

Temperament and the Spiritual Life

"God takes our humanness seriously." Father Thomas Dubay "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." Galatians 5:22-23 The desire for God is written in everyone's heart, because we are created by God and for God. As a result, we can never be truly happy until our hearts are centered on him. At times we are tempted to place our hope and trust in things of this world-money, status, power-or we may center our desires on other people or in our self-will. We may not at first know what will make us happy. But sooner or later we begin to realize, as St. Augustine wrote, "Our hearts are restless until they rest in thee, O Lord." So we embark on our quest, our search for God and for true happiness.

On our journey, we bring along our temperament-with its advantages and disadvantages. God's grace will supply whatever else we need. Since grace never destroys nature, but rather builds upon it and perfects it, it is critical to understand how our nature, specifically our temperament, affects our growth in the spiritual life. In this chapter, we will take a more detailed look at the inclinations that each temperament affords us with regard to prayer and the spiritual life. In addition, we will examine the characteristic spiritual weaknesses and temptations that can beset each temperament.

Human nature, created by God in his image, is essentially good. Yet as long as creation, wounded by Original Sin, is in a state of journeying toward perfection, our temperaments are limited in the same way that all of nature is limited. Furthermore, our nature is wounded through Original Sin. Many spiritual writers (such as St. Francis de Sales and Romano Guardini) stress that the imperfections that arise out of our natural temperament are not culpable; the weaknesses of our temperaments are not themselves sins. But they can make certain virtues more difficult to acquire. For example, some people are, by temperament, prone to sadness and find it extremely difficult to attain the virtue of magnanimity; others tend to be impulsive, and attaining the virtues of constancy and order is a true battle. Still others seem to be prone to action rather than to reflection.

The choleric temperament seems to possess almost naturally the virtue of magnanimity, while peacefulness and mildness seem quite difficult to attain. The sanguine naturally exhibits joy, yet must do battle to acquire self-control. The melancholic seems naturally capable of faithfulness (or long-suffering), while joy must be consciously acquired and prayed for. The phlegmatic is

naturally quite gentle, yet perhaps needs to acquire the virtues of audacity and fortitude and to shed undue concern for the opinions of others.

However, although imperfections may flow from our temperament, these can still be moderated or corrected by practice of the opposite virtue. Nothing is impossible with God's grace. "Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48) For baptized persons in a state of grace, the gifts of the Holy Spirit complete the natural (i.e., deriving from temperament) and acquired virtues. Charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, and chastity are perfections that the Holy Spirit forms in us, known as the "fruits" of the Holy Spirit.

Every Christian is called to holiness. Jesus gave us the new commandment, to love one another as he loved us. His love is a total, radical self-giving. Without God's grace, it would not be possible to imitate. But, with his grace and mercy, we can become the "living stones" that build his Church here on earth and help to bring about the coming of Christ's kingdom: "It is therefore quite clear that all Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of love, and by this holiness, a more human manner of life is fostered also in earthly society."⁴⁸ All Christians-whatever their vocation, their state of life, or their temperament-are called to holiness.

Transformation in Christ Growth in the spiritual life is not merely a matter of adding a virtue or dropping a defect; it is not about harnessing a naturally virtuous temperament, or, conversely, about growing in virtue through great effort of the will; nor is it about self-perfection. It is, rather, a *complete surrender to Christ*, who draws us ever closer to him. This friendship with Christ requires us to change.

It is not enough to follow Christ or to imitate him, but to be transformed. We must be transformed, yet we remain essentially who we are. We don't start out human and become angels. Nor does God fashion us with a particular temperament, only to require us to become its opposite. Thus, if you are an enthusiastic, talkative sanguine, you will not necessarily be compelled to become a contemplative monk with a vow of silence. A highly volatile and dynamic extravert is not likely to be transformed by grace into a complete introvert. He may, however, having learned to control his passions, become a highly enthusiastic Christ-centered leader noted for charity!

