

*The* IMITATION  
*of* CHRIST



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*The Imitation of Christ*  
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*The* IMITATION  
*of* CHRIST

THOMAS À KEMPIS

*Translated from the Original Latin  
by the Right Rev.*

Richard Challoner, D.D

TO WHICH ARE ADDED PRACTICAL  
REFLECTIONS AND A PRAYER  
AFTER EACH CHAPTER

*“Write, read, sing, sigh, keep silence, pray,  
bear thy crosses manfully; eternal life is worthy  
of all these, and greater combats.”*

*—Bk. III, chap. 47*

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Feast of St. John of God  
March 8, 2012

Dear Reader,

When Conor Gallagher, Vice President of Saint Benedict Press, first came to me and shared that the Lord had put it on his heart to assist the Poor Clares in the building of their new monastery, we had a heart-to-heart discussion. In my rather straightforward manner, I told him that I knew there were people whom the Lord had called to be a part of this work—this building up of His Church in the South by laying a foundation for a life of adoration and thanksgiving. I also told him that there were those whom God had not chosen, and that I was perfectly capable of returning donations to people who had their own agenda in mind. I think he might have been a little shocked at that point. However, there is a restlessness of the spirit when God is commanding a soul to engage in His work—and that spirit was actively working in the soul of our dear friend.

In our discussions on what would be an appropriate means to use to raise funds for the building of a monastery, the guiding light was that it would be of benefit to souls. With this in mind, we narrowed it down to a selection of time-tested classics that have been written by the saints and read by the saints. In other words: saint-makers.

In our world today, we are pulled in so many directions and we have become people of ceaseless activity. It seems we have forgotten

that the Gospel mandate is to *pray* without ceasing, not to work without ceasing.

These books are a call from the Lord to our weary souls to “come away with Me for a while”; to step aside from the hectic pace of our daily routine, and to ponder the purpose of possessing immortal souls: that we may spend *eternity* in the embrace of God.

Each soul is called to holiness. We all have different paths, but the same goal. These books are a compelling force that will direct our sight to the “one thing necessary.”

May each page enkindle in the hearts of those who read them, a love for God and a desire for heaven that will give them the strength to fight the good fight and to gain the joy of heaven.

—MOTHER DOLORES MARIE OF THE  
WOUNDED HEART OF MARY, PCPA  
Abbess  
Saint Joseph Adoration Monastery

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# PREFACE

IF IMITATION is the surest means of reproducing any desired goal that has already been accomplished before, then it makes sense to gaze intently upon the original itself. Budding artists study and scrutinize the works of famous masters from times past, aspiring athletes replay every move of their star players, amateur performers carefully examine the techniques of leading actors, and those eager to follow the call to sanctity seek out the tried and true paths traversed by saints before them. For centuries now, *The Imitation of Christ*, by Thomas à Kempis, has been the most popular spiritual classic, after Sacred Scripture itself, guiding souls in the fundamentals of the spiritual life and leading them in the way of imitation of Christ, Who said, “Learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble of heart.” (*Matthew* 11:29).

We are obviously living in a momentous time in the history of the Church and of the world. All around us, in every sphere of society, we are faced with escalating challenges, and the mounting tension between the light of Truth and the darkness of lies is coming to a head. The so-called “gray middle-ground” is disappearing into stark black and white, as men and women—as you and I—are forced to clearly choose where we stand and what we believe in.

Yet where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more, making our era a truly extraordinary and exciting age for the Church! Once people are forced to emerge out of convenient ignorance or lack of awareness, or

even to grasp more firmly to what they already know to be true, then the spiritual battleground becomes clearly marked and the crusade for souls can take full force. How do we then successfully engage in this combat for Christendom? Quite simply, it is by the transformation of our lives, one soul at a time. And the surest way towards this transformation is by imitating Christ, Who identified Himself as the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

In *The Imitation of Christ*, Thomas à Kempis arms us for spiritual combat and the transformation of society. Categorizing his meditations into four sections, he gives his reader *Useful Admonitions for a Spiritual Life*, *Admonitions Concerning Interior Things* along with thoughts on *Interior Consolation*, and finally, an instructive and devotional treatise on the *Blessed Sacrament*. In these sections, he identifies the footsteps of Christ, the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Book One of *The Imitation* addresses *Useful Admonitions for a Spiritual Life*, showing the soul practical steps to following Christ, the Way. Whether you are a Religious in a monastery, a business man in the world, or the busy mother of small children, Kempis offers practical advice on how to foster genuine growth in the spiritual life, so that the footsteps of your daily routine fall into the tracks of the Way towards eternity.

