



# LIGHT & LIFE

## VOICE OF THE ROSARY CENTER & CONFRATERNITY

Fr. Joseph Sergott, O.P., *Director*    Jan-Feb 2019, Vol 72, No 1    **Western Dominican Province**

### YOU DIE THE WAY YOU LIVE

*By Fr. Joseph Sergott, OP*

You die the way you live. Over the past month, I had spent much time with Fr. Paul Aquinas Duffner, OP, the former long-time director of the Rosary Center and its most influential figure, who died on November 29, 2018 at 103 years-old and in his 78th year of priesthood. Each time I came to visit Fr. Duffner, the two things that he looked for—even hungered for—were the Holy Eucharist and the praying of the Rosary. Both gave him such consolation. He had spent his life with a great love and devotion for the Real Presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and for the Blessed Virgin Mary. So, as he approached that final uphill climb back to the Lord, he counted on receiving Holy Communion and praying the Rosary.

Receiving the Holy Eucharist is the most important thing that we can do in our preparation to leave this world. Holy Viaticum is that Bread of Angels that connects us to our Lord in that most critical time. It is literally food for the journey as we die, and with God's grace, arrive upon the shores of eternal life in heaven.

Our Lord says,

“Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me.” (John 6:53-58)

Fr. Duffner understood the importance of receiving the Body and Blood of Christ and thus was always grateful to receive Holy Communion. Each time he received it, he would say, “Thank-you very very much.” As his final days approached, as he grew weaker and weaker, it became more difficult for him to receive Holy Communion. In the end, I was breaking off a small piece of the host; yet, each time he was grateful.

Fr. Duffner had prayed the Rosary every day for most of his life. His love and devotion for the Blessed Virgin Mary was palpable. When one prays the Rosary devoutly they connect with her in a singular way. There was a bond between them. In my visits, upon giving him Holy Communion, we moved to pray the Rosary. No matter how sick he was, or how much pain he had, he still was always eager to pray the Rosary. It meant that She would be there. The consolation of her presence was very reassuring for him.

In his last weeks, I always led the Rosary and he would respond with his half of the Our Father and the Hail Mary. As his death approached he became more frail and feeble. Yet, he always tried to join me in this Gospel prayer. Two days before he died, he was no longer responsive to any form of communication—not

even with doctors. So, I said to myself that I would say both parts out loud; yet, to my surprise, as his part came, he suddenly spoke and prayed his part.

On the day before he died, when he was still nonresponsive, I prayed the Rosary, and even though he was in a coma-like state, I watched as his lips moved in response to this prayer. Fr. Duffner had gone to the

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Madonna with Child,  
St. Dominic and St. Vincent Ferrer (ca. 1773).  
*Ubaldo Gandolfi*

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in honor of

### OUR LADY OF LOURDES

FEBRUARY 11 — FEBRUARY 19

TO BE OFFERED FOR YOUR INTENTIONS

# THEOLOGY FOR THE LAITY

## Virtues

By Fr. Thomas Aquinas Pickett, O.P.

[Fr. Thomas Aquinas Pickett, O.P., from Ellensburg, Washington, entered the Western Dominican Province in 2011 after having received his B.A. in Philosophy from Gonzaga University. After receiving his S.T.B. from l'Institut Catholique de Toulouse, and his M.A. in Theology and M.Div from the Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology, he was ordained to the priesthood in 2018. Fr. Thomas Aquinas now serves as Director of Evangelization and Faith Formation at Blessed Sacrament Parish in Seattle, Washington.]

It is a general truism that the more precise the task, the smaller the margin of error. In other words, the more exact something needs to be, the more ways there are of messing it up. A 95-mile-an-hour fastball takes around 450 milliseconds to reach homeplate; and since it takes 150 milliseconds to swing a bat, the batter has only tens of milliseconds to decide whether or not to swing. ([www.npr.org/2016/09/03/492516937/how-a-baseball-batters-brain-reacts-to-a-fast-pitch](http://www.npr.org/2016/09/03/492516937/how-a-baseball-batters-brain-reacts-to-a-fast-pitch)) In those precious moments the batter could misread a pitch, not only in terms of its velocity, but also of its location and movement. That split-second decision could mean not swinging at a good pitch, or swinging at a bad one. But even if the batter decides to swing at a good pitch, his swing could miss the ball not only below or above, too early or too late, too hard or too soft, but even at too high or too low of an angle. And even if the batter does succeed in making contact, he can fail by hitting the ball on the wrong part of the bat or by hitting directly to a fielder. It is astounding to think of how many little details can go wrong in trying to hit a baseball! As Yogi Berra said, "little things are big."