Knowing what our strengths and weaknesses are helps us to develop a plan for harnessing our strengths and avoiding our weaknesses--perhaps even eliminating them! If you are a very active choleric who wants to be a little more Mary (contemplative) and a little less Martha (active), you will realize that you need to set aside time every day to be still in the presence of the

Lord. If you are a phlegmatic, you may wish to examine the purity of intention with which you undertake new activities, striving to do everything thing out of love for Christ, not merely because you don't want someone to get angry. If you are a melancholic struggling with the tendency to criticism, you can make a resolution at the beginning of each day to be generous and kind to co-workers and children, asking yourself each time a critical thought enters your mind, "How would Jesus see this person?"

The phlegmatic and sanguine are more relationship-oriented, likely to take into consideration people's feelings when making a decision, while the choleric and melancholic tend to make judgments based on harder facts and logic. This does not mean that people of any one temperament will have a greater or lesser ability to remain docile to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit or to order their faculties rightly. Nonetheless, as Father Thomas Dubay notes in *Authenticity*, these two different approaches will have consequences in the spiritual life. Thus, we may find that the more affectively oriented sanguine may readily take direction from a trusted priest or spiritual director. A feeling-driven phlegmatic may find it easier to trust "inspirations" he receives from the Holy Spirit than a more skeptical choleric would. The more pragmatic, fact-oriented choleric may find himself seeking direction from the Catechism of the Catholic Church or by reading one of the great spiritual classics, but may find himself a tad reluctant to accept advice or direction from a young parish priest or a lay spiritual guide. No matter what its source, we therefore strongly encourage seeking authentic spiritual direction as a means of guiding and focusing our natural tendencies toward service of Christ and the Church.

So often it is tempting to surrender to our own whims and natural desires, to place ourselves at the center of the universe. But spiritual growth requires us to follow God's will instead of our own, and often we need help in discerning it. Discernment is a difficult and demanding task, and, whatever our natural temperament, we should be careful not to blithely or naively accept every inspiration as a revelation from Gods' Scripture reminds us, "He who trusts in his own mind is a fool" (Prov. 28:26).

Are some temperaments better suited to sanctity? There is no single temperament that is better able to progress in holiness. At first glance, you might suppose that the melancholic choleric temperament, more naturally given to reflection and the interior life, must be more capable of achieving great holiness through contemplation or even mystical union with God. On the contrary, Father Adolphe Tanquerey, author of the classic *The Spiritual Life*, writes, "There have been and there are contemplatives of every temperament and of every condition of life." Everyone one is called to holiness.

However, Father Tanquerey notes that "there are temperaments and modes of life which lend themselves better to infused contemplation. The

reason for this is that contemplation is a free gift bestowed stowed by God when and on whom he pleases, and that moreover, God is wont to adapt his graces to the temperament and the duties of state of each individual.

""Transformation in the spirit is not simply a matter of buckling down and getting to work, although a firmly engaged will is necessary to change and grow spiritually. We are dependent on God's grace to be transformed:

"Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because cause without me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Prayer is vitally necessary for every temperament. It is the humble recognition that we depend on God: for our existence, for our daily sustenance, for all good things. And so, we "lift our minds and hearts to God.""

Jesus tells us, "Ask and you shall receive." Not only do we ask for good things; we also seek intimacy and friendship with God. St. John Chrysostom writes, " `As the deer longs for the running stream, so longs my soul for thee, O God,' writes the psalmist [Ps. 42]. The lover seeks the beloved, seeks union with him. Prayer is the light of the soul, giving us true knowledge of God. It is a link mediating between God and man. By prayer the soul is borne up to heaven and in a marvelous way embraces the Lord."

Each temperament may also show some distinct preferences when it comes to forms of prayer. The introverted melancholic may gravitate toward mental prayer, for example, while the extraverted sanguine may find a prayer group naturally appealing. The practical and decisive choleric may be particularly uncomfortable if he finds himself in a very charismatic, feeling-oriented liturgical celebration. And so on.

