



ST. MARY THE VIRGIN

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Sovereign Military Order of the Temple of Jerusalem

# Nine Templar Virtues

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Prepared by



Dr. Chev. Peter L. Heineman, GOTJ  
2020 Avenue B  
Council Bluffs, IA 51501  
Phone 712.323.3531 • [www.plheineman.net](http://www.plheineman.net)

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## INTRODUCTION



## Meditations

The original monastic rule of our Order was drawn up by St. Bernard de Clairvaux and was a modification of the monastic rule of St. Benedict. Most people in the medieval era – including the warrior monks of the Order – were illiterate. One purpose of the annual Convent was to provide a forum where the Grand Prior and local Priors could reinforce their members’ oath and the key tenants of the Order. Our Modern Rule is a modification of that which the confrere knight followed. As was done then, it is read at least annually to the Knights and Dames in Convent and at each investiture.

As the Order moved more deeply into the year leading up to the grand celebration of the 900th anniversary of the organization and founding of the Knights Templar, members of the GPUSA Chaplains Corps, and other clergy of the Order, shared meditations inspired by the nine Templar virtues. This effort is rooted in the historic reality that knights of the time, and in particular the founding knights of the Order, sought to integrate a chivalric life that reflected the highest of Christian virtues with the clashing need to protect nationalist interests. As Templar history is told, the warring side of a knight’s life has overshadowed the spiritual grounding of his life as monk, relegating the virtues he sought to uphold through his vows to the Order to a footnote. Through these meditations we aspire to breathe new life into the significance of these virtues: chivalry, courage, charity, justice, honor, fidelity, faith, sacrifice, and discipline. It is our hope that as they inspired the forbearers of our Order, we may find guidance from them today.

The following collection of meditations appeared on the GPUSA website throughout the 900<sup>th</sup> Anniversary period. A series of nine commemorative challenge coins were struck representing the virtues on the obverse (as depicted below) and the 900<sup>th</sup> Anniversary on the reverse (as depicted above).



## Bernard of Clairvaux

was a French abbot and a major leader in the reform of Benedictine monasticism that caused the formation of the Cistercian order.

Bernard's parents were both members of the highest nobility of Burgundy. Bernard was the third of seven children, six of whom were sons. At the age of nine years, he was sent to a school at Châtillon-sur-Seine run by the secular canons of Saint-Vorles.

He was sent to found a new abbey at an isolated clearing in a glen known as the *Val d'Absinthe*, southeast of Bar-sur-Aube. According to tradition, Bernard founded the monastery on 25 June 1115, naming it *Claire Vallée*, which evolved into *Clairvaux*.

In the year 1128, Bernard attended the Council of Troyes, at which he traced the outlines of the Rule of the Knights Templar, which soon became the ideal of Christian nobility.



## Chivalry

At its heart, chivalry finds its bearing in the love of God that we learn through the ongoing revelation of Jesus Christ. It is the manifestation of selflessness, whether directed toward the well-being of another in a given moment or extended through repeated acts of service. Like traditional Christian sacraments, chivalry is the outward expression of an inner, spiritual reality.

The very notion of knighthood has its roots in chivalry, dedicated to the embodiment of Christian virtues, especially those of courage, honor, justice, and a zeal for advocating for and offering protection to those who were vulnerable. These virtues reflect the very essence of how Jesus modeled a life grounded in devotion and faithfulness to God. In every way, our modern Order compels us to remember that the mind of Christ is service, and the way of discipleship is love.

Daily, the Christian heart is challenged to empty our hearts of our own concerns in order to make space for and be filled with compassion for the suffering of others. We are encouraged to be unflagging in our zeal for justice for those who are oppressed and to offer hospitality to those who seek shelter from their respective storms. This is the chivalric “norm,” the genetic code of faith to which we declare our allegiance as Templars.

Ultimately, we are invited to take risks for love in ways that reveal our commitment to Christ. In so doing we demonstrate that it is in his name that we serve the poor, the hungry, the persecuted, the marginalized, and the voiceless, sacrificing for his sake the earthly temptations that become stumbling blocks to the realization of God’s kingdom. We offer ourselves not for ourselves, but to the glory of God, who reigns.



## Charity

Christian charity is a two-fold endeavor rooted in the heart of the believer and expressed outwardly through words and deeds. In its purest sense, charity is the seat of compassion and kindness through which all else in our faithful life flows.

