

## You And Your Service Sheet

— *Fifth of a Series* —

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### YOUR PIETY (continued)

#### 7. — Your Stations of the Cross

You made the Stations of the Cross on the first night of your Cursillo. Perhaps for the first time in your life! And you were deeply moved!...

What are the Stations (or the Way) of the Cross? — The Way of the Cross is the Way to Calvary. Christ took the cross on His shoulders, and slowly walked up to Mount Calvary to be crucified for you. In the Way of the Cross you accompany Him with His Mother and His disciples.

The Way of the Cross is a meditation on the Passion and Death of Christ. Step by step your mind recalls the events of that fateful day, from the time Jesus was condemned to death to the time He was laid to rest in the sepulchre. The Way of the Cross is divided into fourteen stations.

Not all the Stations are found in the Gospels. Many of them have come down to us from the ancient tradition of the early Church. If you ever visit Jerusalem, you will be able to follow the *Via Dolorosa* — that is, the road, which, according to tradition, Christ walked on His way to Calvary — and to stop at the places where the events commemorated by the Stations took place.

The Way of the Cross can be done in many ways. The Guide Book gives you one. But you can follow others. Or make your own. You

do not even have to say any vocal prayers. The important thing is that you accompany Christ, and meditate on His Passion and Death.

The usual way to make the Stations of the Cross is to walk up to the Stations, praying and meditating at each of them. If you cannot walk to the Stations, follow them mentally. And if you are sick or, for some reason, cannot go to church, you can make the Stations of the Cross at home in front of a crucifix.

You can make the Stations of the Cross at any time. However, they are particularly suited for Fridays — the day Our Lord died — and for the Lenten Season.

When you feel discouraged, ready to give up, about to collapse under the heavy burden of suffering and temptations, the Way of the Cross will give you hope, strength, courage!...

It is not advisable to make the Stations of the Cross when Mass is being said or the Blessed Sacrament is exposed. The reason is easy to understand. The Sacrifice of the Mass is the *real* Sacrifice of Calvary, while the Way of the Cross is just an *imaginary* composition of the Passion of the Lord; and in the Sacrament of the Eucharist the true and living Christ is *physically* present, while at the Stations you just look at material representations or figures of Christ.

As I said speaking of the Rosary, the Way of the Cross should not take the place of Meditation in your Service Sheet. However, a particular Station, or the Passion of the Lord as a whole, is an excellent topic for meditation.

### 8. — Your Spiritual Reading

Early in the morning you take a shower; and then go out to your work. In the street there is heat, there is dust... Once in a while you have to wash your hands, to wipe off your perspiration; you have to freshen up.

In the morning your soul got ready for the day with the Morning Offering, Meditation, Mass and Communion. Later you paid a visit to Christ in the Eucharist. However, throughout the day, our soul

gathers dust; the result of the imperfections of the world in which we live and of our own imperfections. Our soul has to freshen up; we have to refresh it with spiritual thoughts.

Spiritual Reading will do this for your soul. After a busy day it is an excellent idea to find a few minutes in the evening — or at some other convenient time — to read from a spiritual book.

Spiritual Reading is not study or meditation. But it is not to be taken lightly. Books used for spiritual reading should offer practical doctrine for our Christian life and solid food for our souls.

Not all the books on spiritual life have the same value and sanctifying efficacy. And not all books are advisable for everybody. Consult your spiritual director. He knows your spiritual needs, and can advise you accordingly.

One book that you should read often is the Life of Christ as found in the Gospels.

When you do your spiritual reading do not rush through the pages of the book as if you were reading a novel. Do not try to cover so many pages every day! Read slowly. Let the message that God wants to deliver to you through the book sink deeply into your mind and heart...

Your spiritual reading is an exercise of piety. It is expected to increase your love for God and intensify your desire for Christian perfection.

Of course, you should not forget to invoke the Holy Spirit before you start your spiritual reading, and to say a short prayer to thank after finishing it.

You can do your spiritual reading in the Church, at home or in some other convenient place.

What I said about seriousness and consistency with regard to the time, place and length of your meditation, also applies to your spiritual reading.

A question before ending this short discussion on Spiritual Reading. Oftentimes cursillistas ask: "What is the difference between

meditation and spiritual reading?" — Well, after having read about both in this article, I hope that you know the difference. However, in order to further clarify the point, allow me a few more words on the subject.

Meditation is more serious, more thorough; it calls for greater effort, than Spiritual Reading. If you don't mind the comparison, we can say that meditation is a meal while spiritual reading is a snack between meals; meditation is the reading of a serious book; while spiritual reading is *light reading*, for instance, the reading of a newspaper.

They are different acts of piety; and, in their different ways, they are powerful aids to spiritual progress.

### 9. — Your Daily Examination of Conscience

"It was a good day," you say in the evening with a feeling of satisfaction; or "things did not go so well today," you complain with a sad expression on your face . . .

When you speak in this way, you are thinking of your business, of your profession, of the material and temporal things that belong to the body.

How about your soul? How was the day in so far as it concerned your spiritual life? How about an Examination of Conscience? . . .

