THE DAILY BREAD

The Acts of the Apostles



Companions for the Journey

A FORMATION BOOK BY

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The Everyday Apostle

INTRODUCTION

You Are Not Walking Alone

There is a strange loneliness that settles over the modern man trying to live the Christian life.

You may have a parish. You may have a wife, children, friends. You may have a small group at church on Tuesday nights. And yet, when the actual interior work begins, when the question is what to do tomorrow morning with the disordered piece of your own soul, you often feel as if you are the first person in history to face this particular fight.

You are not.

Every question you have ever had about the spiritual life, every temptation, every confusion, every dark night, every burst of love followed by months of dryness, has been faced before, in detail, by men and women whose names the Church still says out loud at Mass two thousand years later. They were not different from you. They had jobs. They had families. They had vices they hated and could not seem to shake. They had doubts. Most of them were not, in their own time, considered impressive people.

And they made it through.

The communion of saints is not a polite metaphor. It is a real, ongoing, intercessory fellowship that you have already been baptized into.

This little book is a curated set of twelve portraits. Not a complete catalog, the Church has thousands of saints, and you should meet many of them over a lifetime, but a starting set of companions whose lives speak with unusual clarity to the situation a modern Catholic man finds himself in.

Each chapter is short by design. You can read one in fifteen minutes. You can return to one in a hard week. The point is not to know the facts of these lives, the way you might know facts about a historical figure, but to begin a relationship. The saints are not in the past. They are in the room. They are praying for you right now while you read this sentence.

Pick one. Start there. Walk with him or her for a few months. Read more. Ask their intercession. Notice what changes.

You are not walking alone. You never were.

C H A P T E R O N E

Augustine of Hippo

The Wandering Heart

He spent his twenties in love with the wrong things and his thirties writing one of the greatest books ever produced about why.

Aurelius Augustinus was born in 354 in a small town in what is now Algeria. His mother Monica was a devout Christian; his father was a pagan civil servant. The young Augustine was brilliant, restless, and ambitious. He went to Carthage to study rhetoric and immediately fell in with the kind of life Carthage offered: a long affair, a son out of wedlock, the slow cultivation of a public reputation. He flirted with one heresy, then another. He moved to Rome, then to Milan, climbing the imperial career ladder.

He was thirty-one years old, professionally successful, and miserable. He wrote later that he was "in love with loving," but nothing he loved actually filled the hole. Sex did not. Status did not. Philosophy did not. The pagan religions did not. The Manichean heresy he had followed for nine years did not. He was running out of options.

In a garden in Milan, he heard a child's voice through a wall, repeating a singsong phrase: *tolle, lege*, "take and read." He picked up a copy of Paul's letters lying nearby, opened at random to Romans 13, and read: "Not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual excess and lust … but put on the Lord Jesus Christ." Something broke. He wrote later that the doubt did not return.

He was baptized by Bishop Ambrose, returned to Africa, and was eventually made bishop of the small port city of Hippo. He spent the next thirty-five years writing, preaching, arguing with heretics, and working through, in front of the whole Latin-reading world, what his own conversion had actually meant. The *Confessions* is the result. *The City of God* is the result. The Western intellectual tradition is, in important respects, the result.

What Augustine Teaches

Augustine teaches that the restlessness of your own heart is not a malfunction. It is a homing signal.

Most modern men have been told, implicitly, that their dissatisfaction is a problem to solve with the next acquisition, the next promotion, the next relationship. Augustine spent his youth running the same experiment, and his report is unambiguous: it does not work. The

hunger you feel for something more, beneath all the things you have already tried, is a hunger for God. It will not be satisfied by anything smaller.

He also teaches that conversion is rarely instant. He prayed for years some version of "Lord, make me chaste, but not yet" before the garden scene. The slow part of his story, the years of half-wanting God and half-wanting his old life, is more important than the dramatic part. That is the part that looks like your own life.

You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you. — Confessions, I.1

How to Walk With Him

Read the *Confessions*. Not all of it; the first nine books are the autobiographical part, and they are surprisingly readable in any modern translation. You will find a man wrestling with the same questions you are wrestling with, in surprisingly contemporary language, sixteen hundred years ago.

Pray to him by name when you find yourself attached to something you know is not God. "Saint Augustine, you spent years loving the wrong things. Pray that I learn faster than you did." He will not be offended. He has heard the prayer before.

C H A P T E R T W O

Benedict of Nursia

A Rule of Life

The fall of Rome was not a single event. It was a long unraveling, a century of receding order, in which the institutions and habits that had held Western life together quietly stopped working. Benedict was born into the middle of it, around 480, in central Italy.

