Copyright information: If you have registered for the Uniformity with God’s Will Online Course, you are welcome to print out up to 10 copies of these lessons to use for a group study with your family or small group. To print out more than 10 copies or to purchase a printed version of this course, email kathryn@catholicspiritualdirection.org for permission. Thank you.

Please Read: Instructions and Terms for the Course

1. **Read:** Please read through each lesson either independently or out loud with others in a group setting.

2. **Reflect and Pray:** Take some quiet time (5-15 minutes) to reflect and pray about the teachings in the lesson and about how they might apply to your life.

3. **Decide and Act:** Decide if and how you will act upon what you learned or what stood out to you in this lesson. Pray for the graces you need such as the grace to love God more, and to know God’s will and to do it.

4. **Optional Group Discussion:** If you feel comfortable and would like to, take time to share or discuss each lesson. You can do this either in a group setting, or if you have registered for the online course, you can use the online dialog box at the bottom of each lesson page to report either your comments or a summary of your group’s comments.

Comments might include what particularly stood out to you about the lesson, how it applies to your life, realizations or decisions you have made resulting from the lesson, and/or other related pertinent information. If you haven’t already and you would like to sign up for the online course and participate in the online discussion, you can register at www.catholicspiritualdirection.org/uniformitysignup.html.
Uniformity With God's Will
by St Alphonsus de Liguori

"Perfection is founded entirely on the love of God: 'Charity is the bond of perfection;' and perfect love of God means the complete union of our will with God's." St. Alphonsus

Translated by Thomas W. Tobin, C.SS.R.

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Preface

In Volume 1, Opere Ascetiche di S. Alfonso M. de Liguori, Roma, 1933, "Uniformity with God's Will" is included as one of three works under the heading, "Lesser Works on Divine Love." There is no preface in the Italian original. However, it has been thought well to provide one here.

Prof. Candido M. Romano says this brochure was written probably in 1755, as appears from a letter by the Saint, under date of Nov. 2, 1755, to Sister Giannastasio, at Cava. Romano goes on to say:

"This (i.e. God's will) was for Alphonsus a theme of predilection, a theme dearest to his heart. Just as St. Ignatius stressed 'the greater glory of God,' St. Alphonsus in all his works, gave prominence to 'the greater good pleasure of God.' Most likely the occasion that brought forth this treatise was the death, in 1753, of Father Paul Cafaro, C.SS.R., St. Alphonsus' confessor and director. The death of this worthy priest deeply affected the Saint and he expressed his sentiments in a poem on God's will. The wide acclaim it received may have suggested to him the thought that a tract on the same subject would be helpful to the souls of others. If this be true, his surmise proved correct, for the appearance of his subsequent pamphlet was greeted with instant favor."
Cardinal Villecourt, in his Life of St. Alphonsus, quotes long passages from this pamphlet and ends by saying: "Our Saint frequently read it himself and when his sight had failed he arranged to have it read to him by others."

This brochure bears the stamp of Alphonsian simplicity of style and solidity of doctrine. Moreover the instances he cites from the lives of the saints have a gentle graciousness and contain a fragrance that is redolent of the Fioretti of St. Francis of Assisi.

Through God's grace and our Lady's prayers may a diligent reading of the book bring us far along the way of perfection by the cultivation of uniformity with God's holy will!

THOMAS W. TOBIN, C.SS.R.
Feast of St. Gerard Majella, C.SS.R.
1. Excellence of this Virtue.

by St. Alphonsus de Liguori

Perfection is founded entirely on the love of God: "Charity is the bond of perfection[1];" and perfect love of God means the complete union of our will with God's: "The principal effect of love is so to unite the wills of those who love each other as to make them will the same things[2]." It follows then, that the more one unites his will with the divine will, the greater will be his love of God. Mortification, meditation, receiving Holy Communion, acts of fraternal charity are all certainly pleasing to God -- but only when they are in accordance with his will. When they do not accord with God's will, he not only finds no pleasure in them, but he even rejects them utterly and punishes them.

To illustrate: -- A man has two servants. One works unremittingly all day long -- but according to his own devices; the other, conceivably, works less, but he does do what he is told. This latter of course is going to find favor in the eyes of his master; the other will not. Now, in applying this example, we may ask: Why should we perform actions for God's glory if they are not going to be acceptable to him?

God does not want sacrifices, the prophet Samuel told King Saul, but he does want obedience to his will: "Doth the Lord desire holocausts and victims, and not rather that the voice of the Lord should be obeyed? For obedience is better than sacrifices; and to hearken, rather than to offer the fat of rams. Because it is like the sin of witchcraft to rebel; and like the crime of idolatry to refuse to obey[3]." The man who follows his own will independently of God's, is guilty of a kind of idolatry. Instead of adoring God's will, he, in a certain sense, adores his own.

The greatest glory we can give to God is to do his will in everything. Our Redeemer came on earth to glorify his heavenly Father and to teach us by his example how to do the same. St. Paul represents him saying to his eternal Father: "Sacrifice and oblation thou wouldst not: But a body thou hast fitted to me . . . Then said I: Behold I come to do thy will, O God[4]." Thou hast refused the victims offered thee by man; thou dost will that I sacrifice my body to thee. Behold me ready to do thy will.

Our Lord frequently declared that he had come on earth not to do his own will, but solely that of his Father: "I came down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him that sent me[5]." He spoke in the same strain
in the garden when he went forth to meet his enemies who had come to seize him and to lead him to death: "But that the world may know that I love the Father: and as the Father hath given me commandment, so do I; arise and let us go hence[6]. Furthermore, he said he would recognize as his brother, him who would do his will: "Whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, he is my brother[7]."

To do God's will -- this was the goal upon which the saints constantly fixed their gaze. They were fully persuaded that in this consists the entire perfection of the soul. Blessed Henry Suso used to say: "It is not God's will that we should abound in spiritual delights, but that in all things we should submit to his holy will[8]." "Those who give themselves to prayer," says St. Teresa, "should concentrate solely on this: the conformity of their wills with the divine will. They should be convinced that this constitutes their highest perfection. The more fully they practice this, the greater the gifts they will receive from God, and the greater the progress they will make in the interior life[9]."

A certain Dominican nun was vouchsafed a vision of heaven one day. She recognized there some persons she had known during their mortal life on earth. It was told her these souls were raised to the sublime heights of the seraphs on account of the uniformity of their wills with that of God's during their lifetime here on earth. Blessed Henry Suso, mentioned above, said of himself: "I would rather be the vilest worm on earth by God's will, than be a seraph by my own[10]."

During our sojourn in this world, we should learn from the saints now in heaven, how to love God. The pure and perfect love of God they enjoy there, consists in uniting themselves perfectly to his will. It would be the greatest delight of the seraphs to pile up sand on the seashore or to pull weeds in a garden for all eternity, if they found out such was God's will. Our Lord himself teaches us to ask to do the will of God on earth as the saints do it in heaven: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven[11]."

Because David fulfilled all his wishes, God called him a man after his own heart: "I have found David . . . a man according to my own heart, who shall do all my wills[12]." David was always ready to embrace the divine will, as he frequently protested: "My heart is ready, O God, my heart is ready[13]." He asked God for one thing alone -- to teach him to do his will: "Teach me to do thy will[14]."

A single act of uniformity with the divine will suffices to make a saint. Behold while Saul was persecuting the Church, God enlightened him and converted him. What does Saul do? What does he say? Nothing else but to offer himself to do God's will: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do[15]?

5
return the Lord calls him a vessel of election and an apostle of the gentiles: "This man is to me a vessel of election, to carry my name before the gentiles[16]."

Absolutely true -- because he who gives his will to God, gives him everything. He who gives his goods in alms, his blood in scourgings, his food in fasting, gives God what he has. But he who gives God his will, gives himself, gives everything he is. Such a one can say: "Though I am poor, Lord, I give thee all I possess; but when I say I give thee my will, I have nothing left to give thee." This is just what God does require of us: "My son, give me thy heart[17]." St. Augustine's comment is: "There is nothing more pleasing we can offer God than to say to him: 'Possess thyself of us'[18]." We cannot offer God anything more pleasing than to say: Take us, Lord, we give thee our entire will. Only let us know thy will and we will carry it out.

If we would completely rejoice the heart of God, let us strive in all things to conform ourselves to his divine will. Let us not only strive to conform ourselves, but also to unite ourselves to whatever dispositions God makes of us. Conformity signifies that we join our wills to the will of God. Uniformity means more -- it means that we make one will of God's will and ours, so that we will only what God wills; that God's will alone, is our will.

This is the summit of perfection and to it we should always aspire; this should be the goal of all our works, desires, meditations and prayers. To this end we should always invoke the aid of our holy patrons, our guardian angels, and above all, of our mother Mary, the most perfect of all the saints because she most perfectly embraced the divine will.

3. 1 Kings, 15:22, 23.
10. Suso, Serm. 2. (Opera Colon Agrip.)
13. Ps. 56:8.
16. Ibid.
18. St. August. in Ps. 131:3.
Lesson 1 Questions for Reflection:

2. Reflect and Pray: Take some quiet time (5-15 minutes) to reflect and pray about the teachings in the lesson that you have just read, and about how they might apply to your life. Write down your thoughts as you go through the questions and reflection.

Some questions to consider are:
• What particularly stood out to you about this lesson? ____________________________________________
• How does this lesson apply to your life? _______________________________________________________
• What new realizations have you had about God, yourself, others or your life as a result of reading, reflecting and praying about this lesson and what are they? _____________________________________________________________
• Do you have any questions related to this lesson that you want to bring up for discussion (in a group setting or the online dialog box)? ________________
• What decisions, if any, have you have made resulting from the lesson? How will you incorporate them into your life? What changes might you make? ______________________________________________________________
• Do you have an related pertinent information to this lesson that you'd like to make a note of to share with others? __________________________

3. Decide and Act: Decide if and how you will act upon what you learned or what stood out to you in this lesson. Pray for the graces you need to put your decision in practice, for example, the grace to love and trust in God more, the grace to know God's will and to do it, the grace to give up any particular sin, etc.

4. Optional Group Discussion: If you feel comfortable and would like to, take time to share or discuss something that particularly stood out to you about this lesson. You can do this either in a group setting or you can use the online dialog box online.
Lesson 2

1. Uniformity in All Things.

by St. Alphonsus de Liguori

The essence of perfection is to embrace the will of God in all things, prosperous or adverse. In prosperity, even sinners find it easy to unite themselves to the divine will; but it takes saints to unite themselves to God's will when things go wrong and are painful to self-love. Our conduct in such instances is the measure of our love of God. St. John of Avila used to say: "One 'Blessed be God' in times of adversity, is worth more than a thousand acts of gratitude in times of prosperity[1]."

Furthermore, we must unite ourselves to God's will not only in things that come to us directly from his hands, such as sickness, desolation, poverty, death of relatives, but likewise in those we suffer from man -- for example, contempt, injustice, loss of reputation, loss of temporal goods and all kinds of persecution. On these occasions we must remember that whilst God does not will the sin, he does will our humiliation, our poverty, or our mortification, as the case may be. It is certain and of faith, that whatever happens, happens by the will of God: "I am the Lord forming the light and creating the darkness, making peace and creating evil[2]." From God come all things, good as well as evil. We call adversities evil; actually they are good and meritorious, when we receive them as coming from God's hands: "Shall there be evil in a city which the Lord hath not done[3]?

"Good things and evil, life and death, poverty and riches are from God[4]."

