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PUBLISHER’S NOTE: Clarence J. Enzler was the author of many Catholic books and booklets, including *My Other Self* (1957) and *Everyone’s Way of the Cross* (1970). His nine-part series of Lenten reflections, published under the title “Heroism and Holiness,” first appeared in the *Ave Maria* magazine in February, March, and April of 1963.

Lenten Reflections

Six: He Must Become More and More

BY CLARENCE J. ENZLER

In the preceding articles we have tried to show that:

- All are called to holiness.
- Holiness consists in being *someone* rather than in doing *something*.
- The someone each of us is called to be is unique, which means that we must strive to be not saints in general but the particular saints God intends.
- Holiness consists therefore in being completely what we are in the best possible way.
- To be completely what we are we must let God lead us moment by moment and step by step, uniting our will with His in every present moment of our existence.

If once again the question is, “how?” the answer is—spiritual recollection.

And it is precisely here that we of the laity, well-intentioned and apostolic-minded as we may be, encounter one of our most formidable hurdles.

We have no time. We have no time set aside, that is, in which regularly to practice recollection. The monk in the monastery, the nun in the convent, have their hours for Holy Mass, for the Divine Office, for meditation

and for other spiritual exercises. The secular priest has his daily Mass schedule, the necessity of making time for the Office, and strong incentives for meditation. As many a married person has noted, more or less enviously, he can even fall back on the Office to escape gracefully from tiresome social functions.

We of the laity are pretty much on our own. Daily Mass for the priest, while not a strict obligation, is certainly “part of the job.” For us, it’s an extra, over and above the job. Neither are we obligated to pray the Office, to do spiritual reading or to meditate; on the contrary, it is a bit difficult to fit spiritual exercises with any regularity into our

Everyone’s Way of the Cross

Clarence Enzler’s perennially popular *Everyone’s Way of the Cross* was first published by Ave Maria Press in 1970 and has since gone on to sell over 3.6 million copies, in both a [regular](#) and a [large print](#) edition. Ideal for either private devotion or public Stations of the Cross, Enzler’s meditation booklet urges us to carry on Christ’s “unfinished business” and unite our will with His.

workaday schedules.

We have no place. There are no chapels in our home, no churches next door. We can't, generally speaking, "duck in" at any break in the day to pray the rosary, make the Way of the Cross, or spend five minutes before the Blessed Sacrament.

We have few reminders. In the factories, offices, and stores where so many of us work, crucifixes, statues and religious paintings do *not* abound. In the home or outside of it, no tinkling bell summons us to worship. Even the church bells that used to call out "time for the Angelus" are stilled in many of our cities today.

Yet there is another side, and we would be unfair not to recognize it. True, we have no designated hours for prayer, but we in the United States undoubtedly have more free time, in general, than any generation that has ever lived, anywhere. We have longer weekends and shorter workdays, bigger vacations and earlier retirement—adding up to more leisure than some of us know what to do with.

While we have less access to places of worship than the clergy and others in the religious life, churches and chapels are more favorably located in terms of time and convenience than ever before. And the noon, afternoon and evening Masses, together with the relaxed regulations for the Communion fast, bring the Mass and the sacraments within comparatively easy range.

As for reminders, while the bells in our town may no longer ring out the Angelus, we are far more fortunate than earlier generations in the religious books, magazines, newspapers and pamphlets everywhere available, to say nothing of the radio and television programs of religious significance that can be ours for the turning of a knob.

Admitting all this, the time-place-reminder situation still constitutes a mammoth handicap to the soul in search of recollection. The difficulty is that though

leisure, in the sense of time away from the job, has grown, the attractive secular demands upon that leisure have more than kept pace. Though our access to churches, to the Mass and the sacraments is favorable, our fevered pace all too often causes us to rush into a noontime Mass at the Gospel and leave it immediately after Communion, wondering if we've done right to steal these precious moments from our crowded lunch period.

And though we have the vast advantage of a well-advanced Catholic literature and press, we have also to contend with the almost overwhelming pressure of a materialistic secular press, the flamboyant sensualism of the paperbacks, the movies that "go farther" every year, and the trash that saturates most of a normal evening's watching of television.

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We live surrounded by noise; but recollection thrives only in quiet. Our world is in turmoil; but recollection demands serenity. Violence assails us as the crime statistics demonstrate; but recollection cries for peace. The atomic age threatens mankind with an unbelievable horror; and this the spirit of recollection can only abhor.

Enmeshed as we are in this net of fevered living, buffeted by noise and turmoil, bereft of peace and quiet, spinning frantically in a whirlpool of anxieties, how can we of the laity live a recollected life?

The spirit of recollection requires not only that we make the Morning Offering, but that we live with God in the back of our minds, so to speak, all day long. But isn't this asking too much? How can a mother be recollected when simultaneously the baby is crying, the telephone is ringing, somebody is at the front door, and the smell of the oven indicates that the casserole must come out—this minute!

How can a person be recollected driving a car through traffic, with income-tax problems, payroll schedules, and a painful phone call that must be made within the next 30 minutes, preying on his mind?

Or to veer away from extremes, how can recollection be practiced in a world in which exterior cares absorb so much attention and even our leisure more and more consists of a hectic round of meetings, socializing and that host of activities which fall under the category of “getting ahead”?

The fact is that recollection can be practiced and achieved even in such a world; indeed, it *must* be if we are to live as God would have us live.

We who have no time, must *make* time for the health of our souls. Time for daily Mass, to the extent that it does not interfere with our duties. Time for spiritual reading, again fitted into the demands of vocation and circumstances. But, above all, time for what St. Teresa of Avila called the prayer of recollection.

