

Catholic Candle

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Words to Live By – From Catholic Tradition

Mortifying Our Passions and Desires Helps Us Much More Than Choosing to Perform Unusual Voluntary Penances

Here is how St. John of the Cross, Mystical Doctor of the Church, counsels us:

One must greatly lament the ignorance of certain men, who burden themselves with extraordinary penances and with many other voluntary practices, and think that this practice or that one will suffice to bring them to the union with Divine Wisdom. But such will not be the case if they endeavor not diligently to mortify their desires. If they were careful to bestow half of that labor on this, they would profit more in a month than they profit by all the other practices in many years.

For, just as it is necessary to till the earth if it is to bear fruit, and unless it be tilled it bears nothing but weeds, so likewise is mortification of the desires necessary if the soul is to profit. Without this mortification, I make bold to say, the soul no more achieves progress on the road to perfection and to the knowledge of God of itself, however many efforts it might make, than the seed grows when it is cast upon untilled ground. Wherefore the darkness and rudeness of the soul will not be taken from it until the desires be quenched. For these desires are like cataracts, or like motes in the eye, which obstruct the sight until they be taken away.

Ascent Of Mount Carmel, St. John of the Cross, Bk.1, ch.8, §4.



Catholic Candle note: The article below is Part XXIV of the study of the temperaments, starting with the Choleric temperament. Here are links to the first twenty-three parts:

1. Part I: Beginning our study of the choleric temperament:
<https://catholiccandle.org/2024/08/27/lesson-35-about-the-temperaments-the->

[choleric-temperament/](#)

2. Part II: A general overview of the weaknesses of the Choleric Temperament:
<https://catholiccandle.org/2024/09/26/lesson-37-about-the-temperaments-continuation-of-the-choleric-temperament/>
3. Part III: A consideration of the pride of the Choleric Temperament:
<https://catholiccandle.org/2024/10/24/lesson-38-temperaments-choleric-temperament-their-spiritual-combat/>
4. Part IV: A general discussion of anger as a passion – in order to establish a foundation for studying anger in the Choleric Temperament:
<https://catholiccandle.org/2024/11/26/lesson-39-temperaments-choleric-temperament-their-spiritual-combat-part-iv/>
5. Part V: Concerning the motivations for anger:
<https://catholiccandle.org/2024/12/30/lesson-40-temperaments-choleric-temperament-their-spiritual-combat-part-v/>
6. Part VI: Concerning what anger does to the body:
<https://catholiccandle.org/2025/01/27/lesson-41-temperaments-choleric-temperament-a-cholerics-spiritual-combat-part-vi/>
7. Part VII: Explaining when anger is sinful:
<https://catholiccandle.org/2025/02/21/lesson-42-temperaments-choleric-temperament-a-cholerics-spiritual-combat-part-vii/>
8. Part VIII: Explaining how being slighted provokes anger:
<https://catholiccandle.org/2025/03/27/lesson-42-temperaments-choleric-temperament-a-cholerics-spiritual-combat-part-viii/>
9. Part IX: Explaining how anger turns into the sin of holding a grudge:
<https://catholiccandle.org/2025/04/23/lesson-44-temperaments-choleric-temperament-a-cholerics-spiritual-combat-part-ix/>
10. Part X: Recommendations to help choleric to overcome pride:
<https://catholiccandle.org/2025/05/20/lesson-45-temperaments-choleric-temperament-a-cholerics-spiritual-combat-part-x/>
11. Part XI: Explaining how a person sins by not using his reason:
<https://catholiccandle.org/2025/06/28/lesson-46-temperaments-choleric-temperament-a-cholerics-spiritual-combat-part-xi/>

12. Part XII: Explaining some reasons why a choleric does not use his reason properly: <https://catholiccandle.org/2025/07/24/lesson-47-temperaments-choleric-temperament-a-cholerics-spiritual-combat-part-xii/>
13. Part XIII: Explaining why the choleric fears to use his reason well: <https://catholiccandle.org/2025/08/29/lesson-48-temperaments-choleric-temperament-a-cholerics-spiritual-combat-part-xiii/>
14. Part XIV: Explaining generally how Satan targets our fallen and weakened intellects: <https://catholiccandle.org/2025/09/24/lesson-49-temperaments-choleric-temperament-the-cholerics-spiritual-combat-part-xiv/>
15. Part XV: Explaining the passions in general, to lay the foundation for our consideration of the passion of fear: <https://catholiccandle.org/2025/10/26/3050/>
16. Part XVI: Explaining fear as a passion: <https://catholiccandle.org/2025/11/25/lesson-51-temperaments-choleric-temperament-the-cholerics-spiritual-combat-part-xvi/>
17. Part XVII: Explaining how fear works in the soul and influences all of the temperaments: <https://catholiccandle.org/2025/12/29/lesson-52-temperaments-choleric-temperament-the-cholerics-spiritual-combat-part-xvii/>
18. Part XVIII: Explaining how pain and death are objects of fear for persons of any temperament: <https://catholiccandle.org/2026/01/26/lesson-53-temperaments-choleric-temperament-pain-and-death-are-objects-of-fearf-any-temperament/>
19. Part XIX: Explaining in what way sin is an object of fear for all temperaments: <https://catholiccandle.org/2026/02/26/lesson-54-temperaments-choleric-temperament-whether-sin-is-an-object-of-fear-for-all-temperaments/>
20. Part XX: Explaining the causes of fear – applying to all temperaments: <https://catholiccandle.org/2026/03/31/marys-school-of-sanctity-3/>
21. Part XXI: Explaining the effects of fear in all temperaments: <https://catholiccandle.org/2026/04/26/about-the-temperaments-part-xxi-explaining-the-effects-of-fear-in-all-temperaments/>
22. Part XXII: Explaining how to order our loves so we can use the passion of fear properly, and how the devil attempts to prevent this ordering: <https://catholiccandle.org/2026/05/28/about-the-temperaments-part-xxii-how-to-order-our-loves-so-we-can-use-the-passion-of-fear-properly/>

23. Part XXIII: Explanation of sloth in order to analyze this snare of Satan and to combat him: <https://catholiccandle.org/2026/06/26/about-the-temperaments-part-xxiii-explanation-of-sloth-in-order-to-analyze-this-snare-of-satan/>

24. Part XXIV: Explaining more about how the devil tries to draw us away from reasoning and from the things of God:
<https://catholiccandle.org/2026/07/29/about-the-temperaments-part-xiv-how-the-devil-draws-us-away-from-reasoning-and-the-things-of-god/>

Mary's School of Sanctity

Lesson #60 About the Temperaments – Part XXV – The Devil Attempts to Destroy Our Prayer-Life. How Should We Counterattack?