Grounded in the desire to love God above all things with the exceeding fullness of our heart, charity also challenges us to extend that same love to our neighbors. Such love strives to seek and recognize the value and dignity of others, disregarding words, intentions, and actions in favor of anticipating the capacity of all people to find the motive for their choices in goodness and righteousness. It is easy to accommodate the behaviors and efforts of individuals when they align with our own desires, or when we hold common ground and shared values. It is another matter to extend the courtesy of favor to others when they may approach life differently, and to indulge a generosity of the heart at such times.



## The Rule of St. Benedict

is a book of precepts written in 516 by Benedict of Nursia (c. AD 480–550) for monks living communally under the authority of an abbot. Compared to other precepts, the Rule provides a moderate path between individual zeal and formulaic institutionalism; because of this middle ground it has been widely popular. Benedict's concerns were the needs of monks in a community environment: namely, to establish due order, to foster an understanding of the relational nature of human beings, and to provide a spiritual father to support and strengthen the individual's ascetic effort and the spiritual growth that is required for the fulfillment of the human vocation, theosis. The *Rule of Saint Benedict* has been used by Benedictines for 15 centuries.

Likewise, that same lens of divine love considers misfortune to be blameless, inviting us to draw on the transforming love of Christ to mitigate the devastation that a cruel and selfish world can inflict on the vulnerable and the suffering. It is to these hurts, especially, that our call as Knights and Dames is rendered most distinctly. In this context we embody and reflect the nature of God to love deeply and tenderly, drawing a fractured world toward the unifying and healing wholeness that is God's desire for us. As Templars we are called to radiate and glorify that love, incarnating the compassion of Christ. The following prayer invites us to live into this virtue fully as we beseech God: "Take our minds and think through them, take our mouths and speak through them, take our hands and work through them, take our hearts and set them on fire with your love."



## Courage

*"Fear lives in the head, and courage lives in the heart. The job is to get from one to the other. In between is the lump in the throat."*

-Louise Penny, *The Long Way Home*

The Greek word in the Scriptures translated "courage" and "good cheer" means "boldness" and "confidence." In the Bible, courage is the opposite of fear. When Jesus invites us to fear not, to be of good cheer, and to have courage, he is always speaking against fear, which is the opposite of courage.

Templar André de Montbard (5 Nov 1097—17 Jan 1156) was an uncle to Saint Bernard de Clairvaux. Like the first Grand Master Hugues de Payens, he was a vassal of Hugues I, Count of Champagne. André entered the Order in 1119 and went to Palestine, where he quickly rose to the rank of seneschal, deputy and second-in-command to the Grand Master.

Perhaps Andre and the first Templars responded to God's calling in order to assuage the fear felt by pilgrims to the Holy Land. To fulfill their mission, the first Templars had to swallow the lump in their throats and face into their vulnerability as only nine men guarding the entire pilgrim road from Jaffa to Jerusalem. They had to make the counter-intuitive move from head to heart, pursuing a senseless mission that instilled a sense of courage in their charges.

Maya Angelou says, "*Courage is the most important of the virtues, because without courage you can't practice any other virtue consistently. You can practice any virtue erratically, but nothing consistently without courage.*" Courage grows, as do all virtues, through repetition – through risking yourself in what may seem foolish to others, by spending yourself for the sake of others, and for the Christian especially in imitating the generous self-offering of our Lord Jesus Christ.

*"But be of good cheer; I have overcome the world"* (John 16:33).



The **Poor Knights of Christ** and of the Temple of Solomon, also known as the Order of Solomon's Temple, the Knights Templar or simply the Templars, were a Catholic military order recognized in 1139 by the papal bull *Omne datum optimum*. The order, with about nine knights including Godfrey de Saint-Omer and André de Montbard, had few financial resources and relied on donations to survive. Their emblem was of two knights riding on a single horse, emphasizing the order's poverty. The impoverished status of the Templars did not last long.



## Justice

As we celebrate the 900th year of our Order, I am thinking about the state of the world of its founding members. At least one such knight, Godfrey de Saint-Omer, was at the Council of Troyes in 1129 when the Latin, or Primitive, Rule, was developed. In the Prologue of the Primitive Rule it talks about the role Templars will play in revitalizing knighthood. The Rule points out that knighthood had devolved, despising *“the love of justice that constitutes its duties and did not do what it should.”* Rather than defending the poor, widows, orphans, and churches, the Rule claims knights strove to plunder, despoil and kill. For the founding brothers, their vision of being knights to Christ the King meant they participated in the mission of God through Christ’s healing and reconciliation. This vision included an understanding of justice rooted in God’s mercy and love.

