



SBC Conference 2020

IMMUNIZING OURSELVES AGAINST VIRUSES OF THE MIND

Homeostasis: Seeking the Tranquility of Order

by Sister Maria Philomena, M.I.C.M. - October 9, 2020

My plan today is to divide the title of my talk into three parts and address them out of order – before restoring order at the end! (Title) First will come “the tranquility of order” then “homeostasis” and, finally, we’ll take the “seeking”. Let’s ask for Our Lady’s assistance.

Hail Mary . . . Seat of Wisdom . . . Queen of Peace . . .

The “tranquility of order” . . . Students of SAI and Brother Francis will recognize this as the definition of . . . peace. It comes to us from St. Augustine’s City of God.

Peace is the tranquility of order.

Disorder was brought into the world with Original Sin. Man rebelled against God, so his own lower nature rebelled against his higher nature . . . We all have experienced the fact that our passions are no longer subject to reason. The whole point of virtue and grace is to restore the original order. Unfortunately, or rather, fortunately (!), this is not done by the wave of a wand!

We all know what it feels like to not be at peace . . . to feel anxious, worried, pressured, bothered, fearful. More than ever, we are surrounded by a society that contributes more toward disturbance and unrest than to peace. If you listen to (or read) the news, you are constantly bombarded by the media with an avalanche of strife, turmoil, and disorder.

What I would like to do today is look at the part peace plays in our lives – physical and spiritual, temporal and eternal – and see what we should do to effectively seek after peace (as St. Peter tells us to do). “Seek after peace and pursue it . . .”

When Brother André Marie suggested that peace was a topic that was needed to round out the development of the conference theme, he recommended I use a book by Fr. Jacques Philippe: *Searching for and Maintaining Peace*.

Fr. Philippe’s books – the ones we have seen, anyway – are very good, although usually there is some (what Brother André calls) cringe factor – due to either a lack of clear definitions or modern Novus-Ordo-speak (at least in the English translations). However, this book Brother said he can recommend without reservation. I don’t know anyone who’s read it who didn’t find it helpful – including priests. (Even Angelus Press carries it!) In fact, it is so popular, we were only able to get 20 copies from the publisher. (Yes, they are in the bookstore.) One priest friend thinks this little book will go down as a spiritual classic.

It isn’t anything new, exactly, but it is a re-presentation in a small, easily applicable package.

The book’s 110 pages are divided into three sections:

Part One: Interior Peace, The Road To Sanctification

Part Two: How to React To That Which Causes Us To Lose Peace

Part Three: What The Saints Tell Us

The second section is the largest – and it is here that Fr. Philippe gives practical how-to advice.

Really, this little book is well worth keeping handy for reference in upsetting situations.



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“Peace on earth to men of goodwill . . .”

“Peace, be still.”

“Peace be with you”

“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you . . .”

“Seek after peace and pursue it . . .”

Holy Scripture is full of references to peace (239 according to one search engine). But what is it? An absence of conflict? A passion? A virtue? A gift? A fruit?

What is peace?

Peace is tranquility: a result, a crown, an effect. It is not itself a virtue. When we speak about “feeling at peace” or “feeling peaceful”, we are talking about the feeling that results from our emotions being calm, at rest, in order. We don’t actually feel peace itself. Peace is a net effect of all the faculties being in proper order because of a proper order in our relationship with God. The more our lost order is restored, the more peace we possess.

The bottom line is that we can’t have perfect peace in this life, but we can work toward it, and we can achieve what St. Thomas calls “imperfect peace”.

It might be helpful at this point to do a quick review of the faculties or powers of man.

(Chart by a professor @ Franciscan University – clearest for my purposes – terms a little different – translations from St. Thomas’ Latin -- see next page)

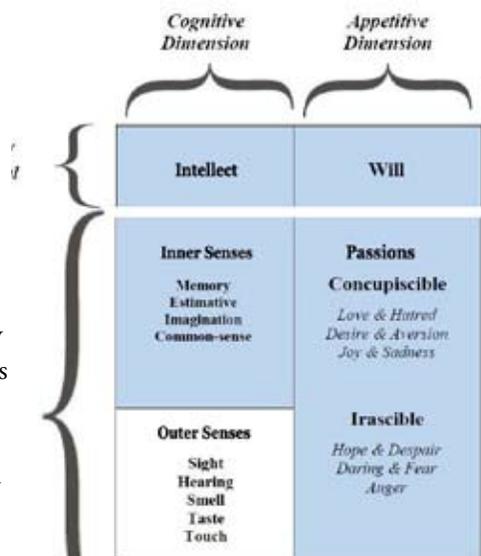
Man has 26 powers, the highest of which are the intellect and will. When you look at the chart of the powers of man, you will see first two divisions, and then three major sections. On the bottom are the vegetative powers: growth, nutrition, and reproduction. These are the powers that are found in all material life: plants, animals, and men.

Above the vegetative powers, the next horizontal group are the sentient powers. These powers we share with the animals. In this group there are several categories (St. Thomas calls them “modes of being”): Locomotion, the Inner & Outer Senses, and the Passions.

Finally, on the top, you see intellect and will. These are man’s spiritual powers/faculties – the ones he shares with the angels; by them we can prove the immortality of the soul.

