

# MAXIMS OF THE LITTLE INSTITUTE

Jean-Pierre Médaille, S.J.

written for the first Sisters of Saint Joseph, LePuy, France c. 1650

## Foreword

This translation and commentary, commissioned by the Federation of Sisters of Saint Joseph, U.S.A., was made by the Intercongregational Research Team under the direction of Marius Nepper, S.J., Villa Maria College, Erie, Pennsylvania, Summer, 1975.

A return to the other writings of the Founder, Jean-Pierre Médaille, S.J., has prompted fresh interest among the Sisters of Saint Joseph in the hundred Maxims "which contain the spirit of their Institute".

The purpose of the present work is to point towards what may be of lasting significance in this writing, independent of limitations imposed by either seventeenth or twentieth century values.<sup>1</sup>

The Intercongregational Research Team used as textual source the French edition of the Maxims published by Marius Nepper, S.J., in 1962, and as references the translations offered by Philadelphia, Brentwood, Wichita, and Hamilton, as well as The Spiritual Legacy of John Peter Médaille, S.J., an Intercongregational Publication of the Sisters of Saint Joseph in 1959.

## ORIGIN

These Maxims are extracted in various ways from a spiritual book composed by Father Médaille, S.J., at a date unknown to us and eventually published at Clermont-Ferrand in 1657 under the rather lengthy title: Maxims of Perfection for Souls Aspiring to Great Virtue. This book must have enjoyed a certain success, since the publisher of the second edition in 1672 wrote that Anne of Austria, Queen of France and mother of Louis

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<sup>1</sup> For a brief view of the political, religious and literary milieu, cf. Origins of the Little Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Joseph, translated from the French of M. Nepper, s.j., Federation Sisters of Saint Joseph, U.S.A., 1969, 1973.

XIV, "took pleasure in using it and kept it among her spiritual reading." (Maximes de Perfection, 1962 French Edition, Marius Nepper, S.J., p. 9)

The longer work is composed of two parts. In the first part, the author explains in a concrete, practical way how to reach "great virtue," that is, virtue practiced in its more perfect acts. Such effort is clearly linked with the Pauline principle of dying to self and living for Jesus Christ. In the second part, "Exercises for emptying of self, putting on Jesus Christ, and imitating him in both his hidden and his public life," this Pauline principle pervades. The author confronts us not with virtues, as in the first part, but with Jesus Christ who lived them and whose mystery we are called to contemplate. Here there is a complete change of tone: the moralist becomes the loving spiritual director who speaks of the same demands but "in the form of prayer and conversation with the Savior himself." (Ibid., P. 7)

It was from the first part only that Médaille took the hundred Maxims for his religious and consequently they are only fully understood in that context.

The Founder's introductory exhortation, his closing prayer, and frequent references in the Constitutions, offer adequate proof of the importance he attached to these Maxims for the Congregation.

## PLAN

The author himself does not speak of a plan for the Maxims. However, after rereading the source materials, it seems obvious that he had one.

"Try, my dear Sisters," Médaille says, "to observe the ... Maxims which contain the spirit of your Little Institute."

### **Maxims 1 to 7: the spirit of the Congregation seen first through the broad lines of its core spirituality**

- M 1 - a sublime vocation lived out in an uncommon way
- M 2 - an always more discerning search for the glory and will of the Father
- M 3 - an ever deeper humility in imitation of the Word Incarnate
- M 4 - a continual striving for charity towards God in honor of the Holy Spirit
- M 5,6 - a constantly more generous entrance into the Paschal Mystery: to "die to" in order to "live for"

M 7 - an always more manifest zeal both for God and for the dear neighbor

### **M 8 to 11 - brief development of M 7**

### **Maxims 12 to 100: the spirit of the Congregation seen again through three major themes or relationships**

M 12 to 43 - my relationship with God: an orientation more and more towards God's will, God's glory, God's contentment

M 44 to 61 - my relationship with the neighbor: a charity ever more and more humane, demanding and yet possible if not separated from Jesus Christ and God his Father

M 62 to 100 - my relationship with myself: more and more constant, realistic and open to a vision of reality that goes beyond reality

What Médaille expressly wanted to do was to affirm the spirit of the Institute: in all, the more and the better, day by day.