Books Two and Three deal with *Admonitions Concerning Interior Things* and *Interior Consolation*, leading a soul to its deepest interior, where Christ's light sheds His Truth into the soul and carries us more intimately into Himself. From the treatment of various vices to the explanation of the soul's interior movements toward God, Kempis instructs his audience in authentic spiritual direction, thus shedding light on the path towards the sanctity of Truth.

Finally, Book Four treats of the *Blessed Sacrament*, the true Life of the Soul. Kempis instructs his readers in basic Church teaching on the Most Holy Eucharist, while kindling ever deeper devotion and reverence towards this greatest of gifts—our spiritual Life

Whether on any given day, you need a catapult out of the spiritual

doldrums, or a refortification of spiritual strength and stamina, *The Imitation of Christ* is a gem in any Catholic library. This is a book that has molded saints and transformed societies. May you take it off of your bookshelf frequently so that its lessons may transform your soul, and then in turn, may you take Christ, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, out into our world in this exciting time of heroic Christian living.

—SR. MARY RAPHAEL OF THE  
DIVINE PHYSICIAN, PCPA  
Feast of St. John of God  
March 8, 2012



# BOOK 1

*Useful Admonitions  
for a Spiritual Life*



## CHAPTER ONE



### *Of the Imitation of Christ, and the Contempt of All the Vanities of the World*

HE THAT followeth me, walketh not in darkness,” saith Our Lord. (*John* 8:12). These are the words of Christ, by which we are admonished, that we must imitate His life and manners, if we would be truly enlightened, and delivered from all blindness of heart.

Let it then be our chief study to meditate on the life of Jesus Christ.

2. The doctrine of Christ surpasseth all the doctrines of the saints, and whosoever hath the spirit will find therein a hidden manna. (*Apoc.* 2:17).

But it happeneth that many, by frequent hearing of the Gospel, are very little affected: because they have not the spirit of Christ.

But he who would fully and feelingly understand the words of Christ, must study to make his whole life conformable to that of Christ.

3. What doth it avail thee to discourse profoundly of the Trinity if thou be void of humility, and consequently, displeasing to the Trinity?

In truth, sublime words make not a man holy and just: but a virtuous life maketh him dear to God.

I would rather feel compunction, than know its definition.

If thou didst know the whole Bible by heart, and the sayings of all the philosophers, what would it all profit thee without the love of God and His grace?

“Vanity of vanities, and all is vanity” (*Eccles.* 1:2), besides loving God and serving Him alone.

This is the highest wisdom, by despising the world to tend to heavenly kingdoms.

4. It is vanity, therefore, to seek after riches which must perish, and to trust in them.

It is vanity also to be ambitious of honors, and to raise one’s self to a high station.

It is vanity to follow the lusts of the flesh, and to desire that for which thou must afterwards be grievously punished.

It is vanity to wish for a long life, and to take little care of leading a good life.

It is vanity also to mind this present life, and not to look forward unto those things which are to come.

It is vanity to love that which passeth with all speed, and not to hasten thither where everlasting joy remaineth.

5. Often remember that proverb: “The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor is the ear filled with hearing.” (*Eccles.* 1:8).

Study, therefore, to withdraw thy heart from the love of visible things, and to turn thyself to things invisible. For they that follow their sensuality, defile their conscience, and lose the grace of God.

### *Practical Reflections*

If we would really honor Jesus Christ, we must apply ourselves to know Him, to love Him, and to follow Him in the practice of every Christian virtue. This is absolutely necessary for salvation, as we cannot become true Christians, but by knowing, loving, and following Christ. To pretend to please our Blessed Saviour by a profound knowledge of His divinity, without endeavoring to follow His example, without living as He lived, would be most dangerously to delude ourselves.

*Prayer*

What will it avail me, O Jesus, to study and to know in part Thy supreme greatness, and the most sublime of Thy mysteries, if I endeavor not to derive advantage and merit from them, by cherishing Thy disposition and copying Thy virtues, since, to save my soul, I must not only know, but practice what Thou hast taught me by Thy word, and manifested in Thy life for my imitation—I must know and practice my religion? This, my Saviour, is the grace which I now ask of Thee, with a firm hope that Thou wilt grant my petition. *Amen.*