

*Scripture: Ephesians 4:1-6, 1 Corinthians 12:12-26, Galatians 6:2*

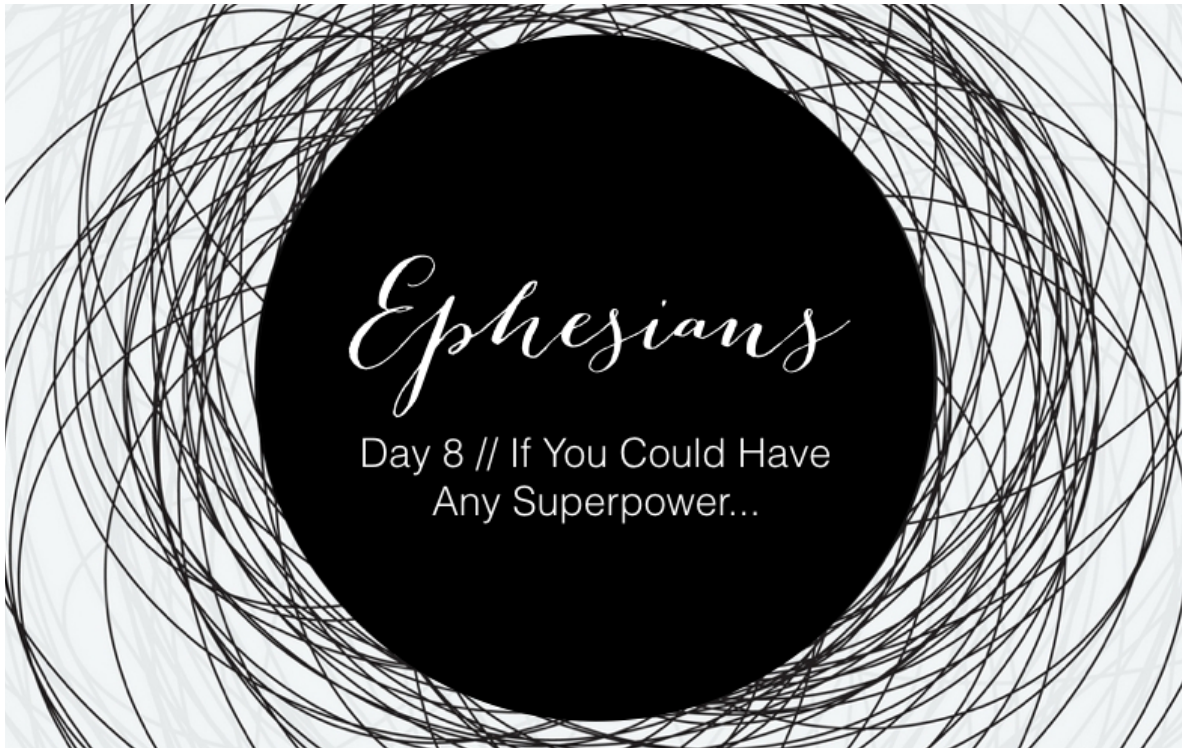
I often hear this said in Mass: “Look, we pray, upon the oblation of your Church, and, recognizing the sacrificial Victim by whose death you willed to reconcile us to yourself, grant that we, who are nourished by the Body and Blood of your Son and filled with his Holy Spirit, may become one body, one spirit in Christ.” When I go to receive Communion, I often hear the hymn “We Are Many Parts.” But what does it exactly mean to be “one body, one spirit in Christ?”

There’s a fun activity that I do on retreats along with my friends and the other retreat participants that ties into the passage from 1 Corinthians. All the groups are given a ball of yarn. Everyone wraps a bit of yarn around themselves and then tosses their yarn towards the other groups. Before you know it, everyone gets all tangled up. Whenever someone tried pulling away from the tangled web, everyone would feel it. In the same way, as the passage from Corinthians says “If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.” All for one and one for all!

How exactly can we help our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ? The answer is found in Galatians 6:2 “Bear one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” This means helping anyone in your circle of friends who is in need. But charity does not just end with your circle of friends. It also means helping out total strangers, like the homeless and the hungry.

Just remember that when you go out and help your fellow man, do so with a spirit of compassion and, as today’s passage from Ephesians says “humility and gentleness, with patience.” However good your intentions may be, you also have to be willing to accept help and feedback from others in your ministry.