## **APPROACH**

Given the fact that there will be certain inherent difficulties in these Maxims as in any three hundred year-old text such as vocabulary, theology, psychology, style, they lead the discriminating reader to a deeper study of the spirit. Médaille could expect such discrimination because he meant the Maxims for "persons aspiring to 'great virtue,' " persons for whom the spiritual adventure, risky as it is, is already an ongoing reality.

Beneath his style, sometimes rigid and sometimes flowing, is nothing other than the expression of a great love for each reader whom he would free from the permanent temptation to mediocrity. Furthermore, in order not to become discouraged the reader should view the Maxims as a whole and should be on guard against isolating certain ones from the context of the total spiritual journey. Attention to these two precisions regarding mediocrity and discouragement offers a fruitful basic approach.

However, Médaille himself seems to suggest, in the longer work from which the hundred were drawn, an approach that is more profound and personal.<sup>2</sup> Believe that if you use the Maxims in this way, the truths they contain will bring you to a single-heartedness, will purify your heart, and will lead it to an authentic understanding and practice of great virtue."

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<sup>2</sup> Read them often. Meditate on them frequently and when you have imbibed their meaning, reflect on the way you have already lived them and on how you can do so more fully in future.

Abbreviations used:

- C - Constitutions
- L - Eucharistic Letter
- R - Règlements

*"...Take this book and eat it..." "I ate it, and it was like honey in my mouth. " Ezekiel 3:3*

*This is what the translators want with all their heart for you, their Sister.*

## MAXIMS OF THE LITTLE INSTITUTE

Try, my dear Sisters, to observe the following Maxims which contain the spirit of your Little Institute.

1. Keep always in mind the aim of your vocation which is sublime; and never do anything which contradicts the commitment to a life full of modesty, gentleness, and holiness.

*To seek the greater "glory, will and contentment of God" (M 2) and the "salvation and perfection of the dear neighbor" (M 7). This is the sublime vocation I am called to live in an uncommon way.*

2. Take it as a general rule for your inner being, for your virtues, and for your actions, that "you must be made perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect"; (Mt. 5:48) that is to say, embrace in all things what will bring about the greater glory of God, be more conformable to his holy will, and be more pleasing in his sight.

*Is being more pleasing to the Father the same as being more conformable to his will? Does this bring about his greater glory? Are all three of equal importance in my life? Am I ever mindful of the "more" suggested here?*

3. Empty yourself continually in honor of the Incarnate Word who emptied himself with so much love for you. (Phil. 2:7) Make your commitment to live in the practice of the most sincere, true, and profound humility possible to you. Do so on all occasions, to everyone but especially to God, from whom must come all the blessings of your Institute.

*How escape this process of kenosis (Phil. 2) and this "more" if I am following the Word Incarnate!*

4. Live, as much as you can, in such a way that your life, in honor of the Holy Spirit, may be a continual act of the most pure and perfect charity that you are able to practice toward God.

*Love of God ... a most pure love of God ... a dominant note of the Founder: "In honor of God the Holy Spirit who is all love, they should so live that their Congregation may bear the name of the Congregation of the great love of God ... " (C. p. 12, 57)*

**The mention of the Holy Spirit (M 4) after that of God the Father (M 2) and that of the Word Incarnate (M 3) reveals a Trinitarian perspective of Father Medaille: the Father. . perfection, the Word Incarnate ... humility the Holy Spirit... the impulse of love.**

5. Esteem the world and its vanities no more than dung. (Phil. 3:8) Let the world be crucified to you and you to it; (Gal. 6:14) that is to say, "despise the world which is only illusion" (1Cor. 7:31) and reject its maxims which are full of deceit and impiety.

*Die to the world. . . not the world the Father loved so much that he sent his only Son ... but the world of 1Corinthians 7:31, the world hostile to the Holy Spirit. . . and die to the various things in me, which affirm the world in this sense of self-centeredness, the old self.*

6. "Put aside your old self" "so that you can put on the new," (Eph. 4:22-24) and accordingly lead a life dead to the world and to self-love, full of gentleness, humility of heart, true sincerity, modesty, interior and exterior peace, and of charity toward the neighbor; in a word, (a life) completely modeled on the holiness and the pleasing virtues of Jesus which you should develop in yourself. Thus you can by grace draw many people who will profit by your example and your conversations.

