THE DAILY BREAD

The Creed of the Apostles



Living in the State of Grace

A FORMATION BOOK BY

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The Everyday Apostle

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Keeping the Life of God Alive in You

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INTRODUCTION

The Most Important Thing About You

There is a fact about a man more important than his health, his wealth, his reputation, or his accomplishments, and it is a fact most men never think about from one year to the next: whether or not, at this moment, the life of God is alive in his soul. The Church has a name for the condition of a soul in which that divine life is present and active. She calls it the state of grace, and she teaches, soberly and without exaggeration, that nothing else a man possesses matters remotely as much as whether he possesses this. A man can gain the whole world and lose it; a man in the state of grace possesses, right now, the beginning of eternal life.

This book is about that life: what it actually is, how a man comes to have it, how he keeps it, how he loses it, how he gets it back, and how he grows it until it fills him. For many Catholics the phrase state of grace is a piece of inherited vocabulary whose meaning has gone vague, something to do with being in good standing, perhaps, or with not having done anything too terrible lately. But the reality the phrase points to is the most concrete and consequential thing about a man's inner life, and learning to live deliberately in the state of grace, to guard it, feed it, and grow in it, is simply learning how the Christian life actually works from the inside.

I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. — John 10:10

We will begin with what grace actually is, because a man cannot value what he does not understand. We will see what it means to be in the state of grace and what it means to fall from it, and we will take the measure of mortal and venial sin without either panic or complacency. We will look closely at the two great means by which this life is restored and fed, the sacraments of Confession and the Eucharist, and at the daily habits that keep a soul healthy between them. And we will press on past mere maintenance to the real goal, which is not simply to stay barely alive in grace but to grow in it without limit, until a man becomes, by grace, the saint he was created to be.

CHAPTER ONE

What Grace Actually Is

The Life of God in the Soul

The word grace gets used so loosely, even by religious people, that its real meaning has nearly worn away. It is spoken of as if it meant God being nice, or a vague favorable feeling God has toward us, or the good luck of undeserved blessings. The Catholic reality is immeasurably greater and more precise than any of these, and a man cannot begin to value the state of grace until he grasps what grace itself actually is. It is not a feeling, not a mood, not a metaphor. It is a real participation in the very life of God, poured into the soul.

He has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature. — 2 Peter 1:4

A Share in God's Own Life

The astonishing claim at the center of the Christian faith is that God does not merely forgive a man or improve him from the outside; he actually comes to dwell within him and to share with him his own divine life. This indwelling, this real communication of God's life to the soul, is what the Church means by sanctifying grace. It is called sanctifying because it makes a man holy, not by his own effort but by the presence within him of the Holy One. Scripture dares to call it becoming partakers of the divine nature, and the phrase is not poetic excess; it is the literal truth of what happens when grace enters a soul. A man in the state of grace is not simply a forgiven sinner on his best behavior. He is a dwelling place of God, carrying within him a life that is nothing less than a share in the life of the Trinity itself, the seed of the very life he will live forever in heaven.

It is worth pausing on how far this goes beyond what most men imagine Christianity to be. The common picture is of a God somewhere outside a man, pleased or displeased with him, keeping a ledger, to be appeased by good behavior. The reality grace describes is of a God who does not stay outside at all but moves in, takes up residence, and begins to share his own life from within, so that the goal is not a man standing on his best behavior before a distant judge but a man indwelt and transformed by the God who has made his soul a home. Once a man sees this, the whole spiritual life changes character. It stops being the management of an external relationship and becomes the tending of an interior life, the life of God himself, now living in him.

Given, Never Earned

The second essential truth about grace is that it is pure gift, given freely by God and never earned by a man, and the very word grace carries this meaning, for it comes from the word for a free and unearned favor. A man cannot buy grace, cannot deserve it, cannot generate it by his own effort however heroic; it is God's to give, and he gives it freely, won

for us by the death and resurrection of Christ and poured out through the sacraments. This is humbling and liberating at once. Humbling, because it means a man can take no credit for the greatest thing in him; the divine life in his soul is sheer gift. Liberating, because it means he does not have to achieve his way to God, does not have to be good enough first, but has only to receive what is offered. The whole Christian life rests on this foundation: that the life of God in the soul is grace, gift, from first to last, and a man's part is not to earn it but to welcome it, keep it, and let it grow.

