

Examination of Conscience: Faith, Hope and Charity

The focus of this examination is not only on various mortal and venial sins, it also looks at what could be termed “spiritual imperfections.” Spiritual imperfections are the many ways in which you fail to live fully immersed in the will of God. Those who want to live a life of true virtue must seek to purge even the smallest of sins and imperfections. There is no better guide for this than the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity.

After reading the introduction to each virtue, ponder the points carefully and slowly. Return often to the points below and especially focus upon those that strike you as an area in which you lack perfection. Do not get discouraged if these virtues greatly challenge you or if their perfection seems impossible. They most likely will not be perfected within one holy hour, or even several. But if you carefully and intentionally make a firm resolve to grow in these areas, allowing grace to purge you of sin and help you attain greater virtue, then little by little you will achieve greater heights of perfection.

IMPERFECTIONS OF FAITH

Faith means you have a clear knowledge of God and His holy will and are not influenced by the lies and deceptions of the evil one, nor are you led astray by weaknesses of human nature. *Perfect* faith may be very difficult to arrive at since it requires a deep and total cleansing of your intellect so that the only influence upon your thinking is God and His holy will. Faith is continually perfected when you continually shed all that confuses you and leads you to believe anything other than that which is in the mind of God.

What influences your thinking?: Your mind cannot be nurtured with the truth unless you expose it to the truth. Just as a flower needs the sun, so your mind needs the Truth—the Word of God, the very Person of Jesus Christ. Do you daily seek to allow the Word of God to speak to you? Do you expose yourself to the Scriptures, Church teaching, the lives of the saints, and various other inspired teachings from Christ? Or, do you spend excessive time allowing worldly influences to shape your thinking, such as social media, TV, secular news, magazines, etc.? Failure to allow the Word of God to daily influence you, thus allowing the world to influence you more, is an act of negligence and is an imperfection.

An act of faith each day: When you love someone, it is important to renew that love regularly by saying “I love you.” So it is with faith. When you believe in God, it is essential that you regularly renew your faith by saying “I believe.” Do you make an act of faith each day? If so, is it sincere? An act of faith could be an intentional recitation of the Apostles’ Creed or even a short statement, such as “Dear Lord, I believe in everything You have revealed to me and to Your Church.” Failure to express your faith to God every day is an imperfection.

Seeking daily increase in faith: Faith must be more like a flowing river than a stagnant pond. Perhaps you may arrive at faith and then remain there, thinking this is sufficient. But faith must daily increase, otherwise it decreases and weakens. Doing nothing will decrease your faith no matter how strong you believe you are. Do you seek to increase your faith every day? Is this a deep desire in your heart? If not, this is negligence on your part.

Trust in God or yourself?: When you are faced with difficulties in life, you may turn to your own “good” ideas rather than God’s. Trust means you know that God and God alone is the source of truth and He and He alone has all the answers to life’s questions. As you face challenges in life, where do you turn? How deeply are you convinced that God and God alone has all the answers? Do you seek His Truth and wisdom in all things? Or do you rely more on your own ideas or the misleading opinions of others? God must lead you through every challenge as well as every other aspect of your life. If some other form of “wisdom” is guiding you, this is a lack of faith and trust.

Faith must be expressed: For faith to grow, it cannot sit silent in your mind and heart, separated from your external self, what you say and do. When faith is alive, it is shared, expressed and affects those around you. Do you express your faith? Are you comfortable allowing what you believe to be seen by others? For example, are you comfortable praying in public or talking about God in casual conversation? Or are you embarrassed? Failure to allow faith to be expressed openly and comfortably is a denial of faith.

Faith seeks understanding: The truths of God are in no way contradictory to science, human suffering, tragedy and the like. Faith provides the deep answers you need in life to every question. Additionally, faith does not only help you resolve confusions in life, it also helps you to seek understanding of the highest order. The reality of angels, of the Blessed Sacrament, the moral life and everything contained in the Creed must be continually pondered in the light of God’s truth. Do you seek to understand every question in life from the truth of God? Failure to do so is a lack of faith.