However, some of the weaker areas of each temperament might be strengthened by learning another type of prayer, one that may not be as naturally appealing. For example, if you are a phlegmatic and you find yourself most comfortable with formalistic prayer (such as the Rosary, novenas, and so forth), perhaps you could develop your sensible imagination by trying the Ignatian form of meditation, in which you project yourself into the scriptural scene you are meditating on. If you're melancholic, you might find that a prayer group helps bring you out of yourself, stretches you, and provides you with opportunities to share with others the many blessings God has given you. Charismatic prayer may be completely foreign to your sharp and practical choleric's intellect, yet you may find it fruitful to mediate upon the words of Scripture and contemplate what the Holy Spirit is saying to you right now. In any case, it is quite likely that, as we mature in our spiritual lives and deepen our personal relationship with Christ, we may find that our original preferences are less important.

No matter what our particular temperament, we all should practice all the forms of prayer: adoration, petition, intercession, thanksgiving, and praise.

It is just and proper for us to adore and thank our loving Father, who gives us all we need. And we must listen, too, for Christ, like any friend, isn't satisfied if we do nothing but ask for favors; he wants us to listen to him. In addition to vocal (external) prayer, every Christian should make an effort to engage in mental (meditative and contemplative) prayer. Here, as the Catechism tells us, there are as many approaches as there are spiritual masters.

Now let's take a more in-depth look at each of the temperament types from the spiritual vantage point. We should note that many of the suggestions that follow are somewhat generic: everyone needs to have a strong prayer and sacramental life, to grow in virtue and in understanding of the will of God, and to nurture a personal relationship with Christ and an eagerness to serve him and his Church. As *Lumen Gentium* reminds minds us, we are all called to the perfection of love. For charity to grow in our souls like the good seed, we must willingly hear the word of God, carry out God's will in deeds, frequently receive the sacraments-especially the Eucharist-and apply ourselves assiduously to prayer, self-denial, brotherly service and growth in virtue.

But within each temperament (or temperament combination), we find certain areas of strength and weakness. The following paragraphs will highlight particular spiritual practices that may be especially useful or may apply more readily to one temperament than another, given these strengths and weaknesses. If, like most people, you have a combination of temperaments, read the sections that apply to both your temperaments.

THE CHOLERIC'S SPIRITUAL LIFE

Moving faith from the head to the heart, choleric can be great saints ... or great sinners. Once they perceive a goal, they will wholeheartedly pursue it. The key is pursuing the right goal! A choleric without a spiritual life, or one who is totally living on the natural level, is likely to be passionate, driven, prideful-even cruel and violent-in the pursuit of his goals. When these goals are not God-given, much damage can occur. Consider St. Paul, who is thought to have been of choleric temperament. Prior to his conversion, Saul was rabidly anti-Christian, "laying waste" to the Church, dragging off the early followers and throwing them into prison (Acts 8:3). But, after his encounter with Christ, he became even more fervent in spreading the gospel; becoming, perhaps, the greatest apostle.

St. James must have been a choleric. One of the "Sons of Thunder," he was a man of action, ambition, and strong words-not to mention temper. When the Samaritan village did not welcome Jesus, James (with John) asked, "Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to consume

them?" (Luke 9:54). With John, he wanted to sit in a position of glory at the right or the left hand of Jesus (Mark 10:37).

Cholerics are neither joiners nor followers, preferring always to lead, and they are not naturally docile to direction. But they must learn to follow Christ. Without a spiritual director, the choleric tends to do his own will, and will assume that he's right-even when he's very wrong. Stubborn attachment to his own ideas and his own will ("my way or the highway") might cause difficulty for the choleric in his personal relationships and might contribute to a certain lack of docility in taking spiritual direction. The choleric will tend to question, argue, and debate everything first. This doesn't necessarily mean that he is wedded to his oppositional position; rather, it means he needs to feel he has come to assent or agreement freely, using his own reason. An astute spiritual director will offer guidance without seeming to infringe on the strong will of the choleric, respecting the choleric's strong need to come to a decision on his own.

CHOLERIC Spiritual gifts: Zeal for souls, fortitude, knowledge. Spiritual weaknesses: Self-will, control, anger, haughtiness, superiority. Saint who shares your temperament: St. Paul. If you are a choleric, you might have observed this in yourself: someone one asks you to do something, and your first reaction is to question his judgment and to think you have a better way of doing it. A choleric who has never struggled to attain the virtue of docility may prove to be quite a thorn in the side of his boss, spiritual director, or church group! But once you become aware of this tendency, you can work through your initial temptation to question and argue, and strive to be a team player, exemplifying docility to your directors or boss for the sake of esprit de corps and the common good. To develop the virtue of charity, you may have to sacrifice your strong attachment to self-will and develop your desire for unity, self-sacrifice, graciousness, and kindness.

