



3rd Order SSPX

Letter to Members: District of Australia & New Zealand



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Saintly Sanity

Dear Postulants and Professed members,

The following line struck me recently while reading G.K. Chesterton's *St. Thomas Aquinas*: 'Every saint is a man before he is a saint'.

What does he mean? That sanctity only 'works' when the person concerned is fully human. Only a real, flesh and blood man or woman, embracing all that it means to be human (sin excepted) can be an apt receptacle of grace. Since God is the author of both human beings *and* grace, the latter are 'compatible'.

There is a famous Latin phrase in theology which says that *gratia supponit naturam*, or 'grace presupposes (or builds upon) nature'. Sanctity assumes sanity, soundness and normality.

Wings only work if there is a trunk to attach them to. In like manner, sanctity gives us wings to soar into the heavens, but the wings will only flap and lift the body if there is a body to begin with. A soaring cathedral will only rest upon a firm foundation. The same architect designed both foundation and superstructure.

This idea can apply to many things, not just our spiritual lives. Take the crisis in the Church, for example.

Some have said, 'Archbishop Lefebvre in 1988 should not have disobeyed the Holy Father but instead trusted that God would intervene and save the priesthood and Tradition!'

Our answer is that Our Lord *did* intervene: he gave us the saintly, ever-obedient Marcel Lefebvre, the premier prelate of the 20th century.

To make the connection explicit: God's grace in saving Catholic Tradition presupposed and built upon one bishop's doing of his daily duty with complete fidelity. It did not depend upon miracles and visions.

One need only read about the other crises in Church history to see that Christ's promise that "the gates of Hell will not prevail" depended not on flashy divine interventions during times of crisis but on the heroic few who faithfully did their daily duty as Catholics.

That is, grace built upon nature. Sanctity built upon sanity.

In fact, this year our VCE students have been learning about the life of Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre. Something that continually strikes the students is what a fine man he was even aside from his being a priest, bishop and founder of a Religious Order. He is constantly described as courteous, a gentleman, devoted, hardworking, loyal, reliable, wise

and prudent. None of these are specifically 'religious' descriptions, and could be said about any great statesman or prominent historical figure.

It was this manliness, this fulness of what it means to be a man, that was the bedrock upon which Our Lord could build the saintly figure of Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre. Again, grace presupposes and perfects nature.

Back to Chesterton's remark, that 'Every saint is a man before he is a saint'.

He means that every Saint on the Church's liturgical calendar first had to become fully human, we could say, 'fully ripe', before sanctity could begin in them. Just as the healthy vine precedes delicious grapes, so a manly man or womanly woman precedes their sanctification.

If we look at the Creation account in Genesis, we see that God creates 'from the bottom up' before all culminating in His own "image and likeness" in the persons of the Adam and Eve filled with His sanctifying grace. The higher was built upon the lower.

Likewise in the life of Our Lord, look at the solid, no-frills foundation upon which His life was laid: a lowly birth to poor parents, 30 years of obscurity working as a common carpenter, ending bloody betrayal and abandonment. These were the sane and solid foundations upon which the Resurrection and our Redemption had to be built. In a sense, it was the fact that Christ was the *manliest* man that the *highest* grace worked in Him: that of the Hypostatic Union and all the fruits of Redemption following from it.

Do I bring to my spiritual life a sanity upon which sanctity can work? Am I cultivating the simple soil of my soul so that the divine seeds of grace can receive a ready welcome and blossom into saintliness? Here are a few things to examine myself upon, basic habits without which sanctity will simply slide off my soul and not get a grip:

Am I reliable? That is, can I be depended upon to do what I have promised? That promise might be the more solemn type such as the marriage vows, but it also includes the daily promises of being on time for appointments, of having the house clean and tidy.

Do I put basic duties first, or do I spend too much time on secondary things? Am I watching podcasts and programs that are fascinating and educational but taking the place of learning about my Faith?

Am I courteous, self-effacing and well-mannered? Or do I speak only of myself, my opinions, cutting people off or taking little notice if their views disagree with mine?

Do I live a temperate life, rising early, not eating between meals, getting some exercise if I can? After all, the 5th Commandment includes within it all these obligations of maintaining a healthy, fit body.

Is my day ordered, with predictable times to pray, read, go to Mass, study, clean and prepare for the performance of my duties of state?

If these and other basic things are in place, the grace of God will find soft, moist soil to produce an abundance of good works, contemplation and character that all combine to make us into a saint.

Doubtless it is difficult, but no saint was ever formed without a struggle. A saint without a struggle is as impossible as a beautiful garden without weeding. The very word 'Israel', the new name given to Jacob after wrestling with an angel, means 'wrestling with God'.

Let us then wrestle and struggle daily to be the man or woman we are called to be so that God's grace finds our natural powers primed and ready to be lifted up into the skies of the supernatural. The faithful performance of our 3rd Order Rule will ensure this will happen.

In the Sacred Heart of Jesus, through the Immaculate Heart of Mary,

Fr Jordie Stephens Spiritual Director of the Third Order of SSPX for Australia

