

# Cultivating Virtue

## Self-Mastery with the Saints





# Cultivating Virtue Self-Mastery with the Saints

*Translated from the Italian by*  
A Member of the Order of Mercy  
Mt. St. Joseph's Seminary  
Hartford, Connecticut

*“The object of all virtues is to bring us into union with God, in which alone is laid up all the happiness that can be enjoyed in this world. Now, in what does this union properly consist? In nothing save a perfect conformity and resemblance between our will and the will of God.”*

—ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS

TAN Books  
Charlotte, North Carolina

Imprimatur: ✠ Michael Augustine  
Archbishop of New York  
January 21, 1891

Originally published as *A Year With the Saints: A Virtue for Every Month of the Year* in 1891.

Reprinted in abridged edition in 1972 by Marian Publications, South Bend, Indiana, and reprinted in 1983 by TAN Books.

Complete and unabridged edition retypeset and published by TAN Books in 2016. Typography is the property of TAN Books and may not be reproduced, in whole or in part, without written permission from the publisher.

Cover and interior design by Caroline Kiser

ISBN: 978-1-50510-859-0

Published in the United States by  
TAN Books  
P. O. Box 410487  
Charlotte, NC 28241  
[www.TANBooks.com](http://www.TANBooks.com)

Printed and bound in the United States of America

To Mary, Our Lady of Mercy, under the title of Queen of All Saints, this translation is affectionately dedicated in the hope that through her advocacy it may conduce to the growth of sanctity in numerous souls.





# Contents

	Page
Translator's Preface . . . . .	ix
January—Perfection . . . . .	1
February—Humility . . . . .	41
March—Mortification . . . . .	91
April—Patience . . . . .	131
May—Meekness . . . . .	169
June—Obedience . . . . .	221
July—Simplicity . . . . .	251
August—Diligence . . . . .	287
September—Prayer . . . . .	321
October—Confidence . . . . .	355
November—Charity . . . . .	385
December—Union . . . . .	429







# Translator's Preface

In presenting this work for the first time in English dress, the translator would take the opportunity of drawing the attention of the devout American reader to one or two peculiarities in its structure, which have already won for it a wide recognition among readers of books of its class in Europe.

In the first place, the allotment of separate months to individual virtues agrees well with a practice of self-examination much recommended by many spiritual writers, who advise us to take different virtues in turn as the objects of special effort. Nothing certainly could be better fitted to assist us in the acquisition of a virtue than these selections from the writings of the most eminent masters of spiritual science which portray its beauties, declare its necessity or explain its various degrees and the methods of its attainment.

In the second place, the few words of exhortation or instruction which open the reading for each day are followed by the best of all commentaries—that of action. A great part of the book

## CULTIVATING VIRTUE



is composed of examples which, while they have the interest of anecdote, furnish at the same time the strongest proofs of the possibility of carrying out in real life precepts and principles which might otherwise seem too high and heavenly for our everyday existence.

In the hope then that these exotic flowers may flourish and blossom in many an American garden, they are offered to the lovers of spiritual excellence and beauty by

THE TRANSLATOR.



JANUARY

# Perfection

---

*Be ye perfect as your Heavenly  
Father is perfect.*—MATT. 5:48

---

**1** Consider all the past as nothing, and say, like David:  
Now I begin to love my God.

—ST. FRANCIS DE SALES

It was in this manner that the Apostle St. Paul acted; though, after his conversion, he had become a vessel of election, filled with the spirit of Jesus Christ, yet, to persevere and advance in the heavenly way, he made use of this means, for he said in his Epistle to the Philippians: “Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended. But one thing I do: forgetting the things that are behind, and stretching forth myself to those that are before, I press towards the mark, to the prize of the supernal vocation of God in Christ Jesus.” [PHIL. 3:13–14].

## CULTIVATING VIRTUE



Thus the glorious St. Anthony went from day to day, stimulating himself to virtue. St. Anastasius said of him that he always looked upon himself as a beginner, as if every day were the first in which he was serving God, and as if in the past he had done nothing good and were but just setting foot in the way of the Lord and taking the first steps on the road to Heaven. And this was the very last admonition he left to his monks at his death: “My sons,” he said to them, “if you wish to advance in virtue and perfection, never give up the practice of considering each day that you are then beginning, and of conducting yourselves always as you did on the day you began.”