Your active and decisive temperament will lead you naturally toward the apostolate. Perhaps your pastor or members of your parish will call upon your assistance in parish projects or in larger diocesan initiatives. Your leadership ability and enthusiasm are usually recognizable. You might even find yourself juggling many projects at once. As a result, you may be a candidate for activism--doing too many things without a supernatural spirit. When Peter didn't pray with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, he resorted to violent action (cutting off the soldier's ear), and Jesus reprimanded him.

God does not want action divorced from prayer. Remember the Benedictine motto "Ora et labora" ("pray and work"); work alone will never suffice in the spiritual realm. It is worthwhile for you to meditate on the Mystical Body of Christ. The body of Christ has many parts; one individual cannot do it all, nor is your way the only way. While you are actively

participating in building up the Church, reflect upon the importance of unity and charity. Without a deep and abiding prayer life, you risk blind activism, the egotism of individualism, or an apostolate founded on pride and vanity rather than on the pure love of Jesus Christ. Prayer is vital. Frequent reception of the sacraments, especially Holy Communion and Confession, is also critical.

Pope John Paul II tells us, "Every commitment to holiness, every activity aimed at carrying out the Church's mission, every work of pastoral planning must draw the strength it needs from the Eucharistic mystery and in turn be directed to that mystery as its culmination. In the Eucharist we have Jesus, we have his redemptive sacrifice, we have his Resurrection, we have the gift of the Holy Spirit, we have adoration, obedience, and love of the Father. Were we to disregard the Eucharist, how could we overcome our own deficiency?"

Distraction in prayer plagues all temperaments. For the choleric, it may be due to the fact that you always have many items on your "to do" list, and you want to waste no time getting started on them. You may find yourself distracted by pressing agenda items and want to spring immediately into action on those tasks. Instead, keep a pad of paper near your spiritual reading or place of prayer and, when distractions arise, simply jot them down. Then you can return to prayer, assured that the tasks, not forgotten, will still be there when you are done.

Elijah was thinking like a choleric when he expected the Lord to be in the earthquake or the violent wind. Like Elijah, you need to wait and listen, and hear the Lord in the gentle whisper in your heart. Another temptation you might experience is to remain emotionally detached from your prayer. The intellectual stimulation of spiritual reading can appear to provide spiritual consolation-so much so that you do not move from your head to your heart. It is vital that you go more deeply into meditation to the point that your prayer becomes a prayer of the heart. We recommend using Scripture as your source of meditation, as well as challenging spiritual writers who are able to draw their readers into a deeper relationship with Christ or more deeply into prayer.

THE MELANCHOLIC'S SPIRITUAL LIFE

Longing for heaven: It is said that a melancholic so longs for heaven that he can never be happy with less than perfection here on earth. Even as small children, melancholics are concerned with truth, beauty, and justice. They are naturally inclined toward reflection, prayer, and piety. They are compassionate, intelligent, and introspective, which are great assets in the spiritual life and may explain why it is often thought that the saints who achieved the heights of contemplation were melancholics.

If a melancholic is not aware of this intense spiritual longing for perfection, he might find himself extremely dissatisfied and frustrated on the natural level, without knowing why. Deep intimacy with God in prayer and good spiritual guidance will be able to help him avoid a downward cycle of frustration, anxiety, and depression. It is often said that St. Paul was a choleric who had strong melancholic tendencies. He exhibited the intelligence, deep prayer life (even mystical experiences), and the striving for perfection of the melancholic. He wrote that he was "caught up to the third heaven." And "I know that this person (whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows) was caught up into Paradise and heard ineffable things" (2 Cor. 12:3-4). Once while preaching, he spoke on and on, until midnight, refusing to take into account his audience, (until a young man drifted off to sleep and fell out the window!), just as a preachy melancholic would (Acts 20:7-12).