Little things are big when connected with a task that requires precision. You wouldn't say, "don't sweat the small stuff" to a scientist working with hazardous chemicals; you wouldn't trust an accountant, a broker, or a banker who relies on "ballpark estimates" when dealing with your money; you wouldn't want a surgeon with shaky hands to perform a cataract surgery. The more important something is, the more precision it requires, and the narrower the margin of error.

And what could be more important than our moral life? Not everyone has to be a baseball player, a scientist, a broker, or a surgeon, but everyone has to deal with morality. If important things require precision, and the moral life is important, therefore the moral life too requires precision. "What should I do?" This tremendous question does not content itself with only vague answers. Morality concerns, in a precise manner, what I should do here and now.

Unfortunately, in morality, just as in baseball, there are so many ways in which our choices can miss the target. This target is what we describe in moral terms as the "mean". The mean describes that perfect action, the right choice and the right response to a desire or a situation. Normally we describe the mean as being between "too much" or "too little". This mean is understood, not in a mathematical

sense (as when we say that 3 is the mean between 1 and 5), but as dictated by rational reflection about our course of action. For example, a father may miss the mean by disciplining an unruly child either too much (resulting in enduring resentment and later rebelliousness) or too little (resulting in a lack of moral character and self-control). Furthermore, how much, and in which way the father disciplines one of his children might be too much or too little for another child. One son might learn sufficiently from a glance or a headshake; another son might need time-outs or patient explanations. The mean can vary in an incredible number of ways depending on where and when we are, and even depending on who we are.

We can miss the right moral action by too much or by too little, just as a batter can miss the ball by swinging too high or too low. This means that there are more ways of messing up than there are of getting something right in the moral sphere. St. Thomas Aquinas even notes, "the fact that very few people are virtuous, and most people wicked, comes about because there are more ways to deviate from the mean than there are ways to adhere to it" (*De Malo*, 1.3 ad 17). For example, both the scrupulous Catholic and the lax Catholic are two sides of the same coin. They have both failed in how one approaches morality; the one fails governed by fear, the other fails governed by apathy.

Hitting the moral target with precision requires an intellectual suppleness and perspicacity which is able to correctly size up a situation and discover what one ought to do. Hitting the target requires not only an abstract knowledge of good and evil but the ability to apply this knowledge to concrete situations and circumstances. This incredible ability is what we call the virtue of prudence. It is prudence that, as St. Thomas describes, allows someone to "obtain the mean of reason in his deeds." (*ST II-II.47.7co.*) Just as a trained musician listening to a symphony is able to pick out the cellos amidst the sea of sound, so a person with prudence is able to pick out the right course of action amidst the ocean of moral possibilities. The root of the moral life, therefore, consists by its nature in the virtue of prudence; St. Thomas notes that "Prudence is the principal of all the virtues." (*ST I-II.61.2 ad 1*) If we cannot discover the mean then we will inevitably miss the target, just as a blind batter will inevitably miss the ball.

In my experience, many Catholics have a solid understanding of sinning by *too much*. However, they are often surprised when they learn about all the ways in which one can miss the mean by *too little*. Perhaps this comes about from the fact that *too much* strikes us as more obvious than *too little*: too much jalapeño in a burrito or someone singing too loudly during Mass seizes our attention with more force than does a mild burrito or a quiet whisper. However, for every way that we can sin by excess, there is an equal way of sinning by deficiency.

We can see this in the examples of self-esteem, anger, and sexuality.

The sin of pride occurs when we esteem ourselves more than we should. St. Thomas says that, "Pride is the appetite for excellence in excess of right reason." (ST II-II.162.1 ad 2) We should both desire excellence and see ourselves as worthy of undertaking good and noble tasks. However, the vice of pride distorts this in the direction of excess. The proud person attributes to themselves more than what is due; this leads to the inevitable association with Lucifer who compared himself with God. However, the virtue of humility is not gained by esteeming ourselves less than we should. Rather, humility involves an adequate, truthful self-knowledge: "Humility observes the rule of right reason whereby a man has true self-esteem." (ST II-II.162.3 ad 2) In fact, if we have *too little* self-esteem, if we turn ourselves into a self-deprecating wimp, this is to miss the target as well! The vice at play here is called pusillanimity, which means having a "small soul." In fact, having *too little* self-esteem can be just as bad as being a vainglorious egomaniac! St. Thomas explains that if people do not understand their own dignity then they end up not doing the good and great things that God wants from them. We must hit the true mean of self-esteem through honest self-knowledge.