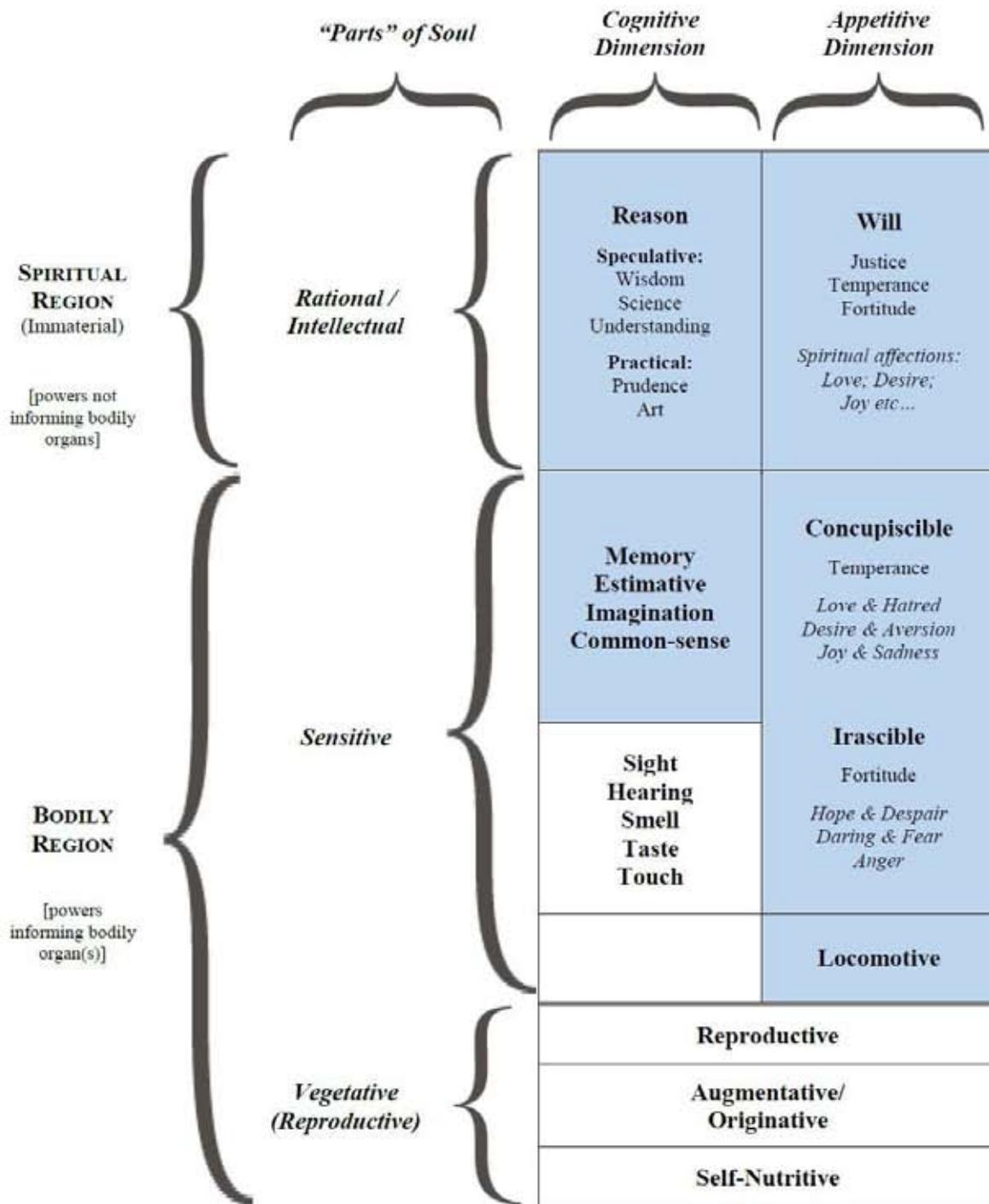
Now, you may also notice that – looking at the sentient & spiritual powers – there is a knowing side and a desiring side. (Let’s simplify the view a bit.)

We gather information from and about the world around us by means of our five outer senses. These senses gather data by using their appropriate organs (tongue, the skin, the ears, the nose, the eyes), and then that information is collated, compared, and filed in the brain by the inner senses. The intellect makes use of this information when it thinks – in the reasoning process we study and practice in Logic. So, on the left side of the chart, these powers all work toward knowing.



POWERS (FACULTIES) OF THE HUMAN SOUL

[following Aquinas (following Aristotle)]



KEY:

(Partial) Control

Powers/Faculties

Virtues

Passions



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On the right hand side, we have the appetitive powers. The word “appetite” is much broader, philosophically, than the way we normally use it. The word comes into English from Latin through French . . . and it meant “to seek” or “desire”. The appetites as a group, draw us toward the good and away from evil. The passions (divided into two groups) are part of the sentient appetite. Even animals have them. When a rabbit smells a fox, the passion of fear helps it instinctively to run away or hide. When Sister Maria Rosaria’s goats hear the treats rattling in the tin can, their memory of the tastiness that goes with that sound arouses desire (one of the concupiscible passions), and this passion literally moves them toward her.

The will is also an appetite – but an intellectual or spiritual appetite (it is not dependent on the body) – that seeks the good presented to it (not by the senses, but) by the intellect.

