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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

Nine: God Himself Is Our Assurance

BY CLARENCE J. ENZLER

The thoughts we have been presenting are not novel. They have all been designed to indicate that what St. Francis de Sales said, three and a half centuries ago, remains true today: that “a strong, resolute soul can live in the midst of the world without embracing worldly ideas, that sources of holiness can be found in the hardships of the world, and that one can live among the flames of earthly desires without burning one’s wings.” Indeed, it is by bearing witness to Christ in precisely this world and in our particular occupations and circumstances—by being, in short, completely what we are—that holiness, even heroic holiness, can and must be achieved.

We must want precisely what God wants for us—no more, no less—here and hereafter. St. Thérèse demonstrated this by writing in her famed Act of Oblation, “I desire to fulfill perfectly Thy will, and to reach the degree of glory Thou hast prepared for me in Thy kingdom.” The heroic soul therefore desires exactly that role in the world, in the Church, and even in heaven, which God has destined for it—no more, no less.

But surely over the centuries some formula, some secret, some “method” must have been developed for achieving sanctity. The only formula, the only secret, the saints have been able to prescribe is to love God. This is both the means to sanctity and its end; the means because it is the only way to go to God, the end because sanctity is nothing other than a heroic love of God. Because each moment and each act of loving God makes us love Him more, the means inevitably leads to the end. “If you really want to love God,” St. Francis said, “go on and love Him more and more. Never look back. Move forward constantly. Begin as a humble

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.

apprentice and the very power of love will draw you on to become a master in the art.”

The “method” the spiritual doctors offer, then, might be summed up in two words: Do it! Instead of trying to find out *how* we can learn to love God, it is far better to begin to *practice* loving Him, far better to *do it*.

Although there is no precise formula for attaining sanctity—because sanctification depends on God’s action—there are certain essentials of attitude on our part which render us receptive to the divine action. These essentials can be signified by the two words just referred to: Do it! Four letters: D-O-I-T, each letter standing for one of the essentials.

The first step toward holiness—toward loving God—is to desire to love Him. So the first letter, *D*, indicates desire.

No one will ever be a saint who does not want to be holy—who does not want it with a deep and abiding desire. God implants this desire, but we ourselves are charged with keeping it alive. The saints *desired* holiness, some of them from early childhood. St. Teresa was a little girl of seven when she set off with her brother, Rodrigo, hoping to reach the country of the Moors, there to be martyred. An uncle overtook the children and brought them home. But the little Teresa offered the totally logical explanation that she had run away because “I want to see God, and to see Him we must die.”

Having failed in this first endeavor, the little Teresa turned to other ways. She built “little hermitages” in an orchard at home. Later she decided to become a nun, but her father refused permission. After a period which probably lasted many months, she left home early one morning with one of her brothers, he to enter the Dominicans, she to become a Carmelite. When her father saw the extent of her desire, he made no further objection but yielded his full consent. Teresa, at the time, was 20 years old.

Her desire to “see God” is reminiscent of the question another future saint kept

putting to the monks of Monte Cassino. Young Thomas of Aquino asked over and over, “What is God?” foreshadowing his desire to know and love Him.

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The Little Flower, St. Thérèse, was equally intent on seeking God. Like Teresa, she had to overcome formidable obstacles, not from her father but from Church authorities because of her tender age. Nevertheless, she entered the Carmel of Lisieux at the age of 15. She states matter of factly in that section of her autobiography addressed to Mother Marie de Gonzague, “As you know, dear Mother, I’ve always wished that I could be a saint.”

And at least one of the saints, whose name I fail to recall, is said to have departed his home leaving behind a note: “Gone away to be a saint.”

Desire is different by far from a whim. Some persons say, “I’d give my right arm to play the piano.” Actually, they wouldn’t give even 15 minutes a day to learn to play the piano. True desire is that quality which the football coach often sees exemplified in undersized kids: a burning drive to make the team, a passion, a consuming want, a hunger that refuses to take no for an answer. That it has its counterpart in the spiritual life is evident in the writings and actions of a multitude of saints: for example, in the constant day and night longing of St. Catherine of Siena for Holy Communion.

Desire remains the starting point of sanctity, no matter how old we become. It grows as holiness grows. Thus, St. Teresa could write at the age of 62, “I am very old and tired now, though I still have good desires.”

The second essential is a kind of optimism that is apparently a universal quality of the saints. It was not for nothing that St. Teresa could not abide “a sad saint.”

The optimism of the saints is compounded of two basic sentiments: Of myself I can do nothing; with God there is nothing I cannot do. St. Thérèse, on comparing herself to the saints and concluding that they were like “great mountains” while she was only “an insignificant grain of sand,” nevertheless, was not discouraged. As she herself relates, “I said to myself: ‘God wouldn’t inspire us with ambitions that can’t be realized. Obviously there’s nothing great to be made of me, so it must be possible for me to aspire to sanctity in spite of my insignificance. I’ve got to take myself just as I am, with all my imperfections; but somehow I shall have to find out a little way, all of my own, which will be a direct short cut to heaven.’”

What superb optimism, trust, confidence, call it what you will.