Godfrey and the other Poor Knights were called to take to heart the scriptures, such as *“What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness?”* (Micah 6:8), *“Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; justice and peace will kiss each other. Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and justice will look down from the sky.”* (Psalm 85:10-11), and *“Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; steadfast love and faithfulness go before you.”* (Psalm 89:14) With these holy words and wisdom are also the teachings of Jesus, who understood himself to fulfill the justice-laced message of Torah. He makes central to those who follow him the call to love neighbors, to bring healing into broken contexts, and to offer forgiveness and restoration in face of transgressions. Thus, justice is defined as the formative means of restoration, and not retribution.

For Jesus genuine justice involves welcome, hospitality, and healing. As noted in the Gospel of Matthew, justice is grounded in acts of generosity and compassion: *“I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me”* (25:35-36). Such acts embody genuine justice and echo the words of Jesus about his own vocation in the Gospel of St. Luke, chapter 4: freedom for the oppressed, sight to the blind, good news to the poor.

For the Knights Templar, from the day of Godfrey to today, the virtue of justice forms and informs all we do, and the greater mission we share with all Christians. All who follow Christ are called to be emissaries of peace and seek the good of all humanity in cooperation with powers and authorities in politics, culture, and economics. But they also must fight against pretensions and injustices when these same powers endanger human welfare. Their strength is in their confidence that God's purpose, justice, and merciful love, rather than human's schemes, will finally prevail, and all things will be reconciled to God.



## Psalms

The Book of Psalms, commonly referred to simply as Psalms or "the Psalms", is the first book of the *Ketuvim* ("Writings"), the third section of the Hebrew Bible, and thus a book of the Christian Old Testament. The title is derived from the Greek translation, ψαλμοί, *psalmoi*, meaning "instrumental music" and, by extension, "the words accompanying the music". The book is an anthology of individual psalms, with 150 in the Jewish and Western Christian tradition and more in the Eastern Christian churches. The Latin motto of the Knights Templar is:

***Non nobis Domine  
non nobis sed Nomini  
Tuo da gloriam***

*Not to us Lord, not to us,  
but to Your Name give the  
glory.*

The Latin text derives from Psalm 113:9 (according to the Vulgate numbering), which corresponds to Psalm 115:1 in the King James Version.



## Honor

What does honor mean? What does honor look like? It seems that the word "honor" is creeping out of our vocabulary and our lives. Seldom do we hear about the topic let alone spot a living example who models for us the charism of honor.

St. Bernard of Clairvaux, our Order's patron saint, speaks often about the Christian honoring God and consequently in honoring our blessed Lord, we live to honor one another, for Christ deigns to live in the hearts and lives of His faithful people everywhere. So, to return to my original questions, I pose to you this answer, which I take from various sermons of St. Bernard: Seek to be humbled, serve with humility; learn not to be proud; honor Christ instead of seeking honor; it is a great good to seek God for the soul knows no greater blessing; do not fear admitting your fault, but seek repentance and your will find forgiveness; and, it is indeed a great and marvelous thing to be the servant of Christ.

These are but a few snippets from St. Bernard's writings which point us toward the path of living with honor, by living first and foremost for Christ. Honor then requires from us the discipline that we put God first. Yet, we know how difficult it is to live by a code of honor. Our sins, shortcomings, defects of character, in essence lure us away from all that is noble and honorable within us. But take heart, my fellow Knights and Dames, God already knows this about us and nonetheless He loves us all the more. It is in knowing that sacred love in the deepest parts of our lives that urges us to keep the honorable chivalric oath we all have sworn. St. Bernard says, nothing is impossible to believers, nothing difficult to lovers, nothing hard to the meek, nothing arduous to the humble for to them grace lends it aid, and devotion gentles every command to the obedient person. These words of St. Bernard are offered for the spiritual sustenance and assistance of a Templar in keeping their sacred oath.