The sin of anger occurs, not when we get angry, but when we get *too angry* or angry *in the wrong way*. Anger itself is a powerful emotion which is meant, in its God-given design, to help us fight against evil. However, because of the effects of Original Sin, we can get angry at things that are not really evil, or we can fight them in a *disproportionate* manner. St. Paul tells us in Ephesians 4:26, "Be angry but do not sin." We can have virtuous, righteous anger if it is directed at a true evil and expressed in a proportionate, governed way. Again, however, just as the vice of anger occurs through *excess*, there is also a vice of a *deficiency of anger*. St. Thomas says that, at times, "lack of the passion of anger is also a vice." (ST II-II.158.8 co.) In fact, it can be a sign that we do not understand the gravity of a situation: "the lack of anger is a sign that the judgment of reason is lacking." (ST II-II.158.8 ad 3) There are times when the situation *calls for anger*, because anger is what will help us to accomplish the good that must be done.

The vice of lust occurs, not through any delight in sexual pleasure, but through its *excessive* pursuit, carried out in the wrong way. Sexual desire is itself very important; St. Thomas even says that it is "most necessary for the common good." (ST II-II.153.3co) Due to its utmost importance, the misuse of sexuality can be exceptionally grievous; harming both the individual, the family, and the society. While people tend to misuse sexuality in terms of excess, once again, we can see that its *deficiency* can even be sinful! St. Thomas notes that this type of vice "is not found in many," yet nevertheless does exist. (*Ibid.*)

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# What would the Virgin Mary say about Humility?

by Fr. Columban Mary Hall, O.P.

[Fr. Columban Mary Hall, OP is a student brother of the Western Dominican Province in simple vows. He currently is on his residency year at Holy Family Cathedral in Anchorage, Alaska.]

Humility is a virtue we instinctively associate with the Blessed Virgin, who twice refers to herself as the "handmaid" of the Lord (Lk. 1: 38 and 48). Both occasions, the Annunciation and the Visitation to St. Elizabeth, are remembered in the Rosary, and provide wonderful opportunities for meditating on the humility of the Blessed Virgin.

What would Mary herself say about humility? Her Magnificat says it all. Though some have seen in the Magnificat Mary's pronouncement of her own greatness ("henceforth, all generations will call me blessed"), it is principally about the greatness of God, our sovereign good and final goal.

St. Thomas writes that humility is a virtue that helps us properly order ourselves to the difficult good, tempering and restraining the mind against presumption or overconfidence. Its counterpart is magnanimity, a part of fortitude which prevents us from despairing of the difficult good. Both of these are shown in Mary's Magnificat: recognizing that she has everything from God, Mary magnifies Him and lays claim to her role and responsibility as mother of the Messiah. Assured of God's grace, she puts her faith in Him; hence Elizabeth calls her blessed for believing.

I think Mary would say that putting ourselves down is not humility, neither is discounting the gifts, talents, and blessings God has given us. We never see her do this. On the other hand, the humble do not admire themselves, nor seek to be admired, despite the gifts they acknowledge. They put them at the service of God and neighbor. When the angel called her "full of grace," Mary was troubled, and did not understand "what sort of greeting this was" (Lk. 1: 28-29). I cannot think the immaculate Virgin was ever under the illusion she had sinned, yet that does not mean she guessed the profundity of her own holiness or thought much of herself. She thought of God and blessed God. She did not tarry to congratulate herself on being chosen, she rose in haste to visit Elizabeth.

Mary would tell us that, acknowledging their nothingness before God, the humble do not cease to strive for great things; but they strive for them with confidence in God, asking them from God, as things ordered to God, hidden in God. It is not earthly greatness or outward exaltation for which they strive, for these hinder the desire for heavenly things. The humble strive for more: nothing less than God Himself, that their souls may magnify Him.

May the Rosary be for us a school of humility, a means of glorifying God, and a catalyst of charity.

**"The Lord heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds." Psalm 147:3**

**Virtues** Continued from page 3

The opposite of lust is a vice where a person “has such a dislike for sexual intercourse as not to pay the marriage debt.” (*Ibid.*) The person is so *disgusted* by sex so as to do harm to the union of their marriage. The virtue of chastity allows one to use and enjoy sexuality well according to one’s state in life. The husband and wife who express their love in a moral way exercise the same virtue that the monk employs in his celibacy.