The Importance of Fostering a Strong Prayer Life

On many occasions, Our Lord emphasizes of the importance of prayer. He tells us to (1) persevere in prayer;¹ (2) be humble in prayer;² and to (3) trust in God saying, “And all things whatsoever you shall ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive.”³

He assures us that His heavenly Father cares about us. He taught His Apostles *The Lord's Prayer*, viz. *The Our Father*, which includes all of these aspects. In fact, *The Lord's Prayer* is the perfect prayer⁴ and is meant to be said with humble submission to God's will and a desire to receive our intellectual and spiritual daily bread.

Furthermore, Our Lord instructed His Apostles (and us) to ***pray always***. Our Lord said, “Watch ye, therefore, praying at all times, that you may be accounted worthy to escape all

¹ For help and encouragement to persevering in prayer, read this short article: <https://catholiccandle.org/2020/05/01/be-assured-your-prayers-are-always-answered-so-persevere/>

² “The prayer of him that humbleth himself, shall pierce the clouds”. *Ecclesiasticus*, 35:21.

³ *St. Matthew's Gospel*, 21:22.

⁴ For a greater appreciation of *The Our Father* and for help learning to pray it more perfectly, read this short article: <https://catholiccandle.org/2022/09/22/if-you-want-to-say-the-most-effective-prayer-say-the-our-father/>

these things that are to come, and to stand before the Son of man”⁵, and “Pray, lest you enter into temptation”.⁶

Since prayer is the lifting of the heart and mind to God,⁷ we fulfill this precept of Our Lord when we live in the presence of God and keep Him in our minds as we try to please Him in all of our thoughts and actions.

The Four Temperaments and How They Typically Affect the Soul’s Spiritual Life

As we saw in our last lesson,⁸ it is important to know ourselves so we can better use our inclinations to make spiritual progress and to avoid spiritual harm. This is one of the many reasons why it is crucial to discover our own particular temperament. But a person might say, “I do not know what temperament I have.” It is a major goal of this present study of the four temperaments that we will all gain a deeper understanding of the temperaments and discover our own temperament (if we have not already identified it). However, for the present, we list below some general characteristics and spiritual tendencies of persons with a predominance of one of the four temperaments:

A Choleric Tends to:

- Be extremely high strung;
- Be very excitable and prone to become agitated;
- Have lots of nervous energy;
- Allow his thoughts to race “a mile per minute” and thus he has a tendency to be superficial in his thinking. He needs to force himself to slow down and to deliberate carefully, especially to consider what is most pleasing to God. He has to force himself to relax and be calm; and

⁵ St. Luke’s Gospel, 21:36.

⁶ St. Luke’s Gospel, 22:40.

⁷ To better understand the essence of prayer, read this short article:
<https://catholiccandle.org/2024/08/10/cc-in-brief-essence-of-prayer/>

⁸ <https://catholiccandle.org/2026/07/29/about-the-temperaments-part-xiv-how-the-devil-draws-us-away-from-reasoning-and-the-things-of-god/>

- Be undaunted by anything and tends to be overconfident; this makes it difficult for him to cultivate a deep trust in God and also a healthy mistrust of himself.

A Sanguine Tends to:

- ❖ Predominantly use his imagination;
- ❖ Love beauty, especially in art and religious pictures;
- ❖ Be easily distracted and must strive to stay focused; and
- ❖ Be a shallower thinker and must make efforts to form the habit of probing deeper into a subject.

A Melancholic Tends to:

- † Use lots of considerations to analyze truths and to draw many conclusions;
- † Be a deeper thinker and be attracted to prayer;
- † Be prone to scruples; and
- † Be prone to worry and to a lack trust in God's Providence; he has to make efforts to look for hope in difficulties.

A Phlegmatic Tends to:

- ✓ Lack energy;
- ✓ Have a hard time motivating himself, as well as feeling and showing enthusiasm;
- ✓ Be a slow and methodical thinker; and
- ✓ Have a difficult time observing the movements of his soul because impressions need to be repeated many times before they leave a mark.

We can see from this short list of the spiritual tendencies of each temperament that some temperaments are more prone to reflection and prayer, while others are more prone to spiritual laziness. But we must remember that no temperament is immune from the traps of the devil! WE MUST NOT FORGET that the devil's pull to sloth can affect ALL souls although some souls fall into this trap more easily than others do. No one should disdain those souls who fall more easily into this snare. Instead, we should foster pity if

we find that prayer is easier for us than for some souls who find it almost impossible to focus and pray!

We must all be on our guard. In this lesson we will look at the Life of St. Teresa of Avila and find some striking snares that Satan used on her. We will see Satan's subtle temptations to lure her soul away from prayer. We will see how well she endured these temptations and see the ones for which she fell.

By looking at her experience we will be able to see how it is paramount for us to study ourselves and to be on high alert for anything that is detrimental to our prayer life.

Four Aspects Regarding the Spiritual Life of St. Teresa of Avila

In our present consideration of prayer and the devil's tricks, we will consider four aspects of the life of St. Teresa of Avila:

1. Her need to read a book in order to try to pray;
2. Her need to see a picture in order to pray;
3. Her description of her sloth; and
4. Her temptation to give up mental prayer in her meditations because she was not humble and sinless enough to pray.