*Die to (M 5) . . . in order to live for (M 6). . . continuing entrance into the paschal mystery.*

7. In the manifestation of zeal characteristic of your very humble vocation, imitate the fervor of the most zealous and embrace in desire the salvation and perfection of a whole world in a spirit replete with a true humility and a generous courage. This will bring you to wish to do everything, to suffer everything, and to undertake everything for the advancement of the glory of God and the salvation of the dear neighbor.

*Fortunately, the Règlements (p. 6f.) and the Letter (#22) describe this manifestation of zeal, calling it "the total double union": of ourselves and the dear neighbor with God, and of ourselves and all others whoever they may be, and of all others among themselves and with us, but totally in Jesus and in God his Father. Am I willing not only to pay the initial cost of such zeal but also to continue in it with courage and vigor?*

***These first seven maxims present the spirit of the Congregation seen through the broad lines of its core SPIRITUALITY.***

8. Root the strength of your resolutions and the hope of the success of your undertakings in the knowledge of your great weakness and the total mistrust of self, as well as in the firm and assured confidence you ought to have in God, for whom nothing is impossible and who will always assist you in everything you undertake for his glory through the movement of his grace and according to the orders of obedience.

9. Shun always and with repulsion all vanity, selfcomplacency, and infidelity to grace as plagues which infect good works and interfere with the action of divine grace on the living out of your life.
10. Speak neither well nor ill of yourself without necessity; have no esteem of yourself nor of what you do, since what you are and can do is nothing before God, and since anyhow you are full of imperfections which would make you despise yourself were they known to you.
11. Always speak favorably of others and value highly the good in them, excusing and covering up, in the best way you can, the deficiencies they might have.

*Could these four maxims constitute for the person engaged in the apostolate (M 7) a brief examen of consciousness as to basic convictions (M 8), as to certain feelings (M 9), as to the spoken word (M 10, 11)?*

*Relationship with GOD ... Médaille opens it out before me (M 12 to M 43) in the light of his ever-present principle of the "more." He seems to recognize that the spiritual journey will draw me more and more towards God's will, God's glory and God's contentment.*

12. Choose to bear all the evils of time rather than the least of eternity, all the evils of nature rather than the least deprivation of grace, since all kinds of reasons illumined by faith teach you to live according to this truth.
13. Consequently, accept without hesitation the loss of all good and the suffering of all evil, rather than the failure, however slight, to fulfill the holy will of God.

*God... his grace... his will... but to what lengths might that lead me... and to what deaths?*

14. Be completely humble since whatever you are, whatever you have, and whatever you do for yourself and others depends on a pure mercy and an infinite condescension of God. If you are not humble in every way, you make yourself unworthy of these and of the assistance of his graces.

*This reference to humility seems to invite me to confront the stark reality of . . .*

15. Likewise, be very faithful to the grace of the Holy Spirit, listening to him attentively, obeying him promptly and entirely, attributing to him, as is indeed just, the honor resulting from the success of your good actions.

*What might happen if I remain open to the Holy Spirit, to his inspirations, and aware of the fruitfulness of his sudden appearances in my life! ... And if in the congregation you and I together...!*

16. In everything and everywhere, have only God, his will and his glory before your eyes, and make no account of anything else.

*This maxim about purity of intention offers me the highest motive for my actions.*

17. Desire little in this world, and what you do desire, desire that very little. And better yet, live without desire and without set plans. Abandon yourself, surrendering very gently, to the very loving Providence of God your Father,

*I must "remain in the arms of Divine Providence, without entertaining any desire unless it be to want what God wants of us". (St. Francis de Sales, 21st Spiritual Conversation)*

18. Make so perfect a sacrifice of self and of will that you are empty of self from this time on, and thus you will no longer be able to choose deliberately anything except that God's will be completely and perfectly accomplished in you, by you, and among all others.