I once saw a wonderful illustration of how these appetites move man toward the good (I hunted and hunted but couldn’t find it). There was a coach with a large team of horses, driven by a blindfolded man with another man at his shoulder. The horses are the passions, and they are being driven by the will. The will itself is blind – and is guided by the intellect. If all the passions work together – the coach moves in the right direction . . . and there is order. If any of them rebel . . . well, it gets exciting! That is us. We have a blind will, guided by an intellect that doesn’t know everything, driving horses that don’t work together.

It is possible that the will is seeking the good, but the passions are still disordered. Then we would have an interior peace (to some extent), but it wouldn’t be one that we can feel.

Ideally, and this is how it will be in Heaven, ALL the appetites will be united in the possession of the Supreme Good. Then, once we have our bodies, we will feel the result of that perfect peace. For now, though, imperfect peace is all that we can achieve. St. Thomas says of imperfect peace:

“though the chief movement of the soul finds rest in God, yet there are certain things within and without which disturb the peace.”

“[M]an’s heart is not at peace, so long as he has not what he wants, or if, having what he wants, there still remains something for him to want, and which he cannot have at the same time.”

But what if a man wants something bad – and all his appetites are focused on that?

“There can be no true peace except where the appetite is directed to what is truly good, since every evil, though it may appear good in a way, so as to calm the appetite in some respect, has, nevertheless many defects, which cause the appetite to remain restless and disturbed.”

Right? How often how you thought something would make you happy; you get it; and you find that it doesn’t satisfy you after all?

And then, finally:

“without sanctifying grace, peace is not real but merely apparent.”

Pere Philippe:

“The interior peace that we are considering cannot, of course, be shared by all persons independently of their attitude toward God.

“Those who oppose God, who more or less consciously flee from Him, or who flee



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from certain of His calls or His demands, cannot be at peace. When individuals are close to God, [when they] love and desire to serve the Lord, the usual strategy of the devil is to cause them to lose their presage of heart, whereas God, on the contrary, comes to their aid to give them peace. But this rule is reversed for those whose hearts are far from God, who live in indifference and evil. The devil seeks to tranquilize such individuals, to keep them in a false sense of quietude, whereas the Lord, Who desires their salvation and conversion, will trouble and disquiet their consciences in an effort to get them to repent.

“One cannot enjoy a profound and durable peace if he is far from God, if his inmost will is not entirely oriented toward Him. “You made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You” (St. Augustine).” pp 15-16

Our spiritual life – that process of having God dwelling in our souls and growing in union with Him as He restores His order in our very beings – can be summed up as the living of the theological virtues. There is nothing higher than the theological virtues. Even the Gifts, Fruits, and Beatitudes are simply God working in/with us to bring the infused virtues – and we’re focusing on the top three – to their highest potential. The Gifts perfect them; the Beatitudes are the special reward of their perfect works; the Fruits are the result of these virtues operating with ease and sweetness . . . all done by the operation of the Holy Ghost.

St. Thomas says that the Gifts are necessary for salvation. Without them, we don’t really know how to use the theological virtues since they are supernatural virtues. Our efforts make us (as I heard a priest say) like spastic ducks (!) – how would a spastic duck do paddling? – until the Holy Ghost comes along and blows in the sails of our little boat.

You will remember that a virtue is a good habit. The three theological virtues are unique among the infused virtues (those that allow us to act in the state of grace) in that not only are they given by God (we can’t acquire them by our own efforts), but they have God as their object. By Faith, we know what God has revealed; by Hope, we are confident that He will fulfill His promises, by Charity, we are united to Him in a union that grows until it culminates in a grand crescendo with the Beatific Vision. So, it is Charity, founded on Faith and Hope, that restores order in our soul and gives us peace.

When we name the theological virtues, it is important to understand that they are not just stepping stones (Faith leading to Hope which in turn leads to Charity); they are also inter-related and dynamic. When we love, we grow in confidence. When we are relying on God’s promises, we have to keep going back to revelation to learn more about them. Faith teaches us to have confidence. Love makes us want to believe in God’s revelation . . . and so on.

And, more than that, these virtues allow us to see, not only God, but God’s creation (including those around us) with the light of His own knowledge & love. We’ll come back to this point later, but this all part of the restoration of order that results in peace.

Peace is the result of Charity – which, in this life, constantly interacts with Faith & Hope. Since the Gifts perfect the virtues, which Gift perfects Charity? The Gift of Wisdom . . . which orders all things rightly. So, Wisdom perfects Charity which results in peace.

St. Augustine has a list where he relates the seven Gifts to the first seven Beatitudes; what Beatitude, do you suppose, is the perfect work of Wisdom? “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.” Saint Augustine says that “wisdom is becoming to peacemakers, in whom there is no movement of rebellion, but only obedience to reason.” “Wisdom is the most perfect knowledge of the most important



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truths in the right order of emphasis, accompanied by a total permanent disposition to live accordingly.” Wisdom unites the intellect and the will; it is charity restoring order by reason (God’s reason) . . . and there is peace.

And, since peace is a result of charity, we also find it in the list of the Fruits of the Holy Ghost (which are “virtuous deeds in which one delights”). “Charity, joy, peace, patience, etc.” Charity is the presence of God, Joy follows upon being united with the Beloved, and, with the perfect rejoicing in the beloved good – nothing can disturb this enjoyment so there is Peace. (Psalm 118:165): “Much peace have they that love Thy Law, and to them there is no stumbling-block.”