*Scripture: Ephesians 4:7-16, 1 Corinthians 12:1-12, Isaiah 11:1-3*

There are two questions we often get asked as a kid: “What do you want to be when you grow up?” and “If you could have any superpower, what would it be?” The job that we wanted to have as a kid may not be the same as what we want to do with our lives now. In the same way, we might respond to that superpower question differently than what we chose as children. This is because that by the time we grow up, we’re more aware of our talents and our skills as well as things we need to improve on.

It’s true that some careers and vocations seem a lot cooler or more glamorous than others. But today’s passages remind us that it takes all kinds to make the world a better place. One reason that there are million different kinds of superheroes in the Marvel and DC Universes is that each superhero meets a certain need that the other superheroes can’t. In the current lineup of shows based on the DC Comics, Arrow appeals to people who long for a light to shine in their dark lives. The main character of Arrow fights to make his hometown of Star City a better place, in spite of the corruption that has snaked its way into the hearts of most of the people. Similarly, heroes such as Daredevil in the Marvel universe also fight against corruption.

In contrast, there are more idealistic superheroes such as The Flash and Supergirl. In the current Flash series shown on the CW, the titular hero often works together with his friends to solve problems dealing with whatever the monster of the week happens to be. CBS’s Supergirl doesn’t just save the day by flying around and using her super strength or laser vision. Her real powers are her compassion for humanity, her empathy for those in need, and willingness to believe in the best in people.

So how can we be heroes? We may not have superpowers, but we were given gifts from God. Traditionally, they are called the gifts of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord. Living a Christ-filled life also gives us the fruits of the Holy Spirit: charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, and chastity. All of these can be our superpowers. We may not be able to master all of these traits at once, but through spending time in prayer and discernment, God will reveal to us which talents he wants us to hone.

I hope that you take some time today to ask God to help you know your own special superpower and that you glorify God through your gift.

- Monique

Reflection: What are some gifts, talents, or skills that you or others have considered to be a kind of “superpower?”

Reflection: How do you think God works through your gifts?

Act: Use your “superpower” to help someone who may need your help today!

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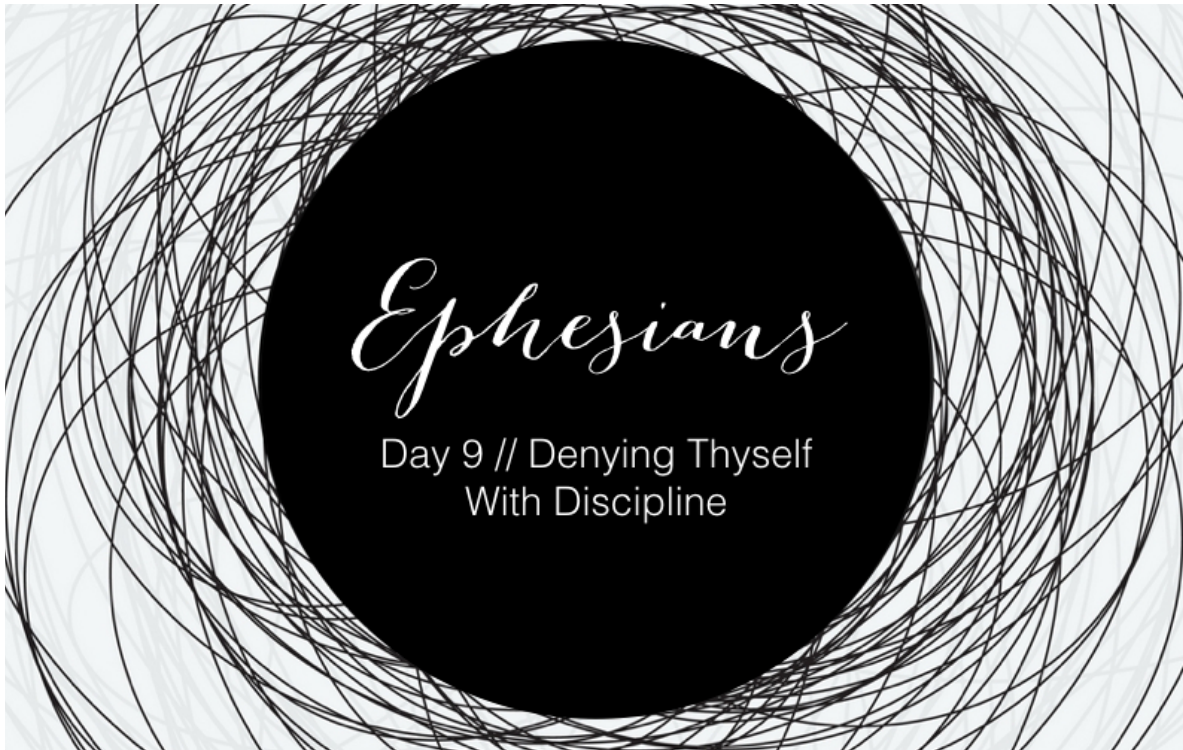
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*Scripture: Ephesians 4:17-24, 1 Peter 1:13-15, Matthew 16:24-27, John 3:30*

