

        ii. "If we wish, then, to attain to union with God, we must repress all inordinate movements of the passions, even the most trifling; for perfect union with God presupposes that there be nothing in us contrary to the divine will, no wilful attachment to creatures or to self" (Tanquerey, 381).

    b. Purification of the Intellect – The soul must let itself be led by the light of faith so that the intellect can be united with God in this life.

    c. Purification of the Will – Detachment from created things is absolutely indispensable for arriving at Christian perfection, but it would be of little avail to detach oneself from external things if one is not likewise detached from one's own ego, which constitutes the greatest of all the obstacles to one's free flight to God.

    d. Purification of the External Senses

        i. The purpose of the active purification of the external senses is to restrain their excesses and to subject them to the rule of reason illuminated by faith.

        ii. Two Ways to Mortify the Senses

            1. Deprive them of anything that may produce unlawful pleasure

2. Practice positive mortification by means of bodily self-denial

e. Purification of the Internal Senses

i. Imagination – Freed from restraint, the imagination paints in vivid colors the pleasure of sin or exaggerates the difficulties of the path to virtue. Difficulties can be avoided if we maintain custody of our external senses, be prudent regarding the types of content we consume, pay attention to our duty each day, and become indifferent to distractions.

ii. Memory – Throughout life we experience many things that are of no use for the sanctification of the soul. The following suggestions help purge the mind of bad memories

1. Forget past sins

2. Cease thinking about past injuries

3. Remember benefits from God

4. Consider motives for Christian hope

III. Application: Physical Training as Religious Devotion

1. "To jeer at the austerities of former Christian days is a baneful error of modern times. As a matter of fact the Saints of all ages, those that have been beatified in these latter days as well as those of old, have severely chastised their bodies and their exterior senses, well aware that man's whole being must be brought into subjection, that in the state of fallen nature, man's whole being must be crucified is he is to belong wholly to God" (Tanquerey, 372-373).

2. "Mortification, however, must be practiced with prudence and discretion. It must be properly fitted to the physical and moral strength of each, and must be in keeping with the accomplishment of one's duties of state" (Tanquerey, 372).

Episode #17 – The Seven Deadly Sins

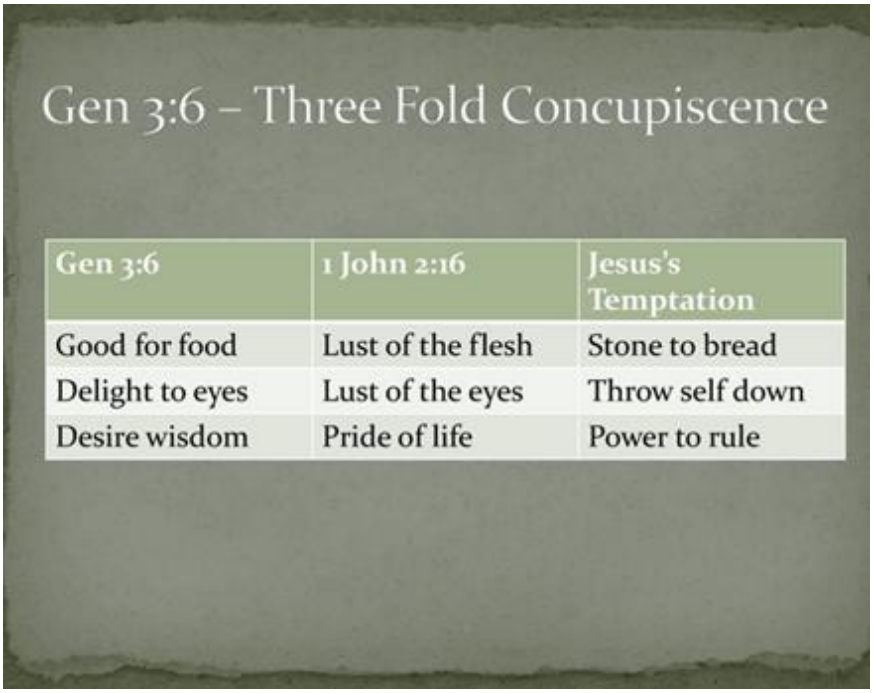
I. Introduction

1. Opening Question: Are the seven deadly sins, sins?
2. Last week, we discussed the role of mortification in the purgative way.
3. This week, we are going to discuss the seven deadly sins.

II. The Seven Deadly Sin & The Threefold Concupiscence

1. Introduction

   a. 1 John 2:16 – For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world.



   b. The Seven Deadly Sins – Tanquerey p. 392

      i. The seven deadly sins "must be known and attacked. They are tendencies rather than sins; however, they are called sins, because they lead to sins; they are termed capital (deadly), because they are the fountain-head or source of other sins."

      ii. "These tendencies can be referred to the threefold concupiscence in this way: from pride are born vain-glory, envy, and anger; from the concupiscence of the flesh issue gluttony, lust, and sloth; lastly, the concupiscence of the eyes is one with avarice or the inordinate love of riches."

2. Problem: The lust of the flesh is the inordinate love of sensual pleasure.

    a. Remedy: “In order to obtain a complete victory, it does not suffice to renounce evil pleasures, but we must, in order to be on the safe side, sacrifice all dangerous ones, for these almost invariably lead us to sin. Besides, we must deprive ourselves of some lawful pleasures in order to strengthen our wills against the lure of forbidden ones. In fact, whoever indulges without restraint in all lawful pleasures, is in proximate danger of falling into those that are sinful.” (Tanquerey, 104)

    b. The Seven Deadly Sins – Lust of the Flesh

        i. Gluttony is an inordinate love of food or drink.

        ii. Lust is an inordinate love of sex.

        iii. Sloth is an aversion to what is difficult. Effeminacy is a disordered attachment to what is pleasurable.

3. Problem: The lust of the eyes includes all unwholesome curiosity and inordinate love of the goods of this world.

    a. Remedy: “To combat vain curiosity we must recall to mind that whatever is not eternal is not worthy of winning and captivating the thought of immortal beings such as we are. . . . As regards inordinate love of the goods of this world, we must bear in mind that wealth is not an end in itself, but the means given by Providence to minister to our needs.” (Tanquerey, 105)

    b. The Seven Deadly Sins: Lust of the Eyes – Greed is an inordinate attachment love of earthly goods. Greed is a mistrust in God who has promised to watch over us and supplies us with that which we need.

4. Problem: The pride of life is a profound depravity; it is the worship of self; man becomes his own god through excessive self-love.

    a. Remedy: First, we should refer all to God because all things come from Him and all things will return to Him. Second, we must remember that of ourselves we are but nothingness and sin.

    b. The Seven Deadly Sins – The Pride of Life

        i. Vain-Glory is an inordinate love of the esteem of others

        ii. “Envy is a tendency to be saddened by another’s good as if that good constituted an affront to our own superiority.” (Tanquerey, 404)

        iii. Anger can lawful and just for there is such a thing as righteous indignation, but anger as a deadly sins is an inordinate desire for punishing others.

III. Application: Keep practicing the Rule of Life