He went to Rome as a young man to study and was so repulsed by the moral chaos he saw there that he left. He spent three years living alone in a cave at Subiaco. Eventually he emerged, took on disciples, founded a series of monasteries, and around the year 530 wrote a short document called the Rule, seventy-three chapters of practical instructions for men trying to live together as Christians.

The Rule does not contain dramatic mysticism. It contains schedules. When to pray. When to work. When to read. When to sleep. How much wine to drink (a half-pint a day, but "the strong have no need of it"). How to handle a brother who breaks things. How to receive guests. How to rotate the kitchen duty.

It does not look impressive on the page. But it worked. Benedictine monasteries spread across Europe for the next thousand years, copying manuscripts when no one else was, preserving agriculture and learning through the collapse, raising up the saints and scholars who would eventually become the Middle Ages. Western civilization was not saved by an emperor or a general. It was saved, in significant part, by a man with a schedule.

What Benedict Teaches

Benedict teaches that holiness is mostly structural.

We tend to imagine the spiritual life as a series of inspired moments, surges of devotion, dramatic conversions, moving experiences at retreats. Those things are real, but they are not the substance of the spiritual life. The substance is what you do every day at the same time, year after year, whether you feel like it or not. Benedict understood that the soul is shaped by repetition more than by intensity.

Most modern men do not have a rule of life. They have a chaotic schedule pushed around by emails, family demands, work emergencies, and the algorithm. Their spiritual practice happens, when it happens, in the cracks. This is exactly backwards. The spiritual practice should be the load-bearing structure, and the rest of life should be fit around it.

Listen, my son, and incline the ear of your heart., The opening words of the Rule of St. Benedict

How to Walk With Him

Write a rule of life. Not a long one. A page. Start with these: a fixed time to get up, a fixed prayer in the morning, a fixed prayer in the evening, a fixed day of the week to rest, a fixed monthly confession. Add to it slowly. Live by it.

When you fail at it, do not throw it out. Benedict's monks did not throw out the Rule when they fell short of it. They came back to it the next morning, and the morning after that. The Rule is what they returned to. Returning is the whole work.

C H A P T E R T H R E E

Thomas Aquinas

Thinking as Worship

He was the youngest son of a noble Italian family, large, quiet, and so slow-moving that his classmates called him "the dumb ox." One of his teachers, Albert the Great, heard the joke and reportedly responded: "You call him a dumb ox, but the bellowing of this ox will be heard throughout the world."

Thomas Aquinas was born around 1225 near Aquino, Italy. His family wanted him to be a Benedictine abbot, a respectable career. He wanted to join the new and slightly disreputable Dominican order of preachers, who took vows of poverty. His family was so opposed that they kidnapped him on the road and held him captive for a year. He used the year to memorize the Bible.

Once they let him go, he went north, studied under Albert the Great, and began to do the work that would occupy the rest of his life: bringing the rigorous philosophical methods of the recently rediscovered Aristotle into conversation with the Catholic faith. The result is the *Summa Theologiae*, an attempt to lay out, in clear logical structure, the entire content of what Christians believe and why.

Three months before he died, he had a profound mystical experience while celebrating Mass. He stopped writing the *Summa*. When his secretary urged him to continue, he said: "I cannot. All that I have written seems like straw compared to what has been revealed to me." He died in 1274, on the way to a Church council, at forty-nine years old.

What Aquinas Teaches

Aquinas teaches that the Catholic faith is not a refuge from thinking. It is the place where thinking finally goes all the way down.

There is a temptation, in the modern Church, to oppose faith and reason, as if they were rival forces and one had to win. Aquinas spent his life demonstrating that this opposition is false. Faith does not begin where reason ends; faith and reason are looking at the same world, asking the same questions, and arriving, when both are working properly, at the same truth.

For a man who lives in a culture that treats Christianity as anti-intellectual, Aquinas is a gift. The Catholic tradition has thought longer and more carefully about almost every important question than the people currently insisting that the tradition is unserious. You do not have to choose between your mind and your faith. You can do both. Aquinas did them at the same time, at the highest level, for thirty years.

He also teaches what to do with intellectual achievement. The man who wrote the most ambitious work of theology in Christian history put down his pen because Christ Himself, encountered in prayer, made the writing look thin. The mind matters; God matters more. Aquinas knew the order.

Grant me, O Lord my God, a mind to know You, a heart to seek You, wisdom to find You, conduct pleasing to You, faithful perseverance in waiting for You, and a hope of finally embracing You. Amen. — Prayer of St. Thomas Aquinas

How to Walk With Him

Read something. The *Summa* is enormous; do not start there. Start with a short introduction, Peter Kreeft's writings on Aquinas are accessible and faithful, and work outward from there. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* draws heavily on Aquinas; reading it slowly is, in effect, a course in his thought.

