

The sixth habit is also Marian -- praying the Holy Rosary each day and meditating on its mysteries, which surround the life of Our Lord and Our Lady. As Bl. Josemaria puts it, "For those who use their intelligence and their study as a weapon, the Rosary is most effective, because this apparently monotonous way of beseeching Our Lady, as children do their mother, can destroy every seed of vainglory and pride" (Furrow, 474). The Rosary is a habit that, once acquired, is hard to break. By repeating words of love to Mary and offering up each decade for our intentions, we take the shortcut to Jesus, which is to pass through the heart of Mary. He cannot refuse her anything!

The seventh habit is the brief examination of conscience at night before going to bed. Again the holy Founder of Opus Dei says "Examination of conscience. A daily task. Bookkeeping -- never neglected by anyone in business. And is there any business worth more than that of eternal life?" (The Way, 235). You sit down, call on the Holy Spirit for light and for several minutes go over your day in God's presence asking if you behaved as a child of God at home, at work, with your friends. You also look at that one particular area which you have identified with the help of spiritual direction in which you know you need to improve in order to become a saint. You may also take a quick look to see if you have been faithful to those daily habits that we have discussed in this article. Then you make an act of gratitude for all the good that you have done and an act of contrition for those areas in which you have willfully failed. Then it is off to your well-deserved rest, which you strive to make holy through your interior dialogue with the Holy Trinity and your mother Mary as you drift off to sleep.

If a person honestly looks at their day, no matter how busy he is, (and I never seem to meet people who admit they are not busy unless they are permanently retired), he can usually find that he wastes some time each day. Think of that needless extra cup of coffee when you might have been able

to drop by and visit the Blessed Sacrament for 15 minutes before beginning work. Or the half-hour or much more wasted on watching vapid and inane television programs or videos. Then there is the commuting time spent sleeping on the train, or listening to the radio in the car that could be used for the Rosary. How about that newspaper that could be read in ten minutes rather than twenty minutes, leaving room for your spiritual reading? And that lunch which could be finished in a half-hour, leaving time for noon Mass? Don't forget that half hour spent frittering away time at the end of the day when you could have done some good spiritual reading, examined your conscience and gone to bed at a fixed time restoring your energy for the next day's battles. The list goes on. Make up your own. Be honest with yourself, and with God.

These habits, lived well, enable us to obey the second part of the great commandment "to love our neighbor as ourselves." We are on earth, as was the Lord, "to serve and not to be served." This can only be achieved by our gradual transformation into another Christ through prayer and the sacraments. To live the seven habits will enable us to become holy and apostolic, always assured that when we fail in something big or small, we always have the loving Father awaiting us in the Sacrament of Penance and the prayerful help of our spiritual advisor to put us back on the right track.

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The Seven Daily Habits of Holy Apostolic People

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You are reading this because you are interested in taking your spiritual life more seriously from this point on. You heartily assent to one of the key points of the Second Vatican Council: the importance of the doctrine of the universal call to holiness. You also know that Jesus is the one way to holiness, "I am the way, the truth and the life." The secret of holiness is constant prayer which could be defined as continual contact with the Holy Trinity, "Pray always and do not lose heart" (Luke 18:1).

There are various ways to come to know Jesus. We are going to speak briefly about some of them in this article. You want to come to know, love and serve Jesus the same way you learn to love and stay in love with anybody: your spouse, family members, and close friends, i.e. by spending a considerable amount of time with him on a regular and, in this case, daily basis. The payoff, if you will, is the only true happiness in this life and the vision of God in the next. There are no easy substitutes. Sanctification is a work of a lifetime and it requires our determined effort to cooperate with God's sanctifying grace coming through the sacraments.

The seven daily habits that I propose to you are the morning offering, spiritual reading (New Testament and a spiritual book suggested to you by your spiritual advisor), the Holy Rosary, Holy Mass and Communion, at least fifteen minutes of mental prayer, the recitation of the Angelus at noon, and a brief examination of conscience at night.

These are the principal means to achieve holiness. If you are a person who wants to bring Christ to others through your friendship, these are the instruments by which you store up the spiritual energy that will enable you to do so. Apostolic action without the sacraments and a deep solid

interior life will in the long run be ineffective. You can be sure that all the saints incorporated in one way or another all of these habits into their daily routine. Your goal is to be like them, contemplatives in the middle of the world.

I want to stress several points before examining the habits.