It is true, when one offends us unjustly, God does not will his sin, nor does he concur in the sinner's bad will; but God does, in a general way, concur in the material action by which such a one strikes us, robs us or does us an injury, so that God certainly wills the offense we suffer and it comes to us from his hands. Thus the Lord told David he would be the author of those things he would suffer at the hands of Absalom: "I will raise up evils against thee out of thy own house, and I will take thy wives before thy face and give them to thy neighbor[5]." Hence too God told the Jews that in punishment for their sins, he would send the Assyrians to plunder them and spread destruction among them: "The Assyrian is the rod and staff of my anger . . . I will send him to take away the spoils[6]." "Assyrian wickedness served as God's scourge for the Hebrews[7]" is St. Augustine's comment on this text. And our Lord himself told St. Peter that his sacred passion came not so much from man as from his Father: "The chalice which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it[8]?"
When the messenger came to announce to Job that the Sabeans had plundered his goods and slain his children, he said: "The Lord gave and the Lord taketh away[9]." He did not say: "The Lord hath given me my children and my possessions, and the Sabeans have taken them away." He realized that adversity had come upon him by the will of God. Therefore he added: "As it hath pleased the Lord, so is it done. Blessed be the name of the Lord[10]." We must not therefore consider the afflictions that come upon us as happening by chance or solely from the malice of men; we should be convinced that what happens, happens by the will of God. Apropos of this it is related that two martyrs, Epictetus and Atho, being put to the torture by having their bodies raked with iron hooks and burnt with flaming torches, kept repeating: "Work thy will upon us, O Lord." Arrived at the place of execution, they exclaimed: "Eternal God, be thou blessed in that thy will has been entirely accomplished in us[11]."

Cesarius points up what we have been saying by offering this incident in the life of a certain monk: Externally his religious observance was the same as that of the other monks, but he had attained such sanctity that the mere touch of his garments healed the sick. Marveling at these deeds, since his life was no more exemplary than the lives of the other monks, the superior asked him one day what was the cause of these miracles.

He replied that he too was mystified and was at a loss how to account for such happenings. "What devotions do you practice?" asked the abbot. He answered that there was little or nothing special that he did beyond making a great deal of willing only what God willed, and that God had given him the grace of abandoning his will totally to the will of God.

"Prosperity does not lift me up, nor adversity cast me down," added the monk. "I direct all my prayers to the end that God's will may be done fully in me and by me." "That raid that our enemies made against the monastery the other day, in which our stores were plundered, our granaries put to the torch and our cattle driven off -- did not this misfortune cause you any resentment?" queried the abbot.

"No, Father," came the reply. "On the contrary, I returned thanks to God -- as is my custom in such circumstances -- fully persuaded that God does all things, or permits all that happens, for his glory and for our greater good; thus I am always at peace, no matter what happens." Seeing such uniformity with the will of God, the abbot no longer wondered why the monk worked so many miracles[12].

2. Isaias 45:6, 7.
5. 2 Kings, 12:11.
6. Isaias, 10:5, 6.
7. St. Aug. in Ps. 73.
10. Ibid.
11. ML (Vitae Patrum) 73-402, etc.
Lesson 2 Questions for Reflection:

2. Reflect and Pray: Take some quiet time (5-15 minutes) to reflect and pray about the teachings in the lesson that you have just read, and about how they might apply to your life. Write down your thoughts as you go through the questions and reflection.

Some questions to consider are:

• What particularly stood out to you about this lesson? ______________________________________________________________

• How does this lesson apply to your life? ______________________________________________________________

• What new realizations have you had about God, yourself, others or your life as a result of reading, reflecting and praying about this lesson and what are they? ______________________________________________________________

• Do you have any questions related to this lesson that you want to bring up for discussion (in a group setting or the online dialog box)? __________

• What decisions, if any, have you have made resulting from the lesson? How will you incorporate them into your life? What changes might you make? ______________________________________________________________

• Do you have an related pertinent information to this lesson that you’d like to make a note of to share with others? __________________________

3. Decide and Act: Decide if and how you will act upon what you learned or what stood out to you in this lesson. Pray for the graces you need to put your decision in practice, for example, the grace to love and trust in God more, the grace to know God's will and to do it, the grace to give up any particular sin, etc.

4. Optional Group Discussion: If you feel comfortable and would like to, take time to share or discuss something that particularly stood out to you about this lesson. You can do this either in a group setting or you can use the online dialog box online.
3. Happiness deriving from perfect Uniformity.

by St. Alphonsus de Liguori

Acting according to this pattern, one not only becomes holy but also enjoys perpetual serenity in this life. Alphonsus the Great, King of Aragon, being asked one day whom he considered the happiest person in the world, answered: "He who abandons himself to the will of God and accepts all things, prosperous and adverse, as coming from his hands." "To those that love God, all things work together unto good[2]."

Those who love God are always happy, because their whole happiness is to fulfill, even in adversity, the will of God. Afflictions do not mar their serenity, because by accepting misfortune, they know they give pleasure to their beloved Lord: "Whatever shall befall the just man, it shall not make him sad[3]." Indeed, what can be more satisfactory to a person than to experience the fulfillment of all his desires? This is the happy lot of the man who wills only what God wills, because everything that happens, save sin, happens through the will of God.

There is a story to this effect in the "Lives of the Fathers" about a farmer whose crops were more plentiful than those of his neighbors. On being asked how this happened with such unvarying regularity, he said he was not surprised because he always had the kind of weather he wanted. He was asked to explain. He said: "It is so because I want whatever kind of weather God wants, and because I do, he gives me the harvests I want[4]." If souls resigned to God's will are humiliated, says Salvian[5], they want to be humiliated; if they are poor, they want to be poor; in short, whatever happens is acceptable to them, hence they are truly at peace in this life. In cold and heat, in rain and wind, the soul united to God says: "I want it to be warm, to be cold, windy, to rain, because God wills it."

This is the beautiful freedom of the sons of God, and it is worth vastly more than all the rank and distinction of blood and birth, more than all the kingdoms in the world. This is the abiding peace which, in the experience of the saints, "surpasseth all understanding[6]." It surpasses all pleasures rising from gratification of the senses, from social gatherings, banquets and other worldly amusements; vain and deceiving as they are, they captivate the senses for the time being, but bring no lasting contentment; rather they afflict man in the depth of his soul where alone true peace can reside.
Solomon, who tasted to satiety all the pleasures of the world and found them bitter, voiced his disillusionment thus: "But this also is vanity and vexation of spirit[7]." "A fool," says the Holy Spirit, "is changed as the moon; but a holy man continueth in wisdom as the sun[8]." The fool, that is, the sinner, is as changeable as the moon, which today waxes and tomorrow wanes; today he laughs, tomorrow he cries; today he is meek as a lamb, tomorrow cross as a bear. Why?

Because his peace of mind depends on the prosperity or the adversity he meets; he changes with the changes in the things that happen to him. The just man is like the sun, constant in his serenity, no matter what betides him. His calmness of soul is founded on his union with the will of God; hence he enjoys unruffled peace.

This is the peace promised by the angel of the Nativity: "And on earth, peace to men of good will[9]." Who are these "men of good will" if not those whose wills are united to the infinitely good and perfect will of God? "The good, and the acceptable, and the perfect will of God[10]."

By uniting themselves to the divine will, the saints have enjoyed paradise by anticipation in this life. Accustoming themselves to receive all things from the hands of God, says St. Dorotheus[11], the men of old maintained continual serenity of soul. St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi derived such consolation at hearing the words "will of God," that she usually fell into an ecstasy of love[12].

The instances of jangling irritation that are bound to arise will not fail to make surface impact on the senses. This however will be experienced only in the inferior part of the soul; in the superior part will reign peace and tranquillity as long as our will remains united with God's. Our Lord assured his apostles: "Your joy no man shall take from you . . . Your joy shall be full[13]." He who unites his will to God's experiences a full and lasting joy: full, because he has what he wants, as was explained above; lasting, because no one can take his joy from him, since no one can prevent what God wills from happening.

The devout Father John Tauler[14] relates this personal experience: For years he had prayed God to send him someone who would teach him the real spiritual life. One day, at prayer, he heard a voice saying: "Go to such and such a church and you will have the answer to your prayers." He went and at the door of the church he found a beggar, barefooted and in rags. He greeted the mendicant saying:

"Good day, my friend."
"Thank you, sir, for your kind wishes, but I do not recall ever having had a 'bad' day."

"Then God has certainly given you a very happy life."

"That is very true, sir. I have never been unhappy. In saying this I am not making any rash statement either. This is the reason: When I have nothing to eat, I give thanks to God; when it rains or snows, I bless God's providence; when someone insults me, drives me away, or otherwise mistreats me, I give glory to God. I said I've never had an unhappy day, and it's the truth, because I am accustomed to will unreservedly what God wills. Whatever happens to me, sweet or bitter, I gladly receive from his hands as what is best for me. Hence my unvarying happiness."

"Where did you find God?"

"I found him where I left creatures."

"Who are you anyway?"

"I am a king."

"And where is your kingdom?"

"In my soul, where everything is in good order; where the passions obey reason, and reason obeys God."

"How have you come to such a state of perfection?"

"By silence. I practice silence towards men, while I cultivate the habit of speaking with God. Conversing with God is the way I found and maintain my peace of soul."

Union with God brought this poor beggar to the very heights of perfection. In his poverty he was richer than the mightiest monarch; in his sufferings, he was vastly happier than worldlings amid their worldly delights.

2. Rom. 8:28.
4. Vitae Patrum. Exact citation unknown.
6. Phil. 4:7.
7. Eccles. 4:16.
8. Eccus. 27:12.
Lesson 3 Questions for Reflection:

2. Reflect and Pray: Take some quiet time (5-15 minutes) to reflect and pray about the teachings in the lesson that you have just read, and about how they might apply to your life. Write down your thoughts as you go through the questions and reflection.

Some questions to consider are:
• What particularly stood out to you about this lesson? ________________  ______________________________________________________________
• How does this lesson apply to your life? __________________________  ______________________________________________________________
• What new realizations have you had about God, yourself, others or your life as a result of reading, reflecting and praying about this lesson and what are they? ____________________________________________________________
• Do you have any questions related to this lesson that you want to bring up for discussion (in a group setting or the online dialog box)? __________  ______________________________________________________________
• What decisions, if any, have you have made resulting from the lesson? How will you incorporate them into your life? What changes might you make? __________________________________________________________
• Do you have an related pertinent information to this lesson that you'd like to make a note of to share with others? __________________________  ______________________________________________________________

3. Decide and Act: Decide if and how you will act upon what you learned or what stood out to you in this lesson. Pray for the graces you need to put your decision in practice, for example, the grace to love and trust in God more, the grace to know God's will and to do it, the grace to give up any particular sin, etc.

4. Optional Group Discussion: If you feel comfortable and would like to, take time to share or discuss something that particularly stood out to you about this lesson. You can do this either in a group setting or you can use the online dialog box online.
Lesson 4

4. God wills our Good.

by St. Alphonsus de Liguori

O the supreme folly of those who resist the divine will! In God's providence, no one can escape hardship: "Who resisteth his will[1]?" A person who rails at God in adversity, suffers without merit; moreover by his lack of resignation he adds to his punishment in the next life and experiences greater disquietude of mind in this life: "Who resisteth him and hath had peace[2]?" The screaming rage of the sick man in his pain, the whining complaints of the poor man in his destitution -- what will they avail these people, except increase their unhappiness and bring them no relief? "Little man," says St. Augustine, "grow up. What are you seeking in your search for happiness? Seek the one good that embraces all others[3]."

Whom do you seek, friend, if you seek not God? Seek him, find him, cleave to him; bind your will to his with bands of steel and you will live always at peace in this life and in the next.