Bring your harder questions to prayer. Aquinas held that intellectual difficulty is honored when it is taken seriously, not papered over with vague feeling. If you have a real question about the faith, find a real answer. The answer almost always exists. Aquinas probably wrote it down.

C H A P T E R F O U R

Francis of Assisi

Freedom From Things

He was the cheerful, well-dressed son of a wealthy cloth merchant in a small Italian town, the kind of young man who threw the best parties and led the singing through the streets at night. There was no reason to expect anything dramatic out of him.

He went to war, was captured, spent a year in a prison cell, and came home different. He started spending time in ruined chapels outside town. He gave away his father's merchandise to the poor, repeatedly, until his father took him to court. In the public square of Assisi, in front of the bishop and the whole town, the young Francis stripped off the clothes his father had paid for, handed them back, and walked away naked. He spent the rest of his life in a brown robe tied with a rope.

What followed is one of the strangest careers in Christian history. Francis founded an order of friars who owned nothing, in an age when religious orders typically owned vast estates. He preached to birds and reportedly negotiated a peace with a wolf. He met the Sultan of Egypt during the Crusades, walked unarmed into his camp, and was treated with honor. Near the end of his life, on a mountain at La Verna, he received the stigmata, the wounds of Christ in his own hands, feet, and side. He died in 1226, lying on the bare ground at his own request, singing.

What Francis Teaches

Francis teaches that the things you own are also owning you, and that joy is on the other side of giving them up.

The modern man is suffocating under his possessions. The closet is full. The garage is full. The phone has three thousand apps. The calendar is packed with commitments to maintain a lifestyle he never quite chose. He suspects, somewhere, that less would be more, that simplicity would be a relief, but the structures he has built make the unwinding difficult.

Francis cut the knot. He did it dramatically because his temperament was dramatic, but the underlying logic does not require drama. The logic is just that things you do not need are weighing on you, and the lightening that comes from letting them go is real and immediate. Every saint who has tried this reports the same thing: poverty, voluntarily embraced, is not deprivation. It is freedom.

He also teaches that creation, when properly seen, is full of brothers and sisters. Brother Sun, Sister Moon, Brother Fire, Sister Water. This is not sentimental nature-poetry. It is a particular metaphysical claim: that everything God made is in relation to you, that you are not the center, and that the proper response to a sunrise is closer to wonder than to indifference. Francis recovered something Adam had before the Fall: a way of being in the world without grasping.

Preach the Gospel at all times. When necessary, use words., Attributed to St. Francis

How to Walk With Him

Give something away this week. Not the things you do not want; something you would actually miss. Notice what happens inside you when you do it. Francis discovered, slowly, that the inside of the soul opens up to the degree that the outside life is uncluttered. Try it on a small scale and see if he was right.

Spend time outdoors without a phone. Look at things. Let the created world be the company. Francis would say you are with family.

C H A P T E R F I V E

Thomas More

The Public Man

He was the most important lawyer in England, the Lord Chancellor under King Henry VIII, a man at the very top of public life in the early sixteenth century. He had a happy marriage, four children, a beautiful house at Chelsea on the Thames, and the king′s personal friendship. He had everything a man could be expected to want.

And then Henry VIII decided he wanted to divorce his wife and marry Anne Boleyn, and required every official in England to sign an oath acknowledging Henry, not the Pope, as the head of the Church in England.

Thomas More resigned his office. He went home quietly. He refused to sign. He refused, also, to criticize the king publicly, hoping to be left alone, but Henry would not allow that either. He needed More′s signature because More′s reputation was so high that his refusal alone was enough to make the new arrangement look illegitimate.

More was imprisoned in the Tower of London for fifteen months. His wife begged him to sign. His daughter Meg, his beloved scholar-daughter, begged him to sign. His friends pointed out, accurately, that signing was the prudent move and most of the English bishops had already done so. He still refused.

On July 6, 1535, he was beheaded on Tower Hill. His last words, addressed to the crowd, were that he died "the King′s good servant, but God′s first."

What More Teaches

More teaches that there is a line.

Most of public life, including most of corporate life, is a long series of small compromises. You shade the truth in a meeting. You sign off on a strategy you suspect is dishonest. You stay silent when a colleague is being treated unjustly. None of these alone seems like much. Together they constitute a slow erosion of the man you intended to be.

More demonstrates that there is a point at which the compromises stop. The whole question of a man′s integrity is whether he knows where that point is in advance, before the pressure arrives, and whether he has the spine to hold it when the pressure does arrive. The astonishing thing about More is that the pressure that came at him was the pressure of the entire English state, every personal relationship he had, and the threat of his own death, and he still held the line.

