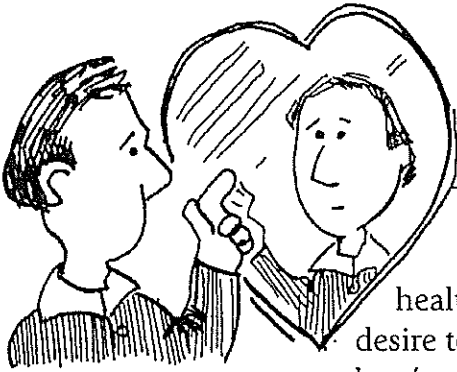


The care and keeping of the soul



We have only one soul and it will last forever. Like anything of great value, it needs care and maintenance. A soul in perfect health is evidenced by a close, prayerful relationship with God, a sincere desire to do good, frequent reception of the Sacraments, a dedication to make others' needs a priority, and a determination to achieve higher levels of holiness.

Performing regular spiritual maintenance keeps us on track to perfect health.

Use any or all of the suggestions from each category to craft your own plan to help in the care and keeping of your soul:

"But from there you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul"
(Deuteronomy 4:29).

Daily

- Before you open your eyes, let your first conscious thoughts be of gratitude to Our Lord for his goodness and glory.
- Every morning, offer the freshest part of the day to God in prayer. Take the first fifteen minutes for you and God alone.
- Read a passage or two from the Bible – choose the daily Mass readings if you can't attend Mass each day, for example. Scripture is one way God speaks clearly and personally.
- Pray the Rosary. It's part of our Catholic identity. The Rosary is a meditation on the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus and a connection with our Mother. Praying the entire day's worth of meditations in one sitting is best, but if that doesn't work with your schedule, pray a decade or two throughout

the day until the Rosary is complete.

- **Do something uncomfortable.** Penance helps us to detach from material comforts and the world in favor of God. Skip cream in your coffee, drink water instead of soda, walk the stairs instead of taking the elevator, do something you loathe – exercise, eat your vegetables, call cranky Aunt Tillie – and offer the discomfort to God.
- **Do something kind.** *"This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another"* (John 13:35). Hold the door for someone else, give a coworker credit for a job well done, pay for a stranger's coffee, feed another's parking meter, let someone go ahead of you in line, bring a neighbor groceries, listen to a coworker's problems. Don't let a day pass without showing kindness.

- **Examine your day.** At the end of the day, ask yourself if your actions moved you closer to God or further away. Focus on the successes that kept you on the right track and resolve to repeat them. Pray to the Holy Spirit for guidance on how to do better where you stumbled. A detailed examination of conscience every night will keep sharp your sense of sin.

Weekly

- **Start the week with Mass on Sunday** and attend Mass on Holy Days of Obligation. This is required of every Catholic. The Holy Eucharist has to be at the very center of our spiritual life. It is worship of the God who made us and saves us. And, it is an opportunity to praise God and thank Him for all that he has done for us. During Mass, we encounter Jesus who is truly present and waits for us.

- Talk about God with at least three people each week. Bring him into conversations with family, friends, coworkers, strangers. It doesn't have to be forced. Mention how he has blessed you, pass on something interesting or inspiring that you read in the Bible, or point out where you see God is working in someone else's life.
- **Contribute.** *"On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper ..."* (1 Corinthians 16:2). Be generous with your weekly contribution to the collection basket at church. Parish needs won't be met without the help of each parishioner.
- **Adore the one who adores you.** Visit Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. Spend 30 minutes to an hour before him in prayer and quiet adoration every week. You'll be amazed by the graces you receive.
- **Be encouraging.** Pick a friend, family member, coworker or stranger each week and send an email, text or handwritten note telling that person that you are praying for him or her, that you noticed something good that he or she did, or just send good wishes for a wonderful day.
- **Learn something new.** Pick up the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and read a section with which you aren't familiar.

Monthly

- **Read a good book.** Think you struggle with holiness? Read about St. Augustine, St. Francis,

St. Teresa of Avila, or any of the great saints. You'll be inspired, amused, and encouraged. Spiritual reading is a great way to grow and challenge ourselves. Ask your pastor for suggestions if you need them.

- **Develop your own ministry.** While on Earth, Jesus walked among us, giving of himself and personally connecting with people. He used his talents for others; he didn't keep them for himself. We are his hands and feet. He asks that we continue his work serving. What special talents do you have that can benefit others? It can be as simple as being a friendly face visiting a homebound neighbor or teaching a parish religious education class. Do something constructive for your neighborhood, or community, or country each month – or as often as you can.
- **Meet with a spiritual mentor.** Want to be challenged to new heights of holiness? Find a good spiritual director or mentor who can help you get there. In many dioceses, there are priests or religious who act as spiritual directors and will be happy to mentor you to a closer union with God.
- **Confess monthly.** Catholics are only required to go once a year unless conscious of grave sin, but imagine only filling your car's gas tank once a year. Souls need the grace of the Sacrament far more often. Frequent, sincere Confession done right reveals patterns of sin, helps us to avoid evil, and keeps us focused on pleasing God.

- **Volunteer for your parish.** The Church is dependent upon her people to keep the doors open and to do her good work. Become an extraordinary minister of the Eucharist and visit homebound parishioners, act as an usher at Mass, sing in a choir, clean the church, help with upkeep of the grounds, teach a religious education class, raise money for a church cause. Ask at your parish office for suggestions.

Annually

- **Go on a retreat.** Before beginning his public ministry, Jesus spent 40 days in the desert praying and fasting to prepare. This was a retreat. Periodically, he would invite his disciples to come to a deserted place and rest. Those were also periods of retreat. After appearing to St. Paul, Our Lord directed him to wait to be told what to do and St. Paul waited for three days, preparing himself. St. Paul was on retreat.
Look for a retreat that offers quiet as a means of listening and reconnecting with the one who loves you most. Find somewhere to unplug, get away and deepen your relationship with him without distraction.
- **Donate clothing and other goods.** Generously give of your unused clothing, shoes, dishes, blankets or quilts, toys, furniture, books or other items. Make sure they are in good condition and bring them to a shelter, or Catholic Charities center that receives such goods. Make it a regular habit to donate to the poor.