With the help of William Thomas Walsh, one of her biographers, and using the *Rules for the Discernment of Spirits* of St. Ignatius of Loyola,⁹ we will be able to make the necessary connections between these four aspects in St. Teresa's prayer life. Indeed, we

⁹ For a thorough analysis of the *Rules for the Discernment of Spirits* of St. Ignatius of Loyola, read this five-part article:

1. <https://catholiccandle.org/2021/12/05/1409/>
2. <https://catholiccandle.org/2022/01/10/lesson-6-explanation-of-the-first-week-rules-for-the-discernment-of-spirits/>
3. <https://catholiccandle.org/2022/02/25/lesson-7-explanation-of-the-first-week-rules-for-the-discernment-of-spirits/>
4. <https://catholiccandle.org/2022/03/20/lesson-8-explanation-of-the-second-week-rules-for-the-discernment-of-spirits/>
5. <https://catholiccandle.org/2022/04/20/lesson-9-explanation-of-the-second-week-rules-for-the-discernment-of-spirits-part-2/>

will see how Satan was pulling her soul one way into one form of pride and then in another direction to drag her into a different form of pride.

Mr. Walsh explains how St. Teresa was vain, was caught up in worldly friendships, and was not willing to abandon herself completely to God.¹⁰ Furthermore, although she was careful to not commit any mortal sins, she was not cautious about venial sin and did not give up occasions of sin. We will see how these things led to her downfall.

Since St. Teresa was trying to avoid mortal sin, Satan tempted her with false reasoning in a different way. As St. Ignatius explains in his *Rules for the Discernment of Spirits*, this is a typical tactic of the devil.¹¹ The devil certainly did not want her to succeed in having a prayer life, so he deceived her to be disappointed that she needed to use a book to occupy her mind and needed to use a picture to touch her heart in order to move herself to make acts of love for God. Her disappointment in herself and her discouragement about her problems praying were temptations to pride.

Regarding the Need to Use a Book

She thought it was impossible for her to practice mental prayer without a book, and so she says,

Reading is of great service towards procuring recollection in anyone who proceeds in this way [*viz.*, the way of prayer]; and it is even necessary for him, however little it may be that he reads, if only as a substitute for the mental prayer which is beyond his reach.¹²

¹⁰ For example, see, *St. Teresa of Avila*, by William Thomas Walsh, Bruce Publishing Co., Milwaukee, ©1943, pages 75, 84-85.

¹¹ St. Ignatius explains:

In the persons who are going on intensely cleansing themselves from their sins and rising from good to better in the service of God our Lord, each spirit uses a method contrary to the one he used in the first Rule, for then it is the way of the evil spirit to bite, sadden and put obstacles, disquieting with false reasons, that one may not go on; and it is proper to the good [spirit] to give courage and strength, consolations, tears, inspirations and quiet, easing, and putting away all obstacles, that one may go on in well doing.

Rule #2 of the *Rules for the Discernment of Spirits Week One of the Spiritual Exercises*.

¹² Quoted from *the Autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila*, Ch. 4, ¶12.

And again,

*My soul was as much afraid to pray without one [viz., a book], as if it had to fight against a host [i.e., an army]. With a book to help me – it was like a companion, and a shield whereon to receive the blows of many thoughts – I found comfort; for it was not usual with me to be in aridity: **but I always was so when I had no book**; for my soul was disturbed, and my thoughts wandered at once. With one, [viz., **a book**] I began to collect my thoughts, and, using it as a decoy, kept my soul in peace, very frequently **by merely opening a book** – there was **no necessity for more**. Sometimes, I read but little; at other times, much – according as our Lord had pity on me.*¹³

Regarding Her Need to See a Picture

She expresses her disappointment in her poor imagination as follows:

God never endowed me with the gift of making reflections with the understanding, or with that of using the imagination to any good purpose; my imagination is so **sluggish**, that even if I would think of our Lord's Humanity, or picture It to myself, as I used to labor to picture It, I never could do it.¹⁴ ...

My understanding was so dull, that I could never represent in the imagination either heavenly or high things in any form whatever until our Lord placed them before me in another way.¹⁵

And again,

I was so little able to put things before myself by the help of my understanding, that, unless I saw a thing with my eyes, my imagination was of no use whatever. I could not do as others do, who can put matters before themselves so as to become recollected thereby. I was able to think of Christ only as man. But so it was; and I never could form any image of Him to myself, though I read much of His beauty, and looked at pictures of Him. I was like one who is blind, or in the dark, who, though speaking to a person present, and feeling his presence, because he knows for certain that he is present – I mean, that he understands him to be present, and

¹³ Quoted from *the Autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila*, Ch. 4, ¶13.

¹⁴ Quoted from *the Autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila*, Ch. 4, ¶10.

¹⁵ Quoted from *the Autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila*, Ch. 9, ¶6.

believes it – yet does not see him. It was thus with me when I used to think of our Lord. This is why I was so fond of images.¹⁶

During this period of her life, Satan deluded her to such an extent that she really thought that some people just could not engage in mental prayer. She thought that such people simply did not have the ability although they otherwise had normal abilities and use of their minds. She explained in her autobiography that she thought that she and some other people simply could not engage in mental prayer.

The problem was really with her will as she saw later on. We will treat mental prayer later in this lesson.

Regarding Her Dread of Prayer – Her Sloth

Satan deluded her, moving her to a great dread and fear of prayer. These quickly led her to sloth – *i.e.*, a distaste for the things of God and the loss of charity in the soul.

St. Ignatius of Loyola teaches us that Satan studies the soul in order to detect its weaknesses and then he attacks at those weak spots.¹⁷ This includes Satan pushing someone further in a bad direction in which he is already leaning. St. Teresa wrote,

I failed in my duty to God, because I was not leaning on the strong pillar of prayer. I passed nearly twenty years on this stormy sea, falling and rising, but rising to no good purpose, seeing that I went and fell again. My life was one of perfection;¹⁸ but

¹⁶ Taken from *the Autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila*, Ch. 9, ¶7.

¹⁷ St. Ignatius explains:

The enemy's behavior is like that of a military leader who wishes to conquer and plunder the object of his desires. Just as the commander of an army pitches his camp, studies the strengths and defenses of a fortress, and then attacks it on its weakest side, in like manner, the enemy of our human nature studies from all sides our theological, cardinal, and moral virtues. Wherever he finds us weakest and most in need regarding our eternal salvation, he attacks and tries to take us by storm.

Rule #14, of the *Rules for the Discernment of Spirits Week One of the Spiritual Exercises*.