When it comes to being a Catholic, you can't always get what you want or do whatever you want just because it feels good. We may not see ourselves as vain or self-centered, but the desire for approval or ways to boost our own ego can come when we least expect them. The best way to counter those desires is to deny ourselves and follow God's will, no matter how hard that may be. In other words, we need to practice the virtue of prudence, otherwise known as knowing what the right thing to do is and choosing the best way of doing it.

One of my favorite saints who understood the value of prudence is Saint Therese of Lisieux. As a child, she grew up in a loving Catholic family, but she was a bit fussy and came off as spoiled to strangers and her peers. However, when Saint Therese got older, she learned to practice the virtue of prudence, or knowing the right thing to do no matter what she felt. This spiritual practice became known as "the Little Way." Part of the Little Way includes being willing to abandon oneself to God's will. In one of her letters Saint Therese said:

"When Jesus will to take for Himself the sweetness of giving, it would not be gracious to refuse. Let us allow Him to take and give all He wills. Perfection consists in doing His will and the soul that surrenders totally to Him is called by Jesus Himself 'His mother, His sister,' and His whole family [Matthew 12:5]..."

Saint Therese led an ordinary life and most of it was spent living in a cloistered Carmelite monastery. In spite of that seemingly simple lifestyle, Saint Therese found many opportunities to practice self-denial. She dedicated herself to doing the ordinary tasks of convent life with great love.

There was one instance where Saint Therese escorted an elderly nun to dinner, but found herself caught in a daydream in which she “pictured a drawing-room, brilliantly lighted and decorated, and richly furnished. Young ladies, elegantly dressed, exchanging a thousand compliments, as is the way of the world.” In spite of the daydream she had, she was able to fulfill her duty. “Our Lord so illuminated my soul with the rays of truth...that for a thousand years of such worldly delights, I would not have bartered even the ten minutes spent in my act of charity.” It was a small instance of self-denial, but as someone who constantly gets caught up in daydreams, I admire Saint Therese for her diligence and her prudence.

It’s not easy to detach ourselves from what the world calls having a good time. But bars and clubs are nothing but rooms full of empty promises. I’ve heard countless stories of women who sought fulfillment in the bottom of a beer bottle or through intimacy with a stranger only to wake up the next morning with a hangover and a sense of emptiness. The “squeaky-clean” lifestyle may seem boring at first glance, but trust me when I say that a life spent serving Christ is a lot more fulfilling.

Today, I hope that you spend some time looking for opportunities to deny yourself and follow God’s will. It’s not gonna be easy, but the graces you will receive will be worth it, sisters in Christ.

- Monique

Reflection: Why do you think prudence or self-denial is such a hard thing to practice?

Reflection: Have you ever had an experience when practicing self-denial worked out in the long run?

Act: Ask God for prudence when you have to make a hard decision. Accept the things you can’t change.