Honor, then, looks like a Knight or Dame who with their last ounce of strength gives of themselves wholly and completely to God and the work of His Kingdom through their thoughts, prayers and deeds, while humbly proclaiming from the depth of their heart: non nobis, *Domine*, non nobis sed nomini tuo *da gloriam!*



## Faith

Faith is an abiding love of God that is knitted into our bones and marrow, that gives us hope when all seems lost and beyond reason, and that truly is a mystery and a gift of God's grace. It is this kind of faith through which the Poor Knights of Christ as a religious order, a sacred means through which to express our Christian faith and vocation, was birthed. For modern Templars, what makes us different from other NGOs and organizations is that faith binds us



## Convent

The term derives via Old French from Latin *conventus*, perfect participle of the verb *convenio*, meaning to convene, to come together. The original reference was to the gathering of mendicants. Mendicant orders are, primarily, certain Christian religious orders that have adopted a lifestyle of poverty, traveling, and living in urban areas for purposes of preaching, evangelization, and ministry, especially to the poor. At their foundation these orders rejected the previously established monastic model. This foresaw living in one stable, isolated community where members worked at a trade and owned property in common, including land, buildings and other wealth. By contrast, the mendicants avoided owning property at all, did not work at a trade, and embraced a poor, often itinerant lifestyle. They depended for their survival on the goodwill of the people to whom they preached.

together despite all human divisions in the world. It is faith that moves us to give thanks to God by serving others, and even giving our lives so others may have life. However, like a garden, faith needs to be attended to, as many of our Benedictine fathers and mothers have taught.

John Calvin, who quotes Bernard of Clairvaux more than any other Church Father, early on wrote for his confirmation students *The Golden Booklet of the True Christian Life*. In style and spirit, this book is much like other classics of the Christian faith, like Augustine of Hippo's *Confessions*, St. Benedict's *Rule*, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, or Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation of Christ*. However, its intense practicality sets it apart, making it easily accessible for any reader seeking to carry out Christian values in everyday life. Chapter themes resonate with the Templar's Benedictine roots, including obedience or listening to God, humility, the significance of the cross, and how we should live our lives today. What makes the *Golden Booklet* unique and a classic devotional is in how John Calvin urges readers to apply the Christian life in a balance of mind (knowledge), heart (compassion), and hand (mission) rooted in thanksgiving to God. The book stresses the importance of a devotedly active Christian life shaped by Word and Sacraments (i.e. our baptismal identity and vows, and our union in Christ together which not even death can cause separation).

As we celebrate 900 years of the Knights Templar, let us recommit ourselves to spiritual disciplines, remembering our Benedictine roots so our common faith together may be strengthened. May we also give thanks to God by uniting our hearts and minds in Christ and show thanksgiving to God through the work of our hands.



## Sacrifice

During the Second World War in France a Christian clergyman by the name of Eugene Masure was involved in resistance of the Nazi occupation. Time and time again the Rev. Mr. Masure observed and personally was moved by the beyond-heroic actions of his fellow citizens to protect, at times with their lives, the innocent from overbearing cruelty. With his own eyes he engaged with people who were living into the instructive words of Jesus to his disciples: *"No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."* (John 5:13) Through the lens of his Christian faith he realized that he was seeing nothing less than significant personal sacrifice. Accordingly, he devised a contemporary definition of sacrifice that he and others could understand:

*"The modern sense of the word sacrifice with its implication of generosity seems to be based on this psychology. We do not say that a man who does his duty or pays his debts is making a sacrifice. That does not seem to start until we willingly give something of our own to forward the betterment, moral or physical, of this unsatisfactory world."*

Our twenty-first century ideal of Christian knighthood is based upon a variety of virtues such as chivalry, service and courage. Indeed, to protect the innocent, at times with one's own life, is the most noble of all actions that a human being can take on behalf of a person in need. It is my belief that the virtues of Christian knighthood are made possible only when we are committed to personal sacrifice;



## Knights' Oath of Fealty

Fidelity is the quality of faithfulness or loyalty.

Its original meaning regarded duty in a broader sense than the related concept of *fealty*. Medieval

Feudalism was based on the exchange of land for military service. King William the Conqueror used the concept of feudalism to reward his Norman supporters, or vassals, for their help in the conquest of England. The commendation ceremony was designed

to create a lasting bond between a vassal and his lord. Fealty and homage are a key element of feudalism.