Peace is the tranquility of order. Can you begin to see just how accurate is St. Augustine’s succinct definition? (Say it with me:) Peace is the tranquility of order. (again) Peace is the tranquility of order.

So, a quick quiz to make sure I’ve been clear up to this point (you can just answer out loud):

- 1) Is perfect peace possible in this life? (no)
- 2) Can you have real peace without sanctifying grace? (no)
- 3) Is peace a virtue? (no)
- 4) Is peace a passion? (no)
- 5) Is peace the result of order? (yes)
- 6) What virtue is peace the result or effect of? (Charity)

Bonus: What Gift of the Holy Ghost perfects Charity? (Wisdom)

We are ready now to look at the next term that needs defining.

At this point, it would be a good idea for everyone to stand up and stretch while I get my next prop.

Meet Calico. This is one of our own roosters – hatched and raised by one of our hens from a green egg. We only have one olive egger hen – so we know the mother; and I suspect that he was sired by a White Plymouth Rock. He has hens of his own now – and, for all I know, some of our newest chicks are his.

This fellow isn’t a pet – but he does know who feeds him! I brought him today as a practical demonstration of homeostasis.

This big fancy word was coined by William Bradford Cannon, a professor and chair of one of the departments of Harvard Medical School, to describe a principle written about by a French physiologist, Claude Bernard. The idea is that – in biology – when all the systems are at their best, they are in a “steady state” – and, working together, resist change to maintain their balance. A rise in blood sugar results in thirst as the body tries to dilute the blood. When the body gets cold, shivering is one response; the involuntary movements burn body tissue to produce more body heat. In an age where everything is evolutionary, it is interesting the one of the principles of homeostasis is that “it does not occur by chance, but is the result of self-government.”

I’m not sure of all the details of Cannon’s theorem, but, if we define homeostasis as the balance that Nature and natures maintain by an intricate self-government resulting in a healthy organism, then we can totally agree.



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It is true (we know this philosophically) that every living creature (given the means) works automatically towards its own perfection. The acorn has the potential to become an oak tree, and its nature is always working so that it will be the best oak tree possible in its circumstances.

Given a good environment and enough variety, animals will eat the foods that their bodies most need at the moment. It has been fascinating to watch this with our own animals. We have gotten critters from various sources, and they haven't all been in the best of health or from the best environments – but you should see them now!

(Return Calico to crate.)

When we disrupt God's plan for nature, we suffer the consequences. Calico, here, reminds me how this is seen in the raising of meat birds. In the big industrial chicken farms, the birds are raised in unnatural environments, at an unnatural pace, on unnatural food, without natural light. Consequently, they are very unhealthy animals and must be given medications to shore up their systems to allow them to live long enough to get to market (and this is the meat you buy in the stores!). In responding to the demand for "organic" chicken without the chemicals, the industry raises chickens in similar circumstances, but without the medicines and with better food (although still not natural – chickens aren't vegetarians). However, without the medication, in this unnatural environment, the chickens are not able to develop their natural immunity and their systems are in a very precarious state. They are not able to restore homeostasis when it gets disrupted – they get sick very easily and don't have the means to get their health back. Human beings, working or visiting, have to dress like they are working in lab . . . for the chickens' protection!

When the same breeds of meat birds are raised in a natural environment, with bugs and grass to supplement their feed at will, homeostasis is easily maintained. No need for fancy protective gear . . . these chickens have been able to build up their immune systems the way God intended.

No, this isn't a plug (exactly) for good meat – although I do wish everyone had (if not food of their own raising), access to a Polyface farm (some of you are familiar with what Joel Salatin and his family have done with their farm in Virginia) or a CSA or other local agriculture. If you do – I encourage you to support it. You'll benefit in numerous ways.

No, the reason I bring up the animals – with the help of Calico, here, is to remind ourselves that what is true for the animals' systems is true for our own as well. Given the means, our bodies tend toward their own perfection, tend to keep a balance – and health is the result. How we take care of ourselves, what means we provide, depends in great part on our outlook.

Like the various chicken farms, it is interesting to see how the different medical systems – by their outlook on the body – make it easier or harder for the body to maintain its balance. In general, there are two camps: Conventional & Holistic (although the terms are not defined consistently.)

Conventional medicine is great for dealing with trauma . . . but the mindset of those conventionally trained (besides being evolutionary) is that the body is basically a machine. If a part breaks, remove it. Replace it (artificially if necessary). If there is an infection, kill the infection. This mindset does not take into account the drastic effects that this kind of interference has on the rest of the body . . . Still have a headache, a sick stomach, a ----? Just take another medication.

Holistic medicine, on the other hand, (naturopathic, functional, etc.) focuses on providing



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the environment and means to help the body restore itself to health, to maintain its balance, to return to homeostasis. This is a much more natural, wholesome approach, (although, to be fair, it too has its dangers, particularly toward pantheism).

(On a practical note: A solid foundation in philosophia perennis is essential in being able to take the best from both systems and avoid the fallacies.)

The bottom line is: If we don't provide our bodies with the healthy environment they need to achieve their potential (this includes healthy food, reasonable exercise, sound sleep, etc.) – we will have a very hard time maintaining homeostasis, being constantly in ill health.