At another point, Paul separated from Barnabas and John, known as Mark, because Mark had deserted them at Pamphylia, thus indicating his long memory when it came to a personal grievance (Acts 15:37-38). Melancholics are slow to respond to stimuli and can seem to be irresolute. Fear of the future can also stymie their activity. Spiritual writers have pointed out that melancholics take a long time to decide about a vocation to the religious life. Sometimes melancholics will balk at committing to the apostolate, sometimes out of fear of potential failure or anxiety about details.

If you are a melancholic, you may find yourself flooded by thoughts of potential disasters or difficulties-all piling up at once in your consciousness. This project will be a disaster! I cannot possibly undertake this apostolate! You may be paralyzed by anxiety or by fear of failure. Even worse, you may fear that you cannot grow in holiness! You may become overwhelmed by critical thoughts, scrupulously reviewing your past mistakes. Always bring such feelings of scrupulosity to a spiritual director, for it is a very real problem in the spiritual life. When you find yourself flooded by thoughts of potential disaster, learn to put those negative thoughts out of your mind immediately, developing the trust in God that you need to take a leap of faith and commit generously to serving Christ. "With God all things are possible," could be your motto.

MELANCHOLIC

Spiritual gifts: Piety, long-suffering, wisdom. Spiritual weaknesses: Timidity, scrupulosity judgmentalism, despair. Saint who shares your temperament: St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein). Another great stumbling block for the melancholic is self-pity-a tendency that can result in isolation, self-centeredness, envy, and possibly depression. To gain joy, you should reflect in thanksgiving on all the gifts the Lord has given you. Say

prayers of thanksgiving, especially for specific gifts and blessings. "Rejoice in the Lord always," St. Paul tells us, "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever ever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (Phil. 4:8). Melancholics should take St. Paul's advice vice literally: think about these things!

There lies an antidote to crankiness and a recipe for joy! Without a strong spiritual life (and the melancholic may overtly desire this more than any of the other temperaments), the melancholic can become resentful, bitter, and despairing at worst, or negative and judgmental at best. Melancholics have a natural tendency to moodiness, which can be exacerbated by their thought processes. They should try to become aware of how their thoughts contribute to their moods and, when a negative mood begins, or negative thoughts creep in, should immediately refocus their attention on the underlying positives, as St. Paul recommends.

So that we will not be discouraged or lose heart, St. Paul advises us to keep in mind our ultimate goal—heaven and our ultimate union with the beloved, Jesus Christ: "We are afflicted in every way, but not constrained; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down but not destroyed.... For we who live are constantly being given up to death for the sake of Jesus" (2 Cor. 4: 7-12). "Therefore we are not discouraged.... For this momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond comparison, as we look not to what is seen but to what is unseen" (2 Cor. 4:16-18).

A strong spiritual life, with frequent reception of the sacraments and an intimate relationship with Christ, will help dispel the feelings of depression that can afflict the melancholic. During the eighteenth International Conference on Depression in 2003, Pope John Paul II noted that depression is always a spiritual trial and recommended meditation on the Psalms, "in which the holy author expresses his joys and anxieties in prayer"; the recitation of the Rosary to see Christ with Mary's eyes; and participation in the Eucharist, "source of interior peace."

Pride, in the melancholic, does not usually manifest itself as an attempt to gain recognition or honor, as it might in a choleric. The melancholic does not seek overt praise or commendation. However, the melancholic does fear failure! Thus, his pride shows up in his desire to be perfect and in his fear of disgrace. In his pursuit suit of "perfection," he begins to strive to do everything equally perfectly: regarding the home, the kids, and the apostolate. A melancholic may have a hard time prioritizing, because he wants to do everything perfectly!