Place yourself in the presence of God; and, together with Him, have a look at your day. Let your mind recall the activities of the day. Ask yourself a few questions: Did I keep my Service Sheet commitments: My morning offering, my meditation, etc.? Did I practise all these spiritual exercises with devotion? Did I avoid occasions of sin? Did I scandalize anyone with my conversations, with my actions? Did I practise charity, justice and all the other Christian virtues? Is my soul in a state of Grace? Did I do my best to bring others to Christ? Was today the day for my Team Reunion, Ultreya, Spiritual Direction, Confession? Have I been a true *cutsillista*? . . .

Ask yourself these — and other pertinent — questions; and answer them truthfully, without trying to deceive God or yourself.

This is your daily *general* examination of conscience.

However, there is another kind of examination of conscience, which is strongly recommended to all those who are seriously interested in making spiritual progress. Since you are a Christian in search of perfection, I strongly recommend it to you. This is the *particular* examination of conscience.

The efficacy of the particular examination of conscience lies in fact that it attacks vices one by one with a steady determination until it destroys them.

If you want to make use of the particular examination of conscience, the first thing you should do is to study yourself. What are your dominant passions, your main defects: pride, injustice to others, lack of charity, sins against the flesh? . . . Once you know them, you decide to attack them. In order to do so successfully, you do battle with them one at a time, starting with the most notorious and harmful. This is a single hand-to-hand fight.

Let us suppose that your dominant passion is a violent temper. You attack this vice first. Every evening, after your general examination of conscience, you ask yourself about your temper. You go through your day slowly, trying to find out how you have fared in this respect. When you discover that you have failed on this or that occasion, try to find the cause of your failure. And then determine to do better the next day. The next day you examine your conscience again. And so on, day after day, until you succeed in controlling your temper, and in learning how to be kind to others.

When you have destroyed one vice, go after another with the same determination and using the same technique. Don't take two vices at the same time. If you try to accomplish too much too soon you will probably get confused and discouraged and end giving up the fight. Remember the motto: "One thing at a time, and that done well." Besides, as you know, Christian virtues are linked to one another. If you fully possess one, the others will soon be yours.

By the way, when you are attacking the second vice or dominant passion, do not lose track of the first. Keep an eye on it to make sure that it does not start growing again.

On account of the tenacity with which the particular examination of conscience wages war on vices, it is a most effective way to get rid of them, and a wonderful method to make fast progress in spiritual life.

It has been said that if only we got rid of one vice every year we would soon be saints. You will soon be a saint if the particular examination of conscience becomes a daily practice in your life.

Once you are through with the general and the particular examination of conscience, ask God to forgive your shortcomings and faults; and firmly resolve to improve your performance the next day.

It is very useful to impose on ourselves some penance for our faults, especially acts of the virtues against which we have sinned. This is a proof of our sincerity, and will strengthen our determination to keep trying.

If your examination of conscience tells you that you have committed a mortal sin, you should immediately take the necessary steps to recover your lost grace. Make an act of contrition and decide to go to confession the next day.

Needless to say, in order to be fruitful, an examination of conscience has to be done properly. Take time out for it. You cannot do it well if you do it while you are getting ready for bed or when you are busy with something else.

On the other hand, you should avoid giving way to scrupulosity. Be natural and reasonable in this, as in everything else. If questions or doubts arise, consult your spiritual director.

### 10. — Your Night Prayers

Before going to bed, your children kiss you good night. You wouldn't like them to forget to do so, would you?

God is your Father. He expects you to say good night to Him. This is the meaning of the Night Prayers.

Thank Him for day, for the many blessings He has bestowed upon you and your family, for the help He has given you in your apostolic

work; offer to Him the rest that you are about to take, and ask Him to watch over you and your family during the night.

For this you can use the Night Prayers of your Guide Book. You can also compose your own.

And then take your rest. You deserve it. Your day has been a day dedicated to the service of the Lord. It has been pleasing to Him. With a clear conscience, with peace in your mind, with happiness in your heart, and even with a smile on your lips, you can confidently entrust yourself and your loved ones to His care.

As your Guide Book says, God will keep you as the pupil of His eye, and the shadow of His wings will shelter you! . . .

The generous Lord that He is, He will protect you and guard you with the loving concern of His Divine Providence.

### 11. — Your Spiritual Direction

For this, please see *You and Your Spiritual Director* (*Boletín Eclesiástico*, September 1969).

### 12. — Your Spiritual Retreat

If you go to a hospital, you will find people who are sick—bed-ridden patients. And you will also see people who are not really sick. They are there for a physical check-up. They want to know how their health is; to find out if everything is all right, if there is something to be corrected.

It is sound medical advice to have a check-up every year. In this way many sicknesses can be prevented, and many others can be discovered in their early stages and treated before they can develop into something serious.

The health of your soul is more precious than the health of your body. You also need an annual spiritual check-up.

A Spiritual Retreat is a spiritual check-up. You take an X-ray of your soul, and see how things are: how you practise Christian virtues.