

## ROAD TO FOLLOW

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**YOU ARE CALLED TO BE A SAINT!** Regardless of your attitude toward this matter, whether you are of that school of thought which recognizes as saints only those few chosen souls who have been favored with ecstasy or ravished in rapture, or whether you deride the whole idea as simply preposterous, the fact remains—you are called to be a saint.

This is the sole reason for your existence. Almighty God created you for a very definite purpose—to love and serve Him; and to love and serve God is to lead the life of a saint. Lest there should be any doubt as to the meaning of true sanctity, our blessed Lord came upon this earth and clearly explained it in the Sermon on the Mount, and then confirmed it by His uniquely holy life. And to assure you that you were meant to partake of this sanctity He lovingly extended to you the invitation, “Come, follow Me.”<sup>1</sup>

No doubt you have for a long time been vaguely aware of this call to sainthood. However, abashed and awe-stricken at the very thought of modeling your life upon that of our blessed Lord, you have perhaps put the idea aside, making yourself believe that the all-good God could not possibly expect you to pattern the ways of your frail human life upon that of His divine Son. But you must readily admit that God would not give you so exalted a vocation and then deprive you of the means to attain it. There must be a way. Where there is a goal to be reached, there must be some means of attaining it. But what is this way? This same difficulty has been the stumbling block of countless numbers of the faithful down through the centuries. Ever so many would attain sanctity, but how lead the life of the Man Who was God?

This question was presented to Saint Thomas by a young man desirous of becoming a saint. The great master of human problems gave the simple, yet profound answer, “Walk in the footsteps of good and holy men.” Saint Thomas realized what an infinite gap must ever exist between the lives of weak human beings and the life of their all-perfect Saviour. His vast experience as a teacher and His thorough knowledge of men had taught him that men learn more

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<sup>1</sup> Matt. 19, 21.

readily from those most like themselves—from those who live similar lives, who experience similar trials and difficulties. Besides having seen this fact proven by experience, Saint Thomas was well aware of the incontestable words of Scripture which Saint Paul used in exhorting the early Christians, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ."<sup>2</sup>

But this admonition to walk in the footsteps of good and holy men is the advice not only of Saint Paul and Saint Thomas. It is the constant exhortation of holy Mother Church. The Church, realizing that her children more easily reach sanctity through the imitation of those who have been exemplars of holiness, has set up special saints to aid you in your quest for sanctity. These canonized saints include holy persons from every walk of life—bishops, priests, religious, scholars, scientists, doctors, lawyers, merchants, craftsmen, laborers, farmers, boys and girls, men and women, the young and the old. There are saints of recent times and saints who lived in centuries past. All these persons came into the world with the same purpose as you, to love and serve God, to become saints. They experienced the same difficulties as you encounter in fulfilling that mission. The path they had to travel was often hard and seemingly impossible. It was very difficult to follow for an entire life. Frequently they were in a quandry as to why it led where it did; they were often baffled at certain junctures of the road. But they had leaders. The blessed friends of Christ who had traversed the path before them were their constant companions, acting as guides, pointing out the dangers, deterring them from the catastrophe of sin, and directing them to the secure and fruitful ways of virtue.

It was in this way, by the example of others, that most of the saints fulfilled their mission in life. Read the life of any saint and you will see the beloved of God eagerly tracing the footsteps of another holy man. This is very evident in the life of Saint Thomas Aquinas. As a child, Thomas had heard much about the saints from his parents. As a student, he had lived with saintly men in a monastery. He spent much of his time reading the Fathers of the Church and their prescriptions for leading a life of sanctity. So familiar did he become with them that he was later able to raise a magnificent edifice of theology in which time and again he quotes their counsels and maxims verbatim. But there was one saint whom Thomas took as his model. This was the great Saint Dominic. As a young man, Thomas had heard wondrous stories of the then recently deceased Dominic. He learned that Dominic used as his principal means to sanctity

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<sup>2</sup> I Corinthians 4, 16.

prayer, study and preaching. Thomas had at his fingertips the regulations which Dominic had bequeathed to his followers. Ringing in his ears were the last words of Dominic, words exhorting his sons to remain ever faithful to the counsels of the Gospel. Thomas heard of Dominic's daily practices. He set out to follow them meticulously. He donned the Preacher's garb of penance and purity. During his whole life Thomas followed religiously every injunction of Dominic's *Constitutions*. No one could have obeyed more perfectly the dying legacy of his saintly exemplar. He drove out temptation with physical force. Thomas, son of a noble and wealthy family, did not know what it meant to have money of his own. He was never known to have disobeyed the slightest wish of authority. Dominic had gone to the universities to acquire a thorough knowledge of the sacred sciences in order to refute the heretics. Thomas became an intellectual giant and gave the answer to the lies against religion in his own and subsequent centuries. Dominic was a man of prayer. Thomas was always in choir before the scheduled time and he never taught or studied without having spent some time in prayer. Dominic was devoted to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and to His holy Mother, Mary. Thomas constantly sought their aid and protection, and wrote and preached of them incessantly. Thomas followed Dominic closely. Thomas, too, became a saint.

Saint Thomas would be the first to admit that Saint Dominic was not the saint for everyone to imitate. But what about the little girl, the farmer? The little girl has Saint Theresa, Saint Bernadette, Blessed Imelda and many others. For the farmer there is Saint Isidore and other saintly men who were humble tillers of the soil. For everyone, regardless of his position in life, there is a holy exemplar who has traveled the path before him.

But how are you to become acquainted with the saints, with their daily lives, their maxims, their secrets to sanctity? You have, no doubt, heard something of them already. You will recall stories told to you at your mother's knee, or in the first years of your schooling by the devoted sisters. There were stories of the early martyrs, of child saints burning with love for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. Time and again your priests have referred to examples in the lives of the saints, either in their sermons or by way of instructing you in the confessional. However, the best manner for you to acquire a thorough knowledge of the saints is by reading their biographies. The field of hagiography is well stocked with accounts of the ways of life of nearly all the canonized saints and many of the beatified. Fortunately for you, the life of many a saint is now written in a delightful, popu-

lar style, which makes the acquisition of a knowledge of the ways of holiness a distinct joy.

There is yet another way of knowing the saints. You can know them by associating with them. You know best the people with whom you live. You will know true sanctity best by living with men of virtue. There are probably saints in whose midst you are living. These people are an inestimable aid to you in the attainment of your purpose; they are living exemplars of the life which you must live in order to attain the goal of your life. By seeking their advice and imitating their practices you are assured of rapid progress on the road that leads to God.

You came into this world to love and serve God, which presupposes that you believe in Him and hope in Him. In the lives of the saints is exemplified in a most striking manner the constant practice of the virtues of faith, hope and love. By becoming acquainted with these acts of virtue in the saints you will be incited to similar action. It is the practice of these virtues that make for the complete Christian life, the prelude to eternal glory, which you must attain since you are called to be a saint.