IMPERFECTIONS OF HOPE

Perfect hope means you have full confidence in the plan of God for your life and for the world. Perfect hope requires you to align your will with the truths presented to you in faith by God. In other words, when you seek to understand life, every difficulty and every good thing, using the light of faith alone, that faith will challenge you on the level of your will and call you to trust rather than despair. Hope is a confident assurance coming from faith that enables you to move forward with peace and joy no matter what you encounter in life. Hope strengthens you and lifts you up, enabling you to have certitude not only in your mind but also in your actions.

Discouragement: Discouragement is not from God. It may be a part of human life, but it's not a virtue; it's a lack of virtue, a lack of hope. Hope is not mere optimism. It's confidence in God and His perfect plan. What do you get discouraged about? When you do get discouraged, do you see this as a weakness of the virtue of hope on your part? Too often it may be tempting to blame others or various circumstances for your discouragement; but the truth is that discouragement is a spiritual imperfection because it's a lack of the divine virtue of hope.

An act of hope: It is essential that each person striving for virtue and holiness be attentive to hope every day. Like faith, if you allow this virtue to remain stagnant, it will decrease. Therefore, hope requires that you express it with an intentional act every day. To say "Lord, I place all my hope in You" is like saying "I love You" or "I believe in You." Placing your hope in God is an action that builds upon faith and takes it to the level of action. Hope is trust, an intentional entrustment of your life to God. Do you daily make an act of hope in God? Failure to do so is a sin against hope.

Worries, anxieties, difficulties and troubles: Everyone who lives will come face to face with those things that tempt you to worry. The key question is this: What do you do when you are tempted to worry? The perfection of hope will enable you to *immediately* dismiss worries. Why? Because God is in control, and, no matter what happens, He will not abandon you. Do you believe this? If you find yourself dwelling on worries, this is a lack of hope.

Complaining: To complain is to act with a lack of hope because complaining sees life or the circumstances of life through the eyes of anger or despair and not through the eyes of grace. Saint Paul said in his letter to the Romans, "All things work for the good for those who love God and are called according to His plan." Therefore, nothing in life is worth complaining about when you have hope in God. This is because everything you are tempted to complain about can be used for good by God, even your sins, the sins of others or the most painful of situations. Hope raises you out of the apparent struggle and gives you the perspective of eternity. Did our Blessed Mother complain as her Son was being crucified? No, she had sorrow but also perfect hope that even this brutality would be transformed by grace, and indeed it was. Complaining is a sin against hope.

Dwelling on your sin or the sins of others: Do you dwell on your past sin? If so, make sure it has been confessed. From there, move forward and do not dwell on the past. There is no value in dwelling on something that God has forgiven. Or, perhaps you dwell on the sins of others and the pain that this caused you. If this is ongoing, seek to remedy it in accord with God's will. If you have done so, then let go of that sin and stop dwelling on it. There is no value in allowing the past to live in your head. Hope transforms the past into grace and uses it for good. Failure to have hope in the face of past sins is a spiritual imperfection from which God wants to free you.

The object(s) of your hope: Often, you may rely upon the things of this world more than God. You may dream of wealth, security, comforts, honors and the like. When those dreams are not achieved, or even if they are achieved, you will be left empty and dry. Why? Because when you put your hope in material things or honors of this world, you lose the virtue of hope in God. You cannot have hope in worldly things and hope in God at the same time. Hope in the world will diminish your hope in God and will steal your peace and joy. What do you hope in the most? What do you dream about the most? What is your greatest desire? Hope in God—and Him alone. Anything less is a spiritual imperfection.

IMPERFECTIONS OF CHARITY

Perfect Charity means you love God above all things and love your neighbor as God loves them. Perfect charity requires that you become purified of all selfishness so that you can turn your complete attention to the love of others, starting with love of God. Perfect love of God means that every fiber of your being is dedicated to the praise, honor, worship and adoration of God. As you deepen your love of God, that love overflows into a love of all God's children and all His creation.