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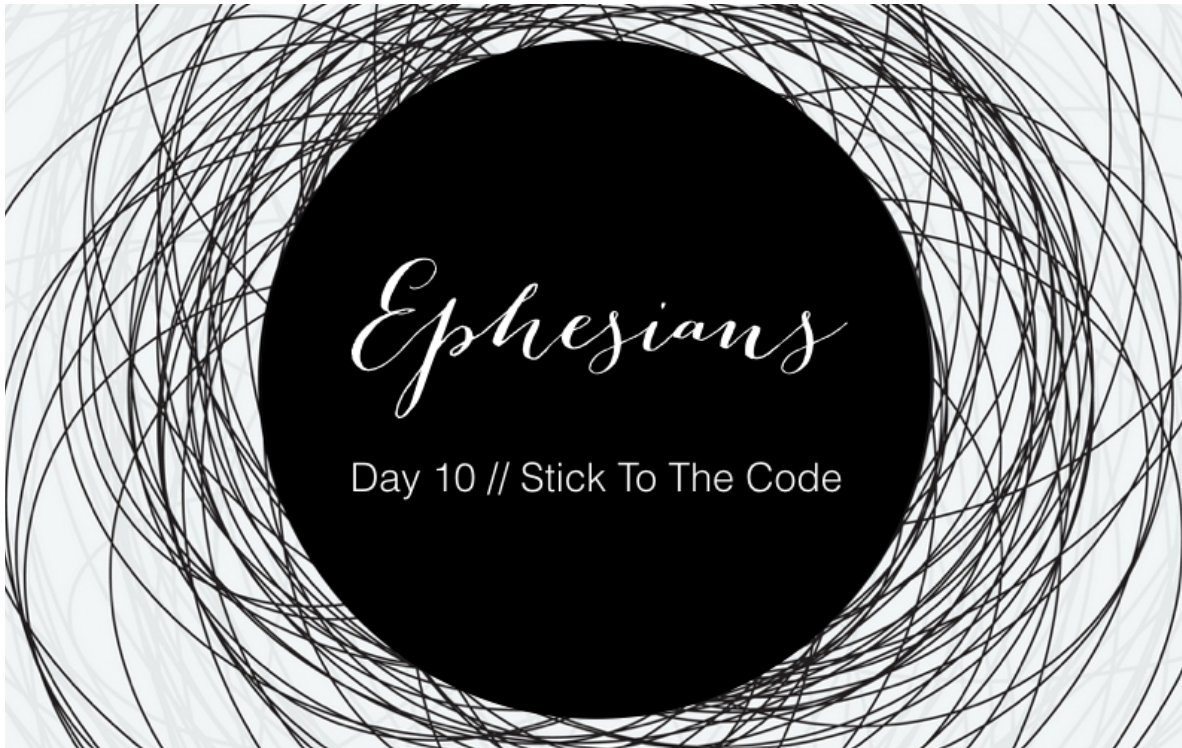
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*Scripture: Ephesians 4:25-32, Matthew 5:21-48*

I love the Pirates of the Caribbean films. Something interesting about the pirates in these movies is that even though they are thieves, they keep to a code. The pirates who have a sense of honor make for interesting characters because their honor and complex morals keep them from being completely depraved. Unfortunately, there is also a tendency in the films to see the rules of the Code as more like “guidelines.”

In contrast, the rules for a new life laid out in today’s passage is straight and narrow: Be honest. Don’t dwell on your anger. Work hard and don’t steal. Use your words to encourage others and not to hurt. Be kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving to one another.

It sounds easy enough to follow, but unfortunately, we have a tendency to treat the lessons we learn from the Bible as guidelines. There are times when we’d rather nurse a grudge, cut corners in order to make a job easier, indulge in gossip, and only act kind towards our friends instead of giving kindness and forgiveness to those who actually need them. If we say that we are Christian, but act in this manner, we are no better than the Pharisees.

All of these rules in the passages from Ephesians and the Gospel of Matthew center around the virtue of justice. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

“Justice is the moral virtue that consists in the constant and firm will to give their due to God and neighbor...Justice toward men disposes one to respect the rights of each and to establish human

relationships the harmony that promotes equity with regards to persona and to the common good.” (CCC 1807)

Are we being fair and just when we indulge in holding our anger, gossip about others, and treat some people better than others? The answer, of course, is “NO!” Instead of seeking vengeance, follow what the Gospel of Matthew has laid out: turn the other cheek and love your enemies.

How exactly does one love an enemy, you ask?

Turning the other cheek does not mean acting passively when faced with adversity. Back in Jesus’s time, striking someone on the right cheek was often done with the back of someone’s right hand, which was a way of the striker regarding the one he hit as his social inferior. By turning the other cheek, it forces the one who struck to recognize the one he hit as an equal because he has no choice but to hit with the palm of his right hand. Turning the other cheek, in other words, is another way of standing one’s ground and being assertive without acting aggressive or acquiescing to the other person’s violence.

