



PRESENTED TO

Name

Date / Occasion

Personal Note



A YEAR
WITH THE
MYSTICS





A YEAR WITH THE MYSTICS

VISIONARY WISDOM
FOR
DAILY LIVING

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AUTHOR'S DEDICATION

To Jesus Christ, Our Sovereign King, who is the world's salvation. All praise and homage do we bring and thanks and adoration. Christ Jesus, Victor! Christ Jesus, Ruler! Christ Jesus, Lord and Redeemer. (Father Martin B. Hellriegel, 1941, St. Louis)

To Declan Coffin, that every day may be a deeper plunge into the life of faith.

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In some cases the writer's argument depends on a significantly different translation, such as the Septuagint or Vulgate. In these cases, that translation has been retained.

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It is the saints who know what being in love is all about. Earthly love pales in comparison.

—Fr. Thomas Dubay, SM, *The Fire Within*

If I saw the gates of hell open and I stood on the brink of the abyss, I should not despair, I should not lose hope of mercy, because I trust in thee my God.

—St. Gemma Galgani

How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts!

—Psalms 84:1

So: we come to rest with the mysteries. . . . We do not abandon reason, we merely recognize its limitations. We reason to the existence of God, it is revealed to us that His Son was the incarnation, and that such was His love of us that He endured a torture excruciating in pain, and unique in aspect—the God of hosts, mutilated by His own creatures, whom He dies forgiving, loving. Can we do less? Yes, we do less, but must try to do more, until we die.

—William F. Buckley, Jr., *Nearer, My God: An Autobiography of Faith*

Introduction



The memorial of Our Lady of Lourdes happens to be the day that Pope Benedict resigned. It's also the day that everything changed for me, in many ways. I remember many things about that day. I had been up late reading for research preparation for an article. I woke up to my sister asking me by text message if a pope can resign and quite a few media requests for comment already. But that day was pivotal for me because since William F. Buckley Jr., the founder of *National Review*, had died a few years earlier, I had increasingly had the itch to write more about the enduring things after many years as the editor of the magazine's website. As it happened, Bill Buckley had set an example for me, writing and speaking frequently about the importance of the Beatitudes and Bethlehem in fostering a healthy political climate as well as a life-affirming culture. Benedict XVI's resignation further justified such a shift in the focus of my writing as people were curious to know just what on earth was going on. Not long after, I became a senior fellow at our non-profit journalistic think tank, focusing more officially on religion, culture, and civil society.

Fast forward to September 2015. I sat on a folding chair on the lawn of my alma mater, the Catholic University of America, and listened to Pope Francis at the canonization Mass for Junipero Serra, a saint who had been an early part of our very country and continent—a continent that should be more united than it is (Our Lady of Guadalupe seemed to want that). I probably experienced just about every emotion that day as I was both pilgrim and pundit. I ran into some of my best friends in the world there and gave thanks for the gifts God has given me in my life.

And I listened as the Holy Father talked about how so many people today seem to be going through life anesthetized. That may have been enough to get me to stop tweeting for a moment and nudge me to examine my conscience, something this pope has inspired me to do often, the controversies surrounding him notwithstanding.

This Mass and his words came after a few months of thinking and praying and writing and traveling around the life of now Saint Serra. He had been—and will doubtless continue to be—a source of debate himself.

Like most of humanity—including the saints—he was not perfect and is probably not best judged by present-day conventional standards. There was a harshness to the society to which he came as a missionary, to which he tried to bring the tender love of Jesus as best he could.

As it happens, there's a harshness to our society that needs the tender love of Jesus too. In some of Serra's homilies we have, he talked about tasting and seeing the goodness of the Lord: "What a difference there is between a temperament that is harsh, stern, and severe and a disposition that is mild, loving, sweet, and gentle. The harsh temperament rides roughshod over everything, causes trouble everywhere, and usually ruins everything. The mild disposition, on the other hand, arranges everything peacefully, softens everything, and attracts everyone with its tenderness."

Around the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, just before Pope Benedict XVI stepped down, I was at the Vatican for a gathering of Catholic leaders, including bishops, from the Americas. On the first night, the Holy Father, with the image of the Holy Spirit behind him, gently admonished us. The gist of his remarks, which were in a mix of English and Spanish, was: *if you are not encountering Jesus Christ in prayer, all your evangelization plans and strategies aren't worth much. You people who are talking about him, professing to be his followers, do you even know Jesus Christ?*

The sacramental life is joyful. It is also rigorous. It's not about security or certainty other than in the promises of Christ.

