

SIXTH MAXIM

To be guided in all things by the spirit of wisdom

Christians ought never to walk in darkness but always in the light. This will happen if we are guided by the indwelling Spirit. The spirit of intelligence makes us calm in our attitudes and mature in our thinking. It causes us to put first the amendment of our own lives.

The first priority in our day-to-day living is to perform our duties towards others faithfully and try to be good at our job, whatever it may be. We serve God best by doing well what God asks us to do.

Every day we need to spend time in prayer and reading, especially the Scriptures. And we should not neglect the necessary rest and recreation. By preference therefore we look to a life of regularity and balance. But we know from experience that God will inevitably call us away from home and routine to serve the needs of people. In this too the wise Spirit guides us.

God summons us to action through external circumstances: either we see an obvious need, as the good Samaritan did; or we receive a specific request. If we fix our eyes on the Lord who summons us, our response will be prompt and full of love, even to the point of sacrifice.

“So it can happen that the Christian, who for his part would prefer a quiet life far removed from the world’s worries – a life devoted to prayer, study, work, rest and other basic needs – is drawn out of his sanctuary which he is devoted to not through laziness but through sincere humility. He is led into activity: indeed, he may be plunged into a sea of cares, of labours great and small, noble or abject: all this for the good of his neighbour, according to the priority which God himself has established.” (*Maxims, full text, 7:17*)

In answering a call of charity, we should:

- respond to the first request first;
- only accept requests where we are able and free to take them on;
- and prefer spiritual works to temporal.

And whatever we start, we persevere with to the finish.

Any internal prompting of the Holy Spirit should be checked out with a prudent spiritual guide. The sure test of whether we are truly following what God desires of us will be peace of mind and heart.

“If Christians were to put all these things into practice, they would form a peaceful and happy society, not only in the future, but even in this present life.”

(Maxims conclusion 6:25)

Rosmini’s book of *Maxims*, although little known outside Italy, is justly regarded as a modern classic of Christian spirituality. The synopsis above, put together for use in New Zealand, is a free adaptation of the original Italian text, but is considerably abridged.

Rosmini wrote the *Maxims* between 1827 and 1830 about the time he was founding the Religious Congregation which bears his name.

However, a letter to a lay friend indicates that he intended them for general use, not just for vowed religious. He writes: *I intend them as much for people living in a regular community as for those living outside and not having vows... The book is so concise that it may seem a bit hard to swallow; nevertheless it is worth chewing on as it is!*

(letter to Giovanni Boselli, January 1831)

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Maxims of Christian Perfection

Antonio Rosmini

Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect (Mt 5:48)

As Christians we hear the call of the gospel to become perfect, which means to love God and other people with all our being. But we are unable to add anything to God which is not already his. So what can our response be? Only... “to live justly, to love tenderly, and walk humbly with our God” (*Mic. 6:8*)

We respond to the gospel call by seeking to grow towards what God wants us to become – to model our lives on Jesus Christ, who of all people was the most fully human: with Jesus to be poor, to be chaste, to obey God.

A Christian single-mindedly seeks to know what God desires of him or her, and lovingly strives to carry it out, even though it may call for sacrifice.

FIRST MAXIM

To desire only to please God: that is, to be just

Doing what God wants, allowing myself to be shaped by God: that is what it means to be just. Being *passive*, not in the sense of being inert, but like a dancer who is pliable to the movement of her partner, or a faithful hound eager to anticipate its master’s every whim.

Jesus bids us to “hunger and thirst” for this justice (*Mt 5:6*) and guarantees that if we truly desire it, he will ask the Father so that we will most certainly be given it.

► Justice unites us with Jesus himself, who strove only to fulfil his Father's will while on earth. Our prayer and action become one with the life of Jesus, and so we become closely united to God.

If we truly desire to be just we will be wary of being sidetracked by lesser goals or values. In other words we suspend judgment on the absolute value of a course of action until we have discerned that this is precisely what God wants us to do.

We will often find ourselves attracted by material things, and it should not worry us unduly if outside events sometimes distract us. It remains for us simply to return to that precious inner solitude with God in prayer which more than anything else will keep our lives in balance.