God wills only our good; God loves us more than anybody else can or does love us. His will is that no one should lose his soul, that everyone should save and sanctify his soul: "Not willing that any should perish, but that all should return to penance[4]." "This is the will of God, your sanctification[5]." God has made the attainment of our happiness, his glory. Since he is by his nature infinite goodness, and since as St. Leo[6] says goodness is diffusive of itself, God has a supreme desire to make us sharers of his goods and of his happiness. If then he sends us suffering in this life, it is for our own good: "All things work together unto good[7]." Even chastisements come to us, not to crush us, but to make us mend our ways and save our souls: "Let us believe that these scourges of the Lord have happened for our amendment and not for our destruction[8]."

God surrounds us with his loving care lest we suffer eternal damnation: "O Lord, thou hast crowned us as with a shield of thy good will[9]." He is most solicitous for our welfare: "The Lord is solicitous for me[10]." What can God deny us when he has given us his own son? "He that spared not even his own son, but delivered him up for us all, how hath he not also, with him, given us all things[11]? "Therefore we should most confidently abandon ourselves to all the dispositions of divine providence, since they are for our own good. In all that happens to us, let us say: "In peace, in the self same I will sleep, and I will rest: Because thou, O Lord, hast singularly settled me in hope[12]."
Let us place ourselves unreservedly in his hands because he will not fail to have care of us: "Casting all your care upon him, for he hath care of you[13]." Let us keep God in our thoughts and carry out his will, and he will think of us and of our welfare. Our Lord said to St. Catherine of Siena, "Daughter, think of me, and I will always think of you." Let us often repeat with the Spouse in the Canticle: "My beloved to me, and I to him[14]."

St. Niles, abbot, used to say that our petitions should be, not that our wishes be done, but that God's holy will should be fulfilled in us and by us. When, therefore, something adverse happens to us, let us accept it from his hands, not only patiently, but even with gladness, as did the apostles "who went from the presence of the council rejoicing, that they were accounted worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus[15]." What greater consolation can come to a soul than to know that by patiently bearing some tribulation, it gives God the greatest pleasure in its power? Spiritual writers tell us that though the desire of certain souls to please God by their sufferings is acceptable to him, still more pleasing to him is the union of certain others with his will, so that their will is neither to rejoice nor to suffer, but to hold themselves completely amenable to his will, and they desire only that his holy will be fulfilled.

If, devout soul, it is your will to please God and live a life of serenity in this world, unite yourself always and in all things to the divine will. Reflect that all the sins of your past wicked life happened because you wandered from the path of God's will. For the future, embrace God's good pleasure and say to him in every happening: "Yea, Father, for so it hath seemed good in thy sight[16]." When anything disagreeable happens, remember it comes from God and say at once, "This comes from God" and be at peace: "I was dumb and opened not my mouth, because thou hast done it." Lord, since thou hast done this, I will be silent and accept it.

Direct all your thoughts and prayers to this end, to beg God constantly in meditation, Communion, and visits to the Blessed Sacrament that he help you accomplish his holy will. Form the habit of offering yourself frequently to God by saying, "My God, behold me in thy presence; do with me and all that I have as thou pleasest." This was the constant practice of St. Teresa. At least fifty times a day she offered herself to God, placing herself at his entire disposition and good pleasure.

How fortunate you, kind reader, if you too act thus! You will surely become a saint. Your life will be calm and peaceful; your death will be happy. At death all our hope of salvation will come from the testimony of our conscience as to whether or not we are dying resigned to God's will. If during life we have embraced everything as coming from God's hands, and if at death we embrace death in fulfillment of God's holy will, we shall certainly save our souls and die the death of saints.
Let us then abandon everything to God's good pleasure, because being infin-
initely wise, he knows what is best for us; and being all-good and all-loving --
having given his life for us -- he wills what is best for us. Let us, as St.
Basil counsels us, rest secure in the conviction that beyond the possibility
of a doubt, God works to effect our welfare, infinitely better than we could
ever hope to accomplish or desire it ourselves.

1. Rom. 9:19.
4. 2 Peter, 3:9.
5. 1 Thes. 4:3.
8. Judith, 8:27.
11. Rom. 8:32.
12. Ps. 4:9, 10.
13. 1 Peter, 5:7.
Lesson 4 Questions for Reflection:

2. Reflect and Pray: Take some quiet time (5-15 minutes) to reflect and pray about the teachings in the lesson that you have just read, and about how they might apply to your life. Write down your thoughts as you go through the questions and reflection.

Some questions to consider are:
• What particularly stood out to you about this lesson? ________________________________________________________________
• How does this lesson apply to your life? ________________________________________________________________
• What new realizations have you had about God, yourself, others or your life as a result of reading, reflecting and praying about this lesson and what are they? ________________________________________________________________
• Do you have any questions related to this lesson that you want to bring up for discussion (in a group setting or the online dialog box)? ______________
• What decisions, if any, have you have made resulting from the lesson? How will you incorporate them into your life? What changes might you make? ________________________________________________________________
• Do you have an related pertinent information to this lesson that you’d like to make a note of to share with others? ____________________________

3. Decide and Act: Decide if and how you will act upon what you learned or what stood out to you in this lesson. Pray for the graces you need to put your decision in practice, for example, the grace to love and trust in God more, the grace to know God's will and to do it, the grace to give up any particular sin, etc.

4. Optional Group Discussion: If you feel comfortable and would like to, take time to share or discuss something that particularly stood out to you about this lesson. You can do this either in a group setting or you can use the online dialog box online.
Lesson 5


by St. Alphonsus de Liguori

Let us now take up in a practical way the consideration of those matters in which we should unite ourselves to God's will.

1. In external matters. In times of great heat, cold or rain; in times of famine, epidemics and similar occasions we should refrain from expressions like these: "What unbearable heat!" "What piercing cold!" "What a tragedy!" In these instances we should avoid expressions indicating opposition to God's will. We should want things to be just as they are, because it is God who thus disposes them.

An incident in point would be this one: Late one night St. Francis Borgia arrived unexpectedly at a Jesuit house, in a snowstorm. He knocked and knocked on the door, but all to no purpose because the community being asleep, no one heard him. When morning came all were embarrassed for the discomfort he had experienced by having had to spend the night in the open. The saint, however, said he had enjoyed the greatest consolation during those long hours of the night by imagining that he saw our Lord up in the sky dropping the snowflakes down upon him.

2. In personal matters. In matters that affect us personally, let us acquiesce in God's will. For example, in hunger, thirst, poverty, desolation, loss of reputation, let us always say: "Do thou build up or tear down, O Lord, as seems good in thy sight. I am content. I wish only what thou dost wish." Thus too, says Rodriguez, should we act when the devil proposes certain hypothetical cases to us in order to wrest a sinful consent from us, or at least to cause us to be interiorly disturbed. For example: "What would you say or what would you do if some one were to say or do such and such a thing to you?" Let us dismiss the temptation by saying: "By God's grace, I would say or do what God would want me to say or do." Thus we shall free ourselves from imperfection and harassment.

3. Let us not lament if we suffer from some natural defect of body or mind; from poor memory, slowness of understanding, little ability, lameness or general bad health. What claim have we, or what obligation is God under, to give us a more brilliant mind or a more robust body? Who is ever offered a gift and then lays down the conditions upon which he will accept it? Let us thank God for what, in his pure goodness, he has given us and let us be content too with the manner in which he has given it to us.
Who knows? Perhaps if God had given us greater talent, better health, a more personable appearance, we might have lost our souls! Great talent and knowledge have caused many to be puffed up with the idea of their own importance and, in their pride, they have despised others. How easily those who have these gifts fall into grave danger to their salvation! How many on account of physical beauty or robust health have plunged headlong into a life of debauchery! How many, on the contrary, who, by reason of poverty, infirmity or physical deformity, have become saints and have saved their souls, who, given health, wealth or physical attractiveness had else lost their souls! Let us then be content with what God has given us. "But one thing is necessary," and it is not beauty, not health, not talent. It is the salvation of our immortal souls.

4. It is especially necessary that we be resigned in corporal infirmities. We should willingly embrace them in the manner and for the length of time that God wills. We ought to make use of the ordinary remedies in time of sickness -- such is God's will; but if they are not effective, let us unite ourselves to God's will and this will be better for us than would be our restoration to health. Let us say: "Lord, I wish neither to be well nor to remain sick; I want only what thou wilt."

Certainly, it is more virtuous not to repine in times of painful illness; still and all, when our sufferings are excessive, it is not wrong to let our friends know what we are enduring, and also to ask God to free us from our sufferings. Let it be understood, however, that the sufferings here referred to are actually excessive. It often happens that some, on the occasion of a slight illness, or even a slight indisposition, want the whole world to stand still and sympathize with them in their illnesses.

But where it is a case of real suffering, we have the example of our Lord, who, at the approach of his bitter passion, made known his state of soul to his disciples, saying: "My soul is sorrowful even unto death" and besought his eternal Father to deliver him from it: "Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me." But our Lord likewise taught us what we should do when we have made such a petition, when he added: "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt."

How childish the pretense of those who protest they wish for health not to escape suffering, but to serve our Lord better by being able to observe their Rule, to serve the community, go to church, receive Communion, do penance, study, work for souls in the confessional and pulpit! Devout soul, tell me, why do you desire to do these things? To please God? Why then search any further to please God when you are sure God does not wish these prayers, Communions, penances or studies, but he does wish that you suffer patiently this sickness he sends you? Unite then your sufferings to those of our Lord.
"But," you say, "I do not want to be sick for then I am useless, a burden to my Order, to my monastery." But if you are united to and resigned to God's will, you will realize that your superiors are likewise resigned to the dispositions of divine providence, and that they recognize the fact that you are a burden, not through indolence, but by the will of God. Ah, how often these desires and these laments are born, not of the love of God, but of the love of self! How many of them are so many pretexts for fleeing the will of God! Do we want to please God? When we find ourselves confined to our sickbed, let us utter this one prayer: "Thy will be done." Let us repeat it time and time again and it will please God more than all our mortifications and devotions. There is no better way to serve God than cheerfully to embrace his holy will.

St. John of Avila once wrote to a sick priest: "My dear friend, -- Do not weary yourself planning what you would do if you were well, but be content to be sick for as long as God wishes. If you are seeking to carry out God's will, what difference should it make to you whether you are sick or well[5]?" The saint was perfectly right, for God is glorified not by our works, but by our resignation to, and by our union with, his holy will. In this respect St. Francis de Sales used to say we serve God better by our sufferings than by our actions.

Many times it will happen that proper medical attention or effective remedies will be lacking, or even that the doctor will not rightly diagnose our case. In such instances we must unite ourselves to the divine will which thus disposes of our physical health. The story is told of a client of St. Thomas of Canterbury, who being sick, went to the saint's tomb to obtain a cure. He returned home cured. But then he thought to himself: "Suppose it would be better for my soul's salvation if I remained sick, what point then is there in being well?" In this frame of mind he went back and asked the saint to intercede with God that he grant what would be best for his eternal salvation. His illness returned and he was perfectly content with the turn things had taken, being fully persuaded that God had thus disposed of him for his own good.

There is a similar account by Surio to the effect that a certain blind man obtained the restoration of his sight by praying to St. Bedasto, bishop. Thinking the matter over, he prayed again to his heavenly patron, but this time with the purpose that if the possession of his sight were not expedient for his soul, that his blindness should return. And that is exactly what happened -- he was blind again. Therefore, in sickness it is better that we seek neither sickness nor health, but that we abandon ourselves to the will of God so that he may dispose of us as he wishes. However, if we decide to ask for health, let us do so at least always resigned and with the proviso that our bodily health may be conducive to the health of our soul.
Otherwise our prayer will be defective and will remain unheard because our Lord does not answer prayers made without resignation to his holy will.

