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 6 Podcast Schedule

- Episode #23 – Introduction to the Unitive Way
- Episode #24 – Introduction to the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit
- Episode #25 – The Perfection of the Intellect and Will
- Episode #26 – The Perfection of the Appetites
- Episode #27 – The Prayer of the Perfect

Episode #23 – Introduction to the Unitive Way

I. Introduction

1. Last month, we discussed the second of the three ways of the interior life, namely, the illuminative way. We discovered that in the illuminative way, the soul is adorned with Christian virtues. We discussed the nature of the illuminative way, the two classes of souls at this stage, and the program to be followed.

2. This month, we will turn our attention to the final way, which is called the illuminative way. When one enters the unitive way, he is readied for an intimate union with God. The unitive way was captured by St. Paul when he said, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2:20).

3. This week, we will begin our examination by defining the nature and purpose of the unitive way, the characteristics of this stage of the interior life, and the three conditions of a man on the unitive way.

II. The Path of the Perfect

1. The Nature and End of the Unitive Way

    a. The goal of the unitive way is "none other than habitual and intimate union with God, through Jesus Christ" (Tanquerey, 1290).

    b. "To live altogether unto God, the Living God, the Most Blessed Trinity dwelling in us, to praise God, serve Him, revere Him and love Him . . . The aim of the perfect Christian" (Tanquerey, 1290).

2. Four Characteristics of the Unitive Way (Tanquerey, 1292-1295)

    a. **The soul lives continually in the presence of God**; it delights to contemplate Him living in the heart, "to walk inwardly with God."

    b. **The love of God becomes not only the principal virtue of the soul**, but, one may say, its only virtue, in the sense that all the other virtues which it practices are for it but so many acts of love.

    c. **Prayer becomes increasingly simple**. Reasoning disappears to make room for pious sentiments, which in turn become simpler, until they become but a loving, lingering thought of God.

    d. **A simplification of our whole life**. Life becomes a perpetual prayer: whether working or recreating, whether alone or in the company of others, we continually rise towards God by conforming our will to His.

III. Application

1. Three Following Conditions of a Man on the Unitive Way (Tanquerey, 1296)

    a. **A Great Purity of Heart**, not merely the expiation and reparation of past faults, but detachment from whatever may lead to sin, horror for all deliberate venial sins, and even for any willful resistance to grace.

b. **A Great Mastery Over Self**, acquired by the mortification of the passions and the practice of the moral and theological virtues.

c. **A Constant Need of Thinking of God**, of conversing with Him, and of performing every action with the view of pleasing Him.

2. This month, we'll investigate the following four topics, so you may get a sense of the unitive way of the interior life.

    a. The Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit

    b. The Perfection of the Intellect and Will

    c. The Perfection of the Appetites

    d. Prayer of the Perfect

Episode #24 – The Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit

I. Introduction

1. Opening Question: What are the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit?

2. Last week, we introduced the unitive way by examining the nature and purpose of the unitive way, the characteristics of this stage of the interior life, and the three conditions of a man on the unitive way.

3. This week, we are going to discuss the nature and cultivation of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit.

II. The Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit

1. The Nature of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit

    a. The simple unitive way "is the state of fervent souls who habitually live in intimate union with God . . . Already accustomed to the practice of the moral and theological virtues, they strive to perfect these by the cultivation of the gifts of the Holy Ghost. . . . Among the gifts of the Holy Ghost, some are given chiefly for action, and others chiefly for contemplation." (Tanquerey, 607-611)

    b. Garrigou-Lagrange explains that the Gifts of the Holy Ghost "are infused dispositions which make a man promptly docile to divine inspirations. They have traditionally been compared to the sails of a ship, enabling the ship to be moved by wind – which represents the inspirations of the Holy Ghost" (*The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, Vol. 1, p. 496).

    c. What is the difference between infused virtues and the gifts of the Holy Ghost?

        i. Adolphe Tanquerey explains that "the virtues incline us to act in accordance with the nature of our faculties . . . The virtues are therefore energies that are primarily and directly active. The gifts on the contrary impart to us a docility and a receptiveness that enable us to receive and follow the motions of operating grace" (*The Spiritual Life*, 1309).