What does this have to do with peace?

Peace is the tranquility of order. Homeostasis is simply the tranquility of order in a physical body in the physical world. What is true of the physical is also true of the spiritual. Peace, like health, is the result of homeostasis, a balance, an ordering. Just as our natures try to achieve their perfection, our souls try to achieve perfection by reordering what was lost in the fall. We all seek it.

St. Thomas Aquinas quotes St. Augustine and Dionysius on this point, that all men desire peace. He says that even those who start wars are trying to achieve a more perfect peace than they had before – an order where nothing is contrary to their will.

Now, like the amazingly intricate systems in the body, the life of the soul is made up of the most delicately interconnected systems of virtue and grace. Looking at the many virtues can be as complicated as trying to trace all the chemical conversions that go on in the endocrine system. Setting out to acquire those same virtues by sheer will quickly becomes discouraging.

The virtues maintain a balance, a homeostasis, amongst themselves. They grow together. If you work on one virtue, you will end up practicing many others along the way. God's Providence draws our attention to what should be worked on at the moment . . . but the real work, the real ordering that results in peace, is done by God, mysteriously working in the soul by His grace. We must do our part – and, as with the body, our part is primarily to provide the right outlook and disposition. The right disposition gets us to an atmosphere where the theological virtues can flourish.

So, what is that atmosphere?

The atmosphere is sanctifying grace. The right disposition that gets us there is good will. Good will determines our receptivity to grace, and once we have received sanctifying grace, good will itself becomes an exercise of charity.

Pere Philippe says that good will is the most fundamental, the most essential condition – the sine qua non – for interior peace.

“We could also call it purity of heart. It is the stable and constant disposition of a person who is determined more than anything to love God, who desires sincerely to prefer in all circumstances the will of God to his own, who does not wish to consciously refuse anything to God. There would undoubtedly be many imperfections in his effort to accomplish this desire. But he will suffer, he will ask the Lord's pardon for this and seek to correct himself. Following moments of eventual failure, he will strive to come back to his usual disposition of wanting to say “yes” to God in all things, without exception.



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“Here, then, is what we mean by goodwill. It is not perfection, nor sainthood achieved, because it could well coexist with hesitations, imperfections, and even faults. But it is the way, because it is just this habitual disposition of the heart (whose foundation is found in the virtues of faith, hope, and love), which permits the grace of God to carry us, little by little, toward perfection.” (pp 16-17)

So, good will is essential. But, it is also a sufficient condition. “Peace on earth to men of good will.”

Pere Philippe:

“[W]hat does God demand of us, if not this goodwill? What more could He demand of us, He who is a good and compassionate Father, than to see His child desiring to love above all, to suffer if unable to love Him sufficiently and to be disposed, even if he knows he is unable, to detach himself from that which would be contrary to Him. Is it not up to God Himself to intervene at this point and to bring to fulfillment these desires that man, by his own strength, is so powerless to realize completely?” page 18

Isn't this good will that Our Lady was showing by her fiat? “Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Be it done unto me according to thy word.”

Before a person is in the state of grace, he does not have charity. It is his good will that enables him to cooperate with the grace to get into the state of grace. Once he is in sanctifying grace and has the theological virtues infused, good will is elevated to an act of the very virtue it was preparing for. Good will . . . to want the good, to look for the good, to seek the good. Good will is charity.

So, if we are trying to have good will, are living in the state of grace, why do we lose our peace?

The spiritual life is a warfare, and Pere Philippe quotes one of the great spiritual masters of the 16th century, whom St. Francis de Sales thought very highly of, a Dom Lorenzo Scupoli:

“The devil does his utmost to banish peace from one's heart because he knows that God abides in peace and it is in peace that He accomplishes great things.”

Pere Philippe continues:

“It would be well to keep this in mind, because, quite often in the daily unfolding of our Christian life it happens that we fight the wrong battle . . . We believe, for example, that to win the spiritual battle we must vanquish all our faults, never succumb to temptations, have no more weaknesses or shortcomings. But on such a terrain we are sure to be vanquished! . . . On the contrary, the real spiritual battle, rather than the pursuit of invincibility or some other absolute infallibility beyond our capacity, consists principally in learning, without becoming too discouraged, to accept falling occasionally and not to lose our peace of heart if we should happen to do so lamentably, not to become excessively sad regarding our defeats and to know how to rebound from our falls to an even higher level, This is always possible but on the condition that we not panic and that we continue to maintain our peace.”

He then enumerates the first goal of the spiritual life, which is:

“not to always obtain a victory (over our temptations, our weaknesses, etc.), rather



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it is to learn to maintain peace of heart under all circumstances even in the case of defeat.”

How do we do that?

Pere Philippe:

“One of the dominant aspects of spiritual combat is the struggle on the plane of thoughts.”

How we think determines how we act. Our problem is, we don't always think before we act! We often just react – which is letting the horses of our emotions run away with us.

We all have a running commentary going on in our heads. We see the world around us – colored by all kinds of past associations and ideas. Our emotions are aroused (emotions come after thought, but we're usually not aware of all our thoughts, they come so quickly – so we don't recognize our thoughts until our emotions are already stirred up!), and then that inner monologue, debate, critique, can quickly get out of control, feeding more emotion, spiraling into a whirlwind of fear, anger, worry . . . whatever.