I come to this series—*A Year with*—not as an academic, theologian, or saint, though the latter I not only long to be but know I must be, am called to be. And yet it seems so impossible in the knowledge of the pathetic reality of my sinful unworthiness. I don't pretend to either be a mystic or an expert in mysticism. But I do pray enough to know that so very few of us have plumbed the depths of what God wants to reveal to us and do in us through prayer.

What is more, I never really knew what to do or say or who to tell when I first encountered things in prayer that I didn't understand. God reveals himself constantly to us, in his boundless ways, as he pleases. That shouldn't throw us off our prayer. We can't let that become our prayer, expecting it, taking pride in it. We need to be comfortable being stretched and knowing his ways are unknown and wise as he makes himself known. Be not afraid, as you've heard and will read. Let him bring you to a peace that surpasses all understanding, even as he brings you into a deeper understanding in the

heart of the Trinity. I want you to spend some time with some friends of mine who have helped me know our God better and will continue to, I pray.

If you know me, you probably have taken note of—or occasionally joked about or even considered starting a blog or Twitter account about—the “purse” I carry around filled with books. It often means an extra screening at the airport, too thick are the piles for the machines to see through. Frequently found in there are some of these friends and their insights I share with you here. My battered copies of assorted saints’ writings have touched the tombs of saints, been on many an airport restaurant table, and seen the back pew and adoration chapels of more than a few parish churches in the country and around the world. This volume contains some meditations that have helped me, along with a little reflection that we hope might help you as we try to truly live as Christians together. A heavy messy handbag, and a reading, a consideration and a prayer a day aren’t the stuff of heroic virtue, but if they can help set the stage, along with the sacraments, Scripture, and a well-formed conscience (hint: read the Catechism), this book may just be for you or someone you love. I know the exercise of putting it together has stretched my soul, so I think we’re on the right path together here. Be assured of my prayers.

February 11, 2019

The feast of Our Lady of Lourdes

New York, NY

How to Use this Book



There are enough meditations for a year in here, but you don't have to start on January 1. Start when you pick it up or as you are gifted the book. Start with the first page or dig in as you see fit. Consider how God wants to guide you.

Some of these short prayers at the end of the entries you might want to find yourself praying throughout a day, throughout many days. Adapt things from this book as you feel called to. Don't be afraid to highlight things or write things down in a prayer journal. Whatever approach to this you take, know that the wisdom of these prayerful people can help you, so go for it, make it stick. The goal of this book is that anyone who encounters it will come to know our God more and reflect his light in the world. Use it, and share it, in whatever ways you feel called to do so.

You'll notice along the way that not everyone included in these pages is conventionally thought of as a mystic. Some of the most active saints in the world, including contemporary ones, make appearances, some of them frequently. That's by design. The contemplative life is the spiritual air they breathe; it makes the sanctification of the active life in the world possible. Do not be intimidated by the word *mystic*. Do not set expectations for growing in prayerful encounter with God. Trust him and stay close to the sacraments. At a time when people describe themselves as "spiritual but not religious," the mystics draw us into deeper prayer at the heart of the Church. And that, whatever our station in life, is exactly where God wants us.

God bless you! Pray well to love well in the Trinity and Mary.

Acknowledgments



It's to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and to God's own mother, Mary, that I owe all thanks for anything good there is here and anywhere else in my life. And all deficiencies are mine. We are works in progress. Keep advancing in his love; that is the point of this book.

I'm extremely grateful to my editor, John Moorehouse, and his saintly patience as he waited for this manuscript to be delivered. Heroic, I tell you. My thanks to Nick Vari, Ryan Grant and everyone at TAN and Saint Benedict Press for wanting this to exist and for wanting me to do it. Thank you to Richard Beemer, Barry Jackson, and Hannah Swenson, all of whom pitched in at critical moments.

To my parents, for giving me the gift of the Catholic faith, and to Fr. Peter John Cameron, OP, for both his friendship and his introduction to so many of these people whose deep insights on and from prayer follow. More than a few of the passages included first came to my attention in the pages of *Magnificat*, which is a gift to the world.