In regards to our daily life, we can turn the other cheek by choosing to let go of the anger we have against someone, releasing the power we have over them. Instead of gossiping and using our words to undermine others, we can turn the other cheek by talking well about other people and using our words to encourage others to be better people. And the best way that we can be kind and turn the other cheek is to be nice to those who are mean to us, in spite of how we may feel about them. “Kill them with kindness” as they say.

Today, I hope that you will choose to turn the other cheek and remember to stick to the code!

- Monique

Reflection: Do you see God’s words as guidelines? Why do you think the commandments and suggestions from Scripture are so hard to follow?

Reflection: Reflect on an instance when you turned the other cheek. What happened as a result of that?

Act: Pray the Divine Mercy Chaplet about a situation you think is unjust.

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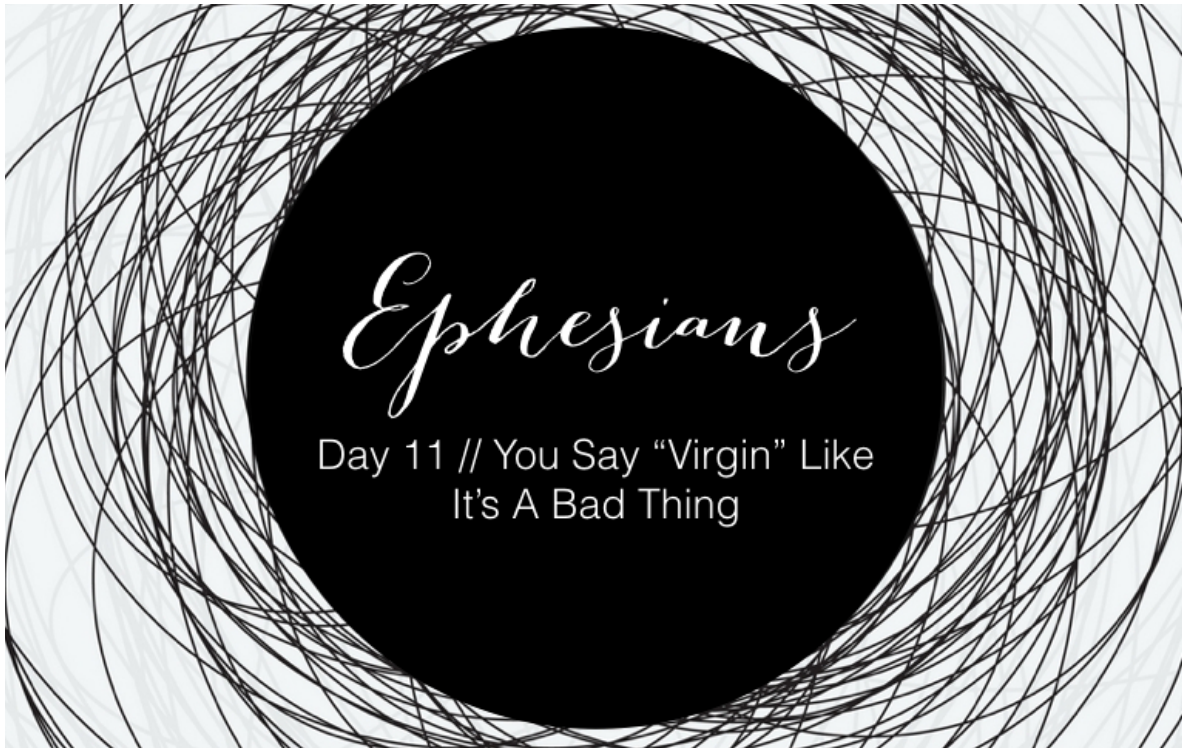


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*Scripture: Ephesians 5:1-5, Ecclesiastes 3:1-8*

Since when did words like “virgin” and “chastity” become ugly? We live in a world where sex is constantly in our faces. Women with gorgeous, airbrushed faces and photoshopped bodies are on the covers of every magazine and billboard, selling lies about how changing the way we dress, eat, and treat men will make our lives as glamorous as theirs. Shows like *Girls*, *Scandal*, and Top 40 songs sell this lie that we’ve all heard since high school: “Everyone’s doing it. Why aren’t you?”

