

La conoscenza di se

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love.
Send forth Your Spirit and they shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth.
O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy his consolations.
Through the same Christ Our Lord. Amen.

Intro

We have just finished the first stage of preparation with the intention **to free ourselves from the spirit of the world, which is the spirit contrary to Jesus Christ.**

We know this worldly spirit infiltrates us in the way we think, reason and love.

However, the rest of our preparation we'll begin this week is divided into three parts – to know concretely three persons: first ourselves, Mary, and Jesus.

St. Louis gives the itinerary of this coming week:

VD#228 During this week they should employ all their prayers and pious actions in asking for a **knowledge of themselves**, and for contrition of their sins; and they should do all things *in a spirit of humility*.

For that end, they can meditate on what I have said before of our **inward corruption.**"

And lastly he says, "They should pray to our Lord and the **Holy Spirit** to enlighten them."

Along these same lines in an earlier section of True Devotion he says,

"By the light which the Holy Spirit will give you through Mary, his beloved Spouse, *you will know your evil depths, your corruption and incapacity for all that is good.* (VD 213)

Noi Stessi – Knowledge of Self

In seeking knowledge of ourselves during this week, we know that devotion to Mary is principally **interior. It must transform us from within. That's why this knowledge of self is central to the life of a faithful disciple of Jesus (and Mary). Louis de Montfort calls the grace of self-knowledge the "foundation of all other graces."**

Because only under the light of the Holy Spirit can we really know ourselves. This is the grace you ask for during this week....to know only *that* which the Holy Spirit would like to point out to you about yourself.

Only in a deeper knowledge of myself can I **then** form a more intimate relationship with Mary and Jesus.

St. Augustine, in his Confessions says, "**Through you** I know me." He also asks of God, "Let me know You, O Thou who know me; let me know You, as I am known."¹

We know that the soul is always present to itself (I know that I am). Each of us knows what we want, what we know, what we have done, etc. Each of us knows the ways in which we are also limited and the capacities we possess, or don't possess (haha). We can understand the things we *do* – *but we aren't referring to this!* We can even know our temperament, our dominant fault, the ways in which we are tempted particularly, but in this talk I'd like to reflect on a deeper knowledge of oneself.

This *deeper knowledge* is the knowledge of ourselves, as we are: limited creatures. This knowledge of self is also hopeful: we must consider that which we're called to be. It's not enough to say "Ah, no. I'm just the way I am" but we must always have **hope** that we can become what we are called to be, by the grace of God. We **can** become the virtuous saint he's calling us to be. Therefore, we must keep watch of our sinful inclinations,

¹ St. Augustutine, *Confessions*, Book 5, 1

desires and the choices we make in the life of grace. We must seek to rid ourselves of everything that does not belong to God.

Don Quijote, in one of his counsels to Sancho said, “You have to set your eyes on who you are, striving to know yourself, which is the most difficult knowledge that can be imagined. From knowing yourself will come out not to swell you up like the frog that wanted to become equal to the ox.”²

We know this is true: the frog must remember he’s just a frog, just as we must remember we are humans.

in the spirit of humility

St Augustine also says “We are what God sees in us” – St. Augustine. This *why* St. Louis makes a great clarification of this knowledge: we are to know ourselves *only* under the light of the Holy Spirit. Because when we look inward at our particular dominant defect, our temperament and all of our weaknesses, we look with HUMILITY and are guided to know more deeply **the things that God will use for a greater good in our lives**. This is essential. We aren’t examining ourselves based on our personal ideals, goals, nor what others perceive about us. Nor are we critiquing ourselves based on a difficult past, people we’ve hurt, the wrong that we’ve done, etc. Because when looking at ourselves as we are now and what we’re called to be, precisely that which God desires of me, it’s like a **vast terrain**, two worlds apart. Before His goodness, He helps us to realize our weakness and total dependence. Louis de Montfort makes this clear: **only with Him can we look back upon ourselves**.

