

*Fr. Perozich comments —*

*After reading the article below, I have a confession to make.*

*Before curious perverted minds start to wonder, “With whom and how many times?”, I will admit it is much worse than that!*

*For a long time now, I do not recall desiring to be a saint, to have perfect union with God, to be holy as He is holy.*

*I pray daily, and know that it is He who draws me to prayer and is present to me in the encounter.*

*My goals for prayer, however, have been to have a peaceful spirit through overcoming temptations, avoiding sin, resolving any of life’s anxieties which disturb my peace.*

*A woman who claims to be in touch with the Holy Spirit told me that she knew that I was not a holy man. I believe that God may have revealed that to her in order that she tell me this because I had not thought about becoming a saint in quite a while.*

*The same woman obviously was overcome by her own earthly spirit or by an evil spirit when she said that I moved to Hawaii to have girlfriends.*

*I live alone, sleep alone, have a few good friends who get together in group, rather than in particular friendships, for prayer, dinner, and fellowship. So the reader can still those perverted curious thoughts.*

*During my time as an active priest/pastor, I always prayed privately in addition to liturgies. The formation I was exposed to in diocesan events such as convocations, mandatory assemblies, deanery meetings was worldly business of parish administration, immigration issues, running schools, and on and on. It did nothing or maybe even impeded my desire for sainthood.*

*As the author tells us in the second paragraph particularly during the troubled times in the church and in the world, **“our duty is in securing our own sanctification.”***

*This I did by affiliating with priests dedicated to their own spiritual development, with real substantive presentations by priests dedicated to building up the souls of us parish priests,*

*men who were doing the same for themselves in their religious orders and monasteries.*

*As the author notes, the changes in the church may have obscured the goal of becoming a saint. Her warning about bad church leaders giving permission to do what you decide to be right for you, shows how this attitude infects the church, its ministers, all the faithful, and wipes away the desire to become a saint.*

*She clearly lays out classic Catholic spirituality as the cure to this evil infection for the revival of the desire to become a saint.*

*I learned in seminary the necessity and power of prayer. We were also taught the “purgative, illuminative, and unitive” states of progress toward holiness. Lectio Divina was offered for our participation.*

*I did all of these, but somewhere along the line forgot about becoming a saint, seeking rather a peace in my soul from the craziness in the church these days, from the political nonsense in our country, the societal moral rot.*

*Now is the time for a new thrust toward sainthood, for each one to secure his own sanctification as she says.*

*The greatest wonderworking I am able to do is get up, drink coffee, and pray in the morning, and offer Holy Mass each day*

*So far, I have to take a plane from Maui if I want to be in the mainland, so I guess bi-location has not been granted me yet.*

*If I want to get something from the kitchen top shelf, I need a step stool since levitation is not yet part of my life.*

*Ecstasy right now only is when Hunter Renfroe of the Padres hits a walk off grand slam in the bottom of the 9th inning to beat the Dodgers rather loss of control of myself in the presence of God.*

*The only visions I see are the beauty of this island with my earthly eyes, rather than the Beatific Vision of God and His saints.*

*This article has awakened in me readiness to pursue fully sainthood for myself.*

*Oremus pro invicem: let us pray for one another each in a full on effort toward becoming a saint.*

# How to Become a Great, Wonderworking, Levitating, Bilocating, Ecstatic-Vision- Having Saint



Hilary White May 2, 2019

**Sanctification: Neither as easy nor as  
impractical as we think**

Many people are wondering how to handle the current crisis in the Church, what they can *do* in practical terms, in a situation that seems increasingly apocalyptic and completely out of their hands. We've been dissatisfied with the answers we've had so far from the very few ecclesiastics willing to publicly admit there even is a crisis: that we should just carry on as if nothing were happening; pay, pray, and obey. We live in an era that reveres activity above all. But while the insouciance with which the advice is usually given is infuriating and seems patronizing, it is essentially true. The number of people who can ameliorate or solve our current ecclesial problems is very small. If you are not a cardinal or bishop, there's very little you can *do* in the sense of action. For nearly everyone, the "solution" to the crisis is not at this level.