One of the important lessons of prayer is learning how to deal with that internal chaos . . . how to go – as one spiritual writer puts it – from victim to witness. We are not our emotions . . . we are mountains, and our emotions are the weather. That weather can enhance the mountain's view or cloud it, but it is not the mountain. To be able to distance ourselves from our emotions is to bring reason and order to the chaos.

How does this work? It is very simple, but not very easy. When you start feeling agitated, try to mentally stop, and go into observer mode. Just watch. What emotions are present? Name them. Don't get caught up in criticism or judgements (“I'm such a jerk for feeling jealous of her . . .”) – feelings aren't good or bad until you act on them. Just identify them. Then you can ask, why am I feeling this way? The reasons may be behind the situation you are currently in – you may not have a quick answer (but at least start thinking about it). Then, the final question is: Can this feeling be used as a guide?

What am I feeling?

Why am I feeling this?

Should I act on this feeling?

This is all part of self knowledge.

Laraine Bennett (who co-authored several books on the Temperaments) reminds us:

“Our emotions are not bad; in fact, they are critically important. People who suffer brain damage that negates their emotional responses become unable to make decisions! Emotions help us make decisions and they give us insight into potential dangers in the environment. They are critical to our interpersonal relationships, they are signals that aid us in interpreting the world and other people, and they aid us in communicating and problem-solving.”

Our problem comes when the emotions are not following reason. (Recognizing what we're feeling allows us to change what we're thinking. Changing what we're thinking changes our emotions or at least puts reason in charge and allows us to make acts of virtue.

So, we're learning to observe our emotions and use them to make rational responses (and never making mistakes in the process! – but I'll come back to this); but, what is the thinking we should be doing?



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As I said earlier: our spiritual life can be summed up as the living of the theological virtues. These virtues, as we grow in them, allow us a participation in the light of God's own knowledge, of seeing things through His eyes. These virtues illumine everything . . . not just the truths of the Faith – but all creation.

As part of the disorder of the fall, we all have cognitive distortions. We look at things selfishly, pridefully . . . and God's light helps us to see things truly. The more we see things with the eyes of Christ and love with His Heart, the more order is restored within us (the closer we get to spiritual homeostasis) . . . and the more we will be at peace with ourselves and others.

It is all about looking for the good, of willing the good, of good will. (The will is an alchemist that can turn any situation into gold . . .

St. Thérèse of Lisieux did not like having her work interrupted. Sometimes she was asked to do work requiring quite a lot of concentration such as painting something or writing a dramatic sketch for the community. The schedule of the Carmelite community was so intense that she had very little time at her disposal. When she finally found an hour or two to devote to the job, she applied herself in the following spirit: "I choose to be interrupted." If a good Sister then came by to ask her for some little service, instead of coldly sending her away, Thérèse made the effort to accept the interruption with good grace. And if nobody interrupted her, she considered that a charming present from her loving God and was very grateful to [H]im. Whatever happened she passes the day peacefully and was never upset. In everything she could do her will, because her will was to accept everything.

[. . .]

Our freedom always has this marvelous power to make what is taken from us – by life, events, or other people – into something offered. Externally there is no visible difference, but internally everything is transfigured: fate into free choice, constraint into love, loss into fruitfulness. Human freedom is of absolutely unheard-of greatness. *Interior Freedom* – pp 56-57)

So, getting back to how to use the theological virtues to guide us in our thoughts . . .

Faith begins by teaching us a number of truths, including:

- God loves us – as we are – and He wants to draw us closer to Him.
- He is omnipotent. There is nothing He cannot do.
- His Divine Providence operates in every detail of our lives. "In Him we live and move and have our being."
- God brings good out of evil. "All things work together for the good of those who love God."

Knowing these things because God has revealed them, we are then drawn to hope, to trust, to have confidence in Him – and then to love Him, not only because He can do so much for us, but because of Who He is – because He is Goodness.

Again, I said it earlier, but these virtues aren't just three steps that you go up once. They are dynamic, inter-connected, growing. Charity increases our Hope, Hope increases our Faith, Faith gives us reasons for Charity, in and out of order . . . all the while restoring order.



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But, we are weak – and we forget that God is in charge, we forget to rely on Him, we forget (subconsciously) that His love is all the love we need, and we lose what peace we had. This weakness is exactly our ticket to holiness. Our falls, our faults, our failings are all means to draw down God’s mercy. Mercy is only given to the weak. (Misericordia = a heart of pity) Pity is only given to the pitiable. This is at the heart of St. Thérèse’s confidence. Back to Pere Philippe.