Sickness is the acid test of spirituality, because it discloses whether our virtue is real or sham. If the soul is not agitated, does not break out in lamentations, is not feverishly restless in seeking a cure, but instead is submissive to the doctors and to superiors, is serene and tranquil, completely resigned to God's will, it is a sign that that soul is well-grounded in virtue.

What of the whiner who complains of lack of attention? That his sufferings are beyond endurance? That the doctor does not know his business? What of the faint-hearted soul who laments that the hand of God is too heavy upon him?

This story by St. Bonaventure in his "Life of St. Francis" is in point: On a certain occasion when the saint was suffering extraordinary physical pain, one of his religious meaning to sympathize with him, said in his simplicity: "My Father, pray God that he treat you a little more gently, for his hand seems heavy upon you just now." Hearing this, St. Francis strongly resented the unhappy remark of his well-meaning brother, saying: "My good brother, did I not know that what you have just said was spoken in all simplicity, without realizing the implication of your words, I should never see you again because of your rashness in passing judgment on the dispositions of divine providence."

Whereupon, weak and wasted as he was by his illness, he got out of bed, knelt down, kissed the floor and prayed thus: "Lord, I thank thee for the sufferings thou art sending me. Send me more, if it be thy good pleasure. My pleasure is that you afflict me and spare me not, for the fulfillment of thy holy will is the greatest consolation of my life."

4. Ibid.
Lesson 5 Questions for Reflection:

2. Reflect and Pray: Take some quiet time (5-15 minutes) to reflect and pray about the teachings in the lesson that you have just read, and about how they might apply to your life. Write down your thoughts as you go through the questions and reflection.

Some questions to consider are:
• What particularly stood out to you about this lesson? ________________________________
• How does this lesson apply to your life? ________________________________
• What new realizations have you had about God, yourself, others or your life as a result of reading, reflecting and praying about this lesson and what are they? ________________________________
• Do you have any questions related to this lesson that you want to bring up for discussion (in a group setting or the online dialog box)? ____________
• What decisions, if any, have you have made resulting from the lesson? How will you incorporate them into your life? What changes might you make? ________________________________
• Do you have an related pertinent information to this lesson that you’d like to make a note of to share with others? ________________________________

3. Decide and Act: Decide if and how you will act upon what you learned or what stood out to you in this lesson. Pray for the graces you need to put your decision in practice, for example, the grace to love and trust in God more, the grace to know God's will and to do it, the grace to give up any particular sin, etc.

4. Optional Group Discussion: If you feel comfortable and would like to, take time to share or discuss something that particularly stood out to you about this lesson. You can do this either in a group setting or you can use the online dialog box online.
Lesson 6


by St. Alphonsus de Liguori

We ought to view in the light of God's holy will, the loss of persons who are helpful to us in a spiritual or material way. Pious souls often fail in this respect by not being resigned to the dispositions of God's holy will. Our sanctification comes fundamentally and essentially from God, not from spiritual directors. When God sends us a spiritual director, he wishes us to use him for our spiritual profit; but if he takes him away, he wants us to remain calm and unperturbed and to increase our confidence in his goodness by saying to him: "Lord, thou hast given me this help and now thou dost take it away. Blessed be thy holy will! I beg thee, teach me what I must do to serve thee."

In this manner too, we should receive whatever other crosses God sends us. "But," you reply, "these sufferings are really punishments." The answer to that remark is: Are not the punishments God sends us in this life also graces and benefits? Our offenses against God must be atoned for somehow, either in this life or in the next. Hence we should all make St. Augustine's prayer our own: "Lord, here cut, here burn and spare me not, but spare me in eternity!" Let us say with Job: "Let this be my comfort, that afflicting me with sorrow, he spare not[1]." Having merited hell for our sins, we should be consoled that God chastises us in this life, and animate ourselves to look upon such treatment as a pledge that God wishes to spare us in the next. When God sends us punishments let us say with the high-priest Heli: "It is the Lord, let him do what is good in his sight[2]."

The time of spiritual desolation is also a time for being resigned. When a soul begins to cultivate the spiritual life, God usually showers his consolations upon her to wean her away from the world; but when he sees her making solid progress, he withdraws his hand to test her and to see if she will love and serve him without the reward of sensible consolations. "In this life," as St. Teresa used to say, "our lot is not to enjoy God, but to do his holy will." And again, "Love of God does not consist in experiencing his ten-dernesses, but in serving him with resolution and humility." And in yet another place, "God's true lovers are discovered in times of aridity and temptation."

Let the soul thank God when she experiences his loving endearments, but let her not repine when she finds herself left in desolation. It is important
to lay great stress on this point, because some souls, beginners in the spiri-
tual life, finding themselves in spiritual aridity, think God has abandoned
them, or that the spiritual life is not for them; thus they give up the prac-
tice of prayer and lose what they have previously gained. The time of aridi-
ty is the best time to practice resignation to God's holy will. I do not say
you will feel no pain in seeing yourself deprived of the sensible presence of
God; it is impossible for the soul not to feel it and lament over it, when
even our Lord cried out on the cross: "My God, my God, why hast thou for-
saken me[3]?" In her sufferings, however, the soul should always be
resigned to God's will.

The saints have all experienced desolations and abandonment of soul. "How
impervious to things spiritual, my heart!" cries a St. Bernard. "No savor in
pious reading, no pleasure in meditation nor in prayer!" For the most part it
has been the common lot of the saints to encounter aridities; sensible con-
solations were the exceptions. Such things are rare occurrences granted to
untried souls so that they may not halt on the road to sanctity; the real
delights and happiness that will constitute their reward are reserved for
heaven.

This earth is a place of merit which is acquired by suffering; heaven is a
place of reward and happiness. Hence, in this life the saints neither desired
nor sought the joys of sensible fervor, but rather the fervor of the spirit
toughened in the crucible of suffering. "O how much better it is," says St.
John of Avila, "to endure aridity and temptation by God's will than to be
raised to the heights of contemplation without God's will!"

But you say you would gladly endure desolation if you were certain that it
comes from God, but you are tortured by the anxiety that your desolation
comes by your own fault and is a punishment for your tepidity. Very well,
let us suppose you are right; then get rid of your tepidity and exercise
more diligence in the affairs of your soul. But because you are possibly
experiencing spiritual darkness, are you going to get all wrought up, give
up prayer, and thus make things twice as bad as they are?

Let us assume that this aridity is a punishment for your tepidity. Was it not
God who sent it? Accept your desolation, as your just desserts and unite
yourself to God's holy will. Did you not say that you merited hell? And now
you are complaining? Perhaps you think God should send you consolations!
Away with such ideas and be patient under God's hand. Take up your
prayers again and continue to walk in the way you have entered upon; for
the future, fear lest such laments come from too little humility and too little
resignation to the will of God. Therefore be resigned and say: "Lord, I
accept this punishment from thy hands, and I accept it for as long as it
pleases thee; if it be thy will that I should be thus afflicted for all eternity, I
am satisfied." Such a prayer, though hard to make, will be far more advan-
tageous to you than the sweetest sensible consolations.

It is well to remember, however, that aridity is not always a chastisement; at times it is a disposition of divine providence for our greater spiritual prof-
it and to keep us humble. Lest St. Paul become vain on account of the spir-
itual gifts he had received, the Lord permitted him to be tempted to impuri-
ty: "And lest the greatness of the revelations should exalt me, there was
given me a sting of my flesh, an angel of Satan to buffet me[4]."

Prayer made amid sensible devotion is not much of an achievement: "There
is a friend, a companion at the table, and he will not abide in the day of
distress[5]." You would not consider the casual guest at your table a friend,
but only him who assists you in your need without thought of benefit to
himself. When God sends spiritual darkness and desolation, his true friends
are known.

Palladius, the author of the "Lives of the Fathers of the Desert," experienc-
ing great disgust in prayer, went seeking advice from the abbot Macarius.
The saintly abbot gave him this counsel: "When you are tempted in times
of dryness to give up praying because you seem to be wasting your time,
say: 'Since I cannot pray, I will be satisfied just to remain on watch here in
my cell for the love of Jesus Christ!' "Devout soul, you do the same when
you are tempted to give up prayer just because you seem to be getting
nowhere. Say: "I am going to stay here just to please God."

St. Francis de Sales used to say that if we do nothing else but banish dis-
tractions and temptations in our prayers, the prayer is well made. Tauler
states that persevering prayer in time of dryness will receive greater grace
than prayer made amid great sensible devotion.

Rodriguez cites the case of a person who persevered forty years in prayer
despite aridity, and experienced great spiritual strength as a result of it; on
occasion, when through aridity he would omit meditation he felt spiritually
weak and incapable of good deeds. St. Bonaventure and Gerson both say
that persons who do not experience the recollection they would like to have
in their meditations, often serve God better than they would do if they did
have it; the reason is that lack of recollection keeps them more diligent and
humble; otherwise they would become puffed up with spiritual pride and
grow tepid, vainly believing they had reached the summit of sanctity.

What has been said of dryness holds true of temptations also. Certai-
nly we should strive to avoid temptations; but if God wishes that we
be tempted against faith, purity, or any other virtue, we should not give in
to discouraging lamentations, but submit ourselves with resignation to
God's holy will. St. Paul asked to be freed from temptations to impurity and our Lord answered him, saying: "My grace is sufficient for thee[6]."

So should we act when we find ourselves victims of unrelenting temptations and God seemingly deaf to our prayers. Let us then say: "Lord, do with me, let happen to me what thou wilt; thy grace is sufficient for me. Only never let me lose this grace." Consent to temptation, not temptation of itself, can make us lose the grace of God. Temptation resisted keeps us humble, brings us greater merit, makes us have frequent recourse to God, thus preserving us from offending him and unites us more closely to him in the bonds of his holy love.

Finally, we should be united to God's will in regard to the time and manner of our death. One day St. Gertrude, while climbing up a small hill, lost her footing and fell into a ravine below. After her companions had come to her assistance, they asked her if while falling she had any fear of dying without the sacraments. "I earnestly hope and desire to have the benefit of the sacraments when death is at hand; still, to my way of thinking, the will of God is more important. I believe that the best disposition I could have to die a happy death would be to submit myself to whatever God would wish in my regard. For this reason I desire whatever kind of death God will be pleased to send me."

In his "Dialogues", St. Gregory[7] tells of a certain priest, Santolo by name, who was captured by the Vandals and condemned to death. The barbarians told him to choose the manner of his death. He refused, saying: "I am in God's hands and I gladly accept whatever kind of death he wishes me to suffer at your hands; I wish no other." This reply was so pleasing to God that he miraculously stayed the hand of the executioner ready to behead him. The barbarians were so impressed by the miracle that they freed their prisoner. As regards the manner of our death, therefore, we should esteem that the best kind of death for us which God has designed for us. When therefore we think of our death, let our prayer be: "O Lord, only let me save my soul and I leave the manner of my death to thee!"

We should likewise unite ourselves to God's will when the moment of death is near. What else is this earth but a prison where we suffer and where we are in constant danger of losing God? Hence David prayed: "Bring my soul out of prison[8]." St. Teresa too feared to lose God and when she would hear the striking of the clock, she would find consolation in the thought that the passing of the hour was an hour less of the danger of losing God.