For us ordinary people, the unglamorous news is that ***our duty lies in securing our own sanctification***, exactly as it has in every other age and circumstance. And if this doesn't seem like a "practical" solution, just allow yourself a moment to imagine what the Church and the world would look like if, let's say, only one Catholic in ten were to achieve the kind of extraordinary sanctity we revere in the truly great saints like Padre Pio, Catherine of Siena, Francis of Assisi, Benedict and Scholastica. What *would* the world look like if a hundred and twenty million people dispersed throughout every nation on Earth were saints of this caliber?

We modern Catholics, who have undergone the great collective memory wipe of the new dispensation, suffer from a lack of the Catholic imagination; we have been taught to agree with worldlings who disdain the miraculous, the extraordinary, and downgrade and even dismiss as outdated the “spooky” aspects of the Faith. This is enforced when we are told by the highest authority that the very miracles of Christ in the Gospels, like the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, are mere naturalistic [1] or psychological “miracles of sharing”.

But true Catholicism casts off the dull constraints of mere materialism and naturalism; we mad bead-squeezers dare to believe in *real*, supernatural miracles, direct actions of God that break all the rules. Catholicism without miracles, starting with the Resurrection, can be nothing more than pop psychology and advice-columnism. Or worse: politics.

One of the malign effects of the modern “saint factory” — the highly questionable abolition of a meaningful canonical process [2] and the unprecedented canonization of hundreds of people during the pontificate of John Paul II — has been to downgrade sanctification in the collective Catholic mind. We forget the extraordinary glories of a figure like St. Philip Neri — the miracles, the extraordinary mystical phenomena, all documented and proven authentic — that were until recently understood to be important signs of heroic virtue, sanctity. In short, if everyone is a saint, if the bar is set so low as to be

effectively nonexistent, then no one is a saint, and any concern we might have about the quality of our own efforts dissolves. If it's that easy, why worry about it?

It seems like an odd paradox of the new dispensation of Catholicism that it holds sanctification to be both easier than before and completely impossible. This apparent paradox is resolved when we understand that we are in fact talking about two entirely different proposals. New Catholicism's version of sanctification is completely different from Old Catholicism's version.

Now what if, through the action of Divine Providence, a person starts to understand what is *really* involved: the radical transformation of life and the rejection of sin *as a starting point*? What if, reading the lives of these great saints, he comes to see that the bar used to be set very high indeed? One of the reasons usually cited by defenders of the current status of canonizations is that the old way of thinking about sanctity is intimidating. The bar was too high, they say, and it created an impossible standard that could only discourage. To someone accustomed to the New Catholicism's point of view, real — let's call it "first tier" — sanctification could seem to be an impossible, unfair demand.

This is the falsehood that has led to the most vicious aspect of the Walter Kasper doctrine, finally made explicit in *Amoris Laetitia*, that the old-fashioned Catholic idea of repentance and grace is merely a dispensable, optional extra, a "heroic ideal," suitable for

the very few (or none) [3]. *According to the new dispensation, if after due consideration you decide that adultery or any other sin is OK, then by all means, carry on, with God's blessing. What's most important is how you feel about you.*

But this pernicious lie, this modernist counsel of despair, disappears as soon as one actually does read the lives of the great saints. It is maybe not said often enough, but apart from the extraordinary graces given to them, each of these great wonderworking saints was a perfectly ordinary human being. The Holy Ghost is no respecter of persons; saints can be made from emperors and beggars, tradesmen, peasants and fishermen, as well as criminals. The modernist, Kasperian proposal leaves the divine will entirely out of the picture. But the true teaching of the Faith is **that the very desire to begin to pursue holiness comes from God. Every urge to pray, to turn away from sin, to ask for divine assistance originates with Him.** The way may seem difficult to us down here, but in the ultimate reality of Heaven, it is God who does the heavy lifting.

We see in the lives of the First Tier Saints that the key factor is the love of God, who is waiting to shower His gifts of grace on anyone who shows the slightest interest or puts in the least effort. Even the greatest sinners — prostitutes and profligates (St. Mary of Egypt), murderers and thieves (St. Moses the Black, St. Vladimir), apostates and demon-worshippers (St. Bartolo Longo), adulterers and fornicators (St.

