

## Introduction to Imitation of Christ

1. The imitation of Christ was written in the 15<sup>th</sup> century in Medieval Latin.
  - a. Apart from the bible, no Christian book has been translated into more languages than the Imitation of Christ
2. Author – Thomas A Kempis
  - a. C 1380-July 25, 1471
  - b. Thomas from Kempen/hometown
  - c. German and Dutch
  - d. He is generally accepted as the author but seems to be anonymously written
  - e. He was a brother of the Common Life
3. Major work of the *devotio moderna*
  - a. Movement in arising in the 14<sup>th</sup> century
  - b. Religious reform that was started by a Catholic deacon Geert Groote who was a popular preacher and founder of the Brethren of the Common Life and Sisters of the Common Life.
  - c. Tried to rediscover pious practices like humility, obedience and simplicity of life
  - d. Type of prayer was Christian meditation and projecting oneself in the Biblical scene (St. Ignatius of Loyola in his Exercises was influenced by this movement)
  - e. Promoted an intense personal relationship with God over the pride in theologians
  - f. The high theology of the universities of the Middle Ages became less connected to the life of the Christian
    - i. Book one - good and pure conscience will give more joy than all the philosophy one has ever learned,
    - ii. fervent prayer will bring more happiness than a "multi-course banquet",
    - iii. the silence will be more "exhilarating" than long tales,
    - iv. holy deeds will be of greater value than nice-sounding words (Chap. 24)
  - g. Seems to be in part and influence for the Protestant Reformation, Lutheranism and Calvinism with a more individual attitude towards belief and religion.
  - h. Rise out of widespread dissatisfaction with the church both in its structure and the personal lives of the clergy. Lack of moral values among the clergy
  - i. Began as a lay movement
  - j. Wake of the Protestant Reformation, the movement declined rapidly. They were dissolved in protestant areas like all religious houses. By 1600 most of the houses were gone
4. His audience
  - a. It was written for the Monk, which he states directly
  - b. It became widely read by all states of life
  - c. The focus is on the interior life and withdrawal from the mundane things of the world as opposed to active social justice life of the Gospel
  - d. Emphasis on the Eucharist as the key element of the Spiritual life
5. Reactions to the Imitation of Christ

- a. It is quite serious and for a mature spirituality – Preface by Knox
  - i. Knox said, “If a man tells you that he is fond of the Imitation, view him with sudden suspicion, he is either a dabbler or a saint”
  - ii. No manual is more pitiless in its exposition of the Christian ideal, less careful to administer consolation. There is much about asceticism and cross carrying
  - iii. He calls it a work without frills until the fourth book – a manual for the communicant
  - iv. *The whole work was meant to be, surely, what it is—a sustained irritant which will preserve us, if it is read faithfully, from sinking back into relaxation: from self-conceit, self-pity, self-love. It offers consolation here and there, but always at the price of fresh exertion, of keeping your head pointing upstream. Heaven help us if we find easy reading in The Imitation of Christ.*
- b. “A familiarity with this great classic is an integral part of a mature spiritual life and even a path to holiness” – Benedict Groeschel
- c. Saints who were highly influenced by the book
  - i. St. Therese of Lisieux
  - ii. St. Francis de Sales
  - iii. St. Ignatius of Loyola
  - iv. St Thomas More
  - v. Thomas Merton
  - vi. John Wesley, founder of Methodism
- d. Criticisms of the book
  - i. It is too inner focused and very little about social or neighbor responsibility
  - ii. It is not directed toward liturgical piety
- 6. The Knox translation of the Imitation of Christ that we will be using.
  - a. Knox was a convert from Anglicanism convert who wrote mystery stories
  - b. He was educated in Eton and Oxford in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century
  - c. Knox read a chapter a day from the Imitation of Christ
  - d. He died before completing the Translation and so Michael Oakley finished it.
    - i. Knox only reached Book II, chapter 4
- 7. Work is divided into 4 books
  - a. Book 1 Helpful Counsels of the Spiritual life
    - i. Withdrawal of the outward life as duty allows
    - ii. Renouncing all that is vain resisting temptations and distraction of life
    - iii. Giving up the pride of learning and to be humble
    - iv. Solitude and silence
  - b. Book 2 – Directives for the Interior Life - Stripping us of attachments
    - i. Detachment, mortification
    - ii. We give up our own way, not because of peace but because progress is when you are everyone’s inferior
    - iii. Avoid gossip because you will never know interior devotion until you hold your tongue about the concerns of others
    - iv. Importance of a good conscience

- v. Faith in Jesus not human beings
- vi. A false sense of freedom and over confidence are obstacles for spiritual life
- vii. Attribute all good to God , even small ones because you consider the giver
- c. Book 3 – On interior Consolations
  - i. Dialogue between Jesus and the disciple
  - ii. Contrast those of the world and those of God
  - iii. Spiritual progress is offering oneself of the divine will and not seek own will
  - iv. Do not be anxious about the future, or the absence of God, or being lost or the difficulties of life, he is closer than you realize, who is your hope.
  - v. Internal renunciation of yourself unites you to God, he is the way, the truth and the life
- d. Book 4 – On the Blessed Sacrament
  - i. In the Sacrament spiritual grace is conferred, the soul gets strength and the mind is made strong and the body is renewed that has been debilitate by sin.
  - ii. Make clean the mansions of your heart to receive the Sacrament
  - iii. Jesus says that there is no offering more worthy, no satisfaction greater, for the washing away of sins than to offer oneself purely and completely to God at the time the Body of Christ is offered in the Mass and in Communion

## 8. Our Schedule

- a. **Monday, January 17, 2022** - Introduction to the Imitation of Christ
- Monday, January 24, 2022** - Pages 23-55 (Book 1, Chapters 1-22)
- Monday, January 31, 2022** - Pages 55-90 (Book 1, Chapters 23-25 and Book 2 Chapters 1-12)
- Monday, February 7, 2022** - Pages 91-124 (Book 3, Chapters 1-21)
- Monday, February 14, 2022** - Pages 124-156 (Book 3, Chapter 22-45)
- Monday, February 21, 2022** - Pages 156-186 (Book 3, Chapters 46-59)
- Monday, February 28, 2022** - Pages 187-221 (Book 4, Chapters 1-18)
  - i. **Please do not worry if you are not keeping up the readings** – read it the rest of your life.
  - ii.

## 9. Website for information and download

## 10. Online and in person – regardless of weather