Why It Changes Everything

Once a man grasps what grace really is, the stakes of the spiritual life come into focus and never look the same again. If grace is merely God's good opinion, then losing it costs a man little and guarding it matters little. But if grace is the actual life of God dwelling in his soul, the beginning in him of eternal life, then the presence or absence of grace is the difference between a soul that is spiritually alive and one that is spiritually dead, and everything else, every pleasure, success, and possession a man might gain, is trivial beside it. This is why the saints feared the loss of grace more than they feared any earthly disaster, and valued its presence above life itself. They were not being extreme. They had simply seen clearly what grace is, and a man who sees it as they did will order his whole life around keeping and growing the one thing that is beyond all price: the life of God, alive in him.

CHAPTER TWO

Alive or Dead

The State of Grace and Mortal Sin

If grace is the life of God in the soul, then there are, spiritually speaking, two possible conditions a soul can be in: alive with that life, or dead for its lack. The Church's teaching here is stark because the reality is stark. To be in the state of grace is to have the divine life present and active in the soul. To be in the state of mortal sin is to have driven that life out, to be, in the most literal spiritual sense, dead while still walking around. A man owes it to himself to understand this clearly, neither inflating it into scrupulous terror nor deflating it into something that does not matter.

You were dead in the trespasses and sins… but God, being rich in mercy, made us alive together with Christ. — Ephesians 2:1,4-5

What Mortal Sin Does

Mortal sin is called mortal, meaning deadly, because it actually kills the life of grace in the soul. It is not merely a bad mark on a man's record or a wound to a relationship that otherwise continues intact; it is the expulsion of the divine life itself, a free choice so opposed to God that it cannot coexist with his indwelling presence, and so drives him out. A man in mortal sin is not a slightly worse version of a man in grace; he is in a different state altogether, cut off from the life of God, his soul dead to grace however alive his body remains. This is sobering, and it is meant to be, because the thing at stake, the very life of God in the soul, is of infinite worth, and a man should know that it can really be lost, and lost by his own free choice.

The Three Conditions

Precisely because mortal sin is so grave, the Church is careful to teach that three conditions must all be present for a sin to be mortal, and a man needs to know them, both so that he does not take deadly sin lightly and so that he does not torment himself over sins that are not in fact mortal. The first is grave matter: the act must be something seriously wrong, a grave violation of God's law, not a small fault. The second is full knowledge: the man must know that the act is seriously wrong. The third is deliberate consent: he must choose it freely, with sufficient reflection and full consent of the will. All three must be present together. A seriously wrong act done in genuine ignorance, or without real freedom, or under some force that removes consent, lacks what mortal sin requires. This teaching is not a set of loopholes; it is the Church's careful justice, ensuring that the terrible word mortal is applied only where a man has truly, knowingly, and freely chosen against God.

Neither Panic Nor Presumption

Between two errors a man must steer. On one side is the error of scrupulosity, which sees mortal sin everywhere, turns every fault and stray thought into a crisis, and reduces the Christian life to anxious terror, a distortion that often needs the help of a good confessor to heal. On the other side is the far more common error of presumption, which has quietly decided that mortal sin is a medieval exaggeration, that nothing one actually does could really sever one from God, and that the whole business of grave sin need not be taken seriously. The truth lies in neither. Mortal sin is real, and it really kills the life of grace; and it requires grave matter, full knowledge, and deliberate consent, so that a man who is sincerely trying to love God need not live in dread. The right posture is sober watchfulness: taking seriously the real possibility of losing grace, while trusting the mercy of a God who is, as Scripture says, rich in mercy and eager to make dead souls alive again.

A useful instinct here is to let the gravity of mortal sin drive a man not inward toward anxiety but outward toward the remedy. The point of knowing that grace can be lost is not to make a man spend his days taking his spiritual pulse, but to make him value grace enough to guard it and to run quickly to Confession when it is gone. The scrupulous man turns the teaching into a torment by dwelling on the danger; the presumptuous man disarms it by denying the danger; the healthy man simply acts on it, guarding the life of grace as the treasure it is and knowing exactly where to go the moment he has lost it. Sober watchfulness is not the same as fear, and a man can take mortal sin with complete seriousness while living, day to day, in peace.