Augustine of Hippo and St. Margaret of Cortona) — have been completely changed by seeking this union. In mystical theology, it is called the “Transforming Union” for a reason.

The 30<sup>th</sup> of April is the feast of St. Catherine of Siena. We read that at a very early age, through the action of grace, Catherine sequestered herself in a tiny cubicle in her family home to better practice her interior life of intense prayer and penance. And by tiny, I mean three feet wide by nine feet long. Broom closets are bigger. She lived in this way, according to the Legend in the Roman Breviary, for “several years.” After this she was granted a vision of the Blessed Virgin who “placed upon her finger a ring, in token of her mystical marriage with [Our Lady’s] divine Son.” At this point, the still illiterate Catherine became so influential in the affairs of the world that her counsel was sought by everyone of every station in life, rich, poor, lay, and religious, including the pope, Urban VI, who commanded her to live in Rome so she could counsel him. At her death, the invisible stigmata she bore through life became visible.

Philip Neri, the “third apostle of Rome”, came as a young man to the City from Florence — giving up an apprenticeship in business arranged by his family — and by the end of his life in 1595 had founded two congregations, one for priests and one for laity, and had also become a counselor of the mighty. Known in his own time as a wonderworker, Philip healed bodies and converted souls and even raised the dead. But he was



not born a saint. His sanctification was won by a hard road: years of obscurity and poverty — he eked out a bare existence tutoring the sons of the wealthy, living in simple lodgings and studying philosophy in his off hours — but mainly by intense and prolonged prayer.

For years he spent his nights in ecstatic contemplative prayer, hiding in the ancient labyrinth of catacombs under Rome. During this time he experienced several extraordinary mystical transformations, the most famous of which is when the Holy Spirit appeared as a ball of flame that entered his body and physically enlarged his heart and caused his body to generate great heat. Those who gathered in his rooms to hear his counsels reported the room shaking with the beating of his heart when he spoke of God. Upon Philip's death, it was discovered that his heart had expanded to such a size that his ribs had cracked to accommodate it.

Reading these lives, we see immediately that sanctity of the highest order is rare and extraordinary, yet we are effectively commanded to achieve it. This apparently impossible conundrum is solved by a single line of the Gospel: "With men it is impossible, but with God all things are possible." We are not called to barely make it into Heaven. The imperative "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect..." is not something to be passed over lightly. Nor is it an unjust, impossible demand. Therefore, the question "how?" takes on an immediate urgency. But it is also at the

same moment solved by the lives of the saints. What did they do? Do that.

## **Prayer and the ABCs of sanctification**

We hear many times that we must “deepen our prayer life”. Easy to say, but exactly what does it mean? It’s a somewhat alarming truth of the Faith that we are all — every one of us in every station and condition of life — *required* to attempt the great heights. And we are all given exactly the same means to make the attempt. Every spiritual writer from the earliest centuries to our own time has said the same thing: the means is **prayer**. Without this key ingredient — **the striving of the soul for union with God** — even the power of the sacraments is muted. It is only and exclusively through prayer that a soul is made capable of receiving the sacramental grace dispensed by God through the Church. **Prayer is the rain that softens the hard earth of our souls to receive the seed of the Divine Sower, the grace of the Holy Ghost.**

The great abbess, Cecile Bruyère, student of the 19th-century Benedictine reformer and reviver Dom Guéranger, wrote in her book [4] “The Spiritual Life and Prayer According to Holy Scripture and Monastic Tradition”:

*One thing, however, is required both as the condition and the means for bringing about our restoration [sanctification]; without it man can*

*attain only a philosophical and human perfection, quite inadequate to the supernatural being whereunto he has been raised. This essential is PRAYER. (All-caps in the original) ...*

*We may not choose our own ways of reaching supernatural perfection. To pray or not to pray is no matter of choice; on the contrary, there is nothing more important than prayer, as we learn from many expressions in the writings of the saints — expressions which, at first sight, might seem to be mere pious exaggerations, whereas they are strictly true.*

Nothing at all, no spiritual progress of any sort, can be made by the soul without prayer.