Thanks also to Fr. Walter Oxley and Fr. John Rozembajgier for their inef-fable friendship and for helping me see it through. Fr. Romanus Cessario, OP, Pierre-Marie Dumont, Fr. Aquinas Guilbeau, OP, Jonah Goldberg, and Rush Limbaugh helped me along the way in ways they don't even know.

I'm grateful to Rich Lowry, Lindsay Craig, and Jack Fowler, among many other people at the National Review Institute and *National Review*—I pray many of you find this nourishing. The prayers of David Scott (and a few books of his I borrowed which he may never see again) were especially appreciated as were those of everyone who answered a deadline cry or two for prayer on Facebook. But this only begins the list.

A special thanks to the late William F. Buckley Jr., who created a place in print—*National Review*—where a Catholic vision of the world would be welcome and debated too. When Bill died, more than one priest credited him for nourishing his vocation by being unafraid to talk about his faith on *Firing Line*, in the pages of *National Review*, and elsewhere. Incidentally, I also have him to thank for the phrase “basket cases of ingratitude,” which found its way into this book.

This book would have never gotten done without the help of Jacob Scott, Jeanne Marie Hathway, and Grace Aquilina. Thank you, too, Mike Aquilina!

Though I'm a newbie still, the book was enriched by generous spiritual directees.

I couldn't have finished this without borrowing books from the late Ron Novotny's library at the Cenacle of Our Lady of Divine Providence in Clearwater, Florida. Thank you, Adrienne Novotny.

Thank you also to the Bridgettine Sisters in Connecticut and to the Sisters of Life who occasionally housed me while I was hiding to work on this.

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Thank you all. Thanks be to God!

God bless you.



A YEAR WITH THE MYSTICS

The Daily Readings

Entering into the light

We simply want to see as God sees. That's the work of eternity. Let's get started already.



God is light and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth; but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

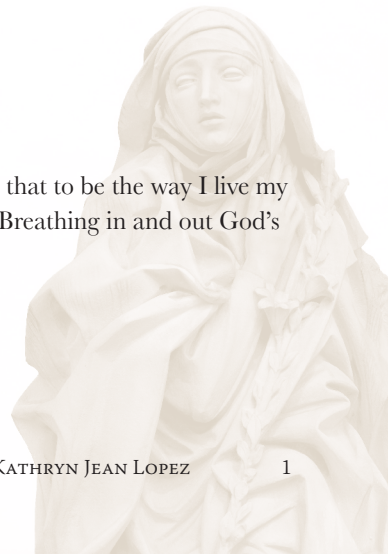
—1 John 1:5–10

IN GOD'S PRESENCE, CONSIDER . . .

Am I ready to walk entirely in the light? Do I want that to be the way I live my life, every day, every hour, every minute, every second? Breathing in and out God's Word, which is my life, which gives me life?

CLOSING PRAYER

Make me your light, Lord—all light, all yours.



Fathoming the depths of the profundity of God

Prayer is really an endless journey. Thanks be to God for so many companions along the way.



The holy virgin told her confessors, of whom, though unworthy, I was one, that at the beginning of her visions, that is to say when the Lord Jesus Christ first began to appear to her, he once came to her while she was praying and said, “Do you know, daughter, who you are, and who I am? If you know these two things, you will be blessed. You are she who is not; whereas I am he who is. Have this knowledge in your soul and the Enemy will never deceive you and you will escape all his wiles; you will never disobey my commandments and will acquire all grace, truth, and light.”

Small words, yet great in value. A succinct doctrine, yet in its way endless! Oh, immeasurable wisdom, wrapped in a few brief syllables, however shall I understand you, who will help me to break your seals? How shall I fathom the depths of your profundity? Perhaps this is that length and breadth, that height and depth, that the Apostle Paul longed to comprehend with all the saints of Ephesus [3:8]? Or perhaps it is one with the Charity of Christ, transcending all human wisdom?

—Blessed Raymond of Capua, *The Life of St. Catherine of Siena*

IN GOD'S PRESENCE, CONSIDER . . .

Do I know God? Do I know who I am in his light? Am I prepared to see?

CLOSING PRAYER

Prepare me, O Lord, for every blessed thing you have to show me. Anoint me with your holy wisdom so that I may love as you love.