If we want to know how to grow in a knowledge of ourselves, Louis de Montfort tells us how:

#228 of True Devotion states, “the intention of this week is clear: the knowledge of self, contrition for my sins, and **to do all things in a spirit of humility.**”

This last part is essential: to do ALL THINGS *in a spirit of humility*. Nothing produces such good within us as **humility**. St. Teresa of Jesus said, “**Humility is to walk in the truth.**” Humility brings us face to face with the truth about ourselves. St. Thomas Aquinas notes in the *Summa*, “Humility takes into account the standard of right reason, according to which someone possesses a true esteem for himself.”³ He highlights here a good point. Those who live this “**spirit of humility**” will not willfully distort information to defend, repair or verify their own image. The humble soul desires nothing else because he sees his own weaknesses and the many countless things he’s received, not merited. Nor does he excessively fear his limits, because he know that the bare truth about himself makes him free. “Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.”⁴ The humble man also doesn’t pretend to have a glory he hasn’t received. He is brought low, abased, and knows *only* that which he **has received** from God. The humble person has a realistic outlook and recognizes, with equal sanity, that he has nothing of himself, only his sin, and that he has everything from God; and his misery - which he does not ignore - does not cause him embarrassment because he sees it transformed by God. The humble gaze coincides with a high self-esteem because it directs one’s sight towards the focus of true greatness, which is “what we are in God and for God.” Humility does not depress man: it is the truth, and it leads to God and trust.

St. Francis de Sales said, “It is not humility to simply consider ourselves miserable, because intelligence is enough for that; it is humility *to want and desire to be seen and treated as such.*” Right, the humble willfully choose to be lowered, to be seen as dust of the earth and depreciated....not for recognition, looks, nor pity: but above all they seek that God may look with favor upon them in their lowliness.

² “Has de poner los ojos en quien eres, procurando conocerte a ti mismo, que es el más difícil conocimiento que puede imaginarse. Del conocerte saldrá el no hincharte como la rana que quiso igualarse con el buey.”

³ St. Thomas Aquinas, *S. Tb II-II*, 162, 3 & 2.

⁴ 2 Corinthians 3:17

One can even look further, that this humility leads the devout slave of Mary “to abandon their own intentions and operations, although good and known, to lose themselves, so to speak in the intentions of the Blessed Virgin, although they are unknown,” says St. Louis de Montfort. He continues, “The devotee practices humility far more than the souls who act of themselves, and lean, however imperceptible a complacency, on **their own dispositions**. But if the soul acts more humbly, it therefore glorifies God more; and He is only perfectly glorified by the humble.” (VD 223)

C: This knowledge of myself is sought *in a spirit of humility*.

Conversio ad Deo

The second part I'd like to look at is who we are before God: creatues.

When we reflect upon our beginning, we must look to our Creator. We can only know WHO we are by knowing WHO called us into being. He is the CREATOR, we are finite CREATURES. Among all the creatures in this world, God deigned that we exist. Our existence rests on him in total dependence. He is supreme, intelligent, and transcendent being, the first cause of all things, and the one who sets the world in order. He has infinite power, and in him is contained all perfections. In creating us as free, intelligent human beings with an immortal soul, God knew all that which would limit us as creatures. In creating man, God willed that man glorify Him by free acts of love and adoration.

But also, this *knowledge of ourselves* also brings us face to face with another truth: our human nature is fallen due to original sin. All that is ours is sin. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states, “Man, tempted by the devil, let his trust in his Creator die in his heart and, abusing his freedom, disobeyed God's command. This is what man's first sin consisted of. All subsequent sin would be disobedience toward God and lack of trust in his goodness.”⁵ In his pride of heart, man chose to disobey God: he fell. However, we who have access to the Father through Jesus Christ know his redeeming love – the price of our sin nailed Jesus to the Cross.