¹⁸ St. Teresa is **not** saying here that she was perfect. When she says “my life was one of perfection” she refers to the fact that she was bound by the vows in the religious life. This life is called the “life of perfection” because this life has perfection **as its goal** and because this life **is ordered more directly to lead a person to becoming perfect**, as compared to the life of a layman. Here is how St. Thomas explains this distinction:

[Footnote continued on the next page.]

it was so mean, that I *scarcely made any account whatever of venial sins*; and though of mortal sins I was afraid, *I was not so afraid of them as I ought to have been, because I did not avoid the perilous occasions of them.* I may say that it was the most painful life that can be imagined, because I had no sweetness in God, and no pleasure in the world.¹⁹

And again,

When I was in the midst of the pleasures of the world, the remembrance of what I owed to God made me sad; and when I was praying to God, my worldly affections disturbed me. This is so painful a struggle, that I know not how I could have borne it for a month, let alone for so many years.²⁰

Later, speaking from the perspective of her better understanding of these matters after her conversion, she says,

I do not understand what there can be to make them afraid, who are afraid, to begin mental prayer, nor do I know what it is they dread. **The devil does well to bring this fear upon us, that he may really hurt us. By putting me in fear,** he can make me cease from thinking of my offences against God, of the great debt I owe Him, of the existence of heaven and hell, and of the great sorrows and trials He underwent for me **I was more occupied with the wish to see the end of the time I had appointed for myself to spend in prayer, and in watching the hour-glass, than with other thoughts that were good. If a sharp penance had been laid upon me, I know of none that I would not very often have willingly undertaken, rather than prepare myself for prayer by self-recollection.** And certainly the violence with which Satan assailed me was so

[Footnote continued from the previous page.]

One is said to be in the *state of perfection*, not through having the act of perfect love, but through binding himself in perpetuity and with a certain solemnity to those things that pertain to perfection. Moreover, it happens that some persons bind themselves to that which they do not keep [*viz.*, unfaithful religious], and some fulfil that to which they have not bound themselves [*viz.*, spiritual laymen], as in the case of the two sons (Matthew 21:28-30), one of whom when his father said: “Work in my vineyard,” answered: “I will not,” and “afterwards . . . he went,” while the other “answering said: I go . . . and he went not.” Wherefore nothing hinders some from being perfect without being in the state of perfection, and some in the state of perfection without being perfect.

Summa, IIa IIae, Q.184, a.4, *Respondeo* (bracketed words added for clarity).

¹⁹ Quoted from *the Autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila*, Ch. 8, ¶1 [bold and italic added for emphasis].

²⁰ Quoted from *the Autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila*, Ch. 8, ¶2.

irresistible, or my evil habits were so strong, that I did not betake myself to prayer; and **the sadness I felt on entering the oratory was so great, that it required all the courage I had to force myself in.**²¹

We can see by these quotes how the Father of lies attacks souls with great violence so he can dissuade them from practicing mental prayer. In these passages one must keep in mind that St. Teresa of Avila was primarily afflicted in her soul because she was not willing to give up worldly friendships. These are the occasions of sin to which she refers.

There were two occasions in which the Lord brought her to tears of compunction as she was beginning to convert and to change her life. Unfortunately, she viewed those tears as womanly weakness and tried to disregard them. She was choleric-sanguine in temperament and did not appreciate those precious tears as she ought to have done. In a future lesson we will come back to the dangers choleric women face when dealing with their feminine nature.

Regarding Her Temptation to Give Up Mental Prayer Because She Was Not Humble and Sinless Enough

The next form of pride Satan tempted her with was to have her believe that she would overcome her sinful tendencies without Divine aid.

She tells us,

I do not think I ever escaped so great a danger as this device of Satan, which he would have imposed upon me in the disguise of humility. **He filled me with such thoughts as these: How could I make my prayer, who was so wicked, and yet had received so many mercies? It was enough for me to recite the [Divine] Office, as all others did; but as I did not do that much well, how could I desire to do more? I was not reverential enough, and made too little of the mercies of God.** There was no harm in these thoughts and feelings in themselves; ***but to act upon them, that was an exceedingly great wickedness.*** Blessed be Thou, O Lord; for Thou camest to my help. This seems to me to be in principle the temptation of Judas, only that Satan did not dare to tempt me so openly. But he might have led me, *little by little*, as he led Judas to the same pit of destruction.²²

²¹ Quoted from *the Autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila*, Ch. 8, ¶10.

²² Quoted from *the Autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila*, Ch. 19, ¶16, [emphasis added; bracketed word added for clarity].

A little later in her recounting of this horrific temptation, St. Teresa adds:

I do not think I ever gave up my purpose of resuming my prayer; **but I was waiting to be very free from sin first.**

Oh, how deluded I was in this expectation! The devil would have held it out before me till the Day of Judgment, that he might then take me with him to hell. Then, when I applied myself to prayer and to spiritual reading, – whereby I might perceive these truths, and the evil nature of the way I was walking, and was often importunate with our Lord in tears, – I was so wicked, that it availed me nothing; when I gave that up, and wasted my time in amusing myself, in great danger of falling into sin, and with scanty helps, – and I may venture to say no help at all, unless it was a help to my ruin, – what could I expect but that of which I have spoken?

I believe that a certain Dominican friar, a most learned man, has greatly merited in the eyes of God; for it was he who roused me from this slumber. He made me – I think I said so before – go to Communion once a fortnight, and be less given to evil; I began to be converted, though I did not cease to offend our Lord all at once; however, as I had not lost my way, I walked on in it, though slowly, falling and rising again; and he who does not cease to walk and press onwards, arrives at last, even if late. To lose one's way is – so it seems to me – nothing else but the giving up of prayer. God, of His mercy, keeps us from this!²³

We can see how insidiously clever Satan is when we consider St. Teresa's temptations. We see how the devil had earlier lured St. Teresa into the worldly vanities into which she fell. Then because her conscience was pricking her, the devil "took her in the opposite direction" by preying upon her sensitive conscience and trying to drive her into scruples (which is another form of pride). The devil's motive was to do anything he could to have her give up prayer because that would surely be her downfall.

The devil's attacks on St. Teresa are interesting and instructive for us concerning the devil's use of this same tactic especially targeting Catholics – because the damnation of a Catholic is a much greater victory for Satan (as compared to the damnation of a person outside of the Church) and such damnation mocks God's greater goodness toward Catholics.