This is the ancient pattern laid before us by all the saints. The Carmelite description of it divides the stages into three: the way of “purgation, illumination and union”. The purgative way is the effortful ousting of sins great and small and the rooting out of all faults, mental or meditative prayer based on reading Scripture, the increase of knowledge of the truths of the Faith, and expressions of the emotions in prayer (“affective prayer”). The way of “illumination” is the start of “infused contemplation” when God more and more takes the reins. The way of “union” is the ultimate end for which we are all created: union with the Living God [5]. This is that “transforming union” part we’ve been talking about, that it seems is very difficult to mistake when you see it: the bi-locating, levitating, stigmata-bearing, vision-having kind of sanctity. It’s the kind that prompts you to make jokes while you’re

being grilled to death, or to not even notice when you're being eaten by lions in the arena.

This threefold "way" is the great secret of the Christian life. It's not enough to "try to be good," to avoid sin or even to receive the sacraments [6]. One *must* become holy, and that is an interior work. The Christian life *is* this conscious striving for union with Christ through prayer. Without it, even sacramental grace cannot chip through the stony layers.

### **Yes, but how?**

Fr. Cassian Folsom of the Benedictines of Norcia describes it much better than I could.

#### **Sensus Fidelium**

#### **Personal Prayer & Lessons from the Rule of St. Benedict ~ Fr. Cassian Folsom, O.S.B.**

When we hear religious talk about prayer, it can seem strange when they say they do it all day. Don't they run out of things to say? But we worldly types mostly think of prayer as just "talking to God," and particularly as asking Him for things. It's mostly what we do for the five minutes or so of quiet after Mass, if we're lucky enough to have that kind of parish. But when we read someone like St. Paul say we must "pray without ceasing" this simple answer is revealed as

inadequate. He can't mean spending all day asking for things, and it doesn't seem quite right to "talk to God" all day about nothing, as though you're making awkward chit-chat with a relative you don't know well. The problem is that most of us have never been taught more than what we knew as children [7] about prayer — mainly vocal recitation of memorized prayers [8].

Here's the great secret of the saints: prayer isn't just "talking to God" the way you chat with the neighbors. The kind of prayer St. Paul and all the other saints are talking about is what is called the "interior life," the ability to turn one's attention to God throughout every waking moment of the day, in the midst of all of life's activities. If it sounds easy, try it for half an hour without getting distracted.

Abbess Cecile, and the ancient sources she quotes, means not "talking" — vocal prayer — still less the empty recitation of memorized prayers — but "mental prayer," the full engagement of the mind and imagination and of all the soul's faculties, that starts with meditation on Scripture. This is why the Divine Office is so firmly based in the Psalms. Eight times a day, a monk of the Benedictine Rule turns his whole attention to God, singing back to the Source all that he reads.

Simply put, this idea of prayer is the process of slowly infusing of the soul with the mind of God as He has revealed Himself to us in Scripture, to come finally to acquire, insofar as possible in this life, the mind of God as one's own.

The Benedictine way of individual prayer [9], called “Lectio divina,” or divine reading, is more practically oriented and less concerned with theory and terminology — “mansions” and stages and all that — which I personally find confusing and distracting. It involves four steps: “Lectio,” “Meditatio,” “Oratio,” and “Contemplatio.” A Benedictine priest I asked once just said, “Well, I read a little bit, then I think about it.” The Rule is terse on the subject, too.

Lectio is the first stage and is simply the “slow meditative reading of Scripture or the saints.” A single, short passage of Scripture is read and re-read and mulled over, held in the mind as though the Lord is speaking directly to the person’s soul through His word [10]. “Meditatio” is the mind’s digestion of the verse, allowing it to sink in. “Oratio,” or “speaking,” naturally follows and is the person’s response to the word of the Lord spoken through the text. The fourth part is “contemplatio” and is the most mysterious stage, since it is mostly out of the control of the person praying. This is where the Lord “speaks” back to the soul, lifting up to heights it could not reach on its own.

