

## Introduction

The chapters of this book have various origins. Some were published as magazine articles, others have been adapted from lectures. They are presented here to make them more accessible to people as aids to living the Christian life.

The thread connecting them is a vision of Christian life as not primarily a tense and anxious human struggle, but a welcoming of God's gifts. Christianity is not a religion of human effort, but divine grace. To be sure, when the Church canonizes one of her children, she honors the beautiful response of that person to God's call. But she especially glorifies the mercy of the Father, the power that this mercy has in transforming a life. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God," says St. Paul (Eph 2:8).

To be Christian is not above all about fulfilling a task, a list of things to do. It is about welcoming, through faith (a faith entwined with hope and love), the immense gift offered freely to us. To live the gospel means learning

to receive in our human heart, with its limits and weaknesses, all the richness of the Father's merciful love, letting ourselves be transformed by it day after day, responding freely and generously to it, and sharing it with those whom the Lord places on our path.

More than ever, God desires to reveal himself and to communicate himself to us. Nothing can give him more joy than to find hearts that welcome, with absolute trust and complete availability, the ceaselessly renewed gift of his love. May this book help its readers to persevere in faith, hope, and charity, to remain always open to the work of the Holy Spirit, and to hasten the Pentecost of love and mercy that God desires to spread across our world, so that "all flesh shall see the salvation of God," according to the promise of Scripture (Lk 3:6).

## CHAPTER I

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# Spiritual Receptivity

## Learn to Receive

**T**he most fundamental question of Christian life is this: How should we receive the grace of the Holy Spirit? How can we keep ourselves ever open to his action?

“The true aim of our Christian life consists of the acquisition of the Holy Spirit of God,” said Seraphim of Sarov, one of the Russian Church’s greatest saints, who died in 1833.<sup>1</sup> Fr. Marie-Eugene of the Child Jesus affirms: “Union with the Holy Spirit is not a luxury that belongs to the summit of spiritual life. . . . No, it is the first act, the first necessity.”<sup>2</sup>

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1. Emmanual Hatzidakis, *The Heavenly Banquet: Understanding the Divine Liturgy* (Clearwater, Fla.: Orthodox Witness, 2013), p. 280.

2. Father Marie-Eugene of the Child Jesus was a Discalced Carmelite friar and founder of the secular institute Notre Dame de Vie in Venasque, France. His beatification was announced by the Vatican in March 2016.