*Interiorizing this maxim will bring me to wish consciously for nothing except the very pure will of God in me, for me and for everyone. (C. p. 6f.)*

19. Recognize and cherish tenderly this very loving will in all that happens in your life, whatever this may be, and in all the orders of your superiors, unless something manifestly sinful is commanded.

*Is the will of God, my loving and loved Father, the core of my life?*

20. Apply yourself seriously and totally to perform with perfection the present will of God without diverting yourself from it, to the detriment of your obligations, by considering uselessly what will be intimated and manifested to you in due time and place.

*In addition to recognizing God's will (M 19) I carry it out, confident that the loving Father gives me the grace I need at the present moment to be totally for him.*

21. Desire neither praise nor reward for your good works in this life and you will have deeper and fuller life in eternity.

22. On the contrary, behave in such a manner that your good actions are hidden in time and known to God alone, to appear only in eternity and even never to appear, if God so wills.

23. Love nothing but God and what can be called divine.

24. Be utterly given to God by a holy self-surrender, utterly for God by a love pure and completely unselfish, utterly in God by a continuing effort to be more conscious of



his presence, utterly according to God by a will, a life and everything conformed to him.

*The interplay between purity of intention and humility (M 21, 22) creates in me a loving single-mindedness (M 23) which culminates in my being utterly and completely in love with God. (M 24).*

25. Be happy in all things about God's glory solely, regardless of who furthers it, and be happier yet when others seem noticeably to advance that glory more than you do.

*This joy is the triumph of purity of intention (M 16) attainable in the lived reality of M 24.*

26. Seek in everything God's contentment and not anything else, and the better to practice this, remember in the entire living out of your life, in desolation, in sickness, etc., to desire God's greater contentment without giving a thought to your own interests.

*At the Baptism and the Transfiguration, God the Father expresses his contentment with God the Son, and John of the Cross interprets it thus:*

*"Nothing contents me, O my Son, Except to be in your presence.*

*And if someone contents me, It is that I love him in you.*

*The one who resembles you the most contents me the most. 11 (Poem XII)*

27. Seek out the interior and hidden life of Jesus in so far as the activities of zeal allow.

*Medaille interrelates a life hidden in God and a life active for God. Do I?*

28. Be sad over the world's notice of you or affection for you and be convinced that such notice and affection are wasted on anyone who so little merits it; and, on the contrary, desire only that the preoccupation and affection of people be, like that of the angels, of God alone and for God alone.

*If I admit the transcendence of God in life (M 26), then perhaps I can admit the possibility in my own life of this surprising desire to "be sad" like the desire to "be happy" (M 25).*

29. Believe with St. Teresa the truths of your religion with a firmer faith when they are more difficult to understand. (The Autobiography of Teresa of Avila, Ch. XIX)

30. And do the same in the practice of hope. When in your actions and plans there is little likelihood of success or of human aid and more difficulties oppose you, trust in God far more.

31. In your greatest troubles and dangers hope with a firm confidence not that God will comfort or deliver you but that he will effect in you and through you his holy and loving will and live perfectly at peace with this hope.
32. When you happen to be abandoned by creatures, and even by God if he takes away his sensible graces, remember the abandonment of the dear Savior on the cross and tenderly cherish your own in consideration of his.

*In the light of God's transcendence and God's love for me, Médaille pushes even to the limit of their difficulty the problems of faith (M 29), hope (M 30), confidence (M 31) and humility (M 32), and peacefully brings me in my powerlessness to God's love and to Jesus Christ.*

33. If it glorifies God, desire to be as pleasing to him by each of your actions as the (holiest) persons in this world would be by the practice of the same action.
34. In your undertakings, see to it that God alone is their inspiration and their goal; that in their execution you never turn aside from his holy will, and as for the result, remain completely indifferent whether they succeed or not, desiring that in all and by all the will of God would be perfectly fulfilled, a will that you should equally recognize and love when your plans are delayed and even destroyed and when you see their advancement and successful development.
35. Convince yourself that wherever you are and whatever you do God sees you clearly and distinctly; do not do in his presence what you would not dare to do in the presence of a person you should esteem.
36. Let your affections and actions be guided by reason and duty and not by caprice and natural inclinations.
37. Ask nothing and refuse nothing, unless you judge it absolutely necessary after having prayed to God. Even in that case let it be done as a simple proposal together with a complete resignation whether this proposal is accepted or not.
38. Never complain about anyone but yourself.
39. Be nothing to yourself and be utterly given to God and to the neighbor.
40. Love nothing that is not eternal.

