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NIHIL NISI JESUM

DEDICATED TO MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

“Salus animarum Suprema Lex esto — The Salvation of Souls is the Supreme Law in the Church” (Canon Law 1752)

www.boston-catholic-journal.com

editor@boston-catholic-journal.com

***The Imitation of Christ* with a Commentary and Audio Files**

by Father Thomas á Kempis
of the Canons Regular of Mount St. Agnes
(1380 - 1471)



A STUDY

*The following pages are dedicated to the Little Hearts entrusted by God
to Cloistered Poor Clare Colettine Nuns*

The *Imitation of Christ* is considered by many to be the second most read book in the world, following the Bible; This is certainly so in the annals of Christianity. Its influence on subsequent religious literature, to the present, cannot be overstated.

Father Thomas à Kempis was a monk of The Canons Regular of Mount St. Agnes at Windesheim in Germany (about 20 miles southwest of Mainz) who was ordained a priest in 1413. He was born at Kempen in the Diocese of Cologne, in 1380 and is described as “a man of middle height, dark complexion and vivid colouring, with a broad forehead and piercing eyes; kind and affable towards all, especially the sorrowful and the afflicted; constantly engaged in his favourite occupations of reading, writing, or prayer; in time of recreation for the most part silent and recollected, finding it difficult even to express an opinion on matters of mundane interest, but pouring out a ready torrent of eloquence when the conversation turned on God or the concerns of the soul. At such times often he would excuse himself, “My brethren”, he would say, “I must go: Someone is waiting to converse with me in my cell.”¹

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<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/kempis/imitation.ONE.1.html> where the individual chapters appear and from which they can be freely printed. We wish to express our gratitude to [Christian Classics Ethereal Library](#).

CHAPTER I

The Imitation of Christ

with a Commentary and Audio Files

The First Chapter

Imitating Christ and Despising All Vanities on Earth

“**HE WHO follows Me, walks not in darkness,**” says the Lord (St. John 8:12). By these words of Christ we are advised to imitate His life and habits, if we wish to be truly enlightened and free from all blindness of heart. Let our chief effort, therefore, be to study the life of Jesus Christ.

The teaching of Christ is more excellent than all the advice of the saints, and he who has His spirit will find in it a hidden manna. Now, there are many who hear the Gospel often but care little for it because they have not the spirit of Christ. Yet whoever wishes to understand fully the words of Christ must try to pattern his whole life on that of Christ.

What good does it do to speak learnedly about the Trinity if, lacking humility, you displease the Trinity? Indeed, it is not learning that makes a man holy and just, but a virtuous life makes him pleasing to God. I would rather feel contrition than know how to define it. For what would it profit us to know the whole Bible by heart and the principles of all the philosophers if we live without grace and the love of God? Vanity of vanities and all is vanity, except to love God and serve Him alone.

This is the greatest wisdom—to seek the kingdom of Heaven through contempt of the world. It is vanity, therefore, to seek and trust in riches that perish. It is vanity also to court honor and to be puffed up with pride. It is vanity to follow the lusts of the body and to desire things for which severe punishment later must come. It is vanity to wish for long life and to care little about a well-spent life. It is vanity to be concerned with the present only and not to make provision for things to come. It is vanity to love what passes quickly and not to look ahead where eternal joy abides.

Often recall the proverb: “The eye is not satisfied with seeing nor the ear filled with hearing.”(11 Eccles. 1:8). Try, moreover, to turn your heart from the love of things visible and bring yourself to things invisible. For they who follow their own evil passions stain their consciences and lose the grace of God.

Sister’s Commentary:

Dear Little Hearts,

We are all called, regardless of our state in life, whether we be married, consecrated, or single, to be “other Christ’s”, “other Marys” in this world. It is not what we do or do not achieve on a temporal level, but the quality of our love, service and being that is, so often, seen by God alone. Nevertheless, on this tempestuous sea of life we need the example of witnesses to whom we can look and upon whom we can pattern our own choices. Some witnesses may have a great appeal others less, but God can make all speak to us if we do but pray and endeavour to be open.

Scripture and the teachings of Holy Mother the Church should be our prime spiritual food, but also very praiseworthy are those writings and treatises passed down to us from generation to generation for our edification. It is a part of what we call *Sacred Tradition* in the Church.

One such book is *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis. Many of you probably have a copy. For those who do not, we have access to it through the Christian Ethereal Library at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/kempis/imitation.ONE.1.html>.

We will be using this translation here, online, but any copy that you possess will suffice and vary only in minor ways that will not impede our prayerful study.

