

DOCTRINAL SECTION

DE COLORES

You and Your Service Sheet

— *First of a Series* —

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Your Service Sheet is a little paper that, because of frequent use, probably looks old and shabby.

To a non-cursillista that little paper means nothing. To you it means a lot.

That little paper can be called your lifeboat. It contains the things you need to keep your soul afloat amidst the storms that plague the ocean you have to travel on your way to heaven. It is an anchor that makes your spiritual life deep-rooted and prevents your supernatural ambitions from being scattered to the four winds.

Hang on to your Service Sheet; and the boat of your spiritual life will never sink. Keep your Service Sheet; and you will keep your life in Grace.

The things contained in your Service Sheet were explained to you in the rollo *Life in Grace*. Many of them were new to you. They are to most cursillistas. And, even after the Cursillo, cursillistas have many questions to ask about them. That is why today we are going to touch on some of these questions, and try to give them clear and concrete answers.

Following the Order of the Team Reunion, let us discuss briefly each of the practices of Piety, Study and Action of your Service Sheet.

I. — YOUR PIETY

1. — Your Morning Offering

Your alarm clock wakes you up in the morning. You feel sleepy and would like to stay in bed. But then you remember that the new day is a gift from God, an opportunity to serve Him. So, without giving way to laziness, you get up and offer that first sacrifice to the Lord.

Because of your love for God you would like to be with him every minute of the new day. The day belongs to God; and you would like to dedicate it entirely to Him.

However, you know that throughout the day you are going to be busy with many things. There are family, professional, and business matters to attend to. Besides, even if you had nothing else to do, you could not possibly be thinking of God the whole day. We are too feeble-natured for that.

How can you therefore combine your desire to be with God all the time and the duties that life in this world imposes on you? — By offering all the activities of the day to God. In this way you make sure that you are always with Him and that everything is done for Him.

The Morning Offering does this wonder for you. The Morning Offering turns your day into a continuous prayer.

In the Morning Offering you thank God for having looked after you during the night; you also thank Him for the Grace of the new day; you tell Him that everything you will do during the day will be for Him, that you want every moment of the incipient day to be dedicated to His service; that, out of love for Him, you are ready to accept whatever trials the new day may have in store for you.

The Morning Offering is short. But it must be sincere.

Don't ever let it become the meaningless routine of the man who gets up from bed sleepily, mumbles a few yawny words and hurries to the bathroom...

Kneel down for a few moments, and speak to the Lord...

You don't have to follow the Morning Offering of your Guide Book. You can improvise your own. The important thing is that you mean what you say.

The Morning Offering should be a *daily* practice of piety. No one can truthfully say that he has no time for it.

If you happen to oversleep, you can make your Morning Offering while you shave or on your way to the Office.

Don't you want your children to greet you in the morning and tell you that they will be good on this day, that they will do well in school?... Your Morning Offering is your "good morning" to God, your Father!...

You also want your children to remember you once in a while during the day, to run to meet you when you come home for lunch or in the evening after the day's work; don't you?

Throughout the day please try to remember your Morning Offering. Renew it mentally once in a while. Especially when you are confronted with an obstacle: when you have to talk to people for whom you feel a particular dislike; when you are about to do a difficult job; when you are tired, and on the point of losing your patience; when you notice that your spiritual strength is decreasing ...

A Morning Offering well done will fill your heart with satisfaction, and set the pace for the day.

You know from personal experience that if you are lazy in the morning, you are liable to be lazy the whole day. If you forget God in the morning, you will probably forget Him for the rest of the day.

Moreover, you should not lose sight of the meritorious value of the Morning Offering. The Morning Offering sanctifies everything you do throughout the day. Thus the whole day becomes a continuous source of supernatural merit. You gain for yourself countless additional actual Graces. And the reward that the Lord has promised to those who serve Him faithfully — to you — will always be on the increase.

2. — Your Meditation

Don't be scared by the word. And stop thinking that meditation is only for monks and contemplative nuns. Don't say: "I cannot meditate..."

Actually, everybody meditates. You meditate often.

When your mind thinks of how wonderful your wife and children are; when, as a result of this, your heart feels like loving them more and your will makes you decide to do your very best to take good care of them and make them happy ... you are meditating!

Transfer this to the spiritual world. Let your mind think about God, let your heart love Him and your will decide that you have to do your very best to please Him... And you are meditating!

Meditation is just that: to think, to love and to decide to please the One we love; that is, God. In other words, meditation is a loving thought.

Meditation is called mental prayer, because it is the mind, not the lips, that prays. Remember that prayer is not the mere uttering of words. Prayer is communication with God.

Our mind concentrates on God, on His perfections, on the wonders of His Creation, on His love for us, on one of the mysteries of the Life of Christ, on the examples of Christian virtues given to us by the Saints, etc... The result of this concentration is that our mind increases its knowledge of God.

However, meditation is not just an act of the mind. It is not just study or research. The knowledge that our mind derives from that concentration is expected to arouse in us an admiration for the things we contemplate, and therefore to increase our love for them and for God. Our heart comes into the picture with an act of love.

But real love is fruitful, not sterile. Real love is measured, not by sighs or beautiful thoughts or words, but by deeds. If we know God better and love Him more, it naturally follows that we must be ready to do more for him. Our will has to be moved to please the God that our mind knows and our heart loves.

To meditate is to think and to love; especially, to love. Remember St. Theresa's saying: "It is not a matter of thinking much, but of loving much."

Very often cursillistas ask this question: *How am I going to meditate?* There are several ways. The following is one of the most fundamental methods. You will find it easy and practical.

You start by placing yourself in the presence of God. In order to do so you should get away from the noise of the world, and try to forget everything except your meditation.