Telling people that you choose not to have sex and refusing to objectify people often leads to ridicule for women and especially for men, who are practically expected to “sow their wild oats” in their youth. But as Arleen Spenceley asked in her awesome book *Chastity Is For Lovers* “Maybe ‘everybody’s doing it,’ but how loving and happy is everybody, really?” People often go into this “free love” lifestyle in fear of missing out, but sex isn’t a commodity. Authentic love ties into what we learned earlier about self-denial and learning to be genuinely happy with how you are, no matter how much or how little “experience” you have.

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, chastity is “the successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of man in his bodily and spiritual being.” Arleen Spenceley interprets that to mean that “chastity is a virtue that aims to integrate sexuality with the rest of the stuff that makes us human.” Through chastity, you neither deny your sexual nature nor do you define yourself by it.

On the other hand, we also have to be aware of the fact that other things that are part of our lives, such as the way that we talk or joke about things. Now, I'm a fan of snarky humor. I love characters with a sharp wit and a sense of humor that often crosses the line in what's considered good and proper. I'm not ashamed to admit that when Deadpool, an R-rated movie about a fast-talking assassin, was out in theatres, I went to go see it. I enjoyed it, but it's not a movie that I would recommend to everyone. Having a chaste lifestyle doesn't mean not allowing yourself to have a sense of humor. It's just knowing that there is a time and a place for bawdy humor and that you can't define yourself on having a snarky mouth and a sharp wit alone.

Chastity ties into the virtue of temperance. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church: "Temperance is the moral virtue that moderates the attraction of pleasures and provides balance in the use of created goods. It ensures the will's mastery over instincts and keeps desires within the limits of what is honorable." (CCC 1809) The virtue of temperance is a balancing act, not having too much or too little of something.

So what does this all have to do with how we're supposed to conduct ourselves in this hypersexualized culture? For starters, practicing chastity reminds us to be our most authentic selves. In order to do that, we must paradoxically deny ourselves and follow God's will, even if it may not make us feel good or goes against what the world says will make us happy. Ultimately, true joy will come into our lives and we find what fulfills us most, whether that means serving God in religious life, living life with a godly spouse, or choosing to minister to the world as a single person. All of these can be done with a chaste heart.

May we all strive to be pure in heart, dearest sisters in Christ!

- Monique

Reflection: What are your perspectives on chastity and temperance?

Reflection: How do you think you can bring more balance into your life?

Act: Ask Saint Gemma Galgani for help if you struggle with chastity and temperance. Practice moderation today in a small way.

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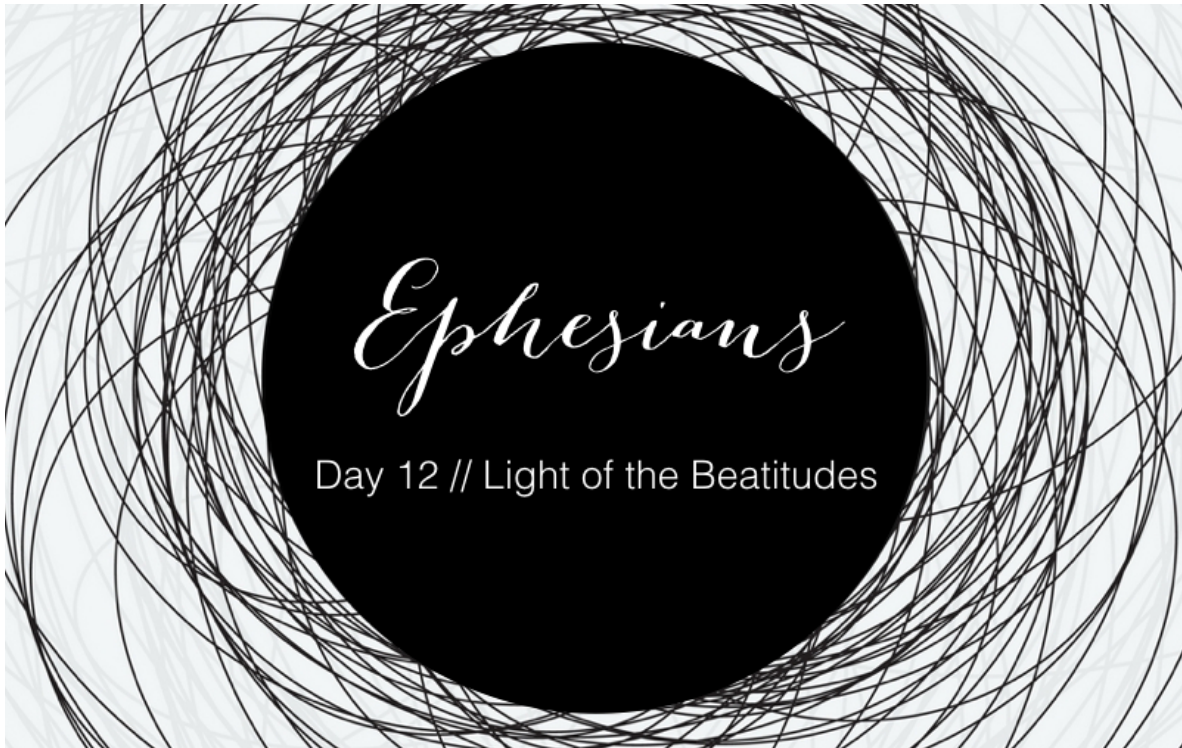
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*Scripture: Ephesians 5:6-14, John 8:12, Matthew 5:1-14*