St. John of Avila was convinced that every right-minded person should desire death on account of living in peril of losing divine grace. What can be more pleasant or desirable than by dying a good death, to have the assur-
ance of no longer being able to lose the grace of God? Perhaps you will answer that you have as yet done nothing to deserve this reward. If it were God's will that your life should end now, what would you be doing, living on here against his will? Who knows, you might fall into sin and be lost! Even if you escaped mortal sin, you could not live free from all sin. "Why are we so tenacious of life," exclaims St. Bernard, "when the longer we live, the more we sin[9]?"] A single venial sin is more displeasing to God than all the good works we can perform.

Moreover, the person who has little desire for heaven shows he has little love for God. The true lover desires to be with his beloved. We cannot see God while we remain here on earth; hence the saints have yearned for death so that they might go and behold their beloved Lord, face to face. "Oh, that I might die and behold thy beautiful face!" sighed St. Augustine. And St. Paul: "Having a desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ[10]." "When shall I come and appear before the face of God[11]?" exclaimed the psalmist.

A hunter one day heard the voice of a man singing most sweetly in the forest. Following the sound, he came upon a leper horribly disfigured by the ravages of his disease. Addressing him he said: "How can you sing when you are so terribly afflicted and your death is so near at hand?" And the leper: "Friend, my poor body is a crumbling wall and it is the only thing that separates me from my God. When it falls I shall go forth to God. Time for me is indeed fast running out, so every day I show my happiness by lifting my voice in song."

Lastly, we should unite ourselves to the will of God as regards our degree of grace and glory. True, we should esteem the things that make for the glory of God, but we should show the greatest esteem for those that concern the will of God. We should desire to love God more than the seraphs, but not to a degree higher than God has destined for us. St. John of Avila[12] says: "I believe every saint has had the desire to be higher in grace than he actually was. However, despite this, their serenity of soul always remained unruffled. Their desire for a greater degree of grace sprang not from a consideration of their own good, but of God's. They were content with the degree of grace God had meted out for them, though actually God had given them less. They considered it a greater sign of true love of God to be content with what God had given them, than to desire to have received more."

This means, as Rodriguez explains it, we should be diligent in striving to become perfect, so that tepidity and laziness may not serve as excuses for some to say: "God must help me; I can do only so much for myself." Nevertheless, when we do fall into some fault, we should not lose our
peace of soul and union with the will of God, which permits our fall; nor should we lose our courage. Let us rise at once from this fall, penitently humbling ourselves and by seeking greater help from God, let us continue to march resolutely on the highway of the spiritual life. Likewise, we may well desire to be among the seraphs in heaven, not for our own glory, but for God's, and to love him more; still we should be resigned to his will and be content with that degree of glory which in his mercy he has set for us.

It would be a serious defect to desire the gifts of supernatural prayer -- specifically, ecstasies, visions and revelations. The masters of the spiritual life say that souls thus favored by God, should ask him to take them away so that they may love him out of pure faith -- a way of greater security. Many have come to perfection without these supernatural gifts; the only virtues worth-while are those that draw the soul to holiness of life, namely, the virtue of uniformity with God's holy will. If God does not wish to raise us to the heights of perfection and glory, let us unite ourselves in all things to his holy will, asking him in his mercy, to grant us our soul's salvation. If we act in this manner, the reward will not be slight which we shall receive from the hands of God who loves above all others, souls resigned to his holy will.

1. 1 Job, 6:10.
2. 1 Kings, 3:18.
4. 2 Cor. 12:7.
5. Eccli. 6:10.
6. 2 Cor. 12:9.
8. Ps. 141:8.
11. Ps. 41:3.
Lesson 6 Questions for Reflection:

2. Reflect and Pray: Take some quiet time (5-15 minutes) to reflect and pray about the teachings in the lesson that you have just read, and about how they might apply to your life. Write down your thoughts as you go through the questions and reflection.

Some questions to consider are:
- What particularly stood out to you about this lesson? ______________________________________________________________
- How does this lesson apply to your life? ______________________________________________________________
- What new realizations have you had about God, yourself, others or your life as a result of reading, reflecting and praying about this lesson and what are they? ______________________________________________________________
- Do you have any questions related to this lesson that you want to bring up for discussion (in a group setting or the online dialog box)? __________
- What decisions, if any, have you have made resulting from the lesson? How will you incorporate them into your life? What changes might you make? ______________________________________________________________
- Do you have an related pertinent information to this lesson that you’d like to make a note of to share with others? __________________________

3. Decide and Act: Decide if and how you will act upon what you learned or what stood out to you in this lesson. Pray for the graces you need to put your decision in practice, for example, the grace to love and trust in God more, the grace to know God's will and to do it, the grace to give up any particular sin, etc.

4. Optional Group Discussion: If you feel comfortable and would like to, take time to share or discuss something that particularly stood out to you about this lesson. You can do this either in a group setting or you can use the online dialog box online.
Lesson 7

7. Conclusion.

by St. Alphonsus de Liguori

Finally we should consider the events which are happening to us now and which will happen to us in the future, as coming from the hands of God. Everything we do should be directed to this one end: to do the will of God and to do it solely for the reason that God wills it. To walk more securely on this road we must depend on the guidance of our superiors in external matters, and on our directors in internal matters, to learn from them God's will in our regard, having great faith in the words of our Lord: "He that heareth you, heareth me[1]."

Above all, let us bend all our energies to serve God in the way he wishes. This remark is made so that we may avoid the mistake of him who wastes his time in idle day-dreaming. Such a one says, "If I were to become a hermit, I would become a saint" or "If I were to enter a monastery, I would practice penance" or "If I were to go away from here, leaving friends and companions, I would devote long hours to prayer." If, If, If -- all these if's! In the meantime such a person goes from bad to worse. These idle fancies are often temptations of the devil, because they are not in accord with God's will. Hence we should dismiss them summarily and rouse ourselves to serve God only in that way which he has marked out for us. Doing his holy will, we shall certainly become holy in those surroundings in which he has placed us.

Let us will always and ever only what God wills; for so doing, he will press us to his heart. To this end let us familiarize ourselves with certain texts of sacred scripture that invite us to unite ourselves constantly with the divine will: "Lord, what wilt thou have me do[2]?" Tell me, my God, what thou wilt have me do, that I may will it also, with all my heart. "I am thine, save thou me[3]." I am no longer my own, I am thine, O Lord, do with me as thou wilt.

If some particularly crashing misfortune comes upon us, for example, the death of a relative, loss of goods, let us say: "Yea, Father, for so it hath seemed good in thy sight[4]." Yes, my God and my Father, so be it, for such is thy good pleasure.

Above all, let us cherish that prayer of our Lord, which he himself taught us: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven[5]." Our Lord bade St.
Catherine of Genoa to make a notable pause at these words whenever she said the Our Father, praying that God's holy will be fulfilled on earth with the same perfection with which the saints do it in heaven. Let this be our practice also, and we shall certainly become saints.

May the divine will be loved and praised! May the Immaculate Virgin be also praised!

The End

3. Ps. 118:94.

Lesson 7 Questions for Reflection:

2. Reflect and Pray: Take some quiet time (5-15 minutes) to reflect and pray about the teachings in the lesson that you have just read, and about how they might apply to your life. Write down your thoughts as you go through the questions and reflection.

Some questions to consider are:
• What particularly stood out to you about this lesson? ____________________________________________
• How does this lesson apply to your life? ____________________________________________
• What new realizations have you had about God, yourself, others or your life as a result of reading, reflecting and praying about this lesson and what are they? ____________________________________________
• Do you have any questions related to this lesson that you want to bring up for discussion (in a group setting or the online dialog box)? __________
• What decisions, if any, have you have made resulting from the lesson? How will you incorporate them into your life? What changes might you make? ____________________________________________
3. Decide and Act: Decide if and how you will act upon what you learned or what stood out to you in this lesson. Pray for the graces you need to put your decision in practice, for example, the grace to love and trust in God more, the grace to know God's will and to do it, the grace to give up any particular sin, etc.

4. Optional Group Discussion: If you feel comfortable and would like to, take time to share or discuss something that particularly stood out to you about this lesson. You can do this either in a group setting or you can use the online dialog box online.

Supplementary:

St. Alphonsus de Liguori Biography

From the Catholic Encyclopedia (1908).
Born at Marianella, near Naples, 27 September, 1696; died at Nocera de' Pagani, 1 August, 1787.

The eighteenth century was not an age remarkable for depth of spiritual life, yet it produced three of the greatest missionaries of the Church, St. Leonard of Port Maurice, St. Paul of the Cross, and St. Alphonsus Liguori. Alphonsus Mary Antony John Cosmas Damian Michael Gaspard de' Liguori was born in his father's country house at Marianella near Naples, on Tuesday, 27 September, 1696. He was baptized two days later in the church of Our Lady of the Virgins, in Naples. The family was an old and noble one, though the branch to which the Saint belonged had become somewhat impoverished. Alphonsus's father, Don Joseph de' Liguori was a naval officer and Captain of the Royal Galleys. The Saint's mother was of Spanish descent, and if, as there can be little doubt, race is an element in individual character, we may see in Alphonsus's Spanish blood some explanation of the enormous tenacity of purpose which distinguished him from his earliest years. "I know his obstinacy", his father said of him as a young man; "when he once makes up his mind he is inflexible". Not many details have come down to us of Alphonsus's childhood. He was the eldest of seven children and the hope of his house. The boy was bright and quick beyond his years, and made great progress in all kinds of learning. In addition his father made him practice the harpsichord for three hours a day, and at the age of thirteen he played with the perfection of a master. Riding
and fencing were his recreations, and an evening game of cards; he tells us that he was debarred from being a good shot by his bad sight. In early manhood he became very fond of the opera, but only that he might listen to the music, for when the curtain went up he took his glasses off, so as not to see the players distinctly. The Neapolitan stage at this time was in a good state, but the Saint had from his earliest years an ascetic repugnance to theatres, a repugnance which he never lost. The childish fault for which he most reproached himself in after-life was resisting his father too strongly when he was told to take part in a drawing-room play. Alphonsus was not sent to school but was educated by tutors under his father's eye. At the age of sixteen, on 21 January, 1713, he took his degree as Doctor of Laws, although twenty was the age fixed by the statutes. He said himself that he was so small at the time as to be almost buried in his doctor's gown and that all the spectators laughed. Soon after this the boy began his studies for the Bar, and about the age of nineteen practised his profession in the courts. In the eight years of his career as advocate, years crowded with work, he is said never to have lost a case. Even if there be some exaggeration in this, for it is not in an advocate's power always to be on the winning side, the tradition shows that he was extraordinarily able and successful. In fact, despite his youth, he seems at the age of twenty-seven to have been one of the leaders of the Neapolitan Bar.

Alphonsus, like so many saints, had an excellent father and a saintly mother. Don Joseph de' Liguori had his faults. He was somewhat worldly and ambitious, at any rate for his son, and was rough tempered when opposed. But he was a man of genuine faith and piety and stainless life, and he meant his son to be the same. Even when taking him into society in order to arrange a good marriage for him, he wished Alphonsus to put God first, and every year father and son would make a retreat together in some religious house. Alphonsus, assisted by divine grace, did not disappoint his father's care. A pure and modest boyhood passed into a manhood without reproach. A companion, Balthasar Cito, who afterwards became a distinguished judge, was asked in later years if Alphonsus had ever shown signs of levity in his youth. He answered emphatically: "Never! It would be a sacrilege to say otherwise." The Saint's confessor declared that he preserved his baptismal innocence till death. Still there was a time of danger.