Then you invoke the Holy Spirit to guide you in your meditation. For this you can use the prayer found in your Guide Book. Or you can say an Our Father or compose your own prayer.

Now read slowly from a book. Pause once in a while to think about what you are reading, trying to understand its meaning.

Let the truths, the lessons, the ideas taught you in your reading penetrate gently — but deeply — into your mind, heart and will.

Finally, decide to put those ideas into practice.

End your meditation by thanking God for the opportunity He has given you to think about Him, and by asking Him for the graces necessary to carry out your resolutions. You can use the prayer of thanksgiving of your Guide Book, or make your own.

Here is a concrete example. Let us suppose that you are reading the story of the denial of Christ by St. Peter, as related in the Gospel of St. Mark (14, 27-31; 66-72). Reading the story you will find out that Peter denied Christ because he was too sure of himself, and placed himself in the way of a proximate occasion of sin. Lesson for you: You should not be overconfident. You should avoid occasions of sin. Resolution: Think of people, places, things that are or may be occasions of sin for you; and decide to stay away from them.

By the way, resolutions, to be effective, have to be specific, concrete. General resolutions, like "I'll do my best to behave", "I'll avoid occasions of sin" will take you nowhere. Your resolutions should be something like this, depending on circumstances: "From now on when Mr. So and So invites me to a nightclub I'll refuse to go with him"; "I'll not go out alone with *that* woman anymore"; "next time I meet a poor man in the street I'll remember Christ and try to help him"; "tomorrow, when I go to the Office, I'll greet *that* man who is always talking against me", etc. . .

Many resolutions never amount to anything because they are too general and vague. That is why it is said that "the road to hell is paved with good resolutions". Do not let your resolutions go that way! . . .

Another important thing. Please do not make too many resolutions in your meditation. One is enough, as long as it is carried out.

Unfortunately, there are cursillistas who do not seem convinced of the need they have of meditation. I hope you are not one of them. If you are, allow me to ask you these questions: As a Christian, aren't you expected to imitate Christ? How will you imitate Christ if you do not know Him? And how will you know Him unless you think about Him, his teachings, the virtues He taught us, the wonders He has worked in His Saints? . . .

Meditation provides you with the examples that you are supposed to follow in your daily life. If you see Christ practising humility, you feel like being humble; if you see one of His Saints excel in love for his neighbour you feel like being charitable; if the subject of your meditation is mortification, you feel attracted to the practice of self-denial . . .

It would be wrong to conclude that you know Christ well just because you took up Theology as part of your curriculum in College, or because you are a member of a study club. From such study your mind draws theoretical knowledge. This is necessary; but it is not enough. As I said earlier, not only the mind, but also the heart and the will must come to know—and to accept!—Christ. Only meditation can do this for you.

Meditation is a must in the life of a cursillista. Can you truly say that you love Christ if you do not think about Him? Will you believe that your children love you if they never—or seldom—think of you?...

How often should I meditate?—How often should you think about the persons you love... The ideal thing would be to make meditation a *daily practice*.

If you meditate only once a week you will not acquire the habit of meditating. Meditation will not really become a part of your life. And, quite possibly, you will not meditate for many weeks...

Besides, the oftener you meditate, the greater—and faster—progress in spiritual life you will make!

How long?—Not so long that your meditation becomes an unbearable burden; not so short that meditation is impossible! For the average cursillista five or ten minutes a day would be right. The length of the time you dedicate to your meditation will increase as your spiritual life grows. In this, follow the advice of your spiritual director.

Where should I make my meditation?—You can have your meditation at home, or in the Church. The place does not matter, as long as you are away from noise and distractions.

What book should I use for my meditation?—Please discuss this with your spiritual director. He knows the state of your soul, and is in a position to advise you on this matter.

In general, any book of a spiritual nature can be used for meditation.

But don't forget that a book is only an aid to meditation. If the book does not help, if it becomes a handicap, put it aside. If your mind and heart are so full of the idea of God that you can meditate without a book, by all means do so. However, it is advisable to keep a book always close by just in case it is needed.

When shall I have my daily meditation?—It depends on your schedule. Choose the most suitable time. By "suitable" I mean the time when you are least liable to be distracted and more able to concentrate. Early in the morning, before Mass, is a good time. It is also a good preparation for Mass and Communion.

Once you have decided when, where and how long to meditate, stick to your decision. Do not change it lightly. If one day you meditate in the morning, and the next day in the evening; if on Monday you do it in the Church and at home on Tuesday, chances are that you will soon stop meditating.

Do not make the mistake of saying: "Today I do not feel like meditating. I'll skip or shorten my meditation; and I'll make up for it tomorrow"... Tomorrow you will also feel lazy. If you develop this habit, your meditation will be short-lived.

Sometimes meditation is difficult. The mind refuses to concentrate, the heart seems to be dry; the will, weak...—Don't squeeze your brains nor force your heart and will violently.... But don't give up your meditation!... Tell God that you find it hard to meditate; but that, for His love, you will do your best. Then pick up your book, and read slowly the whole length of your meditation.... Even if the whole thing looks useless to you, it is not. Actually such meditation is exceptionally meritorious in the eyes of God because it entails a special effort on your part.

Love is not measured by the emotion or happiness we find in doing something; but by our readiness to sacrifice for the one we love; in this particular case, by your readiness to go on thinking about God in spite of the fact that you find it distasteful.

On the other hand, on some occasions you will experience an unusual happiness in your meditation. And you would want to extend it. You can do so; but on condition that such an extension is not detrimental to your other duties and that it does not mean that if the next day you find it difficult to meditate you are going to say: "Never mind; I can afford to forget about meditation today because yesterday I meditated for twenty minutes, instead of ten"...—Make sure that in your meditation you seek God, not yourself!...