If you're a melancholic, make sure that your own high ideals don't result in a lack of empathy for those who do not have equally high ideals or who need to be motivated or taught (such as children!). Melancholics can be tempted to hold everyone, including themselves, to an impossibly high standard. A melancholic who loses sight of his ultimate goal can become a real cross to himself as well as to his spouse and children-critiquing, complaining, and constantly seeking that elusive goal of "perfection." He can appear very self-effacing and humble, but when he works on a project, he becomes so critical and exacting that no one else feels competent enough to collaborate on the project! His co-workers give up, feeling as if they have done a poor job. In the end, the melancholic is alone, over-burdened, and resentful. In such a way, pride can seep in to destroy spiritual fruits.

A melancholic needs to develop a greater acceptance and appreciation of the foibles of human nature and to learn not to sweat the small stuff. A deep spiritual life, particularly an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ, will help him realize that only Jesus Christ is the true and perfect friend of his soul. No earthly human being can ever satisfy our deepest longings for intimacy-to be perfectly understood and unconditionally loved. Only a deep, personal relationship with Christ will answer these needs, and with it, the melancholic will become less self-absorbed, less demanding and critical of others, and more gentle, forgiving, and genuinely appreciative.

If you are a melancholic, a virtue you might find particularly beneficial to develop is optimism, or supernatural hope. Optimism, when founded on confidence in God, gives us inner peace and supernatural joy. As a virtue, it requires us to be realistic and seek positive aspects in every situation, including difficult ones. If you are a melancholic, trustful surrender to Divine Providence will give you peace and joy. You should also place a high priority on delicate charity toward your neighbor. There is a temptation to value truth so highly that it trumps charity.

Many a melancholic has complained, "But God doesn't want us to be untruthful! True charity is charity toward God!" This is a false dilemma. Charity is also in the small details: in the way you tell someone the truth, for instance. You must express appreciation for others. It will require a firm commitment of your will to do it (for you do not naturally feel like doing this): overtly and consciously to extend kindness towards others and express your sincere gratitude and appreciation for all those in your life. See Christ in everyone!

A melancholic, whose natural inclination is to strive for the ideal, may err in making "perfection" his ultimate goal-perfection in achieving holiness. Although all persons are called to holiness, holiness for its own sake is not our

ultimate goal; rather, union with God is our ultimate goal, and, with God's grace, we must become holy to achieve it!

THE SANGUINE'S SPIRITUAL LIFE

Rejoice in the Lord always! Sanguines are quick to react, but not long to remember-naturally gifted with the virtue of forgiveness! They are extraverted, devoted, and life-loving, and have great people skills. St. Peter was a lovable sanguine. "I will never betray you, Lord!" he promises. Then, when questioned, he goes along with the crowd: "No, I am not one of them!" (Luke 22:58). At the Transfiguration, he enthusiastically offers, "Let us set up three tents!" Even though, as Scripture also notes, "he did not know what he was saying" (Luke 9:33). He impetuously jumps out of the boat to walk on the water, but then looks down at the water and, afraid, begins to sink (Matt. 14:30). He falls asleep in the Garden of Olives and then impulsively cuts off the Roman's ear (John 18:10). Peter tells Christ that he will never let him suffer and die; Jesus says, "Get behind me, Satan." (Mark 8:27-33).

St. Peter was the one to whom the vision was given to spread the Faith among the Gentiles and who brought the first Gentile into the Church. He was also the one to first work a miracle after Pentecost. His openness and generosity and love for people may have contributed to these "firsts." St. Philip Neri was probably a lively and joyful sanguine. He was "a handsome boy with attractive manners and a gay spirit, but sensitive-the kind that quickly wins affection from others." He was not overly pious as a child and was perhaps a bit impulsive (noted at his canonization was the time he pushed his sister because she interrupted him, and the time he tore up a copy of the family tree). He was a practical joker, but used his humor to gain souls for Christ. "I will have no melancholy, no low spirits in my house," he was known to say.

Relationships are important to the sanguine; he is very adept at dealing with people and is naturally considerate and responsive. But his temptation is to place his trust solely in other people, even to the point of denying what he knows to be right in order to please someone important to him. A sanguine should follow a program of life that includes placing his trust in God first and foremost, strengthening his personal relationship with Christ, and in developing control over his emotions, and consistency and perseverance in his spiritual resolutions.