CHAPTER THREE

The Smaller Wounds

Venial Sin and the Slow Drift

Not every sin kills the life of grace, and it is important that a man understand this, or he will either despair at every small fault or, more likely, ignore the smaller sins entirely as if they did not matter. The Church distinguishes mortal sin, which destroys grace, from venial sin, which wounds but does not kill it. But venial sin is not therefore trivial, and the man who shrugs it off misunderstands both what it does to him now and where it tends to lead. The smaller wounds, left untended, are how most men actually drift away from God.

Whoever is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and whoever is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. — Luke 16:10

What Venial Sin Is and Does

Venial sin is a real offense against God that nonetheless does not sever a man from him, either because the matter is less serious or because full knowledge or complete consent is lacking. It does not drive out the life of grace, and so a man who commits venial sin remains in the state of grace, still alive with the divine life. But venial sin is far from harmless. It wounds a man's friendship with God without breaking it, weakens his spiritual strength, dims his love, and makes him more vulnerable to serious sin down the road. The old image is apt: venial sins are like small cuts, none of them fatal, but a body covered in them is weakened, and a soul grown careless about small sins is a soul being slowly drained of vigor, its resistance lowered, its love cooled, even while the life of grace remains.

How Small Sins Lead to Large Ones

The gravest danger of venial sin is not finally what it does by itself but where it tends, for a pattern of unresisted small sins is the ordinary road to serious ones. A man rarely falls into grave sin out of nowhere; far more often he arrives there by a long series of small compromises, each one lowering the bar, dulling the conscience, and weakening the will, until the serious sin that once would have been unthinkable has become, by slow degrees, possible and then actual. The small lie makes the larger deception easier; the indulged lustful glance prepares the way for the grave fall; the petty dishonesty, tolerated, erodes the integrity that would have held under pressure. This is why Scripture ties faithfulness in little things to faithfulness in great ones: the man careless in small matters is training himself for failure in large ones, and the man faithful in small matters is building the strength that will hold when the real test comes.

There is a further reason not to shrug off small sins, subtler than the slide toward grave ones: habitual venial sin quietly dulls a man's spiritual senses. A soul comfortable with small compromises gradually loses its fineness of perception, its ability to feel the promptings of grace and to be troubled by what should trouble it, the way a palate coarsened by strong flavors stops tasting subtler ones. The man who tolerates his small sins does not merely risk larger ones later; he blunts, now, the very instrument by which he would perceive and resist them, and he cools the love that is the whole life of grace within him. This is why the saints, so far from thinking small sins beneath their notice, watched them more carefully than most men watch grave ones.

The War on Small Sins

The practical conclusion is that a serious man does not make peace with his venial sins but wages steady, patient war on them, not with scrupulous panic but with honest, persistent effort. This does not mean a man will ever be free of them entirely in this life; he will not, and he should not be surprised or discouraged by their persistence. It means he refuses to treat any sin as acceptable, keeps naming and resisting his habitual small faults, brings them to God and to Confession even though they do not strictly require it, and asks for the grace to grow out of them. The goal is not a scrupulous horror of every imperfection but a genuine, settled unwillingness to be comfortable with any sin at all, however small. A man who fights his venial sins faithfully is a man whose love for God is growing and whose defenses against serious sin are strong; a man who tolerates them is a man slowly drifting, his love cooling, his guard down, whether or not he has noticed.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Sacrament of the Second Chance

How Grace Is Restored

Because the life of grace can really be lost, the first question of practical urgency is how it is restored, and here the Church proclaims some of the best news a man will ever hear. Christ did not leave the forgiveness of sins to chance, to a vague hope that God will overlook things, or to the uncertain adequacy of a man's private remorse. He established a sacrament, a definite, reliable, encounter in which a man can know, not merely hope, that his sins are forgiven and the life of grace restored to his soul. This is the sacrament of Confession, and a man who understands it will treasure it as one of the great mercies of his life.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. — 1 John 1:9

Why Christ Gave Us Confession

A man might ask why he cannot simply tell God he is sorry in the privacy of his own heart, and the answer reveals the mercy of the sacrament rather than diminishing it. Christ, knowing the men he had made, gave us a form of forgiveness suited to how we actually are: embodied creatures who need to hear the words, who need the certainty of an external act, who need to speak our sins aloud and be told, concretely and audibly, that they are forgiven. After his resurrection he breathed on the Apostles and gave them authority to forgive sins in his name, and that authority has been handed down ever since. So when a man confesses and hears the words of absolution, it is not finally the priest who forgives him but Christ, through the priest, and the man walks out not hoping he is forgiven but knowing it, the life of grace restored to his soul with a certainty no private remorse could ever give. This is not a burden Christ imposed but a gift he provided, precisely because he knew we would need it.

