



## **THE WAY OF THE SAINT**

**by Father Thomas Hopko**

There are certain characteristics which belong to all saints, whoever they were and whenever they lived. Among these characteristics are the following:

—Every saint is God-centered and seeks in his or her life the “one thing needful”—to glorify God by doing His will.

—Every saint is Christ-centered and seeks to pattern his or her life after the life of Jesus; following Him, keeping His commandments and imitating His example.

—Every saint is Spirit-centered, knowing and living by the fact that it is only by the Holy Spirit that any person can do anything that is good, true and beautiful in his life.

—Every saint is Other-centered, giving up his or her own life for the sake of the life of others, rejoicing in the good of others as the only satisfaction and fulfillment in life.

—Every saint accepts and loves his or her own person and position in life, sanctifying and fulfilling it according to the real possibilities that are given. The servant serves. The worker works. The parent nurtures. The ruler rules. The preacher preaches. The teacher teaches. The pastor guides. The scholar inquires. The student studies. The manager manages. The scientist investigates. The producer produces. The artist creates. Each one does his own thing, according to his or her own talents and gifts...for the glory of God and the good of the other.

—Every saint lives in the present moment, in his or her own time and place. The saint never pines over the past or worries about the future. The saint never wishes to be somewhere else, in some other conditions, with some other people. The saint never wishes to be somebody else. He trusts God in all things and does what has to be done and can be done in the given circumstances. The saint knows that whatever it is that has to be done, it can only be done right now...for only the present is in the power of the person, and nothing else.

—Every saint pays attention to details and does the smallest, seemingly most insignificant act with the greatest love and devotion. For the saint, no act is too small, no work too trifling, no task too demeaning, no deed too insignificant. Every little thing, for the saint, has eternal value and importance. Every little thing is done before God and has meaning and fulfillment in Him.

—Every saint pays attention to persons...and not to structures, institutions, parties, programs or roles. For the saint only the person counts, and everything else is subordinated and ordered to the good of the person. The saint is never impersonal. He never loves or serves “humanity in general.” He only loves and serves the person near at hand, the neighbor given by God—the most difficult and most divine manner of acting that there is.

—Every saint loves the whole of God’s good creation, not only living persons, but animals, plants and all that positively exists. The saint never blasphemes God’s good world, but rejoices in

the beauties of creation to the glory of their Creator.

—Every saint is an utter realist. There is no sentimentality in the saint, no partial views, no prejudicial opinions, no petty interests. There may be real passions and fanatically impassioned actions. There may be factual one-sidedness and fierce conviction, but it is always in the light of the total reality of God and man, and it is always for the good of all. The saint is not self-indulgent in his sanctity. He is not a “spiritual glutton.”

—Every saint suffers—with joy and gladness—for others. The saint does not “come down from his cross.” He loves his cross as the way to his resurrection. He loves his death to himself as the way to his life in God. He loves to put himself down, and be put down, if it means that someone else will be saved and exalted. The saint is not a masochist. He does not love sufferings and pains for their own sake. But he is a realist who knows that what is lasting and good requires the payment of a great price, and he is willing to pay the price in his own blood. When one does good in the sinful world, he suffers. It is as simple as that. And the saint does good.

—Every saint hates sin, in himself and others, but he loves the sinner, including his own “self,” as created in the image and likeness of God, and as loved and saved by God in Christ. The saint knows himself to be the “greatest of sinners.” It is his very sanctity which gives him this knowledge. And as God, he loves men in their sins and does them good as the expression of his love.

—Every saint recognizes the devil and the power of evil, and he fights them to his last breath, in himself and others. The saint never justifies sin and he gives no place to the rationalization of evil. Evil is to be vanquished, not explained. The devil is to be destroyed, not discussed. And the proof of a person’s sanctity is seen in the intensity with which the devil attacks him, and in the power with which the devil is overcome.

—Every saint fasts and prays and lives fully in the life of the Church. It is in this way that he or she is a saint: empowered with grace, enlightened with wisdom, inspired with love and enlivened with the life of God that has no end.

—Every saint—whoever he or she is—has learned to transform the routine of his small, limited, human, mundane, earthly existence into the paradise of the Kingdom of God.

According to the scriptures, we are all “called to be saints.” (Romans 1:7)

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***What is a charitable heart? It is a heart which is burning with charity for the whole of creation, for men, for the birds, for the beasts, for the demons—for all creatures. He who has such a heart cannot see or call to mind a creature without his eyes being filled with tears by reason of the immense compassion which seizes his heart; a heart which is so softened and can no longer bear to see or learn from others of any suffering, even the smallest pain, being inflicted upon a creature. This is why such a man never ceases to pray also for the animals, for the enemies of Truth, and for those who do him evil, that they may be preserved and purified. He will even pray for the reptiles, moved by the Infinite pity which reigns in the hearts of those who are becoming united with God.***

***St. Isaac of Syria***