As a method, its simplicity belies its greatness. The St. Benedict’s Rule exhorts monks to have the mind follow what the voice is saying. Even the choral recitation of the Psalms that makes up most of the Divine Office — that great “work of God” that takes up to 4 or 5 hours of a monk’s day — is meant to be delved into by the monk doing the reciting [11]. At no time is a monk expected merely to “say” his prayers without the

full engagement of his mind. If his mind wanders from the text, as soon as he realizes, he is to correct himself and guide his attention gently back to the content of what he is chanting.

This ancient tradition of Scripture-based mental prayer is deceptively simple. The spiritual writers say it can be as little as 15 or 20 minutes a day, for a busy layman. The time it takes to say a few decades of the Rosary with attention to the mysteries. The time it takes to get oneself going in the morning over a cup of coffee [12]. For a person in the world, any spare moment can be filled with this method, and of course, every smartphone in the world can provide access to the biblical source material.

That's it. There's no other secret method to becoming a saint, and sanctity is not the reserve of the specially gifted. There is no gene for sanctification. Abbess Cecile reminds us only that the content of what we read must be reliable. Scripture and the commentary of the saints is the normal material for meditation. ***She recommends the study of dogmatic, not moral, theology, since it is the teaching of the Church on the nature of God that illumines the meaning of Scripture.*** “The study of dogma raises the soul to higher regions and shows it the divine Exemplar of the true, the good and the beautiful.”

And she puts before us a single compelling motivation: “[T]here is a happiness beyond that which comes from the enjoyment of visible things; no good

less than God will satisfy us, neither will any happiness less than fulfillment of God's promise to pour His own eternal joy into our souls."

### **NOTES:**

[1] Naturalism in philosophy says that only natural, material laws operate in the universe. It denies the truth of the miraculous by denying that there is anything outside nature, including God. If naturalism allows a god at all, it cannot be the transcendent God, the Creator of all existence who lives outside His creation as an author lives outside the book he writes, whom we know through revelation in Christianity.

[2] It's worth remembering the terrible effects on the modern Church of the financial corruption of the Vatican Curia. It probably wasn't John Paul's intention, but the massive volume of people now getting shoved through that office, with the immense fees involved, has made the Congregation for the Causes of Saints one of the wealthiest of all Vatican offices. The reforming saints of the Renaissance who thundered against simony and abuse of wealth would have a few rather sharp things to say about it.

[3] Until *Amoris Laetitia*, New Catholicism's downgrading of sanctification was only implicit; this is one reason we can thank the Lord for the advent of this pontificate that has elsewhere been described as a "great clarification."

[4] A precious and almost forgotten modern manual of sanctification based on ancient sources, that can now



be bought in translation from Wipf and Stock publishers, Eugene Oregon.

[5] I give only a brief description here. Eric Sammons has done an excellent two-part series giving details on this teaching at OnePeterFive. I think a danger beginners can fall into is spending too much time trying to work out which category one is in. A priest who Knows Things once told me, “If you are asking what stage you’re in, you’re a beginner.” His advice? Just pray. Just start. Get going. Let God tell you what stage you were in at various times in your life after you’re done, since His is the only important opinion anyway.

[6] This is not to say a person cannot be saved without prayer. God can do whatever He likes, and we don’t presume to say otherwise. But this is the normal way of pursuing holiness, which is nothing more than pursuing union with Him. Knowing this and refusing to do it because God *might* save anyway places the soul in grave danger of the sin of presumption.

[7] And the post-conciliar period hasn’t helped by allowing a proliferation of neo-modernist, quasi–New Age shysters deforming the terminology. Beware of “centering prayer” and “meditation techniques” based on anything non-Christian.

[8] A good and holy thing, never to be disdained. But not enough for a lifetime.

[9] In Benedictine life, prayer is divided into two: liturgical and individual, personal prayer. How liturgical prayer — the Divine Office as much as the Mass — fits in can be a subject for tomorrow.

[10] It's a good idea to start with a brief prayer asking the Holy Ghost to fill your mind and heart. "Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of Thy faithful and enkindle in them the fire of Thy love. Send forth Thy Spirit and they shall be created. And Thou shalt renew the face of the earth."

[11] This is why, in the Middle Ages, when each monk could not be given a breviary of his own, he was expected to commit the entire Psalter to memory.

[12] Though of course it's preferred to do it without distractions like eating or drinking.

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