Love of God—Thoughts: Where does your mind wander? If you reflect upon where your thoughts have dwelt over the past week, you will have an indication as to how deep your love of God is. The perfection of the love of God in your thoughts will lead you to ponder God day and night. You will think of Him, reflect upon aspects of your faith and be fascinated by the divine mysteries. Reflect upon what occupies your thoughts throughout the day. If it is anything less than a deep love of God, you lack the perfection of love of God.

Love of God—Words: Words can be spoken exteriorly and interiorly. Do you converse with God each day? Do you speak to Him as if to your closest companion? Do you regularly pour out your heart to Him, communicating all that you think, feel and experience? Sometimes this is done well by speaking prayers aloud. At other times, it is accomplished by speaking interiorly, honestly and thoroughly. Speak to God every day. Do you say “I love You” to God every day? It must be expressed. It must be intentional. It must be frequent. Failure to do so will weaken your love of God and is a sin against charity.

Love of God—Actions: Do you spend time praying each day, setting aside time to do nothing other than pray? Do you read, study, attend devotions, etc.? Do you pray with family? Do you spend more time on useless activities than upon activities that deepen your love of God? An examination of the time you spend on various activities of the day will reveal how deeply you love God in your actions.

Charity towards others—Thoughts: It may appear that charity is only an action or word. But charity starts in your thoughts. What you think will affect your desires, actions and words. If you were to examine your thoughts about others over the past week, what stands out? Too often you may tend to dwell on the faults of others rather than their virtues. Charity of thought means you overlook the many faults in the lives of others and choose, instead, to focus upon the virtues they have. Doing so is a clear act of charity. Failure to do so is a sin against charity.

Charity towards others—Words: The tongue is often the most dangerous weapon used by the evil one, but it is also the most powerful instrument used for charity. If you were to record everything you said to others over the past week, what would this transcript reveal? Do you speak words of love, encouragement, forgiveness, kindness, etc.? Or do you cut others down, express anger and dislike? Do you speak of your faith to others, encourage them to pray and to follow the will of God? Do you do so with love and courage? Examine your words and surrender them to God as His instrument of love.

Charity towards others—Actions: Your actions speak volumes and affect others to a serious degree. Are you lazy in your attentiveness to the needs of others? Do you seek to assist in any way you can? Do you look for opportunities to show love? Do others know you love God by your actions? Examine your actions of the past week. If you see selfishness rather than wholehearted generosity, then you lack charity in your actions.

Loving God in struggles: Perhaps when you face some difficulty in life, you may tend to turn your eyes toward yourself and your struggle, and fail to keep your focus upon God and others. The virtue of charity is greatly strengthened when you make an act of love in the midst of some struggle. Such an act of love becomes a conscious choice to turn from yourself and focus on the love of God and others. When your love of God and others is weakened as a result of some struggle, this is an imperfection in the area of charity.

Anger, emotions, feelings: You may not always be able to control your feelings and emotions and, as a result, may allow anger and resentment to consume you. Though feelings are not sins, they may stem from negligence in charity. When you lack forgiveness, mercy, compassion and understanding, you often open the door for your feelings and emotions to become affected by the sins of others. Do you struggle with anger or resentment? Do you hold on to past injuries? Forgiveness and mercy are acts of charity.

General dispositions: A cheerful, generous, welcoming and friendly disposition flows from a heart filled with charity. These are fruits of love, and when love of God and others is alive within your heart, these dispositions will flow forth from you most naturally. On the contrary, if your disposition is not naturally cheerful, generous, friendly, etc., this may be on account of a lack of charity in your heart. One of the best lists of a good disposition is found in the Fruits of the Holy Spirit: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...” ([Galatians 5:22–23](#) RSV-CE).

Source: My Catholic Life <https://mycatholic.life/>