There can be little doubt but that the young Alphonsus with his high spirits and strong character was ardently attached to his profession, and on the way to be spoilt by the success and popularity which it brought. About the year 1722, when he was twenty-six years old, he began to go constantly into society, to neglect prayer and the practices of piety which had been an integral part of his life, and to take pleasure in the attention with which he was everywhere received.

"Banquets, entertainments, theatres," he wrote later on--"these are the pleasures of the world, but pleasures which are filled with the bitterness of gall and sharp thorns. Believe me who have experienced it, and now weep over it." In all this there was no serious sin, but there was no high sanctity either, and God, Who wished His servant to be a saint and a great saint, was now to make him take the road to Damascus. In 1723 there was a lawsuit in the courts between a Neapolitan nobleman, whose name has not come down to us, and the Grand Duke of Tuscany, in which property valued at 500,000 ducats, that is to say, $500,000 or 100,000
pounds, was at stake. Alphonsus was one of the leading counsel; we do not know on which side. When the day came the future Saint made a brilliant opening speech and sat down confident of victory. But before he called a witness the opposing counsel said to him in chilling tones: "Your arguments are wasted breath. You have overlooked a document which destroys your whole case." "What document is that?" said Alphonsus somewhat piqued. "Let us have it." A piece of evidence was handed to him which he had read and re-read many times, but always in a sense the exact contrary of that which he now saw it to have. The poor advocate turned pale. He remained thunderstruck for a moment; then said in a broken voice: "You are right. I have been mistaken. This document gives you the case." In vain those around him and even the judge on the bench tried to console him. He was crushed to the earth. He thought his mistake would be ascribed not to oversight but to deliberate deceit. He felt as if his career was ruined, and left the court almost beside himself, saying: "World, I know you now. Courts, you shall never see me more." For three days he refused all food. Then the storm subsided, and he began to see that his humiliation had been sent him by God to break down his pride and wean him from the world. Confident that some special sacrifice was required of him, though he did not yet know what, he did not return to his profession, but spent his days in prayer, seeking to know God's will. After a short interval—we do not know exactly how long—the answer came. On 28 August, 1723, the young advocate had gone to perform a favourite act of charity by visiting the sick in the Hospital for Incurables. Suddenly he found himself surrounded by a mysterious light; the house seemed to rock, and an interior voice said: "Leave the world and give thyself to Me." This occurred twice. Alphonsus left the Hospital and went to the church of the Redemption of Captives. Here he laid his sword before the statue of Our Lady, and made a solemn resolution to enter the ecclesiastical state, and furthermore to offer himself as a novice to the Fathers of the Oratory. He knew that trials were before him. His father, already displeased at the failure of two plans for his son's marriage, and exasperated at Alphonsus's present neglect of his profession, was likely to offer a strenuous opposition to his leaving the world. So indeed it proved. He had to endure a real persecution for two months. In the end a compromise was arrived at. Don Joseph agreed to allow his son to become a priest, provided he would give up his proposal joining the Oratory, and would continue to live at home. To this Alphonsus by the advice of his director, Father Thomas Pagano, himself an Oratorian, agreed. Thus was he left free for his real work, the founding of a new religious congregation. On 23 October of the same year, 1723, the Saint put on the clerical dress. In September of the next year he received the tonsure and soon after joined the association of missionary secular priests called the "Neapolitan Propaganda", membership of which did not entail residence in common. In December, 1724, he received minor orders, and the subdiaconate in September, 1725. On 6 April, 1726, he was ordained deacon, and soon after preached his first sermon. On 21 December of the same year, at the age of thirty, he was ordained priest. For six years he laboured in and around Naples, giving missions for the Propaganda and preaching to the lazzaroni of the capital. With the aid of two laymen, Peter Barbarese, a schoolmaster, and Nardone, an old soldier, both of whom he converted from an evil life, he enrolled thousands of lazzaroni in a sort of confraternity called the "Association of the Chapels", which exists to this day. Then God called him to his life work.
In April 1729, the Apostle of China, Matthew Ripa, founded a missionary college in Naples, which became known colloquially as the "Chinese College". A few months later Alphonsus left his father's house and went to live with Ripa, without, however, becoming a member of his society. In his new abode he met a friend of his host's, Father Thomas Falcoia, of the Congregation of the "Pii Operarii" (Pious Workers), and formed with him the great friendship of his life. There was a considerable difference in age between the two men, for Falcoia, born in 1663, was now sixty-six, and Alphonsus only thirty-three, but the old priest and the young had kindred souls. Many years before, in Rome, Falcoia had been shown a vision of a new religious family of men and women whose particular aim should be the perfect imitation of the virtues of Our Lord. He had even tried to form a branch of the Institute by uniting twelve priests in a common life at Tarentum, but the community soon broke up. In 1719, together with a Father Filangieri, also one of the "Pii Operarii", he had refounded a Conservatorium of religious women at Scala on the mountains behind Amalfi. But as he drew up a rule for them, formed from that of the Visitation nuns, he does not seem to have had any clear idea of establishing the new institute of his vision. God, however, intended the new institute to begin with these nuns of Scala. In 1724, soon after Alphonsus left the world, a postulant, Julia Crostarosa, born in Naples on 31 October, 1696, and hence almost the same age as the Saint, entered the convent of Scala. She became known in religion as Sister Maria Celeste. In 1725, while still a novice, she had a series of visions in which she saw a new order (apparently of nuns only) similar to that revealed to Falcoia many years before. Even its Rule was made known to her. She was told to write it down and show it to the director of the convent, that is to Falcoia himself. While affecting to treat the novice with severity and to take no notice of her visions, the director was surprised to find that the Rule which she had written down was a realization of what had been so long in his mind. He submitted the new Rule to a number of theologians, who approved of it, and said it might be adopted in the convent of Scala, provided the community would accept it. But when the question was put to the community, opposition began. Most were in favour of accepting, but the superior objected and appealed to Filangieri, Falcoia's colleague in establishing the convent, and now, as General of the "Pii Operarii", his superior. Filangieri forbade any change of rule and removed Falcoia from all communication with the convent. Matters remained thus for some years. About 1729, however, Filangieri died, and on 8 October, 1730, Falcoia was consecrated Bishop of Castellamare. He was now free, subject to the approval of the Bishop of Scala, to act with regard to the convent as he thought best. It happened that Alphonsus, ill and overworked, had gone with some companions to Scala in the early summer of 1730. Unable to be idle, he had preached to the goatherds of the mountains with such success that Nicolas Guerriero, Bishop of Scala, begged him to return and give a retreat in his cathedral.

Falcoia, hearing of this, begged his friend to give a retreat to the nuns of his Conservatorium at the same time. Alphonsus agreed to both requests and set out with his two friends, John Mazzini and Vincent Mannarini, in September, 1730. The result of the retreat to the nuns was that the young priest, who before had been prejudiced by reports in Naples against the proposed new Rule, became its firm supporter, and even obtained permission from the Bishop of Scala for the change. In 1731, the convent unanimously adopted the new Rule, together with a habit of
red and blue, the traditional colours of Our Lord's own dress. One branch of the
new Institute seen by Falcoia in vision was thus established. The other was not to
be long delayed. No doubt Thomas Falcoia had for some time hoped that the
ardent young priest, who was so devoted to him, might, under his direction, be
the founder of the new Order he had at heart. A fresh vision of Sister Maria
Celeste seemed to show that such was the will of God. On 3 October, 1731, the
eve of the feast of St. Francis, she saw Our Lord with St. Francis on His right hand
and a priest on His left. A voice said "This is he whom I have chosen to be head of
My Institute, the Prefect General of a new Congregation of men who shall work for
My glory." The priest was Alphonsus. Soon after, Falcoia made known to the latter
his vocation to leave Naples and establish an order of missionaries at Scala, who
should work above all for the neglected goatherds of the mountains. A year of
trouble and anxiety followed.

The Superior of the Propaganda and even Falcoia's friend, Matthew Ripa, opposed
the project with all their might. But Alphonsus's director, Father Pagano; Father
Fiorillo, a great Dominican preacher; Father Manulio, Provincial of the Jesuits; and
Vincent Cutica, Superior of the Vincentians, supported the young priest, and, 9
November, 1732, the "Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer", or as it was
called for seventeen years, "of the Most Holy Saviour", was begun in a little hos-
pice belonging to the nuns of Scala. Though St. Alphonsus was founder and de
facto head of the Institute, its general direction in the beginning, as well as the
direction of Alphonsus's conscience, was undertaken by the Bishop of Castellamare
and it was not till the latter's death, 20 April, 1743, that a general chapter was
held and the Saint was formally elected Superior-General. In fact, in the begin-
ning, the young priest in his humility would not be Superior even of the house,
judging one of his companions, John Baptist Donato, better fitted for the post
because he had already had some experience of community life in another insti-
tute.

The early years, following the founding of the new order, were not promising.
Dissensions arose, the Saint's former friend and chief companion, Vincent
Mannarini, opposing him and Falcoia in everything. On 1 April, 1733, all the com-
panions of Alphonsus except one lay brother, Vitus Curtius, abandoned him, and
founded the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament, which, confined to the
Kingdom of Naples, was extinguished in 1860 by the Italian Revolution. The dis-
sensions even spread to the nuns, and Sister Maria Celeste herself left Scala and
founded a convent at Foggia, where she died in the odour of sanctity, 14
September, 1755. She was declared Venerable 11 August, 1901. Alphonsus, how-
ever, stood firm; soon other companions arrived, and though Scala itself was given
up by the Fathers in 1738, by 1746 the new Congregation had four houses at
Nocera de' Pagani, Ciorani, Iliceto (now Deliceto), and Caposele, all in the
Kingdom of Naples. In 1749, the Rule and Institute of men were approved by Pope
Benedict XIV, and in 1750, the Rule and Institute of the nuns. Alphonsus was
lawyer, founder, religious superior, bishop, theologian, and mystic, but he was
above all a missionary, and no true biography of the Saint will neglect to give this
due prominence. From 1726 to 1752, first as a member of the Neapolitan
"Propaganda", and then as a leader of his own Fathers, he traversed the provinces
of Naples for the greater part of each year giving missions even in the smallest
villages and saving many souls. A special feature of his method was the return of the missionaries, after an interval of some months, to the scene of their labours to consolidate their work by what was called the "renewal of a mission."

After 1752 Alphonsus gave fewer missions. His infirmities were increasing, and he was occupied a good deal with his writings. His promotion to the episcopate in 1762 led to a renewal of his missionary activity, but in a slightly different form. The Saint had four houses, but during his lifetime it not only became impossible in the Kingdom of Naples to get any more, but even the barest toleration for those he had could scarcely be obtained. The cause of this was "regalism", the omnipotence of kings even in matters spiritual, which was the system of government in Naples as in all the Bourbon States. The immediate author of what was practically a lifelong persecution of the Saint was the Marquis Tanucci, who entered Naples in 1734. Naples had been part of the dominions of Spain since 1503, but in 1708 when Alphonsus was twelve years old, it was conquered by Austria during the war of the Spanish Succession. In 1734, however, it was reconquered by Don Carlos, the young Duke of Parma, great-grandson of Louis XIV, and the independent Bourbon Kingdom of the Two Sicilies was established. With Don Carlos, or as he is generally called, Charles III, from his later title as King of Spain, came the lawyer, Bernard Tanucci, who governed Naples as Prime Minister and regent for the next forty-two years. This was to be a momentous revolution for Alphonsus. Had it happened a few years later, the new Government might have found the Redemptorist Congregation already authorized, and as Tanucci's anti-clerical policy rather showed itself in forbidding new Orders than, with the exception of the Society of Jesus, in suppressing old ones, the Saint might have been free to develop his work in comparative peace. As it was, he was refused the royal exequatur to the Brief of Benedict XIV, and State recognition of his Institute as a religious congregation till the day of his death. There were whole years, indeed, in which the Institute seemed on the verge of summary suppression. The suffering which this brought on Alphonsus, with his sensitive and high-strung disposition, was very great, besides what was worse, the relaxation of discipline and loss of vocations which it caused in the Order itself. Alphonsus, however, was unflagging in his efforts with the Court. It may be he was even too anxious, and on one occasion when he was over-whelmed by a fresh refusal, his friend the Marquis Brancone, Minister for Ecclesiastical Affairs and a man of deep piety, said to him gently: "It would seem as if you placed all your trust here below"; on which the Saint recovered his peace of mind. A final attempt to gain the royal approval, which seemed as if at last it had been successful, led to the crowning sorrow of Alphonsus's life: the division and apparent ruin of his Congregation and the displeasure of the Holy See. This was in 1780, when Alphonsus was eighty-three years old. But, before relating the episode of the "Regolamento", as it is called, we must speak of the period of the Saint's episcopate which intervened.