²³ Quoted from *The Autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila*, Ch. 19, the end of ¶17, & ¶¶ 18-19 [bold and italic added for emphasis].

An Important Note about Mental Prayer. What is Mental Prayer?

Mental prayer, like all prayer, is lifting the heart and mind to God.²⁴ This speaking to God is making an act of our will. It can be telling Him that we love Him. Our words to God do not have to be elaborate. We simply can tell Him what we are thinking. It is not that He doesn't already know this, but He wants us to desire to tell Him. He wants us to cooperate with Him in the work of our salvation.

Thus, mental prayer is dependent upon **our** actions. It is important to keep in mind that St. Teresa really had the human ability to collect her thoughts and say something to God. She explains how she was fooled by the fear (with which Satan deluded her) of trying to gather her thoughts and simply to open her heart to speak to God. She was simply resisting God's call to give Him her whole heart. Once she was willing to abandon her heart to God, her friendship with Him grew to a beautiful mystical marriage.²⁵

St. Teresa herself has this to say as a lesson we should learn from her experience:

One must humbly ask himself to consider (1) what the world is; (2) what he owes to God; (3) the great sufferings of God for him; (4) his own scanty service in return; and (5) the reward God reserves for those who love Him.

If one considers these things then, he learns how to defend himself against his own thoughts and against the occasions and perils of sin.²⁶

We should be grateful to God for allowing us to have knowledge of the wonderful lives of the saints in order to learn how they cooperated with God in their salvation. God is marvelous in His Providence and His sculpting of souls. What a great inspiration for us all!

A Preview...

²⁴ For a further explanation of mental prayer including meditation, read this article: <https://catholiccandle.org/2021/09/03/lesson-2-meditation-how-why/>

²⁵ Concerning this mystical marriage of the soul with Christ, to which all souls in the state of grace are called, read this article: <https://catholiccandle.org/2019/06/20/our-souls-should-be-docile-brides-of-christ/>

²⁶ Quoted from *The Autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila*, Ch. 4, ¶11.

We want to learn, as did St. Teresa of Avila and the other saints, the fruits of avoiding worldliness. In our next lesson we will look further into how we can know ourselves better in order to help us to avoid worldliness, so that we can foster and preserve a solid prayer life and to grow in friendship with God.



***Catholic Candle* note:** Below is part 10 of our exploration of the best type of education – which is a true *Catholic Liberal Education*. Do not confuse this education with many university programs called “liberal arts” but which are full of fluff, falsehood, and aimless so-called “cultural enrichment” courses and “humanities”.

A liberal education also does not refer to liberalism, nor is a true liberal education an indoctrination into that error of liberalism or *political correctness*. In fact, a true *Catholic Liberal Education* is the best antidote to the errors of liberalism.

As context for this tenth part of this article, let us recall what we saw in the earlier nine parts:

Previously, ***in part 1 of this article***,²⁷ we examined the problems we see in modern education:

- Modern colleges do not improve the quality of their students’ minds (and their thinking ability) much or at all.
- Most “education” is merely job training, fluff courses, and/or leftist indoctrination.
- The students are trained to sound like someone in their field but they do more memorizing and little thinking.
- Grade “inflation” and degree “inflation” are rampant. Grades and academic degrees do not mean much anymore.

In part 2 of this article,²⁸ we examined, in general, what education is. We considered the human soul and the perfection of its highest faculty (*i.e.*, its highest power) – which is the intellect – and which is immaterial (*i.e.*, incorporeal). We saw that our intellects are perfected through knowing eternal, unchangeable truths and the causes of things.

²⁷ Part 1 of this article can be found here: <https://catholiccandle.org/2025/06/28/the-blessings-of-a-true-catholic-liberal-education/>

²⁸ Part 2 of this article can be found here: <https://catholiccandle.org/2025/07/24/the-blessing-of-a-true-catholic-liberal-education-part-ii/>

In part 3 of this article,²⁹ after having seen what true education is, we examined the question *who should perfect his intellect*.

In part 4 of this article,³⁰ having seen that modern universities do not provide a true education, we consider whether there is *ever* a good reason for men or women to attend them.

In part 5 of this article,³¹ having seen that women and girls should pursue a True Catholic Liberal Education – just as men and boys should, too – we then considered what the best environment is in which women and girls should do this.

In part 6 of this article, we addressed the objection that, having seen the great value of a true Catholic Liberal Education, we should be afraid that the great blessing of this education would be a danger to our souls because it might foster in us the vice of pride.³²

In part 7 of this article, we considered more fully the difference between the education which is appropriate for a free man as contrasted to the education which is appropriate for a slave.³³

In part 8 of this article, we considered further how the truth perfects our minds. This shows us that we must really *know* the truth, not merely believe true opinions.³⁴

In part 9 of this article, we considered more-specifically what studies (sciences) belong in a Catholic Liberal Education.³⁵

²⁹ Part 3 of this article can be found here: <https://catholiccandle.org/2025/08/28/the-blessing-of-a-true-catholic-liberal-education-part-iii/>

³⁰ Part 4 of this article can be found here: <https://catholiccandle.org/2025/09/24/the-blessing-of-a-true-catholic-liberal-education-part-iv/>

³¹ Part 5 of this article can be found here: <https://catholiccandle.org/2025/10/26/the-blessing-of-a-true-catholic-liberal-education-part-v/>

³² Part 6 of this article can be found here: <https://catholiccandle.org/2026/01/26/3129/>

³³ Part 7 of this article can be found here: <https://catholiccandle.org/2026/02/26/the-blessing-of-a-true-catholic-liberal-education-part-vii/>

³⁴ Part 8 of this article can be found here: <https://catholiccandle.org/2026/03/10/the-blessing-of-a-true-catholic-liberal-education-part-viii/>

³⁵ Part 9 of this article can be found here: <https://catholiccandle.org/2026/06/26/the-blessing-of-a-true-catholic-liberal-education-part-viii-2/>

Below, in part 10, we explore the motive and the goal of a true *Catholic Liberal Education*.

What Are the Motive and the Goal of a True Catholic Liberal Education?

A Catholic Liberal Education Begins in Wonder and Aims at Wisdom

Part 10

In an earlier part of this article³⁶, we saw that the seven liberal arts are important studies by means of which we should begin our study of the highest sciences – which are philosophy and theology.