Furthermore, by His grace, we have the opportunity to divest ourselves of all that is disordered and receive his grace in the sacraments. Right..this knowledge of ourselves must remind us who we are called to be, which is **another Christ**. As Christians, we are called to imitate Jesus. The man who seeks to know himself *in a spirit of humility* sees **the divine action of God at work within him. Remember, this knowledge of ourselves isn't to close up within ourselves**. We seek to become that which Christ asks of us, and God must elevate and help me to purify my intentions. That's also why our penance and daily acts of virtue should never lead us to sadness, but rather help us to become more joyful interiorly because God sees our misery and fills us with his mercy! Our misr But GK Chesterton said that the opposite of Christianity isn't atheism, its sadness. That's also why we can't confuse a “knowing ourselves” with scrupulosity or self-perfection, because we want to look **at ourselves in the light of the truth**. There may be sadness in the beginning, because humbling oneself does require an injection to our pride!

St. Teresa of Jesus highlights this knowledge of self when speaking of the different regions of the soul. She says, “This matter of self-knowledge must never be put aside—for there is no soul so great a giant on this road but has frequent need to turn back, and be again an infant at the breast. **The knowledge of our sins, and of our own selves, is the bread which we have to eat with all the meats, however delicate they may be, in the way of prayer; without this bread, life cannot be sustained, though it must be taken by measure**. When a soul beholds itself resigned, and clearly understands that there is no goodness in it—when it feels itself abashed in the presence of so great a King, and sees how little it pays of the great debt it owes Him—why should it be necessary for it to waste its time on this subject? **His Majesty surely knows better than we do what kind of food is proper for us.**” (Vida, Cap. XIII, 23)

⁵ CCC 397-398

So, we must know ourselves as we are before God. We weren't born angels, and we tend often towards that which is evil. Jesus, in one of his apparitions to St. Catherine of Siena asked, "Do you know, daughter, who I am and who you are?" He then told her, "I am the He who is, and you are she who is not." Now when referencing to her being, she IS, she has being. We ARE. We have being, we have life. But we ARE not because we had the capacity to give ourselves being. We have received our being from another, namely from God himself. We are dependent upon him, our being rests in his hands. All the good we have done, the good gifts we have received - nothing is ours!

This is what Louis de Montfort highlights: the great distance between us and God. Before my nothingness, God still gave me being. This is something we must rejoice in: it is within us, that which we have received. That we realize all that which we are not, which is the truth, but also in gratitude for that which we have received. I am made in the image of God, I share his likeness, his gift of His life within me (grace). St. Teresa called the soul, in all its beauty, a palace of the King. A palace of God. The body therefore is a temple, a church, where God is present, the place in which Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament finds a home.

The more we know God the more we know ourselves. When we see ourselves as God sees us, we see ourselves in proportion to reality, to the truth. It's not just oh I did bad oh I did good, to check off boxes. God he wills for me to see myself as I am. This knowledge of ourselves should humble us, and a confirmation of the work of the Holy Spirit and grace within us should bear these fruits of joy, peace, charity, goodness, etc.

Lastly, we might ask who might best help us in revealing this "knowledge of oneself"? (remembering the Quote earlier from St. Augustine "Through YOU I know myself") St. John Paul the Great says, "Christ the Redeemer **"fully reveals man to himself"** The man who wishes to understand himself thoroughly – and not just in accordance with immediate, partial, often superficial, and even illusory standards and measures of his being – he must with his unrest, uncertainty and even his weakness and sinfulness, with his life and death, **draw near to Christ**. He must, so to speak, enter into him with all his own self, he must "appropriate" and assimilate the whole of the reality of the Incarnation and Redemption in order to find himself. If this profound process takes place within him, he then bears fruit not only of adoration of God but also of deep wonder at himself. ”⁶

In conclusion, as we continue to be guided by the action of the Holy Spirit within us, we look to Mary, the humble daughter of the King. Her entire existence was a gift to the Father. All she knew of herself was in perfect conformity to God. She knew her great dignity and the special role in which God planned for her life: she was to bear her Creator, the One who was to save fallen humanity. May Mary, the Spouse of the Holy Spirit and model of humility, grant us this grace of a true knowledge of self, that we may become her humble slaves.

⁶ Redemptor Hominis, 10