He also teaches that integrity is not the same as harshness. More was, by all accounts, a warm, witty, deeply affectionate husband and father. He loved his daughter Meg so fiercely that her letters to him in the Tower are some of the most tender documents in English literature. He was not stern by temperament. He just had a thing he would not do. And when the moment came, the warmth and the wit did not stop him from going calmly to the block.

I die the King's good servant, but God's first. — St. Thomas More, on the scaffold, July 6, 1535

How to Walk With Him

Think, while it is still cheap to think, about what your line is. Most men only discover their line under pressure, which is too late to consider it carefully. Where, exactly, will you say no? What is the dishonest act, the immoral instruction, the small evil you will not perform regardless of the cost to your career? Decide now. Tell your wife. Write it down if you have to. Then, when the moment comes, the decision has already been made.

Ask More's intercession. He understands what is at stake in modern professional life better than you might think. The pressures look different; the pattern is the same. He is praying that you become, in your own situation, the same kind of man.

C H A P T E R S I X

Ignatius of Loyola

Discernment of Spirits

He was a Basque soldier, vain and ambitious, more interested in his appearance and his social standing than in any deeper question. In 1521, at the siege of Pamplona, a French cannonball broke his leg, ended his military career, and forced him to spend months in bed.

He asked for novels of chivalry to pass the time. None were available. Someone brought him, instead, a life of Christ and a book on the lives of the saints. He read them slowly because there was nothing else to read. And he noticed something.

When he daydreamed about going back to court life, about the famous deeds he would do, about the noble woman he hoped to impress, he felt good for a while and then empty. When he daydreamed about following the saints, about going to Jerusalem, about giving up his rank and serving the poor, he felt good for a while and stayed good afterward. The same imaginative activity, two different aftermaths.

He began to pay attention to these aftermaths. He recovered, gave away his sword at a Marian shrine, lived for almost a year in a cave at Manresa, and started to write down what he was learning about how God moved in a soul and how the enemy moved against it. Those notes became the *Spiritual Exercises*, a thirty-day retreat manual that has, in the five centuries since, shaped Catholic spirituality more deeply than almost any other document outside the Bible.

He went on to found the Society of Jesus, the Jesuits, an order of priests and brothers who would spread Catholic education, mission, and scholarship across the globe. He died in 1556 in Rome, at the desk where he was answering letters.

What Ignatius Teaches

Ignatius teaches that you can learn to read the movement of your own soul.

Most men have no system for distinguishing between the impulse that is from God, the impulse that is from their own ego, and the impulse that is from the enemy. They simply react to whichever impulse is loudest. Ignatius spent his life proving that these can be told apart, that there are recognizable patterns, that the consolations and desolations of the interior life follow rules, and that those rules can be learned.

The simplest version is the one he discovered in bed. Pay attention to the aftermath. The thought that leaves you peaceful, generous, and oriented toward God is from God, even if it

is uncomfortable. The thought that leaves you anxious, self-absorbed, and oriented away from God is from somewhere else, even if it feels exciting in the moment. Make decisions based on the aftermath, not the initial thrill.

He also teaches that there are seasons. Sometimes God floods the soul with sweetness; sometimes He withdraws and the soul has to walk by faith without feeling. Both are normal. Both have rules. Do not make a permanent decision in a temporary mood. Do not abandon a good practice because it has gone dry. Do not double down on a flattering one because it feels exhilarating. Wait, watch, and notice.

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will. All that I have and call my own. You have given it all to me. To you, Lord, I return it. Suscipe prayer, St. Ignatius

How to Walk With Him

Begin the daily Examen. It is the single most useful practice Ignatius left us, and it takes about five minutes. At the end of the day, ask: where did I notice God today? What movement did I feel in my soul, and in which direction did it pull? What do I need to ask forgiveness for? What do I need help with tomorrow?

Done faithfully for a year, the Examen will teach you what no book can teach you: the texture of your own interior life, and the difference between the voice of God and the voice of everything else. Ignatius will be glad to walk you through it. He is, after all, the one who wrote the manual.

C H A P T E R S E V E N

Francis de Sales

Steady Gentleness

He was born in 1567 in Savoy, the eldest son of a noble family who fully expected him to become a lawyer, a soldier, or both. He did not want any of it. He wanted to be a priest.

After a long struggle with his father, he was ordained, and almost immediately was sent into the most thankless mission field in Europe: the Chablais region near Lake Geneva, which had been Protestant for sixty years. The Catholic priests had been driven out. The local population was hostile. Francis arrived with one companion, was nearly killed several times, and decided to win the people back not by argument but by relentless, patient kindness.