SANGUINE Spiritual gifts: Joy, mercy, magnanimity, gratitude. Spiritual weaknesses: Self-love, envy, seeking esteem and human respect. Saint who shares your temperament: St. Peter. The sanguine is eager to serve Christ and the Church; however, if he undertakes many projects without out

sufficient reflection or prayer, he might find himself quickly overloaded, with little time to accomplish anything well. In prayer, he may become distracted. In such cases and in times of aridity or lack of consolation, the sanguine should practice perseverance out of love for God.

The sanguine is docile and cooperative in groups, so religious communities are often formed of sanguines (and phlegmatics; it is the melancholic or choleric who might actually found an order). Sanguines are active and work well with other people; they are a joy to have in an apostolic activity. Because they value relationships, they might find a prayer group or a Cursillo weekend inspiring and helpful. But they can also be easily misled by unscrupulous persons. Therefore, it is critical for the sanguine to have good spiritual direction and to develop spiritual discernment skills.

If you are a lively, imaginative sanguine who struggles to stay focused on prayer, you might find that praying in an atmosphere that capitalizes on your active sensibilities—for example, in a beautiful church with lighted candles, incense, stained-glass windows, or ornate statuary—will be greatly beneficial. The Ignatian form of meditation, which allows you to place yourself in your imagination at the very Gospel scene you are meditating on, might also be very profitable. If you are struggling with constancy, you might particularly benefit by meditating on the Passion.

The authors of *Prayer and Temperament* offer this recommendation (among others) for those with very active senses and imagination: "Take your crucifix, look intently at it, feel it, kiss it. In your imagination, go back to the first Good Friday. Try to put yourself in the place of Jesus being nailed to the Cross. This is what St. Francis did in the cave at Alverno..... In spiritual studies, the sanguine might be tempted to settle for a cursory or superficial understanding. He may find it difficult to stay focused in performing apostolic work: flitting from task to task, depending on what appeals to him at the time, never following through with perseverance. But this can be remedied with motivation.

If the sanguine is motivated by love for Christ, and is given good direction, structure, and formation, he will be a zealous and joyful apostle for the Lord! If you are sanguine, it is important to develop both depth and constancy in your spiritual life. Christ calls you to leave the shallows and go deeper: *Duc in altum!* (Luke 5:4). One way to encourage age this is to make reflection a habit; make it a policy to think before you act. When you meditate on the Scriptures, do not be satisfied with the warm glow of inspired thoughts while reading; go deeper, and make a resolution based on what Christ is asking of you. Check up on yourself at night during your examination of conscience. A prayer group that also requires accountability in fulfilling

prayer commitments and spiritual formation will help you develop self-discipline in the spiritual life.

Taking part in a movement or a spirituality that meets regularly with evenings of reflection or for prayer and study will be extremely helpful. A spiritual director will also help you achieve discipline and commitment. If you are a sanguine who was raised at a time when very little substance was covered in religious education, or if your parents were somewhat oblivious of the effects of the culture on your formation, or you had only the minimum of religious instruction, you might find yourself discouraged and might feel spiritually insecure, rely on others' opinions, or blame your parents or history for your formation gaps. The truth is, we are all responsible for our own spiritual formation, simply by our incorporation into the Church! We should not blame our parents or our teachers.

The antidote to this spiritual insecurity is to develop self-discipline in the spiritual life, a discipline that includes daily prayer as well as self-formation through spiritual reading and through growth in virtue. Tackle one virtue at a time, if you feel you are very far behind. Through prayer and a close relationship with Christ, you will come to understand your depth as a unique individual and will begin to root your confidence in the basis for all true confidence: God's absolute unconditional love for you. You will begin to appreciate your strengths and to attack your weaknesses.

When you make an effort to practice mental prayer, and to know the person of Jesus Christ intimately through meditation on the scriptures, you will discover great depths within yourself—depths you did not realize you had—along with a great capacity for self-sacrifice, a generosity in self-giving, and the joyous heart of a true apostle. Your vivacity, joy, devotion, and sensitivity will draw many other souls to Christ and will help build up the Church.