SECOND MAXIM

To delight in Jesus Christ and in his church

God is revealed to us in the person of his Son, Jesus. God delights in his Son, and Jesus delights in all men and women who follow him as members of his church. Within the church (in its fullest sense) we know we are part of a "great cloud of witnesses" (*Heb. 12:1*) that supports us in prayer, many of whom have gone to God ahead of us. Even on earth we belong already to the Communion of Saints.

As Christians our first concern is to serve the church loyally and wholeheartedly – not just a part but the *whole* church of Jesus Christ. It is through the church especially that the world will come to know the God of love, for it is God's chosen instrument and will never fail. But as regards some parts or aspects of the church we cannot be so sure.

The church is a human institution and needs a visible structure. So we look for guidance to the Pope and bishops as successors of the Apostles, who founded the church in Christ's name. In particular we reverence the Holy Father, the successor of Peter, who is the focus of unity and infallible guide of faith.

It is God's desire that the faithful be united to him for all eternity; and we too pray that every man and woman will eventually come to find their rest in God. To share in the 'wedding feast' of heaven is the reason God made us, and we long for it to happen. Therefore we should live out our

life as if we were on the point of leaving it. Like devoted servants we await our loving Lord Jesus, watching for his return.

THIRD MAXIM

To desire God's will in all things

When we pray daily *Your will be done on earth*, what lies behind this prayer? The answer is that God has created and disposed all things for the greatest possible good. So it is only reasonable for us to remain tranquil and full of joy, however events turn out: they are in God's loving hands. We need, therefore, to dispel all anxious feelings about the future from our hearts, even when events appear to be harmful to the church or against the common good.

We should never presume to have the answer to the world's problems, or fancy that it will depend on our initiative to bring about changes for the good. Rather, the Christian prayerfully waits for the will of God to be revealed, observing that God often uses the most unlikely means to bring about the divine purpose.

FOURTH MAXIM

To give myself wholly to God's providence

This Maxim is the key to our peace of mind and heart, because it implies perfect trust in God alone and detachment from human possessions.

Jesus says to us: "Do not be anxious what you shall eat. Think more of the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, yet God feeds them – how much more you!" (*Lk. 12:22-24*). God, who is love, cares for every atom of creation. God's loving hands fashioned us; his anxious care sustains our every moment. So we can have trust in this God who cherishes each one of us.

- At the start of the gospel passage above Jesus addresses us as his friends, without condition. Not 'if you are good' – but 'whether you are sinners or not.'
- If we are truly God's friends, we are foolish to rely on our own powers. "If I scale the heavens... if I dwell beyond the ocean, even there your hand will be guiding me" (*Ps 139:8-10*).

- We could even embrace actual poverty, content to choose God alone as our patrimony. "Wherever your treasure is, there will be your heart too" (*Mt. 6:21*).
- In our poverty we can confidently ask the Father for our daily bread, since anything we need is a means to establish God's kingdom and his justice. By praying in these words we acknowledge our dependence on God, trusting him to give us what we need – and more.
- We can attend to present duties, but we should not fret about the future. The acid test is whether we worry about the outcome of any decisions we take or about public events. They are in God's hands.
- If we seek only to please God we shall not always be looking for change. We are happy with our status and condition of life, because this is where God has put us. And we shall not be constantly seeking to better our situation.
- On the other hand we are perfectly content to accept change when it comes, and at the time and in the manner God decrees. The important thing is to serve God the way God wants, even at the expense of our health, wealth or reputation.

FIFTH MAXIM

To regard myself as being of little account

In comparison with God the life of the Christian seems of little account: without power, without value. Our sins, moreover, convince us that of ourselves we are incapable of good. Indeed unless God is merciful to us we are capable of every evil.

That is why we should remain passive until moved to action by God. Our attitude becomes paradoxical: full of zeal for God's glory, yet wholly conscious of our inability to do any good.

Our stance will be as reluctant as that of Moses and as humble as the Virgin Mary, who seemed so insignificant by worldly standards, yet whose life was judged by God as worthy to be raised to the heights.

Hence our preference as Christians will be to follow a life of solitude, silence and quiet industry, consecrating our every moment to the service of God. ►