We saw that the liberal arts are not the only parts of liberal education or even the most important parts, but they are the key ***beginning*** of it. They develop our thinking and help make our minds disciplined, vigorous, and *animated by wonder*, so that we will not only desire, but also have the means to can acquire knowledge and wisdom, especially the highest truths, which are again, those of philosophy and theology.

Here is the motive and goal of the education that all of us should seek, each according to his circumstances:

***A true, Catholic Liberal Education
begins in wonder and aims at wisdom.***

Let us “unpack” that statement by first looking at what we mean by ***wonder*** and then let us consider what wisdom is.

What is Wonder?

Wonder is the proper human motive for true education. Wonder involves two things simultaneously: ignorance and knowledge (in different respects). Man finds himself wondering because, at the same time, he both knows something and also doesn’t know everything.

³⁶ <https://catholiccandle.org/2026/06/10/the-blessing-of-a-true-catholic-liberal-education-part-ix/>

Let us contrast wonder with mere curiosity. **Wonder** implies that a person knows a group of facts (*i.e.*, truths) and, knowing these facts, he seeks an explanation of them – *viz.*, their **causes**. Wonder involves a certain delight and joy, a sort of fascination with the way things are. But at the same time, the person has a certain lack of comfort because he is aware of his own lack of knowledge. So he asks **why** things are the way they are. Wonder implies that a person has a certain confidence that the world around him is ultimately explainable. When a person is animated by wonder, he goes through his day, week, or month, seeing additional intellectual connections between various things. He goes through life seeing more aspects of the world around him which are interesting and for which he seeks explanations.

By contrast, a person motivated by curiosity is more interested in questions concerning **how**. When a person is motivated by **curiosity**, he is not so interested in questions concerning **why** – and is not so motivated to seek to know why something is true and what its causes are. Rather, curiosity leads a person to focus on seeking to **do** something and desiring to see if his idea will “work” to achieve a useful practical result or even merely a sensational spectacle. A curious man ultimately seeks power.³⁷ He is more concerned to see how certain generalizations work or how they apply to varying circumstances. In contrast to a person who wonders, a person motivated by curiosity assumes the validity of a principle, in order to see how effectively this principle can be harnessed to exploit a given situation in order to achieve a particular useful result.

This is not to say that the methods of verification in experimental science may not very well be an instrument of wonder of a high order, but when those instruments are employed not in order to understand the truths of Nature, but in order to *find what works*, then curiosity and not wonder is the immediate motive.

So the man who *wonders* at the lightning he sees in the sky is considering questions such as what causes lightning and what is the nature of lightning. But the man who sees the lightning and seeks to protect his house from being struck by lightning is curious rather than wondering. He asks himself things such as, if he places a metal pole on his roof, will that protect his house?

³⁷ In this article, we are treating “scientific curiosity” which motivates inventing useful machines, experimenting to achieve quicker results or more efficient, successful processes and methods, *etc.* These investigations are generally not evil in themselves but are a lower, practical goal, as compared to the truth about the causes of things.

But the word “curiosity” is also used to mean something sinful and lower than the “scientific curiosity” discussed here. This lower curiosity is the useless and idle desire to know about people or things that do not concern one’s self. This is also called “nosiness” and refers to things such as the desire to know one’s neighbor’s private affairs, or seeking to discover the gossipy details of the private lives of celebrities. Such idle curiosity, which is a sin, is not the type of curiosity which is contrasted with wonder in this article.

The proper satisfaction of a man who wonders is ***knowledge of the causes*** of things around us, *e.g.*, what is lightning and what causes it. By contrast, the proper satisfaction of a curious man is seeing that his idea works successfully, *e.g.*, the

lightning rod protected his house from a lightning strike.³⁸

Curiosity and the practical improvements engendered by it are generally not evil³⁹ and are sometimes even necessary. But they are much lower than the possession of universal, eternal truth. Such curiosity is lower than wonder in a way similar to *food for the body* being lower than *food for the mind*. This is because wonder leads to the perfection of our intellect; curiosity leads to perfection of the practical circumstances of our life. The perfection of our intellect is much greater and nobler!

So a man who sees and wonders is spurred on to learn the causes of the things around him because they are interesting and the world around him is explainable by reason. Those causes are worthy of investigation for the sake of the truth because Nature is worthy of investigation (and even more worthy is the First Cause of Nature, Who is God). By contrast, curiosity spurs a man to solve a problem which improves the practical aspects of his life or otherwise helps him, *e.g.*, have a safer home.

Thus, a liberal education begins in wonder, not in curiosity. By contrast (for example), building a better mousetrap begins in curiosity, not in wonder.

So a *Catholic Liberal Education* begins with wonder and involves the seeking of the truth which is the knowledge of the causes of things. This true education aims at wisdom (as we stated above).

But ***what is wisdom?*** Let us next consider that question.

First, Let Us Remember that Wisdom is a Priceless Treasure!

First, let us reflect that wisdom is one of the most important blessings from God. “All wisdom is from the Lord God”.⁴⁰

³⁸ Of course, there is nothing to prevent a man from having both wonder and curiosity about the same subject. So, by wonder, a man could want to know the causes of lightning; and by curiosity, also want to harvest its power, protect himself from it, *etc.* Or, curiosity could eventually cause wonder, or we suppose, wonder could degrade into mere curiosity.

³⁹ However, some developments caused by curiosity can be evil, such as many aspects of bio-engineering, stem-cell research, vaccines developed using the bodies of murdered babies, *etc.*

⁴⁰ *Ecclesiasticus*, 1:1.

Wisdom is incomparably better than fame, prestige, power, riches, pleasures, or comfort. As the *Book of Wisdom* declares:

I preferred her [*viz.*, wisdom] before kingdoms and thrones, and esteemed riches nothing in comparison of her. Neither did I compare unto her any precious stone: for all gold in comparison of her, is as a little sand, and silver in respect to her shall be counted as clay.⁴¹

In fact:

Wisdom is better than all the most precious things: and whatsoever may be desired cannot be compared to it.⁴²

And:

She [*i.e.*, wisdom] is an infinite treasure to men! ⁴³

Therefore, we should pursue wisdom above all of these things. As the wise man teaches us in the *Book of Proverbs*:

Get wisdom, because it is better than gold.⁴⁴

What is Wisdom?