He wrote pamphlets, copied them out by hand, and slid them under doors at night. He invited debate but refused to be cruel. He kept showing up. Slowly, village by village, the Chablais came back to the Church. Tens of thousands of people, by the end of his time there, had been reconciled.

He became bishop of Geneva, though he was forbidden to enter the city by the Calvinist authorities, and spent the rest of his life writing direction letters to ordinary people, mostly lay men and women, trying to live the Christian life in the middle of normal work and family demands. Those letters became the *Introduction to the Devout Life*, one of the great books on lay spirituality ever written. He died in 1622.

What Francis de Sales Teaches

He had, by his own admission, a violent temper as a young man. He spent his whole life subduing it. The biographers who knew him described his eventual gentleness as one of the most striking things about him, and noted that he had constructed it deliberately, on top of a temperament that had to be retrained, day after day, for decades.

This matters for the modern man, because the modern man is often angry. Angry at his job, at his marriage, at the news, at the slow driver, at the colleague who interrupts him, at his own children. He has been told, by the culture, that his anger is righteous and that letting it out is healthy. Francis de Sales would tell him both ideas are wrong. The anger is rarely righteous; it is mostly wounded pride. And letting it out does not discharge it; it deepens it, hurts the people around him, and trains his soul to react that way more easily next time.

Francis also teaches that holiness is not reserved for monks. The *Introduction to the Devout Life* was, when it was published, a quiet revolution. He argued that the soldier, the merchant, the married woman, the father, every person in every state of life, was called to the same holiness, just lived out differently. You do not need to leave the world to be a saint. You need to be a saint inside the world you already have.

Nothing is so strong as gentleness, nothing so gentle as real strength. — St. Francis de Sales

How to Walk With Him

Notice your anger this week. Not to suppress it; to observe it. When does it flare? At whom? What is actually underneath, fear, exhaustion, wounded pride, the sense of being disrespected? Francis would tell you the diagnosis is half the work. Then practice the sixty-second rule: when you feel the surge, do not speak for one minute. The first minute is where most of the damage happens.

Read the *Introduction to the Devout Life*, even just a chapter at a time. It is the warmest, most practical guide for lay Catholic life that anyone has ever written.

C H A P T E R E I G H T

John Henry Newman

The Honest Mind

He was the most influential Anglican clergyman in nineteenth-century England, an Oxford don, a brilliant preacher, and the leader of a movement to restore the Church of England to its catholic roots. He had every reason to stay where he was. Conversion to Rome, in Victorian England, was a social catastrophe. It cost him his career, most of his friendships, and his place in the country he loved.

He did it anyway, in 1845, after twenty years of reading, arguing, and slowly being convinced. He wrote about the experience: "To live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often." He was forty-four years old, and he changed because the evidence required it.

He spent the rest of his life as a Catholic, mostly in Birmingham, writing some of the most important works of nineteenth-century theology, sermons, and apologetics. He founded the Birmingham Oratory. He wrote the *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, a defense of his conversion that is also one of the great spiritual autobiographies in English. He wrote the *Grammar of Assent* on how human beings actually come to believe things. Pope Leo XIII made him a cardinal in 1879. He died in 1890. Benedict XVI beatified him in 2010. Francis canonized him in 2019.

What Newman Teaches

Newman teaches that you have an obligation to follow the truth wherever it leads, even when it leads somewhere that costs you everything.

The modern man lives in a culture that has confused tolerance with intellectual cowardice. He has been taught that all positions are equally valid, that having strong convictions is rude, that following an argument to its conclusion is somehow an act of aggression. Newman would dismiss this entire framework with a single sentence: "Conscience has rights because it has duties." You are not free to believe whatever is comfortable. You are obligated to find out what is true, and then to live by it.

He also teaches, especially in the *Grammar of Assent*, that real belief is not the same as mathematical proof. It is the convergence of many small, fallible probabilities into a moral certainty. A man can be reasonably certain his wife loves him without being able to prove it like a theorem. A man can be reasonably certain that the Catholic Church teaches the truth without being able to settle every disputed question philosophically. Faith is not a leap into

the dark; it is a sober, gradual, well-grounded commitment to what the evidence increasingly demands.

And he teaches, by his life, that conversion is honorable. There is no shame in changing your mind because you have looked more closely. There is great shame in refusing to change your mind because you are afraid of what changing will cost you. The Christian intellectual life has room for everyone willing to do the work; it has no room for those unwilling to follow the work where it goes.

Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom, lead thou me on. — St. John Henry Newman

How to Walk With Him

Be willing to read on the other side of your assumptions. If you grew up Catholic and have never seriously considered the case for the faith, read Newman's *Apologia*. If you are coming to the faith from somewhere else and the arguments seem too hard, read Newman, who did the same work, in public, in front of a hostile country, and made it through.