The ceremony consisted of swearing the Knights Oath of Fealty and the act of homage. The words spoken in the Knights Oath of Fealty were similar to the following:

*I promise on my faith  
that I will in the future  
be faithful to the lord,  
never cause him harm  
and will observe my  
homage to him  
completely against all  
persons in good faith  
and without deceit.*

when we place the needs of the other ahead of our own; when we are willing to forgo our own safety and comfort for the sake of another.

Knights and Dames, whether you are contemplating the care of battered spouses in a shelter complex, the rescue and sustainment of abandoned or neglected children, or the protection of Middle-eastern refugees, the ultimate virtuous ideal of sacrifice must be a primary consideration for your work. How do you know when you are involved in actual personal sacrifice? As an answer to this question, you may want to employ this consideration. If you cannot gain anything in return for your acts and you know that your contributions are personally costly, you will know that by the grace of God you have embraced the honored virtue of sacrifice. According to our Lord Jesus, this is the greatest love a Knight or Dame can have and can give away.



## Fidelity

As Templars, what do we mean by fidelity? Is it loyalty to a specific office or leader? Faithfulness to a specific tradition or way of doing things? As a priest I would clearly state that it is none of the above, rather being laser-focused on what it means to have chosen to follow the ideal of protecting Christians at risk in the Holy Land. That said, what is the “foundational fidelity”- what grounds us in the first place- to do this?

I would say that it is our commonality that we share in our baptismal vows, that those of who celebrate confirmation renewed when we were confirmed, and for those of us who have the opportunity, renew our baptismal vows every year at The Great Vigil of Easter.

Grounded in our Christianity—which is nourished and fed by our regular faith community—is the fuel that feeds us on our Templar journey. This may seem too simple, yet so often it is the hardest thing to do. To stay focused- to maintain fidelity- is not an easy thing. It is a continual journey that never ends, needing continual renewal. Fidelity, especially as a Templar, is not something we decide to do in the morning, and then decide to do something else in the evening. While we are clear that we do not claim direct lineage from the original Templars, we can certainly take to heart their fidelity to their spirituality and practice it as 21st Century Templars. To do so would be exhibiting a remarkable fidelity not only to them, but more importantly, to who we are as Christians.

## Disciple and Discipline

A disciple is a follower and student of a mentor, teacher, or other figure. The term "disciple" represents the Koine Greek word *mathētēs*, which generally means "one who engages in learning through instruction from another, *pupil, apprentice*" or in religious contexts such as the Bible, "one who is rather constantly associated with someone who has a pedagogical reputation or a particular set of views, *disciple, adherent*." Discipline comes from *discipulus*, the Latin word for pupil, which also provided the source of the word *disciple* in the English language. The meaning of the word 'disciple' is not derived primarily from its root meaning or etymology however, but from its widespread usage in the ancient world. Disciples are found in the world outside of the Bible. For example among the ancient Greek philosophers, disciples learned by imitating the teacher's entire way of life and not just by remembering the spoken words of the teacher. In the world of the Bible, a *disciple* was a person who followed a teacher, or rabbi, or master, or philosopher.



## Discipline

*"By forbearance, a ruler may be persuaded, and a soft tongue breaks the bone."* (Prov 25:15) It is a curious fact that discipline is not listed as one of the Templar virtues. What is mentioned and listed is the virtue of forbearance, with which discipline shares a cutting edge, hence the opening of this devotion from the book of Proverbs.

By definition, forbearance means to hold back especially in the face of intentional provocation, or it can mean showing restraint, holding back. It calls for personal restraint when the situation begs for strong, swift, relentless action. Restraint in the face of such provocation is especially important for a warrior lest the warrior succumb to blood lust. Such restraint is called for by St. Augustine and the "Just War Tradition" that calls for proportionality, right cause, respect for and protection of the non-combatant (i.e. civilians, the wounded, prisoners, and those who have laid down arms). The practice of restraint is, thus, a manifestation of discipline.

The Sovereign Military Order of the Temple of Jerusalem is a modern Christian Order of Knighthood, chivalric, charitable, and ecumenically Christian. In Romans 3:25 we read, *"because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed"* In our daily lives as Knights and Dames living our lives in obedience to Christ and in service to others, forbearance is indeed a virtue. No single one of us is going to usher in the peaceful kingdom, but as Knights and Dames we know from Psalm 115, "Non nobis, Domine, non nobis, sed Nomini Tuo da Gloria". It is never about us but about our showing our love of Christ for all as we practice the virtue of forbearance.

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# **Nine Templar Virtues**

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