*The desire to see God content (M 33) moves me to the practice of purity of intention, indifference, reverence, stability, discernment, leaving no room for discontent. In my desires (M 33), actions (M 34), convictions (M 35), affections (M 36), and attitudes (M 37, 38), I am brought once more to a loving single-mindedness which allows me to say "Abba, Father." (Rom. 8:15)*

41. Tend solely and lovingly to resemble the dear Savior perfectly and in all things. Let him live in you and you live utterly in him.

*It is no longer a question of simple imitation of Christ, but that he become the living force, the life in me. (Gal. 2:20)*

42. Long solely and constantly for the great love of God and of our Savior Jesus, but long for it without overeagerness.
43. Be, at least in desire, the poorest of people, the most humble and humbled, the most pure and obedient, in order to become like the One who was all that, the divine exemplar according to whom you should form yourself.

*If it is by looking at, listening to and imitating your beloved Son that I content you, O God, give me the grace of bringing to reality in me in gentleness, peace and joy a life totally conformed to the Savior Jesus. "The one who resembles you the most contents me the most."*

***Relationship with NEIGHBOR. . . maxims 44 to 61. . . I am not alone on my spiritual journey. Médaille suggests for this relationship a charity that is more and more humane, demanding and yet possible; humane, because it is joyful, flexible and without self-interest; demanding, because it goes beyond practice to purity of intention; possible, because in my neighbor I should see the very person of Jesus Christ and because I should live out this charity in a climate of peaceful and intimate union with and love of God.***

44. Never do anything which contradicts the pursuit of holiness.

*This principle about the pursuit of holiness in the relationship with neighbor sheds light on **maxims 44 to 61**.*

45. Always be serious when you are with others, but let it be a joyful seriousness, courteous and full of a gentle and reserved simplicity.
46. Live with the Lord on the cross. Die to pleasures and to vanity. Live only for God and die completely to self.
47. When there is question of many things to be done at the same time in the community and the choice is given to you, choose what is more lowly and difficult, and leave to others what is easier and brings more honor.

48. Pursue above all the pure glory of God, your salvation and perfection, the salvation and perfection of the neighbor, and not the satisfaction and consolation often found in these pursuits.
49. Whenever there is no danger that God will be offended or less honored, manifest all the compliance possible towards the neighbor. Whatever difficulty you may experience in that, do not let it appear, showing a joyful countenance full of gentleness, as if you found great happiness in what is painful to you. Whatever you do for the dear neighbor, do it with the same feeling of devotion and of charity as if you were doing it for the very person of Jesus Christ.
50. Prefer always the will and the contentment of others to your own will and contentment and do so even with a happy and joyful heart, provided, of course, as has been said, that God is not offended by it nor less honored.
51. Give all the happiness you can to those who give you a great deal of unhappiness, and give it willingly,
52. Interpret all things from the best possible point of view.
53. Keep an ever free heart which clings to nothing terrestrial, whatever might be the appearances of good.
54. Empty yourself of all human respect and of the least blameworthy concession, and declare, with a generous heart, never to yield in anything that would be against God's will.
55. When you work for the neighbor do it with a very unselfish love which expects no reward for its services, and aim at nothing other than helping him and being at the same time pleasing to God
56. Be troubled instead of being complacent if it happens that what you do satisfies people, since, according to St. Paul, it seems that those who are pleasing to men are not the servants of Jesus Christ. (Gal 1:10)
57. At the end of your good works, give all the glory to our dear Savior, who by his death has truly become the inspiration of your life and of your good works.
58. Convince yourself of this truth, that you scarcely do anything in this world but place drawbacks in the path of God's grace.
59. Believe, after success in your good works, that the sins you have committed while doing them will have caused much less progress than God had reason to expect from your cooperation.