Pray for honest conviction. Not for certainty; for honesty. Newman would tell you these are not the same thing.

C H A P T E R N I N E

Thérèse of Lisieux

The Hidden Life

She entered a Carmelite convent in northern France at age fifteen, lived a small, quiet, externally uneventful life behind the walls, and died of tuberculosis at twenty-four. She never went on a mission. She never founded an order. She never wrote a long book. She was almost nobody.

She is now one of only four women Doctors of the Church.

Marie-Françoise-Thérèse Martin was born in 1873, the youngest daughter of a watchmaker and a lacemaker, both of whom have also been canonized. She lost her mother to cancer when she was four. She was a sensitive, almost unbearably anxious child. She received what she later called the "grace of Christmas" at age thirteen, a sudden interior strengthening that allowed her to stop crying about everything. Two years later, after a pilgrimage to Rome in which she threw herself at the feet of Pope Leo XIII and begged to be allowed to enter Carmel early, she got her wish.

Inside, she suffered. She had a hard novice mistress, a cold prioress, dry prayer, and tuberculosis that ate her alive over a final eighteen months. Her last year was a dark night of faith in which she could no longer feel God's presence at all. She died on September 30, 1897. Her superior had asked her, the year before, to write down her childhood and her spiritual ideas. The manuscript was published after her death as *Story of a Soul*. Within a few years it was being read around the world.

What Thérèse Teaches

Thérèse teaches that the small life, lived with great love, is the great life.

The modern man has been formed to believe that significance requires scale. If he is not building something large, leading something large, being recognized at scale, his life is somehow unfinished. He looks at the saints in the calendar, the founders, the missionaries, the martyrs, and quietly concludes that ordinary fatherhood, ordinary work, ordinary fidelity is a lesser path.

Thérèse exposes this as a lie. Her "little way" is the discovery that what God wants is not your impressive deeds; He wants the love you put into the unimpressive ones. The diaper change at three in the morning. The reply you don't fire off because it would wound. The smile to the colleague who has been grating on you for months. The quiet hour of prayer no

one sees. None of this looks like sanctity to the world. All of it is sanctity in the eyes of God, who, Thérèse insists, weighs things differently than we do.

She also teaches what to do in spiritual dryness. Her last year, when she could not feel God at all and felt instead a wall of darkness, she did not stop. She continued the small acts. She continued the prayers she could no longer feel. She offered the darkness itself as a gift, in solidarity with people who had no faith at all. That kind of faithfulness, faithfulness without consolation, is what most of the spiritual life eventually looks like. She got there at twenty-three. She is still teaching the rest of us how.

I wish to spend my heaven doing good upon earth. — St. Thérèse of Lisieux

How to Walk With Her

Take one small act tomorrow, the one you would normally do grudgingly, and offer it. Do not announce it. Do not tell anyone. Just do it as a gift. Notice what changes, not in the world, but in you.

Pray to her by name, especially in seasons of dryness. She is famous for sending small signs to the people who ask her intercession, usually flowers, often roses. Many men have laughed off this tradition and then had the experience of being unable to ignore it. She is closer than you think.

C H A P T E R T E N

Maximilian Kolbe

Love Without Limits

He was a Polish Franciscan friar, a publisher, a missionary, a man with consumption in one lung. In 1941, he was forty-seven years old and in a Nazi concentration camp at Auschwitz, prisoner number 16670.

In late July, a prisoner from his block escaped. The standard reprisal was to select ten men from the same block and starve them to death in an underground bunker, as a deterrent. The selections were made. One of the men chosen, a sergeant named Franciszek Gajowniczek, cried out that he had a wife and children. Kolbe stepped forward and asked to take his place.

The astonished SS commandant agreed. Kolbe went into the starvation bunker with the other nine. He led them in prayer and singing. The guards reportedly stopped going down because the atmosphere in the cell, even as the men died, was unsettling to them. After two weeks, four men were still alive, including Kolbe. The Nazis needed the cell. They injected him with carbolic acid on August 14, 1941. He reportedly raised his arm to make it easier for the executioner.

Franciszek Gajowniczek survived the war. He lived another fifty-three years. He attended Kolbe's beatification in 1971 and his canonization in 1982, and spent the rest of his life telling anyone who would listen what Maximilian Kolbe had done for him.

What Kolbe Teaches

Kolbe teaches that there is a kind of love that breaks the entire logic of evil.

The Nazi camps were built on the principle that human life is calculable: that some lives are worth more than others, that survival is the highest good, that fear of death is the lever by which men can be controlled. Kolbe walked into that calculus and broke it by performing an act for which the system had no answer. A free, deliberate substitution of his own life for a stranger's, with nothing to gain, no audience but God, no possibility of escape. The system could kill him. It could not understand him.