In support of what we have just said . . . there is an episode in the life of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus, reported by her sister Celine [Sister Genevieve of the Holy Face]:

“On one occasion, when Sister Thérèse was showing me all of my faults, I was sad and a little upset. I, who so desire to be virtuous, I thought, am so far from it. I would like to be gentle, patient, humble, charitable; Ah! I will never succeed! However, that evening at prayer I read that Saint Gertrude, in expressing the same desire, had our Lord respond to her: ‘In all things and above all else have goodwill; only this disposition will give your soul the light and the special merit of all the virtues. Whoever has goodwill, the sincere desire to obtain My glory, to be thankful to Me, to share in My suffering, to love Me, and serve Me, as well as all creatures, such a person will undoubtedly receive compensations that are worthy of My generosity and his desire will sometimes be more profitable to him than other peoples’ good works are to them’

“Very contented with these good words,” Celine continued, “which were all to my advantage, I shared them with our dear little mistress (Thérèse),” who did her one better and added:

“Have you read what is reported regarding the life of Father Surin? He was performing an exorcism and the demons said to him: “We are able to surmount all difficulties; there is only this bloody dog of goodwill, which we are never able to deal with!” Well, if you don’t have virtues, you have a “bloody little dog,” which will save you from all perils; console yourself, it will lead you to paradise! Ah! Which is the heart that would not wish to possess virtue! It’s what everybody desires. But how few are those who accept to fall, to be weak, who are content to find themselves down and out and have others find them in that condition.” (pp 18-20)

This acceptance of our infirmities is exactly the humility that is the foundation of our spiritual edifice. God can do everything – we can do nothing without His help. Here is yet opportunity for restoring order and being at peace. When we really believe that God’s strength is shown in our weakness – that He can bring good even out of our sins (faith), we start relying on His help – totally surrendering ourselves to Him (hope), and we want to do it all with love (charity). And, with every fall and mistake, we turn to Him again (do you see a homeostasis developing here?). We could even find ourselves being grateful for our mistakes because they are opportunities to practice Faith Hope & Charity anew – which virtues are all the while restoring order and giving us peace.

This radical dependence, this abandonment, also helps us to live now – instead of stewing over the past or worrying about the future. It is only in the present moment that God touches us by His grace.

Pere Philippe makes this broad statement: All of our reasons for losing our peace are bad reasons. Let’s see if we agree with him.

What are reasons people lose their peace? Let’s make a list. (Go ahead, anyone?)



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Most of our reason have to do with bad things happening to us or those we love. Response = “confident abandonment into the hands of God, Who delivers us from all evil, or Who, if He allows it, gives us the strength to endure it and makes it turn to our advantage.” pp 50-51

Or our own disorderes are brought to our attention (what do we want, how do we want it). “Not only must we be careful to want and desire good things for their own sake, but also to want and desire them in a way that is good.” pg 52

Our own sins and imperfections? Response = Faith and confidence that “[t]he love of God turns to profit all that He finds in me, the good as well as the bad.” pg 44

Many of our reason have to do with things beyond our control. “We often live with this illusion [that if only things around us would change, then we would be at peace.] [. . .] But this is often an error. It is not the exterior circumstances that must change; it is above all our hearts that must change. They must be purified of their withdrawal into themselves, of their sadness, of their lack of hope: Blessed are the pure of heart; for they shall see God. Happy are those whose hearts are purified by faith and hope, who bring to their lives a view animated by the certitude that, beyond appearances to the contrary, God is present, providing for their essential needs and that they lack nothing. If they have that faith, they will indeed see God: they will experience that presence of God which will accompany them and guide them. They will see that many of the circumstances that they thought negative and damaging to their spiritual life are, in fact, in God’s pedagogy, powerful means for helping them to progress and grow . . .” pg 43

An attitude of faith & hope & love will overcome all of the reasons we lose our peace. Do you agree?

“Why are you fearful, oh ye of little faith?” St. Matthew 8:26

“And which of you, by taking thought, can add to his stature one cubit? If then ye be not able to do so much as the least thing, why are you solicitous for the rest?” St. Luke 12:25-26

“And he said to them: Why are you troubled, and why do thoughts arise in your hearts?” St. Luke 24:38

“Let not your heart be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in me.” [John 14:1]

“Fear is not in charity: but perfect charity casteth out fear, because fear hath pain. And he that feareth, is not perfected in charity.” [1 John 4:18]

“But if also you suffer any thing for justice’ sake, blessed are ye. And be not afraid of their fear, and be not troubled.” [1 Peter 3:14]

“And when you shall hear of wars and rumours of wars, fear ye not. For such things must needs be, but the end is not yet.” [Mark 13:7]

30 times in the New Testament you find the phrase “fear not”.



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Let's take a very practical, real-life example. This is something that happened just recently to a friend who suggested I share it with you as an example with universal application.

You have to picture driving down a road where you have the right-of-way. There are cross streets, but they have stop signs.. You are driving along, when suddenly, a car from one of the cross streets blows through its stop sign . . . and then stops right in front of you. This is a perfect set-up for a T-bone crash. In his case, my friend narrowly avoided impact . . . but adrenaline is racing . . . and what do you think was going through his mind? What would go through your mind? What emotions would you be feeling?

You idiot! *#\$C@!%^\$D! What do you think you're doing? Anger, fear, concern, injured pride . . . and the thoughts and emotions start spiraling . . . and you get more and more worked up. Maybe you would obsess about the situation for the rest of the day or the week . . .

How could we use our good will and change our thoughts so we don't lose our peace?

1. Observer mode
2. Name the feelings
3. Recognize that while they are certainly legitimate, there is nothing you need to do (there was no accident – you don't need to use the emotions to handle an emergency situation) – so you don't want to act on them. Recognize that the situation was out of your control. There was nothing for you to do differently.
4. Obsessing won't help you or him
5. Look for the good
 - a. Thanks be to God for His protection, for your angel, for your reflexes (those are all acts of Faith as well as Charity)
 - b. Renew your confidence in God's Providence . . . and your complete reliance on Him.
 - c. Can you think of any possible extenuating circumstances that might excuse the other driver's actions? (He really may be a distracted idiot texting on his phone, but it won't help your peace to continue calling names!) Can you think of any justification for him? What if you found out that he had been having a heart attack? Or, maybe his brakes had failed – and he only stopped in front of you because of the delay in getting the emergency brake engaged?