My own approach, as a Consecrated Nun, to this is to see it through the eyes and heart of Mary.....would she not, does she not, draw us constantly to her Son, Jesus Christ Whom we encounter so intimately in the Gospels, we become whom we focus upon. It is not enough to assent to what Christ has said, it is also a call to put His words into choices and actions. The words of the extract above are profoundly true. In Christ's teaching we find hidden manna, food for our souls, our lives and our journey from wandering in the Desert of this world to the very Throne of the Most High God Himself!

At the outset let us pray that we may be consumed in love with the spirit of Christ, the spirit of Mary ... and here, now, in this place, at this time, begin ... for as St. Francis reminded us, “It is time for us to begin anew because in reality we have not yet begun.”

Your Little Sisters in Christ

Sister's Commentary on *The Imitation of Christ*: Chapter One.

"What good does it do to speak learnedly about the Trinity if, lacking humility, you displease the Trinity? Indeed, it is not learning that makes a man holy and just, but a virtuous life makes him pleasing to God. I would rather feel contrition than know how to define it. For what would it profit us to know the whole Bible by heart and the principles of all the philosophers if we live without grace and the love of God? Vanity of vanities and all is vanity, except to love God and serve Him alone."

I.

Learning clearly has an important place in our lives. Indeed, God gave us an intellect to use *for His glory*. Unfortunately, so much of our learning is both abused and misused. We look at the world about us and see the evil ends to which learning has

been twisted and manipulated ... and with what tragic consequences! Such brilliance culminating in such tragedy! Learning has become a commodity that is sold for profit by our universities to the few who can afford it... and then by the graduates to the highest bidder, whatever the product, whatever the service, whatever the end. Our stores abound with books on religion for “spiritual knowledge” ... at a price ... and however questionable the knowledge acquired — and once acquired, how often misused! For many people “knowledge” itself is an instrument of power and self-aggrandizement. They can quote chapter and verse in the Bible, even *teach* the Bible (for a price) — but are totally unwilling to put God's word into practise.

Not everyone can be “learned”. God knows this. He apportions His gifts as He wills. But *everyone* can be humble. And it is the humble who are heard by God. With humility comes the deeper realization of our need of God and His grace. The “learned”, the proud, and the arrogant have ever been at odds with God. “I thank you, Father, that you have kept these things from the wise and the learned and revealed them to the little ones.” (St. Mat. 11.25). It is not in virtue of our “knowing” but in virtue of our *loving* that God reveals His secrets.

Does not Scripture say that “Mary kept all these things in her *heart*” ... not in her *head*?

Empty your head and open your heart if you would know God.

Your Little Sisters in Christ

II.

*“This is the greatest wisdom — to seek the kingdom of Heaven through contempt of the world. It is vanity, therefore, to seek and trust in riches that perish. It is vanity also to court honor and to be puffed up with pride. It is vanity to follow the lusts of the body and to desire things for which severe punishment later must come. It is vanity to wish for long life and to care little about a well-spent life. It is vanity to be concerned with the present only and not to make provision for things to come. It is vanity to love what passes quickly and not to look ahead where eternal joy abides. Often recall the proverb: **“The***

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and lose the grace of God.”*

God has made all things good. All things flow out and from His goodness. The contempt of the world expressed here is to be understood in the spirit of Saint Paul, who tells us that, by comparison to the things of God, everything else is so much rubbish, debris only. The things of God and the things of this world are incomparable. In light of this immense disparity, we must to set the priority of our heart upon God and His kingdom. Everything else is destined to ruin. All things will pass.

We see this so clearly when we begin to grasp how quickly our own lives are passing. *Vanity* is the state of pointlessness or futility — and so it is vanity to set all our hopes, to invest all our trust upon the things of this present world. It is a sobering reality that we can virtually lose all our worldly goods overnight (as many recently have ...), and even our health ... And how much energy is futilely spent on trying to prolong life or

the semblance of youth by the most extraordinary means — as though by sheer will and a sufficient amount of money, we can stave off the inevitable! Our benchmark as Christians cannot, must not, be so vain and so crass. We must come to understand that it is the quality of our *love* that matters, *how we love and serve others*. In focusing upon God and others we lose focus on ourselves.

We are told in the citation above that the human senses are never satisfied. Nor can they ever be. Even if we satiate ourselves we inevitably regurgitate. Like pagans at the Roman vomitoriums, we attempt to satisfy all our desires until we are surfeit, disgorge them, and attempt to replenish them anew. We never learn the vanity of it all, the inherent futility ... because we are too busy squandering our lives on ourselves.

For the Christian — then, as now — it is quite otherwise. We come to realize that all that God created is intended as a Sacrament that will lead us to Him ... and not to ourselves.

In the words of Saint Clare, O wondrous exchange to exchange the things of time for those of eternity.

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