What It Asks of a Man

The sacrament asks only a few things of a man, and all of them are within his reach. It asks an examination of conscience, an honest look at where he has sinned. It asks contrition, real sorrow for having offended God, which need not be a storm of feeling but must be a genuine turning of the will away from the sin. It asks confession itself, the honest naming of his sins to the priest, including serious sins in their kind and number as best he can. It asks a purpose of amendment, a sincere intention to avoid the sin going forward, even knowing he may fall again. And it asks that he perform the penance given,

a small act that expresses his desire to make amends. None of this is beyond an ordinary man, and the man who comes with even imperfect sorrow and honest confession receives the full gift. The sacrament is not a test to be passed by the worthy; it is a remedy provided for the sick, and the only true disqualification is the refusal to come.

Confession as a Way of Life

A man grows most when he makes Confession not an emergency measure but a regular habit, returning frequently even when he is not conscious of serious sin. Frequent confession does far more than restore grace when it has been lost; it deepens a man's self-knowledge, keeps his conscience sensitive, wages effective war on his venial sins and habitual faults, and pours in the grace to grow. The saints, who had far less to confess than most, went often, precisely because they understood the sacrament as an engine of growth and not merely a repair shop for disaster. A practical rule many find fruitful is to go monthly, or at least every few weeks, making it a settled rhythm of life rather than a thing resorted to only in crisis. A man who confesses regularly is a man who stays spiritually healthy, who catches small faults before they grow, and who is always being drawn forward; a man who comes only when he must is forever playing catch-up. The sacrament is a gift meant to be used often, and the man who uses it often is the man who grows.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Food of the Living

The Eucharist and the Growth of Grace

If Confession restores the life of grace, the Eucharist feeds and increases it, and the two together are the great sacramental means by which a man keeps his soul alive and makes it grow. A man would think it strange to be restored to physical health and then never eat, and yet many Catholics treat the spiritual life this way, seeking forgiveness when they must but neglecting the food that is meant to sustain and strengthen the life forgiveness restores. The Eucharist is that food, and understanding what it is transforms how a man approaches the Mass.

Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. — John 6:54

Not a Symbol but a Presence

The Catholic faith holds, and has held from the beginning, that the Eucharist is not a symbol of Christ but Christ himself, truly present, body and blood, soul and divinity, under the appearances of bread and wine. When a man receives Communion, he is not performing a ritual of remembrance; he is receiving into himself the living Christ, the source of all grace. This is why the Eucharist so powerfully increases the life of grace in the soul: it is union with the very author of that life, the closest contact with God available to a man on this earth. Christ's own words in the sixth chapter of John are stark and unmistakable, and his first hearers found them so hard that many left; he did not soften them, because he meant them literally. The man who grasps that the Eucharist is truly Christ will never again receive it casually, and will understand why the saints regarded a single worthy Communion as a treasure beyond all the wealth of the world.

Receiving Worthily

Because the Eucharist is truly Christ, it must be received worthily, that is, in the state of grace, for Scripture itself warns that to receive the body and blood of the Lord unworthily, in a state of serious sin, is to eat and drink judgment on oneself. This is not priestly severity but simple reality: one does not bring the living God into a soul that has, by mortal sin, driven him out, without first being reconciled. The practical rule follows directly and is one every Catholic man should hold firmly: a man conscious of mortal sin must go to Confession before receiving Communion. This is not meant to keep men from the Eucharist but to ensure that when they come, they come as living members able to receive the life offered, rather than adding the sin of sacrilege to the sin already committed. Far from a burden, this teaching honors the Eucharist for what it is and protects the man from compounding his wound. The ordinary pattern of a healthy Catholic life is simple: stay in grace, receive often, and when grace is lost, be reconciled first, then return to the table.

A man should notice that this teaching, far from making the Eucharist harder to receive, actually guards its meaning and his own good. To receive the living God into a soul from which one has driven him by grave sin, as though nothing were wrong, would empty the sacrament of its seriousness and harm the man besides. The requirement of the state of grace is simply the recognition that this is a real union with a real Person, not a social ritual, and that such a union asks to be entered rightly. The man who keeps this rule is not being held at arm's length from Christ; he is being taught to approach Christ with the reverence that so great a gift deserves, and the short detour through Confession, when it is needed, is itself a mercy that prepares him to receive well.