Yet such optimism is not misplaced, since it is placed in the Omnipotent. Did not St. Paul write to the Philippians that God, Who had begun His good in them, would continue to perfect it? And did not St. Francis de Sales explain that such should be our confidence in God as to believe that He would “rather work a miracle than fail in giving her [the humble soul] the power to accomplish what she attempts, because she undertakes it not relying on her own strength but on the gifts which God has bestowed on her.”

Our confidence must be grounded on the infinite goodness of God, knowing that if we place all in His hands He will provide. After all, we are God’s sons and daughters. We sometimes reflect on the wonder of having God for our Father, but seldom on what it means to be His son, of what we should be doing and feeling because we are sons and daughters. The heroically holy soul has the confidence a child of God should have.

What have we to fear from the elements? We are His sons.

What have we to fear from earthly creatures? We are His sons.

What shall we fear from other men? We are His sons.

What have we to fear from Satan himself? We are God’s sons.

As sons and daughters, princes and princesses of an Omnipotent King, our trust should be unbounded, our love unlimited.

Desire, or the will to be a saint, and optimism, or the trust that God will provide, are only the groundwork. We must build on them by initiating action, by taking positive steps in the direction of sanctity and holiness. In this respect, spiritual goals are no different than other objectives. How many times have we desired to do something—and believed we could—but for one reason or another never took the first step and as a result found our desire cooling, then dying.

Never does God call anyone without providing the capacity to respond. If ever we have felt impelled to surrender ourselves completely to Him—and who has not?—then we may be sure that He has invited us to sainthood.

Where we fail is in holding back our assent. Just as the alcoholic takes the first essential step toward conquering his affliction by admitting with conviction: I *am* an alcoholic; so our first great stride toward holiness is made when we say with earnest honesty, “Yes, my God, I *want* to be a saint.”

It is this that so many of us put off so long. We brush aside God’s call, perhaps deliberately, burying ourselves in business or pleasure of worldly pursuits. We turn away, saying in effect, “I’ll think about being a saint tomorrow.”

The third essential, therefore, represented by *I*, is *initiative*, making a definite start. St. Francis de Sales places great store on a decision to give one’s whole being over to God. In his *Introduction to the Devout Life*, he provides a formal act of consecration for the soul intent on living the devout life. He regards it as a most solemn occasion, one to be preceded by much deep and prayerful

consideration and accompanied by a reception of the sacraments. The heart of his act of consecration consists of the following total dedication: "Turning myself toward my most gracious and merciful God, I desire, purpose, determine, and am irrevocably resolved to serve and love Him now and forever. To this end, I give and consecrate to Him my spirit with all its faculties, my soul with all its powers, my heart with all its affections, and my body with all its senses, protesting that I will nevermore abuse any part of my being against His divine will and sovereign Majesty, to whom I offer up and sacrifice myself in spirit, to be forever His loyal, obedient, and faithful creature, without ever revoking or repenting this my act and deed."

A similar total dedication is St. Thérèse's oblation in which she offered herself as a victim of the merciful love of God. This prayer which was not found until after her death reposed in a copy of the Gospels she carried with her at all times.

Some such consecration or decision to belong entirely to God, is, if not absolutely necessary, at least immensely helpful. St. Francis made a special point of urging the renewal of the act of consecration each year on its anniversary day, considering it, in a sense, as less vital to perfection than only the day of one's Baptism.

The all-important thing is to begin, to start, to initiate; to set aside time for prayer, and to *begin, praying*; for spiritual reading, and to *start reading*; for frequent, if not daily, Mass and the sacraments, and to *commence them*; for one's chosen apostolate, and to *initiate it*.

And this brings us to the final essential and the final letter in our acrostic: T—T for Tenacity. Hundreds of millions may have desire. Tens of millions may combine desire with optimism. Millions may be moved to desire and optimism to initiate. But how many have the *tenacity*, the fortitude, the

perseverance, to carry through to heroic holiness? We must strive for a toughness of spirit which will stick it out against the devil's most dangerous tool, discouragement.

The essence of this tenacity appears to be the preservation of a great and holy calmness of mind, which in turn rests upon complete self-abandonment to whatever God wills for us. Though our lives may be a continual warfare, our role is to preserve a peaceful spirit, to guard ourselves against spiritual unrest, and if our heart goes astray, sweetly and gently to call it back to God's presence and His love.

This is all God asks; that we keep turning our souls toward Him, that we give Him our heart's love. This done, the rest is His affair and He carries it to a holy conclusion through the working within us of the Holy Spirit.

What a consolation it is to realize that to be heroically holy we need only give ourselves into His hands and permit Him to make us completely what we are, completely what He intended us to be. "If we are clever, then to be clever; if we are not clever, then not to be clever; if we are successful, then to be successful; if not successful, then not to succeed; if in good health, then to be healthy; if sickly, then to be sickly; and so on. Perfect simplicity with regard to ourselves; perfect contentment with everything that comes our way; perfect peace of mind in utter self-forgetfulness." Says Archbishop Alban Goodier, S.J.

God made us to be great. He made us to be heroic. He made us to be holy.

All we need do is welcome the *desire* to love Him He gives us; cherish the *optimism* with which He encourages us; *initiate* the action to which He inspires us; cling *tenaciously* to the hope of heroic holiness He holds before us.

We can do it. God Himself is our assurance.

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