And don't those emotions start calming down? Meanwhile, you have grown just a bit closer to God – and, instead of the situation harming your peace, it increases it.

Start small (I hope you don't have big close-calls every day). If you practice thinking positively (in terms of Faith, Hope, and Charity) in small daily things, especially when you or someone around you makes a mistake – then when those bigger situations come up, you'll be ready.

St. Thérèse gives us many examples of using little situations. Let's review two.

Do you remember the incident of washing the clothes in the laundry? The Sister next to her was splashing her with dirty water. What would your reaction be? "Please stop splashing?" Make a face; move away? What would the monologue in your head be like?



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St. Thérèse is initially frustrated, but she immediately turns the situation into a game. If Our Lord is giving her opportunities to show her love by making a sacrifice of being splashed, well, she's going to try to get splashed as much as possible.

Or the time the Sister was making irritating noises in the chapel?

You or I would probably get caught up in our heads . . . “That is so irritating. Doesn't she know how distracting that is? Why isn't she more considerate? Here, I am, not even praying. Why won't she stop? It is probably bothering the others too. It would be an act of charity for me to correct her and ask her to stop making noise. Why is she so disrespectful of God in His house? Etc., etc.” What does St. Thérèse do? She tells us:

“ . . . [I]n my heart I knew I ought to bear with her patiently, for the love of God first of all, and also to avoid causing her pain. I therefore remained quiet, but the effort cost me so much that sometimes I was bathed in perspiration, and my meditation consisted merely in the prayer of suffering. Finally I sought a way of gaining peace, in my inmost heart at least, and so I tried to find pleasure in the disagreeable noise. Instead of vainly attempting not to hear it, I set myself to listen attentively as though it were delightful music, and my meditation – which was not the prayer of “quiet” – was passed in offering this music to Our Lord.” pg 186

She doesn't tell us much of what she was thinking (everything for St. Thérèse boiled down to love and sacrifice to show that love). . . but we could speculate that, in her shoes, applying our good will, we could make an act of Faith in how much Our Lord loved the Sister in question, of how happy He was that she was in His presence. We could ask for the grace to love that Sister like Our Lord does – to see that irritating sound the way a parent would take the imperfections of an indulgently loved child. We could thank Him for the opportunity to gather more “coin” for souls. Like St. Thérèse, seeing this as an opportunity, we would then respond generously. As St. Thomas tells us: “good emotions and affections proceed from love and holy charity.” And from charity, comes order, and with order comes peace.

One of the maxims of charity is: “If you can't excuse the action, excuse the intention.” You can't know what is going on in the inmost heart of another. An action that you find irritating, frustrating, rude, etc. may actually be an act of virtue on the part of that person.

The classic example (I think it comes from early monasticism) of mis-judging the actions of another is the story of the monk with real “anger issues.” Apparently, he could go into a towering rage at the drop of a hat. None of the monks had any question about what his predominant fault was. Well, one day, this monk, during a fit of rage, dies. His superior, the abbot, is praying and agonizing over his poor monk. Should he give him Christian burial? How could he possibly have saved his soul . . . dying like that, just overcome with anger? God allowed His answer to come from that monk himself. He appeared to his superior, radiant with glory, and assured him that he was indeed saved. He had died, not out of anger, but out of trying to restrain his anger. It was all good – go ahead and give his body Christian burial.

It can be very helpful to our peace of mind to try to come up with possible, positive reasons for any action we find disturbing (if nothing else, we can always come up with this: that this situation gives us a chance to love God more – and don't we all want that?).

Be prepared to give a reason for the hope that is in you.

Thinking positively doesn't prevent us from identifying and addressing problems, but it does help us to do it calmly. Our Lady, in her apparitions, frequently addresses very grave



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problems – but can you imagine her doing it hysterically? Impatiently? Harshly? Without peace? She clearly feels emotion – at La Salette she was crying – but she is still at peace.

Our holiness is God’s work . . . we need to cultivate our time with Him. That is prayer. The practice we have been discussing of focusing on good will and thinking positively by changing our thoughts to acts of Faith Hope & Charity are simply ways to pray more frequently, of recognizing God’s presence . . . and to bring to Him all our ups and downs. “Pray always.”

Peace is the tranquility of order . . .

“Be still – and know that I am God . . .”

“Behold this Heart that has so loved men . . .”

Oh God, grant me the grace to accept the things I cannot change – the courage to change the things I can – and the wisdom to know the difference. (The fact that this “serenity” prayer was not written by a Catholic doesn’t change the fact the sentiments are well worth praying.)

St. Paul tells us: “[B]e reformed in the newness of your mind, that you may prove what is the good, and the acceptable, and the perfect will of God.”

And so, my dear friends,

let us ask Our Lord

to renew our minds,

to give or keep us in sanctifying grace,

so that with good will

by the flourishing of the theological virtues

our spiritual homeostasis can be attained,

and we will find that peace for which we seek.