60. Love and strive after, especially, the interior gentleness of your soul, living in peace and in the tranquillity of all your passions, and outwardly doing all things without overeagerness and bearing what you must bear without any complaint or murmuring or anxiety whatsoever.
61. Strive also wholeheartedly after the peaceful and intimate union with God, very cordial charity and forbearance towards the neighbor, really innocent purity of heart, very perfect fidelity to grace joined to a peaceful death to all natural inclinations, very true humility, simplicity and sincere candor, the obedience of a child who looks for no reason, poverty completely stripped, continual joy of spirit appropriate to your Institute, in a word, attain the pure and perfect love of God which explains all these things.

*Grant, Lord, that I may not forget the demanding aspect of a humane charity nor ever separate God's contentment from service to and contentment of the neighbor, nor listen in a half-hearted way to what you and the dear neighbor await from me.*

***Relationship with MYSELF ... Médaille would see me more and more constant, realistic, and open to a vision of reality hat extends beyond reality.***

62. Be constant in the way of life and virtue you have chosen, changing nothing about it except to improve it.

*This maxim presents the principle of constancy both in my choice of vocation and the manner in which I live it out despite obstacles and temptations.  
(M 63 to 74)*

62. Do not consider unfortunate events as obstacles but as aids and cherish them, whatever they may be, as effects of the gentle and loving Providence of God your Father.

*. . . "unfortunate events"*

64. Strive to be kind always to everyone and unkind to no one.

*. . . varying difficulties with the neighbor*

65. Be exact and diligent to do what you are advised or what is required by your duties, especially when these are useful or necessary for the neighbor. And beware of the fact that we are often apt to postpone them to accomplish others which are not so much our duty but are more in accordance with our natural inclination and our own petty interest.

*. . . the lure of procrastination*

66. Be courageous to undertake what God wants of you and constant to persevere in what you undertake, never giving up, whatever difficulties occur and whatever obstacles may be placed in your path unless you become totally powerless against them.

*... the danger of losing heart*

67. Accordingly, pursue to the very end and with gentleness and vigor what you have once and for all resolved and what you prudently believe corresponds to the greater glory of God.

*... the imbalance between gentleness and overeagerness*

68. Consider as suspect any desire that is overeager and capable of distracting you from more necessary and obligatory occupations.

*... attractive diversions*

69. Never think of tomorrow unless it has some necessary link with today, but entrust it entirely to Providence.

*... excessive concern for the future*

70. Never be curious regarding the decisions superiors have in mind for you, but await them all from God's hand, and desire this knowledge only at his appointed time without overeagerness to be informed sooner.

*... useless curiosity*

71. Live content with the work obedience gives you, applying yourself to do it carefully, unwilling to tolerate the slightest thought of change, until obedience orders it.

*... temptation to change without discernment: without reason and prayer*

72. Be always ready to obey peacefully, indifferent to all that is not against God's will: to live or to die, to be healthy or ill, happy or unhappy, loved or persecuted, finding always your complete contentment solely in fulfilling God's will.

73. Live out your life with one desire only: to be always what God wants you to be, in nature, grace, and glory, for time and eternity.

74. Obey promptly, joyfully, and simply, without allowing, if you are able, a single thought of reluctance or refusal or without interjecting a single word between the order and the execution, unless it would obviously be a sin.

*. . . not remaining free enough in will (M 72), in desire (M 73) and in action (M 74) to choose God 's way for me . . . Médaille brings me back again to the primacy of God 's will and of God 's contentment (M 73). All becomes clear in view of that primacy: to remain constant, changing nothing except to improve it (M 62 to 74), and to be realistic when faced with the mystery of humility (M 75 to 78).*

75. Desire that people have a modest opinion of you and a good one of others; be uneasy when you are considered important and very much at ease when others are.

76. Hide, as well as is possible to you, the ever so little grace God bestows on you; reveal, should an opportunity offer, what allows you to be less esteemed, but do this with discretion.

77. Fulfill all the duties of the great and true love of God, and you will fulfill the rest.

78. "Glory" in contempt, and accept embarrassment not only patiently but also joyfully and gratefully. It is, as a matter of fact, in embarrassment and in contempt that great souls find an endless source of grace, merit, and heavenly blessings.