THE PHLEGMATIC'S SPIRITUAL LIFE

Blessed are the meek. St. Thomas Aquinas is thought to have been a brilliant phlegmatic. Neither excitable nor loquacious, like the sanguine and choleric temperaments, he was careful in speech and thought and detached, dispassionate, and methodical in his arguments. His temperament served him well as a philosopher: he thought things through deeply and thoroughly, never rushing to conclusions or letting emotion get in the way of his reason.

Adaptable in groups, friendly, and respectful of authority and tradition, phlegmatics have long been considered excellent members of religious communities. They are gentle, quietly persevering, and faithful. With attention to self-formation and motivation on the human level, they can also be superb leaders.

Phlegmatics are very principled as well. They are true to their word and value honesty and integrity. On the other hand, because of their cooperative spirit and their fear of conflict, they might be tempted to compromise their principles and go along with the status quo. Phlegmatics have a tendency to laziness, and without spiritual formation and motivation, they can become spiritual couch potatoes.

They might also be tempted to do things that please other people, instead of God. They might not, on their own, gravitate toward spiritual practices that seem arduous-even something simple, such as a holy hour. But if the structure is provided and they find the initial motivation, they will be faithful to their commitments. But the motivation to get there in the first place is critical. If you are a phlegmatic, don't sell yourself short! Audacity is a virtue founded in prudence, yet with a strong passion for noble ideals and great undertakings.

In your spiritual program, work on building confidence in Christ, fortitude, and prudence. Meeting Christ in prayer each and every morning, in a spiritual communion during the day, and again in an examination of conscience in the evening will help combat any temptation to spiritual laziness.

PHLEGMATIC Spiritual gifts: Peace, understanding, counsel, meekness. Spiritual weaknesses: Sensuality, sloth, complacency. Saint who shares your temperament: St. Thomas Aquinas. You might be attracted to formulaic prayers, such as the Rosary, the Liturgy of the Hours, and the Divine Mercy Chaplet. Sacramentals might also be very appealing to you, especially the brown scapular and the Miraculous Medal. Do not stop with externals or devotions, however.

Take a more active role in prayer by engaging your imagination. Place yourself in a scene from the Gospels, noting how you feel and what the Holy Spirit is telling you. Perhaps you are a shepherd boy near the manger where Jesus lay, as the Blessed Mother gently rocked him and the Magi adored him. Does the infant Jesus look at you? How do you feel? Even one tear shed by the Son of God as an infant could have saved mankind! Prayer journals and prayer groups are also very helpful, providing the encouragement to vocalize your insights from the Holy Spirit, and also the structure and predictability that phlegmatics enjoy. A prayer group or a parish society will also provide some necessary encouragement, motivation, accountability and reinforcement to keep the fire blazing.

Watch out for the tendency to avoid the necessary struggle of the spiritual life. Meditating on the parable of the talents will not only highlight the gifts God has given you, but also remind you of the responsibility such gifts carry with them. Do not bury your talents! Phlegmatics will flourish with

commitment to a structure with accountability. Ongoing commitment to parish life, serving the Church within a clearly identifiable structure (as opposed to just helping out when you feel like it), spiritual direction, regular prayer groups, and other spiritual activities that promote service of the Church within a supportive environment will be extremely beneficial. Know yourself, and begin to know God.

Spiritual growth will always entail a deep prayer life and a humble submission to God's will, lived out in charity. As one spiritual author says, holiness is in the will, because if we love God, we will surely end up with him. But we will be able to love God better if we know him and if we know ourselves. God is constant, and we are not. God loves unconditionally, and we do not. God is always faithful, but we are not.

If we are aware of our own foibles and natural tendencies, we will be better able to thwart those failings and tendencies to sin that spring from our own inclinations, wounded by Original Sin. The more we grasp reality, understanding ourselves and others, the greater our love for God will be and the greater our love for all members of the Body of Christ. As St. Paul tells us, "at present we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then face-to-face. At present I know partially; then I shall know fully as I am fully known" (1 Cor. 13:12). At present we seek God's face and our own, we want to live in the light, but we must make an effort to grow in wisdom and holiness, just as the child Jesus did. Ultimately, love is the only path: "So faith, hope, and love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor. 13:13).