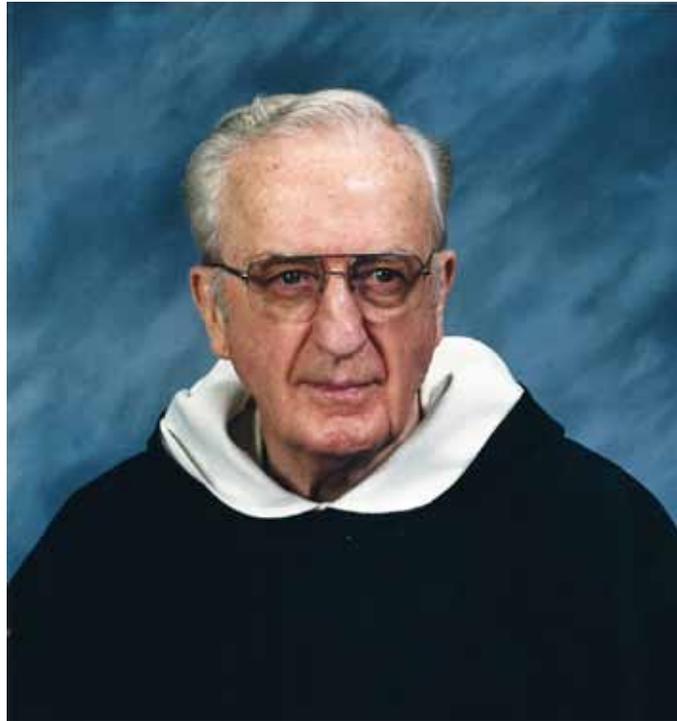
If all of this talk about how easy it is to miss the moral target seems daunting and disheartening, then we can take consolation in the fecundity of the spiritual tradition of the Church which offers us so many helps for growing in prudence. The first help is a daily examination of conscience. The reason why doing this is so important and recommended by countless saints, is because one of the essential parts of prudence is a good memory. St. Thomas says that “prudence requires the memory of many things.” (ST II-II.49.1co) The more moral data we have, the more we cultivate a remembrance of our past actions and feelings, the easier it becomes to understand what is required of us in the moment. Second, we enjoy the ability to sacramentally confess our sins. Through penance, we can recover the virtue that we have damaged, and strengthen our souls for future trials. A good confessor can help guide us through the contours of life free of charge! Third, no shortage exists of wonderful books on the moral and spiritual life. Consistent spiritual reading is a powerful aid in rendering our minds and hearts docile to the voice of the Holy Spirit. St. Ambrose says that prayer and reading go hand in hand:

“We address Him when we pray, we hear Him when we read.” (St. Ambrose, *On the Duties of the Clergy*, Bk 1, Ch. 20) All the more reason, then, to continue reading *Light and Life!* ■

## Note from the Director

*Dear faithful supporters of the Rosary Center & Confraternity, we are grateful for your support. We could not fulfill our Mission if not for our benefactors. After decades of constant use, the Rosary Center, the home of the Rosary Confraternity, is greatly in need of renovation. Please consider making a special gift to help make badly needed repairs, and to refurbish the offices, chapel and kitchen. Thank you for your generosity!*  
Fr. Joseph Sergott, O.P.

**"The heart of Jesus with all its treasures is my portion. I shall live and die there in peace, even in the midst of suffering." St. Bernadette**



**Fr. Paul Aquinas Duffner, O.P.**

**1915 - 2018**

### **You Die the Way You Live** Continued from page 1

Blessed Mother his entire life, and he would not stop asking for her intercession now as he faced his own impending death. Those words, “Pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death,” reminded me that he understood what he was praying and asking from her, and now that he was in his final hours, there was the great consolation of hearing those words, even though he could no longer speak them.

With a few notable exceptions (e.g., St. Paul), most people die the way they live. It is foolish to think that we can live a sinful lifestyle, or a life that is lukewarm, with the mindset that we can put things off and change our lives later. It is not so easy. Nor do we know when death will come. It

is better to recognize our human frailty as we lean on the Lord’s grace and go to his Mother for help and consolation. When death approaches, the best thing we can do is to fall into the good habits that we have already begun.

But perhaps we don’t have our lives ordered properly; in fact, maybe our lives are a complete mess. What are we to do? Where do we begin? Go to the sacraments and start praying the Rosary. Begin by going to confession—and go back again if you are struggling with serious sin, and again and again if it is needed. Go to Mass as much as possible, and when you have no mortal sins on your soul and are properly prepared, receive Holy Communion. If you cannot receive Holy Communion because of mortal sin or due to other circumstances, go to Mass anyway and ask for the grace of conversion. Go every day if you can. In addition, pray the Rosary every single day, even if you are overwhelmed by sin, addiction, depression, or other tumultuous circumstances. Go to Mary. Call on Mary. She will be with you.

Perhaps most of us have not lived the virtuous life of Fr. Paul Aquinas Duffner, OP; however, we can take his practice and make it our own, by frequenting Mass and receiving Holy Communion, and praying the Rosary each day of the rest of our lives. I promise you—it will pay dividends at your hour of death.