One, remember that growing in these daily habits, just like taking on a diet or a physical exercise program, is a gradual work in progress. Don't expect to insert all seven or even two or three of these in your daily schedule immediately, any more than you would attempt a 5K race after not having run regularly, or attempting to play Liszt after your third piano lesson. This haste would be inviting failure and God wants you to succeed at both your pace and His. You should work closely with your spiritual advisor, and gradually and fruitfully incorporate the habits into your life over a period of time in a way that fits your particular situation. It may even be that your life circumstances require a modification of the seven habits.

Second, at the same time you must make a firm commitment with the help of the Holy Spirit and your special intercessors, to make them the priority of your life -- more important than meals, sleep, work and recreation. I want to make it clear that these habits cannot be acquired on the run. That is not the way we want to deal with people we love. They must be done when we are most alert, during the day, in a place that is silent and without distractions, where it is easy to put ourselves in God's presence and address him. After all, is not eternal life more important than our temporal life? All that will remain at the time of your particular judgment will be the amount of the love of God in your heart.

Third, I want to point out that living the seven daily habits is not a zero sum game. You are not losing time but rather, in reality, gaining it. I have never met a person who lived them on a daily basis who became a less productive worker as a result, or a worse spouse, or who had less time for his friends, or could no longer grow in his cultural life.

Quite the contrary, God always rewards those who put him first. Our Lord will multiply our time amazingly as he did with those few loaves and fishes that fed the multitude with plenty left over. You can be sure that Pope John Paul II, Mother Theresa, or St. Maximilian Kolbe pray, or prayed, a lot more than the one and one-half hours that is required for the seven daily habits spread throughout the day.

The first habit is the morning offering, when you kneel down and using your own words, or a formula, you briefly offer up all the day ahead for God's glory. What is not so simple is what has to happen before the offering. As the founder of Opus Dei put it "Conquer yourself each day from the very first moment, getting up on the dot, at a set time, without granting a single minute to laziness. If with the help of God, you conquer yourself in the moment, you have accomplished a great deal for the rest of the day. It's so discouraging to find yourself beaten in the first skirmish (The Way, 191). In my pastoral experience, those who can live the "heroic moment" in the morning and in the evening going to bed on time will have both the physical and spiritual energy throughout the day to stop what they are doing in order to live the other habits.

The second habit is at least 15 minutes of silent prayer. Over time you may want to augment this with an extra 15 minutes at another time during the day. After all, who will not seek more time with such excellent company? Prayer is simply one on one direct conversation with Jesus Christ, preferably before the Blessed Sacrament in the Tabernacle. This is your "face time" or "quality time" if you will, when you can open up in speaking about what is on your mind and in your heart. At the same time you will be able to acquire the habit of listening carefully and prayerfully like another Mary (Lk. 10:38-42) to see what Jesus is asking of you and what he wants to give you. It is there that we come to

understand his saying, "Without Me, you can do nothing."

The third habit is fifteen minutes of spiritual reading, usually consisting of a few minutes of systematic reading of the New Testament to identify ourselves with the words and actions of our Savior, and the rest of the time spent on a classic book of Catholic spirituality recommended by your spiritual advisor. As Bl. Josemaria Escriva puts it, "Don't neglect your spiritual reading. Reading has made many saints" (The Way, 116). In a way it is the most practical of our habits because over the course of years of practicing it we will read many times the life of Christ and acquire the wisdom of saints and the Church by reading dozens of books which enlighten our intellect so we can put the ideas expressed there into action.

The fourth daily habit is participating in Holy Mass and receiving Holy Communion in the state of grace. This is the most important habit of all the seven (cfr. John 6:22-65). As such, it has to be at the very center of our interior life and consequently our day. It is the most intimate act possible to man. There we encounter the living Christ, participate in the renewal of His sacrifice for us and unite body and soul, to the Risen Christ and ourselves. As Pope John Paul II says in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in America*: "The Eucharist is the living and lasting center around which the entire community of the Church gathers" (no. 35).

The fifth daily habit takes but a moment or two. It is to stop what we are doing to pray the Angelus or Regina Coeli prayer to our Blessed Mother, according to the liturgical season, each day at noon. This is a Catholic custom that goes back many centuries. It is a wonderful way both to greet our Blessed Mother for a moment, as any good child remembers his mother during the day and meditate on the Incarnation and Resurrection of our Lord, which give such meaning to our entire existence.