St. Thomas Aquinas explains to us (following Aristotle's teaching) that:

Wisdom is a knowledge of causes.⁴⁵

This definition fits perfectly with what we saw above about wonder. That is, seeking the true knowledge which is offered in a Catholic Liberal Education ***begins in wonder***. As we saw above, true wonder (as contrasted to mere curiosity) motivates us to seek to understand the things that are, and to ***know their causes***.

⁴¹ *Book of Wisdom*, 7:8-9.

⁴² *Book of Proverbs*, 8:11.

⁴³ *Book of Proverbs*, 7:14.

⁴⁴ *Book of Proverbs*, 16:16.

⁴⁵ St. Thomas Aquinas, Commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, Bk 1, Ch 2.

The Wisdom We Discuss Here (and Which We Seek) is Wisdom *Simply Speaking*, not Wisdom in a *Restricted Sense*

In this present article, we are considering the nature of wisdom simply, that is, unqualifiedly. Let us contrast this *unqualified* wisdom to what we could call “wisdom” as that word is used in a narrow or restricted sense.

In a qualified sense – *i.e.*, in ***some*** way – we could call something “wisdom” which is the ***knowledge of causes*** pertaining to a narrow field or pursuit, such as carpentry (or one of the other manual arts). A man could be called a “wise carpenter” because he has the ***knowledge of the causes*** of his art. For example, a “wise carpenter” might reject the use of a particular beam (*i.e.*, plank) which is full of knots because he knows that such a beam would not possess the strength it should have because those knots weaken it.

Such a carpenter is not wise *absolutely speaking* (unqualifiedly) but is wise in a certain, limited respect (*viz.*, regarding his particular field), because he knows the causes which affect his own special art.

But in this present article, we are considering the wisdom by which we would call a man “wise” without qualification, as opposed to calling him “wise” only in a certain specialized respect (as we would say a “wise carpenter”). In other words, in this article we are examining what wisdom is *absolutely*, because of which we would call a man “wise” without adding any qualification such as “carpenter”.

This distinction is similar to the difference between a man being called “good” without qualification (because he possesses great virtue) as contrasted to a person being called “good” qualifiedly, such as being a “good plumber” or a “good assassin”. Being a “good assassin” refers to the person possessing a high degree of the assassin’s skill for killing people. We do not call this assassin “good” without qualification (but we could call him “good” in this certain respect).

Likewise, calling a man “wise” with respect to carpentry is not the same as calling him “wise” without qualification. So in this article, we examine the nature of wisdom as it gives a general excellence to a person and because of which he would be called “wise” *as a person* (and not in a qualified sense such as *wise as a carpenter*).

There Are Two Kinds of Wisdom *Simply Speaking*

There are two kinds of wisdom *simply speaking*. They are *speculative*⁴⁶ *wisdom* and *practical wisdom*. Both of them are the knowledge of causes, but in different ways. They reflect the two kinds of causes that every person should know. Each of these kinds of wisdom causes a person to be called “wise” without qualification:

- ❖ Because of *speculative wisdom*, a person is called wise as the knower of the deep causes of things, especially the First Cause of all things; and
- ❖ Because of *practical wisdom*, a person is called wise as a doer, acting well in light of his final end.

Both kinds of wise men we call “wise” simply speaking, without limiting this adjective by a qualifying word such as “carpenter”.

Let us briefly look at each of these types of wisdom.

What Is Speculative Wisdom?

Speculative wisdom is wisdom in those matters which concern the highest truths⁴⁷ which are most worth knowing and which most-greatly perfect our intellects.

But in addition to knowing high truths, we must also know the **causes** of those high truths; (of course, God is uncaused but is the ultimate Cause of everything else). It is

⁴⁶ The word “speculative” comes from the Latin word, “speculari”, meaning “to observe”. The word “speculative” here refers to matters which are studied and learned because of their intrinsic value and without seeking practical application leading to action.

This is the original meaning of the word and is very different from the modern usage of the word “speculative” which means “doubtful or based on conjecture”.

⁴⁷ Here is one way that St. Thomas Aquinas, Greatest Doctor of the Church, explains this point:

Man’s good [unqualifiedly] consists in the knowledge of truth; yet man's sovereign [*i.e.*, chief] good consists, not in the knowledge of any truth whatever, but in the perfect knowledge of the sovereign truth [*i.e.*, God], as the Philosopher [Aristotle] states (Ethic. x, 7, 8).

Summa, IIa IIae Q. 167. A1, ad 1 (bracketed words added for clarity).

important that, in knowing the highest truths, we also know their causes because we do not know something fully if we do not know its causes.

But there is a difference in causes. Some are lower-level, proximate causes which are themselves caused by higher causes. For example, a dog is one of the causes of its own puppies but God is the higher cause of not only those puppies, but also the parent dogs, as well as all other dogs and creatures.

The most complete and most satisfying knowledge of a thing is to know it with all of its causes, even up to (and especially) the Highest Cause, which is the First and Highest Cause of all creatures. ***This*** is God.

St. Paul infallibly teaches us that we can know God by natural reason, as the First Cause of all other things. In other words, looking at creatures, we can see God's work in them and that God is their cause. Here are St. Paul's words:

[T]he invisible things of Him [*viz.*, God], from the creatures of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made; His eternal power also, and Divinity.⁴⁸

St. Thomas refers to speculative wisdom when he explains (following Aristotle's teaching) that "**it belongs to wisdom to consider the Highest Cause.**"⁴⁹

This knowledge of things with their highest causes is the deepest and fullest way to know things and is *speculative wisdom*.

The science which treats of the first causes (including naturally knowable truths about God Himself, such as His existence and some of His perfections) in the light of the natural capacity of human reason is called *metaphysics* – which is a type of speculative wisdom – as this wisdom is attainable by the power of human reason. The science which studies God in the higher light of what He has revealed about Himself is also called *speculative wisdom*, but it is wisdom as attainable by the greater light of the Catholic Faith. Thus, Catholic theology is the highest wisdom and is the principal satisfaction of wonder on this side of the grave.

⁴⁸ *Romans*, 1:19-20 (bracketed content added to show context).

⁴⁹ *Summa*, IIa IIae, Q.45, a.1, *Respondeo*.