Every modern man is going to be tested in some smaller version of this. Not in a death camp; in a thousand smaller asks. Who will take the unpopular project at work no one else wants? Who will say the difficult thing in defense of someone who is not in the room? Who will give up a comfort, a possession, a reputation, so that someone else can be spared? The

form changes. The underlying question is the same. Are you the kind of man who steps forward, or are you the kind who hopes someone else will?

Kolbe also teaches that sanctity is for ordinary men. He was, before the camp, not a famous mystic. He was a hard-working friar who ran a magazine, ran a radio station, ran a religious community, prayed the Rosary daily, and was deeply devoted to Mary. The substitution at Auschwitz was not a discontinuity. It was the moment when a lifetime of ordinary fidelity revealed what it had been forming him into.

Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. — John 15:13

How to Walk With Him

Ask, this week, what "stepping forward" would look like in your actual life. The chance to take a hit so that someone else does not. The thing you can give up so that another person can have it. Make the gesture small if it has to be small. The point is to begin training the muscle.

Pray to Maximilian Kolbe when you find yourself in a situation where someone is being scapegoated and it would cost you something to defend them. He will know exactly what you are facing. He has done the harder version.

C H A P T E R E L E V E N

Padre Pio

The Long Faithfulness

He was a Capuchin friar in a small mountain town in southern Italy. He carried the wounds of Christ in his hands, feet, and side for fifty years. He heard confessions for ten or twelve hours a day. He had the gift of reading souls, of bilocation, of healing, and possibly of prophecy. He was investigated, restricted, and accused of fraud by his own Church for decades, and he obeyed every restriction without complaint.

Francesco Forgione was born in 1887 in the village of Pietrelcina. He joined the Capuchins as a teenager, was ordained in 1910, and almost immediately began to experience extraordinary mystical phenomena. In 1918, while praying before a crucifix, he received the stigmata. He was thirty-one years old. The wounds did not heal. They bled, on and off, for the next fifty years.

The Vatican was not initially impressed. There had been frauds in the recent past. Padre Pio was forbidden, at various points, from celebrating Mass publicly, from hearing confessions, even from corresponding with most of his spiritual children. He accepted every order. He never complained. He kept praying.

Eventually the restrictions were lifted. The crowds came. Tens of thousands of people came to San Giovanni Rotondo to confess to him. He was famous for his harshness in the confessional, sending away the unrepentant with sharp words, and equally famous for the tenderness he showed those who were trying. He founded a hospital. He prayed the Rosary, by his own account, between fifteen and twenty times a day. He died in 1968, at the age of eighty-one, two days after the fiftieth anniversary of receiving the stigmata. The wounds had vanished from his body in the hours before his death.

What Padre Pio Teaches

Padre Pio teaches that holiness is not the absence of suffering. It is the long, patient transformation of suffering into a gift.

He had constant physical pain for fifty years. He had spiritual dryness, doubts, and assaults that he described in his letters as wrestling with demons. He had the institutional Church doubting him, restricting him, and treating him as suspect for decades. He had every reason to grow bitter, withdraw, demand vindication. He never did. He simply kept showing up at the confessional, kept saying Mass, kept praying the Rosary, kept obeying.

The modern man tends to interpret prolonged suffering as evidence that something has gone wrong, that God has stopped paying attention, that the spiritual life is not working. Padre Pio's life is one long counterargument. The suffering, embraced, was the spiritual life working. It was making him into the man who could, by the end, sit in a confessional ten hours a day and channel the mercy of God to broken people, including people who had been at the worst of the twentieth century.

He also teaches the power of small, repeated, unspectacular devotion. The Rosary fifteen times a day. The hours in the confessional. The obedience to his superiors when they were almost certainly wrong about him. The refusal to advertise his own gifts. None of this looks like the dramatic phenomena he is famous for. All of it was the structure underneath those phenomena. The drama did not produce the saint. The faithfulness did.

Pray, hope, and don't worry. — St. Padre Pio

How to Walk With Him

Pray the Rosary. Not occasionally; regularly. A decade a day at minimum, a full Rosary if you can manage it. Padre Pio called it "the weapon for these times." He was not being romantic. He meant it.

When you suffer something prolonged, an illness, a difficult marriage, a child who has wandered, a long professional disappointment, do not assume the spiritual life has failed. Padre Pio would tell you it has begun. Offer the suffering for someone. Keep showing up at the sacraments. The transformation is slow and you will not feel it, but it is happening underneath.