In the year 1747, King Charles of Naples wished to make Alphonsus Archbishop of Palermo, and it was only by the most earnest entreaties that he was able to escape. In 1762, there was no escape and he was constrained by formal obedience to the Pope to accept the Bishopric of St. Agatha of the Goths, a very small Neapolitan diocese lying a few miles off the road from Naples to Capua. Here with 30,000 uninstructed people, 400 mostly indifferent and sometimes scandalous sec-
ular clergy, and seventeen more or less relaxed religious houses to look after, in a field so overgrown with weeds that they seemed the only crop, he wept and prayed and spent days and nights in unremitting labour for thirteen years. More than once he faced assassination unmoved. In a riot which took place during the terrible famine that fell upon Southern Italy in 1764, he saved the life of the syndic of St. Agatha by offering his own to the mob. He fed the poor, instructed the ignorant, reorganized his seminary, reformed his convents, created a new spirit in his clergy, banished scandalous noblemen and women of evil life with equal impartiality, brought the study of theology and especially of moral theology into honour, and all the time was begging pope after pope to let him resign his office because he was doing nothing for his diocese. To all his administrative work we must add his continual literary labours, his many hours of daily prayer, his terrible austerities, and a stress of illness which made his life a martyrdom.

Eight times during his long life, without counting his last sickness, the Saint received the sacraments of the dying, but the worst of all his illnesses was a terrible attack of rheumatic fever during his episcopate, an attack which lasted from May, 1768, to June, 1769, and left him paralyzed to the end of his days. It was this which gave St. Alphonsus the bent head which we notice in the portraits of him. So bent was it in the beginning, that the pressure of his chin produced a dangerous wound in the chest. Although the doctors succeeded in straightening the neck a little, the Saint for the rest of his life had to drink at meals through a tube. He could never have said Mass again had not an Augustinian prior shown him how to support himself on a chair so that with the assistance of an acolyte he could raise the chalice to his lips. But in spite of his infirmities both Clement XIII (1758-69) and Clement XIV (1769-74) obliged Alphonsus to remain at his post. In February, 1775, however, Pius VI was elected Pope, and the following May he permitted the Saint to resign his see.

Alphonsus returned to his little cell at Nocera in July, 1775, to prepare, as he thought, for a speedy and happy death. Twelve years, however, still separated him from his reward, years for the most part not of peace but of greater afflictions than any which had yet befallen him. By 1777, the Saint, in addition to four houses in Naples and one in Sicily, had four others at Scifelli, Frosinone, St. Angelo a Cupolo, and Beneventum, in the States of the Church. In case things became hopeless in Naples, he looked to these houses to maintain the Rule and Institute. In 1780, a crisis arose in which they did this, yet in such a way as to bring division in the Congregation and extreme suffering and disgrace upon its founder. The crisis arose in this way. From the year 1759 two former benefactors of the Congregation, Baron Sarnelli and Francis Maffei, by one of those changes not uncommon in Naples, had become its bitter enemies, and waged a vendetta against it in the law courts which lasted for twenty-four years. Sarnelli was almost openly supported by the all-powerful Tanucci, and the suppression of the Congregation at last seemed a matter of days, when on 26 October, 1776, Tanucci, who had offended Queen Maria Carolina, suddenly fell from power. Under the government of the Marquis della Sambuca, who, though a great regalist, was a personal friend of the Saint's, there was promise of better times, and in August, 1779, Alphonsus's hopes were raised by the publication of a royal decree allowing him to appoint superiors in his Congregation and to have a novitiate and house of
studies. The Government throughout had recognized the good effect of his mis-
sions, but it wished the missionaries to be secular priests and not a religious order. 
The Decree of 1779, however, seemed a great step in advance. Alphonsus, having 
got so much, hoped to get a little more, and through his friend, Mgr. Testa, the 
Grand Almoner, even to have his Rule approved. He did not, as in the past, ask for 
an exequatur to the Brief of Benedict XIV, for relations at the time were more 
strained than ever between the Courts of Rome and Naples; but he hoped the king 
might give an independent sanction to his Rule, provided he waived all legal right 
to hold property in common, which he was quite prepared to do. It was all-impor-
tant to the Fathers to be able to rebut the charge of being an illegal religious con-
gregation, which was one of the chief allegations in the ever-adjourned and ever-
impending action by Baron Sarnelli. Perhaps in any case the submission of their 
Rule to a suspicious and even hostile civil power was a mistake. At all events, it 
proved disastrous in the result. Alphonsus being so old and so inform--he was 
eighty-five, crippled, deaf, and nearly blind--his one chance of success was to be 
faithfully served by friends and subordinates, and he was betrayed at every turn. 
His friend the Grand Almoner betrayed him; his two envoys for negotiating with 
the Grand Almoner, Fathers Majone and Cimino, betrayed him, consultants general 
though they were. His very confessor and vicar general in the government of his 
Order, Father Andrew Villani, joined in the conspiracy. In the end the Rule was so 
altered as to be hardly recognizable, the very vows of religion being abolished. To 
this altered Rule or "Regolamento", as it came to be called, the unsuspecting Saint 
was induced to put his signature. It was approved by the king and forced upon the 
stupefied Congregation by the whole power of the State. a fearful commotion 
arose. Alphonsus himself was not spared. Vague rumours of impending treachery 
had got about and had been made known to him, but he had refused tobelieve 
them. "You have founded the Congregation and you have destroyed it", said one 
Father to him. The Saint only wept in silence and tried in vain to devise some 
means by which his Order might be saved. His best plan would have been to con-
sult the Holy See, but in this he had been forestalled. The Fathers in the Papal 
States, with too precipitate zeal, in the very beginning denounced the change of 
Rule to Rome. Pius VI, already deeply displeased with the Neapolitan Government, 
took the fathers in his own dominions under his special protection, forbade all 
change of rule in their houses, and even withdrew them fromobedience to the 
Neapolitan superiors, that is to St. Alphonsus, till an inquiry could be held. A long 
process followed in the Court of Rome, and on 22 September, 1780, a provisional 
Decree, which on 24 August, 1781, was made absolute, recognized the houses in 
the Papal States as alone constituting the Redemptorist Congregation. Father 
Francis de Paula, one of the chief appellants, was appointed their Superior 
General, "in place of those", so the brief ran, "who being higher superiors of the 
said Congregation have with their followers adopted a new system essentially dif-
ferent from the old, and have deserted the Institute in which they were professed, 
and have thereby ceased to be members of the Congregation." So the Saint was 
cut off from his own Order by the Pope who was to declare him "Venerable". In 
this state of exclusion he lived for seven years more and in it he died. It was only 
after his death, as he had prophesied, that the Neapolitan Government at last rec-
ognized the original Rule, and that the Redemptorist Congregation was reunited 
under one head (1793).
Alphonsus had still one final storm to meet, and then the end. About three years before his death he went through a veritable "Night of the Soul". Fearful temptations against every virtue crowded upon him, together with diabolical apparitions and illusions, and terrible scruples and impulses to despair which made life a hell. At last came peace, and on 1 August, 1787, as the midday Angelus was ringing, the Saint passed peacefully to his reward. He had nearly completed his ninety-first year. He was declared "Venerable", 4 May, 1796; was beatified in 1816, and canonized in 1839. In 1871, he was declared a Doctor of the Church.

"Alphonsus was of middle height", says his first biographer, Tannoia; "his head was rather large, his hair black, and beard well-grown." He had a pleasant smile, and his conversation was very agreeable, yet he had great dignity of manner. He was a born leader of men. His devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and to Our Lady was extraordinary. He had a tender charity towards all who were in trouble; he would go to any length to try to save a vocation; he would expose himself to death to prevent sin. He had a love for the lower animals, and wild creatures who fled from all else would come to him as to a friend. Psychologically, Alphonsus may be classed among twice-born souls; that is to say, there was a definitely marked break or conversion, in his life, in which he turned, not from serious sin, for that he never committed, but from comparative worldliness, to thorough self-sacrifice for God. Alphonsus's temperament was very ardent. He was a man of strong passions, using the term in the philosophic sense, and tremendous energy, but from childhood his passions were under control. Yet, to take anger alone, though comparatively early in life he seemed dead to insult or injury which affected himself, in cases of cruelty, or of injustice to others, or of dishonour to God, he showed a prophet's indignation even in old age. Ultimately, however, anything merely human in this had disappeared. At the worst, it was only the scaffolding by which the temple of perfection was raised. Indeed, apart from those who become saints by the altogether special grace of martyrdom, it may be doubted if many men and women of phlegmatic temperament have been canonized. The differentia of saints is not faultlessness but driving-power, a driving-power exerted in generous self-sacrifice and ardent love of God. The impulse to this passionate service of God comes from Divine grace, but the soul must correspond (which is also a grace of God), and the soul of strong will and strong passions corresponds best. The difficulty about strong wills and strong passions is that they are hard to tame, but when they are tamed they are the raw material of sanctity.

Not less remarkable than the intensity with which Alphonsus worked is the amount of work he did. His perseverance was indomitable. He both made and kept a vow not to lose a single moment of time. He was helped in this by his turn of mind which was extremely practical. Though a good dogmatic theologian--a fact which has not been sufficiently recognized--he was not a metaphysician like the great scholastics. He was a lawyer, not only during his years at the Bar, but throughout his whole life--a lawyer, who to skilled advocacy and an enormous knowledge of practical detail added a wide and luminous hold of underlying principles. It was this which made him the prince of moral theologians, and gained him, when canonization made it possible, the title of "Doctor of the Church". This combination of practical common sense with extraordinary energy in administrative work ought to make Alphonsus, if he were better known, particularly attractive to the English-
speaking nations, especially as he is so modern a saint. But we must not push
resemblances too far. If in some things Alphonsus was an Anglo-Saxon, in others
he was a Neapolitan of the Neapolitans, though always a saint. He often writes as
a Neapolitan to Neapolitans. Were the vehement things in his letters and writings,
especially in the matter of rebuke or complaint, to appraised as if uttered by an
Anglo-Saxon in cold blood, we might be surprised and even shocked. Neapolitan
students, in an animated but amicable discussion, seem to foreign eyes to be tak-
ing part in a violent quarrel. St. Alphonsus appeared a miracle of calm to Tannoia.
Could he have been what an Anglo-Saxon would consider a miracle of calm, he
would have seemed to his companions absolutely inhuman. The saints are not
inhuman but real men of flesh and blood, however much some hagiographers may
ignore the fact.