        ii. The fundamental difference between the virtues and the gifts does not come from their field of action, which is the same in both, but from the different manner in which they act in the soul. The virtues, with the help of grace, incline us to act in accordance with the nature of our faculties; hence, they are energies that are primarily and directly active. The gifts, on the other hand, impart to us a docility and a receptiveness that enable us to receive and follow the motions of operating grace. This receptivity needs to be cultivated to attain its full development. (Tanquerey, 607-611)

2. The Seven Gifts (Aumann, 97)

    a. Cognitive Faculties

        i. Speculative Intellect

            1. Deeper insight into divine truths: Understanding

2. Proper judgment concerning truths of faith: Knowledge

3. Judgment according to divine norms: Wisdom

ii. Practical Intellect Regarding Human Actions: Counsel

b. Appetitive Powers

i. Volitional Appetite (the will) In Relation to Others: Piety

ii. Sensitive Appetites (the emotions)

1. Irascible Appetites: Fortitude

2. Concupiscible Appetites: Fear of the Lord

III. Application: How do you cultivate the gifts of the Holy Spirit?

1. The Practice of the Moral Virtues: According to St. Thomas Aquinas, "The moral and the intellectual virtues precede the gifts, since man, through being well subordinate to his own reason, is disposed to be rightly subordinate to God" (ST, I-II, q. 68, a. 8, ad. 2).

2. Combat the Spirit of the World – "Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God . . . The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:12-14).

3. Frequently Think About God Living in Us

4. Promptly and Generously Follow God's Inspirations

Episode #25 – The Perfection of the Intellect and Will

I. Introduction

1. Opening Question: How can we perfect the intellect and will?

2. Last week, we discussed the nature and cultivation of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit.

3. This week, we are going to discuss the perfection of the intellect and will through the gifts of counsel and piety.

II. The Perfection of the Intellect and Will

1. The Seven Gifts: Cognitive Faculties – Intellectual Gifts (Tanquerey, 624-634)

    a. Understanding – A gift which gives us a deep insight into revealed truths, without, however, giving a comprehension of the mysteries themselves.

    b. Knowledge – A gift which perfects the virtue of faith, and thereby gives us a knowledge of created things in their relations to God.

    c. Wisdom – A gift perfects the virtue of charity by enabling us to discern God and divine things in their ultimate principles, and by giving us a relish for them.

2. The Seven Gifts: Cognitive Faculties – Practical Intellect (Aumann, 279-280)

    a. Virtue: Prudence

    b. Gift: Counsel – Enables one to judge rightly in particular events what ought to be done in view of the supernatural ultimate end and personal sanctification.

3. The Seven Gifts: Volitional Appetite – The Will (Aumann, 293-296)

    a. Virtue: Justice

    b. Gift: Piety – Fills a person with a profound love of God and for all men and women as brothers and sisters and as children of the same heavenly Father.

III. Application:

1. Predispositions to Cultivate the Gift of Counsel

    a. Profound Humility, Reflection, and Patience

    b. Ability to Listen to God's Voice

    c. Docility and Obedience.

2. Predispositions to cultivate the Gift of Piety
    a. To cultivate the spirit of adopted children of God
    b. To cultivate the spirit of universal kinship toward all humanity
    c. To consider all things, even material things, as pertaining to the house of God

Episode #26 – The Perfection of the Appetites

I. Introduction

1. Opening Question: How can one perfect the irascible and concupiscible appetites?

2. Last week, we discussed the perfection of the intellect and will.

3. This week, we are going to discuss the perfection of the irascible and concupiscible appetites via the gifts of fortitude and fear.

II. The Perfection of the Appetites

1. The Seven Gifts: Sensitive Appetites – Irascible Appetite (Aumann, 311-315)

    a. Virtue: Fortitude

    b. Gift: Fortitude – Strengthens the soul for the practice of virtue, with invincible confidence of overcoming any dangers or difficulties that may arise. The most unmistakable mark of distinction between the virtue and gift of fortitude is the confidence one experiences in being able to overcome great dangers and difficulties with the latter.

    c. Why is the Gift of Fortitude Necessary for Salvation

        i. It gives the soul relentless vigor in the practice of virtue.

        ii. It overcomes all lukewarmness in the service of God.

        iii. It makes the soul intrepid and valiant in every type of danger or against every kind of enemy.

        iv. It enables souls to suffer with patience and joy.

        v. It gives the soul the quality of heroism in great things and in small things.