*Idealistic? No. Inhuman? Maybe. But acceptable if I find myself entering more deeply into the great and true love of God (M 77) and into the kenosis of the Word Incarnate. Especially so, perhaps, if I have experienced both success and failure in the apostolate and if, conscious of giftedness from the Lord, I remain realistic. (M 79 to 87).*

79. Be undisturbed if others have more intelligence and ability than you, more grace and even more virtue when God has so willed it, finding your contentment only in the accomplishment of his contentment.

*. . . about accepting God's way of distributing his gifts*

1. Consider as certain that, when you commit fewer faults and practice virtue more easily, you are not more holy but only more indebted to God and to his grace, such grace often makes beginners more devoted in good works and less prone to faults than those who have already made much progress. Be aware that holiness consists in something utterly hidden and known to God alone.

*. . . in not mistaking external manifestations for the inner reality of holiness*

81. Whatever the virtue you recognize in yourself, never turn away from a true fear of God, conscious that his judgments are unfathomable and that his appraisals are quite different from ours,

*. . . regarding my merits*

82. Consider as certain that in the practice of zeal there is nothing so good as peaceful and disinterested desires for God's glory. He mercifully grants these desires to completely unworthy creatures.

83. However pure your intentions and your views seem, convince yourself that, in some hidden recess of these intentions, you are still seeking self.

*. . . about self-seeking in the guise of the apostolate*

84. Never go ahead of grace by an imprudent eagerness, but quietly await its movements and, when it comes to you, go along with it with great gentleness, humility, fidelity, and courage.

*. . . before the tendency not to wait for grace*

85. Advance good works until they are almost finished; and then, whenever possible, let them be completed by someone else who will receive the honor.

*. . . regarding a too human idea of success*

86. Be above everything that is not God, not allowing yourself to be dominated by any earthly creature but keep all subject to reason.

*. . . as to the basis of true freedom of spirit*

87. Put no more value on any apparent virtues you may notice in yourself than on deceptive images, reminding yourself always that what is in you and from you is only illusion and sin, and that, even when you have done all, you are an "unprofitable servant." (Lk. 17:10)

*. . . in remembering that even with God's gifts I am not very great . . .*

88. Be careful about the good use of time which is so precious, not losing a minute of it, devoting and offering it to God unreservedly with very pure and noble intentions.

89. Profit from the opportunities that arise to practice the general virtues<sup>3</sup> in their highest degree.

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<sup>3</sup> Occasions to practice magnanimity do not often present themselves but . . . gentleness, moderation, humility are among the virtues which should color all our actions . . . " (and hence called the "general virtues") . (St. Francis de Sales, Introduction to a Devout Life, Part III, Ch. 1.)



90. Accomplish with great diligence and perfection everyday actions and unexpected ones, and never become careless in this respect.

*. . . faithful to the simple realities of everyday living (M 88, 89, 90) . . . then, preoccupied with the "more" and yet always reverent before me, Médaille remains content to point out the high road to spiritual adventure; and he leaves to grace and to my own heart the decision as to how ready and open I will be.*

91. Be a person of such greatness that what is not God will be nothing, and embrace gently and eagerly great apostolic undertakings when the Holy Spirit urges you to this; but, according to this same maxim, whatever you do or suffer, let your heart find it a trifle, as indeed it is, in comparison with the grandeur of God and the worth of his sovereign perfection.

*. . . the open door to a vision of reality that extends beyond reality.*

92. Do not imagine that you have arrived at the true love of God before that holy love has entirely emptied you of every kind of vanity, cowardice, heedless-ness, sensuality, earthly attachment and affection; in a word, all natural inclination, in order to bring you to live by the movements of grace and by the maxims of the Church and the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

*Am I ready yet to pay the price for this authentic love?*

93. For the three faculties of your soul desire this perfection:

- for the memory, to forget things and self in order to remember little else but God;
- for the intellect, to see God in all things: his glory, his will, his contentment solely;
- for the will, the one freedom to go to God, to love him, to embrace all the dictates of his Providence with all the love of your heart.