C H A P T E R T W E L V E

John Paul II

Meaning in Pain

Karol Wojtyła lost almost everyone he loved before he was twenty-one years old. His mother died when he was eight. His older brother, a doctor, died of scarlet fever caught from a patient when Karol was twelve. His father, the last surviving member of his immediate family, died of a heart attack when Karol was twenty.

He spent the Nazi occupation of Poland working in a quarry and a chemical factory by day, attending an underground seminary by night. After the war came the Communists. He became a priest, then a bishop, then archbishop of Kraków, then a cardinal, all of it while quietly building a Catholic intellectual and spiritual resistance to a regime that wanted his Church dead.

In 1978 he was elected pope, the first non-Italian in 455 years, the first Slav ever. In 1981, an assassin shot him in St. Peter's Square. He survived after months of recovery. He visited his attempted killer in prison and forgave him personally. He went on to be one of the great public figures of the twentieth century: a key force in the collapse of the Soviet system, a writer of dense and influential theological works, the architect of World Youth Day, a pope who visited more than a hundred countries and addressed millions of young people in person.

And then, slowly, Parkinson's disease took him apart in public, over more than a decade, in full view of the cameras. The strong athletic man who had hiked and kayaked into his sixties trembled, slurred, slumped, and eventually could not speak. He refused to step down. He showed up at the window every Sunday, increasingly unable to bless the crowd. He died on April 2, 2005, in his apartment in the Apostolic Palace. He was beatified in 2011 and canonized in 2014.

What John Paul Teaches

John Paul teaches that suffering, when joined to the suffering of Christ, becomes redemptive. It is not just endured. It is offered. And when it is offered, it works.

He wrote about this directly in *Salvifici Doloris*, *On the Christian Meaning of Human Suffering*. He had a great deal of credibility to write it. He had lost his entire family young, he had lived under two totalitarian regimes, he had been shot, he had been worked over by a disease that humiliated him on the world stage. And he held, against every modern instinct, that this kind of suffering was not waste. United to Christ's, it became one of the

great forces in the universe, capable of changing souls, healing relationships, breaking demonic strongholds, in ways no other action could.

He also teaches what to do when your strength fails. Most modern men derive their identity from competence: from being able to do their job, lead their family, perform physically, command respect. They are terrified, often unconsciously, of the moment when this competence will be taken from them. John Paul, in his last years, modeled for the entire world what it looks like to have all of that taken and still be, somehow, more rather than less. The frail old man trembling at the window had become more himself, not less, by losing the things he had once used to define himself. It is one of the most important witnesses of the modern Church.

Do not abandon yourselves to despair. We are the Easter people, and Hallelujah is our song. — St. John Paul II

How to Walk With Him

Offer your suffering. The next headache, the next disappointment, the next painful conversation, do not just endure it. Say, interiorly, "Lord, I offer this for my wife," or "for my children," or "for the man I work with who is struggling with something he hasn't told me about." The offering is real. It is doing something, even if you cannot see it.

Read *Salvifici Doloris*. It is not long. It is one of the most important documents on suffering written in the last hundred years. The man who wrote it had been formed in a hard school and knew exactly what he was talking about.

CONCLUSION

Pick One. Begin.

Twelve portraits. Many more were possible. The Church has thousands of saints, and you should, over a lifetime, meet a great many of them.

But not all at once. Twelve is enough to start. Probably more than enough.

Here is the most important thing this book can give you: the suggestion that you do not have to admire them all. You have to walk with one or two.

Pick the saint whose particular fight, temperament, or wound most resembles your own. The Augustine for the wandering heart. The Benedict for the man whose life is structurally a mess. The Aquinas for the doubter who wants to think his way through. The Francis for the man suffocating under his stuff. The More for the man under public pressure to compromise. The Ignatius for the man who cannot tell which voice is which. The Francis de Sales for the man who explodes too easily. The Newman for the man who suspects the truth will cost him. The Thérèse for the man whose life looks small. The Kolbe for the moment when stepping forward will cost. The Pio for the long road. The John Paul for the season when your strength is failing.

Or pick one for reasons you cannot articulate. Sometimes a particular saint just stands up in your reading and announces himself. Trust that.

The saints are not in the past. They are in the room. They are praying for you while you read this sentence.

Then begin the relationship. Learn the story. Read something they wrote, if they wrote. Pray to them by name when you face the situation they faced. Notice what happens. Notice the small graces, the slightly easier resistance, the small openings of insight, the way the day goes when you started it asking their help.

This is not magic. It is family. The communion of saints is the great gift of the Catholic Church: you have brothers and sisters in heaven who know your situation, who have walked something like your road, and who are actively interceding for you with the Father.

You are not walking alone. You never were.

Pick one. Begin.

✦ ✦ ✦