One book that I often read during high school that I still love reading today is *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas A. Kempis. It was a book that was way beyond the reading level of your average 15-year-old girl. However, I was in a time when I was completely lost and the words of this Catholic monk were like a lighthouse in the middle of the foggy period of my adolescence. The first chapter of *The Imitation of Christ* opens with this verse from the Gospel of John: “Anyone who follows me shall not walk in darkness.” (John 8:12)

How exactly can we live as children of light as it says in today’s passage? *The Imitation of Christ* suggests this: “Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord.”

What is good and pleasing to the Lord? The Beatitudes, as shown in the Gospel of Matthew, give us a good starting point, but it’s a little bit hard to understand some of them.

I personally find “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God” especially challenging. However, the Catholicism series by Bishop Robert Barron gave me some clarity about this particular verse. Being pure of heart means having no ambiguity about what is most important and centering your love towards pleasing God alone and above all things. I may have a ton of obsessions and passions, but if I want to have a pure heart, I have to remember that none of these things can ever compare to God.

You might wonder what it means to “hunger and thirst for righteousness.” According to Bishop Robert Barron, it means making the desire to do God’s will your number one priority. And what about being a

peacemaker? How can we do that in a world where debates on social media and around the watercooler have become part of the norm? We can start by recognizing that we are all connected to each other and that behind that negative comment is an actual person with thoughts and feelings. Make an effort to draw people together instead of trying to tear down a co-worker or a friend.

The other four Beatitudes are countermeasures for the four most common addictions in this world (according to St. Thomas Aquinas): wealth, pleasure, power, and honor. While these four things are not bad in and of themselves, to try and center our lives on one of these four things only leads to an empty life.

By being “poor in spirit,” we can remind ourselves that God is more important than how much money we have in the bank or if our house can look as good as the pictures we see on Pinterest. People who are mourning are blessed because we all know how fleeting the happiness we derive from earthly pleasures can be. Doing the will of God may not always make us feel good, but this particular Beatitude reminds us that even when we feel bad, we can find consolation in knowing that we are doing God’s will. Being meek doesn’t mean denying yourself the credit that is due, but instead reminds us not to grasp for power or chase selfish ambition. Finally, the beatitude that blesses “those who are persecuted for righteousness sake” reminds us of another aspect to the virtue of humility: to deny yourself of the desire to seek the approval of others. Not everyone will understand, or even like us when we live a Christ-filled life. But this beatitude, along with all the others, reminds us that the opinions of others don’t matter when compared to the rewards we gain for doing God’s will.

My prayer for you, my dearest sisters in Christ, is that you will shine the light of God’s love from your heart into the world. I hope the Beatitudes will give you a good place to start.

- Monique

Reflection: Which Beatitude do you have the hardest one understanding? Why?

Reflection: How do you think you can bring the light of Christ to others?

Act: Practice one of the Beatitudes today or reflect on the hardest one for you to understand in prayer.

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