*Does this mystical wish which inspires me to enter deeply into a world of mystery leave me strangely hesitant in face of it?*

94. Be watchful and take care not to be deceived; in living out your life, by the devil masquerading as an angel of light; he often incites us to take the movements of nature for the movements of grace and inner, somewhat deceptive instincts for true inspirations or revelations of God.

*. . . the ever-present danger of spiritual deception: the belief, for example, that this maxim is not for me.*

95. Develop fully in yourself indifference and resignation to the will of God; abandonment of self once and for all to the comforting bosom of Providence; a loving acquiescence to all the orders of his good pleasure, whatever may be the circumstances of your life; a tender affection for the very pure will of God; an ardent desire to be entirely according to his heart. All these expressions describe for you, in a variety of ways; the perfect conformity of your will to God's which constitutes your entire perfection.

*O Lord, that I may be entirely according to your will, entirely according to your heart!*

96. When you are fortunate enough to possess the presence of grace and the desirable effects of God's love, remember that
- this great good is something lent rather than belonging to you, it belongs to the Savior Jesus, from whose merits this good comes, more than it belongs to you,
  - this same Savior may take it away from you when he pleases without doing you wrong, and
  - if he ever withdrew his graces, the good in you would vanish like smoke.

97. When you meet contradictions, strengthen yourself against human fears, continuing to hope when everything seems to throw you into hopelessness regarding the success of your undertakings.

98. Furthermore, when burdened with great crosses, do not let your heart yearn for death. Let it be enough for you to be crucified with Jesus Christ, as much as and in the way that it is pleasing to God; and, regarding every circumstance of your life and death, let him decide.

*Even to those more advanced in the spiritual life Médaille offers--this time in a gentle, peaceful tone--suggestions regarding an interior and exterior attitude in consolation (M 96), in contradiction (M 97), and in times of great suffering (M 98).*

*Union with Jesus Christ and abandonment to the will of God--these are the major orientations here.*

*Maxims 99 and 100 presuppose each other. Taken together they suggest how interdependent are the search for "great virtue" and the search for union with God.*

99. For the understanding and the practice of the Maxims of Great Virtue, union with God is absolutely necessary because all virtue, ours and everyone else's, is nothing other than a continual, influence of graces accompanied on our part by a faithful correspondence; and because these graces God communicates more or less abundantly according as one is more or less in union with him. Therefore, work tirelessly towards the total union of your soul with God.

100. The virtues which will help you acquire and maintain this union and which will be a summary of your Little Institute are:
- a great and, I dare say, boundless purity of heart and of intention;
  - a very profound and genuine humility in all things and in every situation;
  - a perfect mortification of self-love, of judgement, of will, and even (with discretion) of the senses, which should go as far as emptying self of the slightest traces of natural inclination;
  - a very faithful obedience to all the movements of grace;
  - a sincere simplicity, accompanied nevertheless by a great prudence;
  - a contempt of and total detachment from all creatures and a complete stripping of self;
  - the peace and gentleness that endures and acts without anxiety and without overeagerness;
  - the total self-abandonment into the hands of Providence with a dependence that is absolute;
  - the love of solitude and of prayer, apart from the time set for the works of zeal;
  - the very perfect love of neighbor, which loves every kind of person purely, constantly, and equally in God and for God;
  - finally, the pure love of God which leads souls to dwell in thought of God and makes it difficult for them to live remote from his presence.

*The rapprochement of these last two maxims sets in relief a kind of tension in the mind of Médaille. If, as he claims in M 99, union with God is indispensable for the understanding and practice of the maxims, it will be the practice of these same virtues which will, he states in M 100, make possible this precious union with God.*

*In other words, the spiritual goal is never lost sight of by the very practical Médaille but neither does the spiritual Médaille ever fail to orient me towards the proof of my love, the concrete practice of virtue.*

*Médaille says to me, "All for God and for the dear neighbor; nothing for self." Oh, that this might become true in me!  
Lord God, grant me your fatherly grace on which I count and without which I cannot live this out.*

O Jesus, mercifully grant these virtues to every person called to this Institute, and never allow anyone to be admitted who is not desirous of acquiring them.

Amen.