17 November 2026
ASPECTS OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE
Part II
"The First Conversion: From Distantness from God to Closeness to God"

The spiritual path, the transformation of the human person through the Spirit of God, allows us to experience the fullness of the grace of Baptism. In Baptism, we have received the supernatural light of God, though not yet the full vision of God, which will be given to us only in eternity. Likewise, we are strengthened by the Spirit of God so that, with His help, we may largely regain mastery over ourselves. This is the goal of asceticism.

The original image in which we were created according to God's will is thus regained on the spiritual path, and even more. For with the coming of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, we can be united with God even more deeply than was possible in the paradisiacal state. Thus, in His love, our heavenly Father not only restores everything, but He also receives fallen humanity into His glory when, through the forgiveness of sins and sanctification, we wear the wedding garment that makes us worthy for the *"Marriage of the Lamb"* (Rev. 19:7). We are already beginning to taste God's glory here on earth, even though, compared to the vision we will have in eternity, we can only perceive God as through a dark mirror (cf. 1 Cor. 13:12).

How, then, does God transform us?

<u>Conversion and the Path After Conversion:</u>

As long as our lives are still at odds with God's commandments, He first calls us to an initial conversion, to an encounter with Him, the living God, and to His fundamental order of commandments. If we respond to this call with faith in Jesus Christ and by accepting His grace, then we entrust ourselves to God and sincerely turn away from sin. A new life begins, toward which God's grace draws me and for which I then consciously choose. I turn, as spiritual writers like to put it, from a life of distraction to God, from a life of indifference and distance from God to a life of closeness to God.

A person begins to love God with his will, often accompanied by an emotional closeness to God, and starts to relate everything to God. With God's help, he tries to free himself from the dominion of worldly things and passions. He begins to lead a serious religious life, to acquire virtues, and the pursuit of holiness takes shape. Reading Sacred Scripture and spiritual literature, the lives of the saints, fervent prayer, and the reception of the sacraments become a constant source for strengthening the life of grace. Often, people who have experienced a conversion are very zealous and carry within themselves the fire of first love.

Sanctifying grace, which was already received through Baptism, begins to unfold intensely when properly nurtured. Quite a few ask about their vocation and want to place themselves entirely at God's disposal. Those who encounter Jesus in this way but have not yet been baptized long for Baptism and for communion with the Church. They want to joyfully share their newfound faith with others. They are zealous in good works.

Certainly, there are differences in how people respond. But one thing is clear to all who have had a more intense encounter with the Lord: they want to walk the path of following Christ and never leave it again! The decision that shapes their lives has been made! They have entered through the gate into the Kingdom of God (cf. Jn. 10:9).

For those who are already familiar with the path of faith through their family but have not yet decisively followed the Lord, a special encounter with the Lord brings about a sort of "revival of faith." They awaken from lukewarmness and negligence to a resolute faith. This often happens during spiritual retreats or a deepening of faith, through appropriate courses in the faith, through the witness of others, through good preachers, or in other ways that God, in His wisdom, has devised.

So let us hold fast to this: God's love calls us to repentance in our first conversion, from a life distant from God to a life close to Him, or He awakens us from a life of lukewarmness to a resolute path of following Christ. When we respond, God's grace begins to unfold intensely within us. If we follow the promptings of His love, this gives rise to the precious beginning of the spiritual journey. God draws us to Himself, and we respond. Anyone who has once walked the path of faith with intensity and come to know Jesus knows who has called him and whom he follows. He would leave this path only if he were to fall back into mortal sin and persist in it.

If, however, conversion is not deep enough and does not lead to a concrete spiritual path, it is possible that one will once again succumb to distraction, become negligent in religious practices, and fail to resist the allure of a worldly life sufficiently. Thus, lukewarmness creeps back into the soul. In this case, one is much more susceptible to grave sins. The situation is different with regard to the so-called imperfections that we still discover in ourselves despite all our efforts. With God's help, we must work on these. God's love will guide us forward and purify us of everything that still separates us from Him.

Meditation on the reading of the day in the Novus Ordo:
https://en.elijamission.net/the-churches-of-sardis-and-laodicea-3/