Like a businessman lopping off departments of his enterprise which give no indication of ever being able to pull their own weight, we have to cut out of our lives those occupations and activities, unnecessary to our state of life, which overburden us, agitate us, and in the words of Father Joseph Schryvers, C.Ss.R., “dry up the heart, and finally bring disgust for the interior life.”

We must exercise will power, take inventory of the hours of our day. What portion of our time is given to activities corresponding closely to the duties of our vocation? What portion is given to activities which correspond loosely or are of indifferent value to our vocation? And what portion is given over to things totally extraneous? Specifically, do we devote far too many precious hours to television entertainment, light reading, idle conversation, social pleasures, or other forms of relaxation?

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To lead a well-ordered spiritual life, we must weed out enough unessentials to provide time for what Father Schryvers calls “that peaceful self-possession which is the basis of the perfect life.” And the core of this self-possession is to be found in the prayer of recollection.

This is simply a withdrawal of our attention from exterior things in order to give our attention to God. “It is called recollection,” St. Teresa of Avila says, “because the soul collects together all the faculties and enters within itself to be with its God.” In this prayer, she explains, “it is well to reflect for a time...[but] we must sometimes remain by His side with our minds hushed in silence. If we can, we should occupy ourselves in looking upon Him Who is looking at us; keep Him company; talk with Him; pray to Him; humble ourselves before Him; have our delight in Him.”

And further: “Speak with Him as with a Father, a Brother, a Lord, and a Spouse—and sometimes in one way and sometimes in another, He will teach you what you must do to please Him.”

Having made time, what shall we do to find a place? Must we go to a church or chapel in which to practice this prayer of recollection? Again, let us listen to the saint of Avila:

“Remember how St. Augustine tells us about his seeking God in many places and eventually finding Him within himself? Do you suppose it is of little importance that a soul which is so often distracted should come to understand this truth and to find that, in order to speak to its Eternal Father or to take its delight in Him, it has no need to go to Heaven or to speak in a loud voice? However quietly we speak, He is so near that He will hear us; we need no wings to go in search of Him but have only to find a place where we

can be alone and look upon Him present within us.”

Nor is it even absolutely necessary that we be physically alone. Interior solitude can be had anywhere, so long as we make an effort to withdraw our minds even if only for the moment from what is going on around us and focus our attention on the indwelling God.

Out of these periods of prayer will develop the habit of turning to God at intervals during the day and these turnings will grow in number until eventually we may come to a recollection which “sees” God in all that occurs, task by task, event by event, almost moment by moment. Thus the prayer of recollection will be increasingly renewed by continual glances of the mind Godward until it becomes the thread which ties together all the happenings of all our days.

This may come to pass slowly or rapidly, depending partly on our faithfulness but ultimately of course on God’s favor. As St. Teresa expresses it, however, “If you become accustomed to having Him at your side, and if He sees that you love Him to be there and are always trying to please Him, you will never be able, as we put it, to send Him away.”

Recollection, all the spiritual writers agree, must be wooed; it cannot be forced. It would be sheer foolishness to say to ourselves: All this day I am going to force myself to be aware of the presence of God within me. That way lies only disappointment, irritability and eventually even disgust with the whole idea. This does not mean that a resolution is fruitless, nor that we should not deliberately cause our attention to turn to God. But such turnings should never be agitated or strained or forced, but rather calm though firm, tranquil though definite, leisurely, unhurried, gentle.

Ejaculatory prayer has been recommended at least from the time of St. Augustine as a most important aid to

recollection. In fact St. Francis de Sales wrote: “As the great work of devotion consists in the exercise of spiritual recollection and ejaculatory prayers, the want of all other prayers may be supplied by them; but the loss of these can scarcely be repaired by any other means. Without them we cannot properly lead the contemplative life, and we can but poorly lead active life. Without them repose would be but idleness and labor vexation.”

Being spiritually recollected does not mean, of course, that we are consciously and directly thinking of God all day long. It does mean that we think of Him in this way often, perhaps only in quickly raising our heart or glancing, as it were, in His direction. But it means further that we are never very far removed from a consciousness of Him in the back of our mind. We are aware of Him somewhat as a lover is aware of being in the same room or same house as his beloved, even when he is not directly thinking of her, much less speaking to or looking at her.

And just as the lover never has to make a resolution that he will think of his beloved, so with the recollected soul. The fact that we desire to be aware of God—that we are attracted to thinking of Him—that we want it with a kind of quiet longing, this is the secret of recollection.

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Having achieved at least the beginnings of recollection, we find it no longer so necessary to fight off the distracting details of our daily living. Instead of excluding them, it becomes possible to make use of them. Take our work, for example. How often have we set out to “sanctify” our work by offering it to God, by submitting to its monotony and drudgery for His sake. This is good and undoubtedly profitable. But recollection leads us to permit our work to sanctify *us*. We see it as coming from the hand of the Lord, hearing in it His voice, accepting it as His gift,

knowing that it comes to us with His love. This is the work He gives us for our sanctification. We do not have to sanctify it; this would be our action. We have only to accept it and perform it with a pure intention as God's means of sanctifying us; this is viewing it as His action.

Seen in this light, the difference between prayer and work diminishes. God is to be found in both. As He is *in* our prayer, so He is *in* our labor. We become less eager to put

ourselves into our work and more eager to find Him there.

Then the words of John the Baptist become applicable to our lives: "He must become more and more, I must become less and less." For recollected souls, this is true of the whole of their lives: thoughts, words and deeds. In all of them Christ takes an ever-greater part—while their desires, their selfishness, their wills simply fade away.

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