The Engine of Transformation

Received worthily and often, the Eucharist is the single most powerful engine of a man's transformation into Christ, and its effects accumulate over a lifetime in ways a man may not feel from one Communion to the next but that are real and immense. Each worthy Communion increases the life of grace in the soul, strengthens a man against sin, deepens his union with Christ, and slowly conforms him to the One he receives, so that over years of faithful reception a man is quietly being remade from within. This is why the counsel of the saints is always toward frequent, even daily, Communion for those able to receive it worthily; they understood that nothing on earth so transforms a soul as regular union with Christ in the Eucharist. A man serious about growing in grace does not treat the Mass as an obligation to be discharged but as the weekly, or even daily, feeding of the divine life within him, the single richest source of the growth he seeks, offered to him constantly and asking only that he come, and come worthily, to receive.

CHAPTER SIX

Keeping the Life Healthy

The Daily Habits of a Soul in Grace

Between the sacraments lie the ordinary days, and the life of grace in a man's soul is kept healthy or allowed to languish largely by the small daily habits that fill them. A man can be reconciled in Confession and fed in the Eucharist and still let the divine life in him grow weak through sheer neglect across the week, the way a man can be treated by the finest doctor and still undo it all through a careless daily life. The health of the soul in grace is maintained by habits, and a man does well to build the few that matter most.

Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. — Matthew 26:41

Daily Prayer That Keeps the Line Open

The first and most essential habit is daily prayer, for the life of grace is the life of friendship with God, and no friendship survives without communication. A man who never speaks with God across the week, who lets days pass without a word, is letting the central relationship of his soul go cold, whatever his state on Sunday. The prayer need not be long or elaborate; it needs to be real and daily. A few minutes in the morning offering the day to God, a habit of turning to him through the hours, an examination at night, these keep the line open and the friendship warm. The specific form matters less than the fidelity: that a man actually prays, every day, and so keeps alive in practice the relationship that grace establishes in principle. A soul in grace but without daily prayer is

like a marriage still legally intact but in which the spouses have stopped speaking, technically alive but quietly dying for lack of contact.

The encouragement here is that the bar is low and the reward high. A man does not need to become a contemplative or master elaborate methods; he needs to establish a small, unbreakable daily minimum and then keep it without fail. Five honest minutes every single day will do more to keep the life of grace warm than an hour once a month and nothing in between, because friendship is sustained by regularity more than by intensity. The man who protects a short daily time with God, and guards it the way he guards the appointments he cannot miss, keeps the central relationship of his soul alive through every season, and finds over time that the small daily contact deepens on its own into something he would not give up for anything.

Guarding Against the Occasions of Sin

The second essential habit is a prudent guarding of oneself against the occasions of sin, the situations, places, people, and inputs that reliably lead a particular man toward sin. It is a mark of spiritual immaturity to keep walking into the circumstances that have defeated a man a hundred times and to pray only for the strength to survive them; the mature man prays also for the sense to avoid them. He knows his own weaknesses and the specific triggers that exploit them, and he arranges his life, as far as he can, to stay out of their reach: the website blocked, the second drink declined in advance, the friendship that drags him down kept at a distance, the idle hours that breed trouble filled with something good. This is not cowardice but wisdom, the ordinary prudence of a man who takes his own weakness seriously. Much of keeping the life of grace healthy is simply this unglamorous work of not putting oneself, needlessly, in the path of what has reliably knocked one down before.

The Rhythm That Holds a Man Up

These habits work not in isolation but as a rhythm, a settled pattern of life that holds a man up far more reliably than scattered good intentions ever could. The man who has built into his life a daily time of prayer, a regular Confession, frequent worthy Communion, a prudent avoidance of his known occasions of sin, and some ordinary disciplines of self-denial that keep his will strong, has constructed around the life of grace a kind of trellis on which it can grow and by which it is supported when storms come. None of these habits is heroic; all of them are within the reach of an ordinary busy man. But together they form the ordinary architecture of a soul that stays alive and healthy in grace year after year, whereas the man who relies on willpower and good feeling alone, without the supporting rhythm of habit, finds his resolve failing exactly when he needs it

most. The spiritual life, like every other serious endeavor, is sustained not by occasional intensity but by reliable habit, and the habits that keep the life of grace healthy are neither many nor hard, only daily.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Growing Without Limit

From Staying Alive to Becoming a Saint

A man could spend his whole Christian life merely trying to stay in the state of grace, treating the spiritual life as a matter of not dying, of keeping just above the line, and he would be missing nearly the whole point. The life of grace is not a fixed quantity a man either has or lacks; it is a living thing meant to grow, and to grow without limit, until it fills a man entirely and makes him a saint. The real goal of the Christian life is not bare survival in grace but the unlimited increase of it, and a man sells his destiny short who aims at anything less.

Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. — 2 Peter 3:18

Grace Is Meant to Increase

The divine life in the soul is capable of increase, and every worthy reception of the sacraments, every good act done in grace, every prayer and sacrifice offered in love, actually increases it, deepening a man's share in the life of God. This is a thrilling truth once a man grasps it, because it means the spiritual life is not static but genuinely progressive: a man can be more alive with grace this year than last, can grow in holiness really and measurably, can become by degrees a different and greater man than he was. The saints were not a separate species; they were ordinary people in whom the life of grace was allowed to grow to its full stature, and the same growth is offered to every man in the state of grace. To aim merely at staying barely alive, when one could grow toward sanctity, is like a man content to survive when he could thrive, settling for a fraction of the life he was offered.

The Ordinary Means of Extraordinary Growth

The means of this unlimited growth are not exotic; they are the very ordinary things this book has described, pursued faithfully and with love over time. Frequent Confession, worthy and regular Communion, daily prayer, war on venial sin, prudent self-denial, growth in the virtues, and acts of love toward God and neighbor: these are the ordinary

means by which grace grows, and there is no secret shortcut that bypasses them. What distinguishes the saint from the merely surviving Catholic is not that the saint found some hidden technique but that he gave himself to the ordinary means wholeheartedly, with love and perseverance, over a lifetime, while others used them sparingly or not at all. The growth is real but not instant; it is the fruit of fidelity sustained over years, the slow, reliable increase that comes to the man who keeps showing up to the sources of grace and lets them do their work. A man who wants to grow greatly need not do anything unusual, only do the usual things faithfully and with love, and keep doing them.

The Destiny Offered to You

What is finally at stake in living in the state of grace is nothing less than a man's eternal destiny and the full stature of the person he was created to become. God's will for a man is not that he scrape into heaven at the last, spiritually stunted, having guarded a bare minimum of grace through a lifetime of neglect, but that he grow into the full measure of the life of God, becoming the saint that was always the point of his existence. The life of grace is the seed of that destiny, planted in Baptism, restored in Confession, fed in the Eucharist, and meant to grow until it flowers into the eternal life of heaven, which is simply the life of grace come to its fullness. A man who lives deliberately in the state of grace, guarding it, feeding it, and growing in it, is cooperating with the greatest project in the universe, the making of a saint out of ordinary material, and that project, pursued faithfully, prepares a man for the mission for which all this formation exists, because only a man alive with the life of God has anything of God to give to anyone else.

CONCLUSION

The One Thing Needful

Return to where this book began, to the fact more important than any other about a man: whether, at this moment, the life of God is alive in his soul. Everything in these pages has been an unfolding of that single fact and of how a man lives in light of it. The state of grace is not a piece of religious bookkeeping but the presence within a man of the life of God himself, the beginning of eternal life, the one possession beside which everything else a man could gain is as nothing.

And the whole practical shape of the Christian life follows from taking that seriously. Guard the life of grace, because it can really be lost, through mortal sin, and a man should fear that loss more than any earthly disaster. Restore it without delay when it is lost, through the sacrament of Confession that Christ provided precisely for that mercy.

Feed it constantly, through worthy and frequent reception of the Eucharist, which is Christ himself. Keep it healthy through the daily habits of prayer and prudence that sustain the friendship grace establishes. And never settle for merely keeping it alive, but grow it, through the ordinary means pursued faithfully, toward the sanctity that is a man's true destiny.

This is, in the end, the one thing needful. A man may get a hundred other things right and, if he neglects this, have missed the point of his existence; and a man may fail at much else and yet, if he keeps and grows the life of God in his soul, have succeeded at the only thing that finally matters. So make it the organizing center of your life. Let everything else find its place around this one concern: that the life of God, given to you freely and at infinite cost, be kept alive in you, restored whenever lost, fed daily, and grown without limit, until the grace that began in you as a seed comes at last to its full flower in the unending life of heaven.

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