What Is Practical Wisdom?

The other kind of wisdom is called *practical wisdom* and is also called *prudence*. It is one of the four *Cardinal Virtues*. It is also a *Gift of the Holy Ghost*, as well as an infused moral virtue (infused into the souls of those who are in the state of Sanctifying Grace).

Practical wisdom is concerned with right reason as it applies to our active life. This wisdom regulates the passions and appetites which move us. *Practical wisdom* does this by ordering all of our actions (and our life) to our *Final End*. This *Final End* is also called the ***Final Cause*** of our actions because our end (that is, the goal) is the ultimate cause (reason) why we do what we do.

For example, suppose that a man has an urgent need to travel to an adjoining city immediately. He might go into his bedroom, for the sake of getting his car keys. His obtaining his keys is for the sake of driving his car, which is for the sake of going to the gas station, which is for the sake of filling his empty gas tank, which is for the sake of being able to drive to that adjoining city without running out of gas, all for the sake of making the urgent journey. The ***Final Cause*** (the ultimate reason) for each of those activities was in order to arrive in the adjoining city. In other words, finally, the cause of all of those activities was the arriving there. By contrast, if the man stopped to read a novel, the *Final Cause* of that pastime would not be the urgent trip to the adjoining city.

Likewise, any part of our life which does not promote our ***Final Cause***, is vain. Anything we do which will not help us to achieve the goal for which we have been created (and for which are on earth) is ultimately foolishness that we will regret. That is why one way in which *practical wisdom* can be summed up is as follows:

It is Practical Wisdom (Prudence) to live every minute of our lives in the way that, at our Judgment, we will want to have lived.

Here is how St. Ignatius of Loyola teaches this practical wisdom:

Man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God Our Lord, and by this means to save his soul. All other things on the face of the earth are created for man to help him fulfill the end for which he is created. From this it follows that man is to use these things to the extent that they will help him to attain his end. Likewise, he must rid himself of them insofar as they prevent him from attaining it.

Therefore, we must make ourselves indifferent to all created things, insofar as it is left to the choice of our free will and is not forbidden. Acting accordingly, for our part, we should not prefer health to sickness, riches to poverty, honor to dishonor, a long life to a short one, and so ***in all things we should desire and choose only***

those things which will best help us attain the end for which we are created.⁵⁰

St. Paul urged his flock to live according to practical wisdom when he taught them that they should:

Walk with wisdom towards them that are without.⁵¹

St. Paul is teaching us that (practical) wisdom should guide our actions, *i.e.*, our “walk”.

Following St. Augustine, Doctor of the Church, St. Thomas Aquinas teaches that prudence, *i.e.*, practical wisdom, “judges of human acts by Divine things, and directs human acts according to Divine rules.”⁵²

We see that practical wisdom should cause us to order our lives fearing the Lord so that we can live a life obeying Him and living in His friendship. Here is one way in which the *Book of Proverbs* teaches this truth:

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.⁵³

As we saw in an earlier part of our current investigation of *The Blessings of a True Catholic Liberal Education*,⁵⁴ we should study the truths of Ethics and Politics to attain this *practical wisdom*.

Both Types of Wisdom Have the Same Ultimate Object: God

We see, by looking at both *speculative wisdom* and *practical wisdom*, that God is the ***beginning and end***. That is, both kinds of wisdom ultimately are knowledge of God but in different aspects.

Speculative wisdom starts with all of the various truths around us and traces them back to their First Cause, Who is God. By contrast, through Ethics and Politics, *practical wisdom* considers our Final End (Who is God) as the reason and guiding principle for all

⁵⁰ *Principle and Foundation* of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius.

⁵¹ *Colossians*, 4:5.

⁵² *Summa*, IIa IIae, Q.45 a.3, *respondeo*.

⁵³ *Book of Proverbs*, 9:10.

⁵⁴ For a fuller explanation of the importance of studying true Ethics and Politics, read this article: <https://catholiccandle.org/2026/06/10/the-blessing-of-a-true-catholic-liberal-education-part-ix/>

of our actions and makes sure that all of our actions are for the sake of Him, Who is our Last End and our ***Final Cause*** (to use the proper philosophical term).

Thus, we see more fully the literal truth of what Our Lord says in the *Apocalypse*:

I am Alpha and Omega, ***the beginning and the end***.⁵⁵

Our Lord is the Beginning and First Cause of all that exists; He is the End and Highest Principle to which all of our actions and our lives should conform.

So in all of the studies of a true education, God is the ultimate subject of study – as the First Beginning (the First Cause) of the speculative sciences, and as the Last End of the practical sciences of Ethics and true Political Science.

This Lifetime Pursuit of Wisdom Is The Life of a Free Man

Now through the efforts of a lifetime of study, a man can more fully acquire deeper and broader wisdom. But such precious wisdom nonetheless ***is indeed*** the work of a lifetime.

However, this man's whole "journey" – even the earlier part – should be characterized by the *pursuit* of this great good, and this work of his entire life is rightly called *philosophy* – which means the *love of wisdom*. For every study such a man undertakes is for the sake of wisdom.

And insofar as he lives for wisdom, his whole life is devoted to that which in itself makes life worth living. Thus, he is not a slave but a free man. Accordingly, only the kind of education which introduces a man to the philosophical life is properly named *liberal*.

Conclusions of this Present Part of the Article (*viz.*, Part 10)

A true, *Catholic Liberal Education* begins in wonder and aims at wisdom. God made us to wonder at the world around us and to perfect our minds seeking the causes of things. This is speculative wisdom. He instilled this healthy sense of wonder in us precisely so that we would seek ***Him***, the Cause of causes.

Practical wisdom is acting according to our final end (*i.e.*, goal), which is the *Final Cause* of all of our actions (*i.e.*, the ultimate reason why we act).

Both types of wisdom ultimately lead back to God, the First Cause and Last End (that is, the Final Cause).

⁵⁵ *Apocalypse*, 1:8 (emphasis added).

Looking Ahead

We seek wisdom through perfecting our highest faculty – *viz.*, our intellect – with the highest truths. But there are many authors of many books written on the subjects which are studied in a *Catholic Liberal Education*. Which ones are best to use in these studies?

To Be Continued ...



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