Thus also we find that St. Gregory, St. Bernard and St. Charles acted and advised others to act. To render clearer to all the necessity and utility of this method, they made use of two beautiful comparisons, saying that we must act in this like travelers who do not regard the road they have gone over, but, rather, what remains for them to traverse—and this they keep always before their eyes, even to their journey’s end; or, like merchants eager for riches who make no account of what they have hitherto acquired, nor of the fatigue they have borne, but put all their thought and care upon new acquisitions, and upon daily multiplying their possessions, as if in the past they had made no profit at all.

**2** We must begin with a strong and constant resolution to give ourselves wholly to God, professing to Him, in a tender, loving manner, from the bottom of our hearts, that we intend to be His without any reserve, and then we must often go back and renew this same resolution.

—ST. FRANCIS DE SALES



One of the means for the acquisition of perfection which was chiefly inculcated and much practiced by St. Philip Neri was a frequent renewal of good resolutions.

St. Francis de Sales made from time to time a spiritual renovation, and always conceived in it new desires to serve God better.

St. John Berchmans, at his very entrance into religion, planted in his heart a strong resolution to become a Saint, and then he not only remained constant in all the practices and resolutions which he took up for this end, but he went on daily gaining new vigor to his spiritual advantage.

When a holy religious was giving the Exercises at Torre di Specchi in Rome, a nun called Sr. Marie Bonaventura, who was living a very relaxed life, did not wish to be present. By many entreaties she was finally induced to attend. The first meditation, on the end of man, enkindled such fervor in her heart that the Father had scarcely finished when she called him to her, and said: "Father, I mean to be a Saint, and quickly." She then withdrew to her cell, and, writing the same words on a scrap of paper, fastened them to the foot of her crucifix. From this moment, she applied herself with so much earnestness to the practice of perfection that a memoir of her was written at her death, which occurred eleven months later.

**3** The Lord chiefly desires of us that we should be completely perfect, that we may be wholly one with Him. Let us aim, therefore, at whatever we need to reach this

—ST. TERESA

## CULTIVATING VIRTUE



Father Peter Faber, a companion of St. Ignatius and highly esteemed by St. Francis de Sales, often dwelt on the thought that God greatly desires our advancement. And so he endeavored to grow constantly, and not to let a day pass without some progress in virtue, so that he gradually rose to great perfection and a high reputation for sanctity.

St. Pachomius and St. Anthony, by studying the virtues of others, stimulated themselves to attain similar excellence.

The Venerable Sister Mary Villani had the following vision. On the Feast of St. Francis, for whom she had a particular devotion, this Saint appeared to her and led her to a lofty place, more beautiful than any she had ever seen. To reach it, one was obliged to ascend four very high terraces, which signified, as the Saint revealed to her, the four degrees of perfection. With great difficulty she ascended, by his help, the first terrace; and he explained to her that this was the first state of perfection, called purity of conscience, which borders on angelic purity. In it the soul becomes like that of a little child, enjoys a pure and holy tranquility, never thinks evil of others, nor interests itself in what does not belong to its own position. Thence he brought her up to the second terrace, telling her that whoever had arrived at purity of conscience becomes capable of prayer and of true love, which is the inseparable fruit of prayer. Here he enumerated to her the properties of true love, which is pure, simple, unselfish and founded upon the truth of God, who can give Himself only to souls already possessed of purity. Then he raised her to the third terrace, that of the cross and mortification, adding that from purity and love the soul passes on to taking up the cross courageously and to being itself crucified, and that to arrive at this state one must acquire four



cardinal virtues. These are: a true mortification of all vices and of every earthly affection; a perfect poverty of spirit, which tramples underfoot all temporal goods; a living death, by which the soul dies to itself and to all affections of sense, and lives in a total annihilation and transformation into its crucified Lord, so as to be able to say: "I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me." [Gal. 2:20] The soul that has gained this state seems to have conquered the world, and bears sufferings and crosses as if it could no longer feel them. The fourth terrace, he said, typified the state of real and perfect union.

**4** I hear nothing talked of but perfection; yet I see it practiced only by few. Everyone forms his own ideal of it. Some place it in simplicity of attire; some in austerity; some in almsgiving; some in frequent reception of the Sacraments; this one, in prayer; that one, in passive contemplation; and another, in the gifts called gratuitous. But, by a general mistake, they take the effects for the cause, and the means for the end. For my part, I know of no other perfection than loving God with all the heart, and our neighbor as ourselves. Whoever imagines any other kind of perfection deceives himself, for the whole accumulation of virtues without this is but a heap of stones. And if we do not immediately and perfectly enjoy this treasure of holy love, the fault is in us. We are too slow and ungenerous with God, and do not give ourselves up entirely to Him, as the Saints did.

—ST. FRANCIS DE SALES