2. The Seven Gifts: Sensitive Appetites – Concupiscible Appetites (Aumann, 305-306)

    a. Virtue: Temperance

    b. Gift: Fear of the Lord – Perfect the virtue of hope by motivating a person to avoid sin out of reverential fear of God. To reach the perfection of the Christian life and the most intimate possible union with God, it is necessary that the concupiscible appetite be not only controlled but also purified.

III. Application

1. Predispositions to Cultivate Fortitude
    a. To accustom ourselves to the exact fulfillment of our duties despite any repugnance
    b. Not to ask God to remove our cross but only that he gives us the strength to carry it
    c. To practice voluntary mortification faithfully
2. Predispositions to cultivate Temperance
    a. Cultivate a love of solitude, recollection, and the faithful practice of mental prayer
    b. Be vigilant in keeping custody of the senses and making acts of love of God
    c. Do all things for the salvation of souls and the glory of God.

Episode #27 – The Prayer of the Perfect

I. Introduction

1. Opening Question: What is the prayer of the perfect?

2. Last week, we discussed the perfection of the irascible and concupiscible appetites via the gifts of fortitude and fear.

3. This week, we are going to discuss the prayer of simplicity and the four phases of contemplation.

4. Asceticism & Mysticism – "Mysticism is the flowing of the life of grace and the crowning achievement of the perfection of charity . . . Asceticism and mysticism do not constitute two distinct paths to Christian holiness; they are two stages of the same path to the perfection of charity" (Aumann, 127).

    a. The Prayer of Simplicity

    b. Contemplation

    c. Four Phases of Contemplation

II. The Prayer of the Perfect

1. The Prayer of Simplicity (Aumann, 327)

    a. The prayer of simplicity is "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."

    b. "The prayer is ascetical, meaning that the soul is able to attain to this type of prayer by its own efforts with the help of ordinary grace, but often it is the transition point to mystical prayer. The prayer of simplicity is thus the bridge between ascetical and mystical prayer."

2. Contemplation

    a. Contemplation "is a simple, loving, protracted gaze on God and things divine, under the influence of the gifts of the Holy Ghost and of a special actual grace which takes possession of us and causes us to act in a passive rather than in an active manner" (Tanquerey, 650).

    b. St. Francis de Sales – A loving, simple, and permanent attentiveness of the mind to divine things" (Love of God, Bk. VI, C. 3).

    c. "Contemplative prayer differs from discursive or reasoned prayer, since it excludes long reasonings; it differs, too, from affective prayer, because it excludes the multiplicity of acts which characterize this latter. Contemplative prayer, then, may be defined as a simple and affective gaze on God or things divine" (Tanquerey, 605).

3. Four Phases of Contemplation (Aumann, 337-354)

    a. Prayer of Quiet – A type of mystical prayer in which the intimate awareness of God's presence captivates the will and fills the soul and body with delight.

    b. Prayer of Simple Union – The prayer of union is that grade of mystical prayer in which all the internal faculties (including memory and imagination) are gradually captivated and occupied with God.

    c. Prayer of Conforming Union – In the prayer of conforming union, God captivates both the internal (as in simple union) and the external senses, resulting in the soul being totally divinized. Conforming union is closely connected with the prayer of simple union and is indeed its expansion.

    d. The Transforming Union – The last grade of prayer is the transforming union, identified by many mystics as spiritual marriage. It is a prelude to the Beatific Vision. Conforming Union involves the consent of the will to the union, but Transforming Union is the union itself. This is the highest grade of perfection in prayer, and St. John of the Cross said it is "nothing less than a transformation into God." At this state, "the soul is so transformed that it forgets self and thinks only of God and His glory" (Tanquerey, 693).

III. Application

1. The most important thing to keep in mind is that learning about prayer is not as effective as actually praying. Do not ever neglect your prayer life. Fight with every fiber of your being to keep your prayer regimen. This is why the foundation of our prayer life is simple, so that we can say our daily prayers no matter what is going on.

2. Keep practicing the Rule of Life