While the continual intensity of reiterated acts of virtue which we have called dri-
ving-power is what really creates sanctity, there is another indispensable quality.
The extreme difficulty of the lifelong work of fashioning a saint consists precisely
in this, that every act of virtue the saint performs goes to strengthen his charac-
ter, that is, his will. On the other hand, ever since the Fall of Man, the will of man
has been his greatest danger. It has a tendency at every moment to deflect, and if
it does deflect from the right path, the greater the momentum the more terrible
the final crash. Now the saint has a very great momentum indeed, and a spoiled
saint is often a great villain.

To prevent the ship going to pieces on the rocks, it has need of a very responsive
rudder, answering to the slightest pressure of Divine guidance. The rudder is
humility, which, in the intellect, is a realization of our own unworthiness, and in
the will, docility to right guidance. But how was Alphonsus to grow in this so nec-
essary virtue when he was in authority nearly all his life? The answer is that God
kept him humble by interior trials. From his earliest years he had an anxious fear
about committing sin which passed at times into scruple.

He who ruled and directed others so wisely, had, where his own soul was con-
cerned, to depend on obedience like a little child. To supplement this, God allowed
him in the last years of his life to fall into disgrace with the pope, and to find him-
self deprived of all external authority, trembling at times even for his eternal sal-
vation. St. Alphonsus does not offer as much directly to the student of mystical
theology as do some contemplative saints who have led more retired lives.
Unfortunately, he was not obliged by his confessor, in virtue of holy obedience, as
St. Teresa was, to write down his states of prayer; so we do not know precisely
what they were. The prayer he recommended to his Congregation, of which we
have beautiful examples in his ascetical works, is affective; the use of short aspi-
rations, petitions, and acts of love, rather than discursive meditation with long
reflection. His own prayer was perhaps for the most part what some call "active",
others "ordinary", contemplation. Of extraordinary passive states, such as rapture,
there are not many instances recorded in his life, though there are some. At three
different times in his missions, while preaching, a ray of light from a picture of Our
Lady darted towards him, and he fell into an ecstasy before the people. In old age
he was more than once raised in the air when speaking of God.

His intercession healed the sick; he read the secrets of hearts, and foretold the
future. He fell into a clairvoyant trance at Arienzo on 21 September, 1774, and
was present in spirit at the death-bed in Rome of Pope Clement XIV.
It was comparatively late in life that Alphonsus became a writer. If we except a few poems published in 1733 (the Saint was born in 1696), his first work, a tiny volume called "Visits to the Blessed Sacrament", only appeared in 1744 or 1745, when he was nearly fifty years old. Three years later he published the first sketch of his "Moral Theology" in a single quarto volume called "Annotations to Busembaum", a celebrated Jesuit moral theologian. He spent the next few years in recasting this work, and in 1753 appeared the first volume of the "Theologia Moralis", the second volume, dedicated to Benedict XIV, following in 1755. Nine editions of the "Moral Theology" appeared in the Saint's life-time, those of 1748, 1753-1755, 1757, 1760, 1763, 1767, 1773, 1779, and 1785, the "Annotations to Busembaum" counting as the first. In the second edition the work received the definite form it has since retained, though in later issues the Saint retracted a number of opinions, corrected minor ones, and worked at the statement of his theory of Equiprobabilism till at last he considered it complete. In addition, he published many editions of compendiums of his larger work, such as the "Homo Apostolicus", made in 1759. The "Moral Theology", after an historical introduction by the Saint's friend, P. Zaccaria, S.J., which was omitted, however, from the eighth and ninth editions, begins with a treatise "De Conscientia", followed by one "De Legibus". These form the first book of the work, while the second contains the treatises on Faith, Hope, and Charity. The third book deals with the Ten Commandments, the fourth with the monastic and clerical states, and the duties of judges, advocates, doctors, merchants, and others. The fifth book has two treatises "De Actibus Humanis" and "De Peccatis"; the sixth is on the sacraments, the seventh and last on the censures of the Church.

St. Alphonsus as a moral theologian occupies the golden mean between the schools tending either to laxity or to rigour which divided the theological world of his time. When he was preparing for the priesthood in Naples, his masters were of the rigid school, for though the center of Jansenistic disturbance was in northern Europe, no shore was so remote as not to feel the ripple of its waves. When the Saint began to hear confessions, however, he soon saw the harm done by rigourism, and for the rest of his life he inclined more to the mild school of the Jesuit theologians, whom he calls "the masters of morals". St. Alphonsus, however, did not in all things follow their teaching, especially on one point much debated in the schools; namely, whether we may in practice follow an opinion which denies a moral obligation, when the opinion which affirms a moral obligation seems to us to be altogether more probable. This is the great question of "Probabilism". St. Alphonsus, after publishing anonymously (in 1749 and 1755) two treatises advocating the right to follow the less probable opinion, in the end decided against that lawfulness, and in case of doubt only allowed freedom from obligation where the opinions for and against the law were equal or nearly equal. He called his system Equiprobabilism. It is true that theologians even of the broadest school are agreed that, when an opinion in favour of the law is so much more probable as to amount practically to moral certainty, the less probable opinion cannot be followed, and some have supposed that St. Alphonsus meant no more than this by his terminology. According to this view he chose a different formula from the Jesuit writers, partly because he thought his own terms more exact, and, partly to save his teaching and his congregation as far as possible from the State persecution which
after 1764 had already fallen so heavily on the Society of Jesus, and in 1773 was formally to suppress it. It is a matter for friendly controversy, but it seems there was a real difference, though not as great in practice as is supposed, between the Saint's later teaching and that current in the Society. Alphonsus was a lawyer, and as a lawyer he attached much importance to the weight of evidence. In a civil action a serious preponderance of evidence gives one side the case. If civil courts could not decide against a defendant on greater probability, but had to wait, as a criminal court must wait, for moral certainty, many actions would never be decided at all. St. Alphonsus likened the conflict between law and liberty to a civil action in which the law has the onus probandi, although greater probabilities give it a verdict. Pure probabilism likens it to a criminal trial, in which the jury must find in favour of liberty (the prisoner at the bar) if any single reasonable doubt whatever remain in its favour. Furthermore, St. Alphonsus was a great theologian, and so attached much weight to intrinsic probability. He was not afraid of making up his mind. "I follow my conscience", he wrote in 1764, "and when reason persuades me I make little account of moralists." To follow an opinion in favour of liberty without weighing it, merely because it is held by someone else, would have seemed to Alphonsus an abdication of the judicial office with which as a confessor he was invested. Still it must in fairness be admitted that all priests are not great theologians able to estimate intrinsic probability at its true worth, and the Church herself might be held to have conceded something to pure probabilism by the unprecedented honours she paid to the Saint in her Decree of 22 July, 1831, which allows confessors to follow any of St. Alphonsus's own opinions without weighing the reasons on which they were based.

Besides his Moral Theology, the Saint wrote a large number of dogmatic and ascetical works nearly all in the vernacular. The "Glories of Mary", "The Selva", "The True Spouse of Christ", "The Great Means of Prayer", "The Way of Salvation", "Opera Dogmatica, or History of the Council of Trent", and "Sermons for all the Sundays in the Year", are the best known. He was also a poet and musician. His hymns are justly celebrated in Italy. Quite recently, a duet composed by him, between the Soul and God, was found in the British Museum bearing the date 1760 and containing a correction in his own handwriting.

Finally, St. Alphonsus was a wonderful letter-writer, and the mere salvage of his correspondence amounts to 1,451 letters, filling three large volumes. It is not necessary to notice certain non-Catholic attacks on Alphonsus as a patron of lying. St. Alphonsus was so scrupulous about truth that when, in 1776, the regalist, Mgr. Filingeri, was made Archbishop of Naples, the Saint would not write to congratulate the new primate, even at the risk of making another powerful enemy for his persecuted Congregation, because he thought he could not honestly say he "was glad to hear of the appointment." It will be remembered that even as a young man his chief distress at his breakdown in court was the fear that his mistake might be ascribed to deceit. The question as to what does or does not constitute a lie is not an easy one, but it is a subject in itself. Alphonsus said nothing in his "Moral Theology" which is not the common teaching of Catholic theologians.

Very few remarks upon his own times occur in the Saint's letters. The eighteenth century was one series of great wars; that of the Spanish, Polish, and Austrian
Succession; the Seven Years' War, and the War of American Independence, ending with the still more gigantic struggles in Europe, which arose out of the events of 1789. Except in '45, in all of these, down to the first shot fired at Lexington, the English-speaking world was on one side and the Bourbon States, including Naples, on the other. But to all this secular history about the only reference in the Saint's correspondence which has come down to us is a sentence in a letter of April, 1744, which speaks of the passage of the Spanish troops who had come to defend Naples against the Austrians. He was more concerned with the spiritual conflict which was going on at the same time. The days were indeed evil. Infidelity and impiety were gaining ground; Voltaire and Rousseau were the idols of society; and the ancien régime, by undermining religion, its one support, was tottering to its fall. Alphonsus was a devoted friend of the Society of Jesus and its long persecution by the Bourbon Courts, ending in its suppression in 1773, filled him with grief. He died on the very eve of the great Revolution which was to sweep the persecutors away, having seen in vision the woes which the French invasion of 1798 was to bring on Naples.

An interesting series of portraits might be painted of those who play a part in the Saint's history: Charles III and his minister Tanucci; Charle's son Ferdinand, and Ferdinand's strange and unhappy Queen, Maria Carolina, daughter of Maria Teresa and sister of Marie Antoinette. Cardinals Spinelli, Sersale, and Orsini; Popes Benedict XIV, Clement XIII, Clement XIV, and Pius VI, to each of whom Alphonsus dedicated a volume of his works. Even the baleful shadow of Voltaire falls across the Saint's life, for Alphonsus wrote to congratulate him on a conversion, which alas, never took place! Again, we have a friendship of thirty years with the great Venetian publishing house of Remondini, whose letters from the Saint, carefully preserved as became business men, fill a quarto volume. Other personal friends of Alphonsus were the Jesuit Fathers de Matteis, Zaccaria, and Nonnotte.

A respected opponent was the redoubtable Dominican controversialist, P. Vincenzo Patuzzi, while to make up for hard blows we have another Dominican, P. Caputo, President of Alphonsus's seminary and a devoted helper in his work of reform. To come to saints, the great Jesuit missionary St. Francis di Geronimo took the little Alphonsus in his arms, blessed him, and prophesied that he would do great work for God; while a Franciscan, St. John Joseph of the Cross, was well known to Alphonsus in later life. Both of them were canonized on the same day as the Holy Doctor, 26 May, 1839. St. Paul of the Cross (1694-1775) and St. Alphonsus, who were altogether contemporaries, seem never to have met on earth, though the founder of the Passionists was a great friend of Alphonsus's uncle, Mgr. Cavaleri, himself a great servant of God. Other saints and servants of God were those of Alphonsus's own household, the lay brother, St. Gerard Majella, who died in 1755, and Januarius Sarnelli, Caesar Sportelli, Dominic Blasucci, and Maria Celeste, all of whom have been declared "Venerable" by the Church.

Blessed Clement Hofbauer joined the Redemptorist congregation in the aged Saint's lifetime, though Alphonsus never saw in the flesh the man whom he knew would be the second founder of his Order. Except for the chances of European war, England and Naples were then in different worlds, but Alphonsus may have seen at the side of Don Carlos when he conquered Naples in 1734, an English boy of
fourteen who had already shown great gallantry under fire and was to play a romantic part in history, Prince Charles Edward Stuart. But one may easily over-crowd a narrow canvas and it is better in so slight a sketch to leave the central figure in solitary relief. If any reader of this article will go to original sources and study the Saint's life at greater length, he will not find his labour thrown away.

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