

# Maxims of the Little Institute

*as translated from the original French*



In writing the *Maxims of the Little Institute*, Jean-Pierre Médaille, SJ used a literary form popular in mid-17<sup>th</sup> Century France. Maxims were short pithy statements easy to memorize by a population that generally could not read or write.

## Structure of the Maxims of the Little Institute:

<b>Maxim</b>	<b>1-11</b>	present the spirituality of the Sisters of Saint Joseph
	<b>12-43</b>	emphasize our relationship with God
	<b>44-61</b>	emphasize our relationship with others
	<b>62-90</b>	emphasize our relationship with self
	<b>91-100</b>	provide a summary of the spirituality

Although the Maxim structure emphasizes relationship with God, others and self, we do not see these relationships as separate from one another. We love and serve God in and through our loving service to the dear neighbor.

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.
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 God 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 God’s holy will, and be more pleasing in God’s sight.
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 who must come all the blessings of your institute.
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.
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” (1 Cor. 7:31) and reject its maxims which are full of deceit and impiety.
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.
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.
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 God’s glory through the movement of God’s grace and according to the orders of obedience.
9. Shun always and with repulsion all vanity, self-complacency, 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.
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.
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 God's graces.
15. Likewise, be very faithful to the grace of the Holy Spirit, listening attentively, obeying promptly and entirely, attributing to the Holy Spirit, as is indeed just, the honor resulting from the success of your good actions.
16. In everything and everywhere, have only God, God's will and God's glory before your eyes, and make no account of anything else.
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 Love.
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.
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.
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.
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 God's presence, utterly according to God by a will, a life and everything conformed to God.
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.
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.
27. Seek out the interior and hidden life of Jesus in so far as the activities of zeal allow.
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.
29. Believe with St. Teresa the truths of your religion with a firmer faith when they are more difficult to understand. (Autobiography, Ch. XIX.)
30. And do the same in the practice of hope. When in your actions and plans there is little likelihood of success 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 God will effect in you and through you God's 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 God takes away sensible graces, remember the abandonment of the dear Savior on the cross and tenderly cherish your own in consideration of his.
33. If it glorifies God, desire to be as pleasing to God 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 God's 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 God's 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.



LePuy, France

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.
42. Long solely and constantly for the great love of God and of our Savior Jesus, but long for it without over eagerness.
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.
44. Never do anything which contradicts the pursuit of holiness.
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 not 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 or her 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 others are not the servants of Jesus Christ.
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 tranquility of all your passions, and outwardly doing all things without over eagerness 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.
62. Be constant in the way of life and virtue you have chosen, changing nothing about it except to improve it.
63. 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.
64. Strive to be kind always to everyone and unkind to no one.
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.
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.
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.

68. Consider as suspect any desire that is overeager and capable of distracting you from more necessary and obligatory occupations.
69. Never think of tomorrow unless it has some necessary link with today, but entrust it entirely to Providence.
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 God's appointed time without over eagerness to be informed sooner.
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.
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 for 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.
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.
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 God's contentment.
80. 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 God's grace, such grace often makes beginners more devoted in good works and less prone to faults than holiness consists in something utterly hidden and known to God alone.

81. Whatever the virtue you recognize in yourself, never turn away from a true fear of God, conscious that God's judgments are unfathomable and that God's appraisals are quite different from ours.
82. Consider as certain that in the practice of zeal there is nothing so good as peaceful and disinterested desires for God's glory. God 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.
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.
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.
86. Be above everything that is not God, not allowing yourself to be dominated by any earthly creature but keep all subject to reason.
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)
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 in their highest degree.
90. Accomplish with great diligence and perfection everyday actions and unexpected ones.
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 God's sovereign perfection.
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, heedlessness, 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.
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: God's glory, God's will, God's contentment solely; for the will, the one freedom to go to God, to love God, to embrace all the dictates of God's Providence with all the love of your heart.
94. Be watchful and take care not to be deceived; in living out your life, by the devil masquerading as an angel of light; the devil 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.

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 God's 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 God's 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.
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 goo 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 a way that it is pleasing to God; and, regarding every circumstance of your life and death, let God decide.
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 God. Therefore, work tirelessly towards the total union with God. 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 judgment, of will, and even (with discretion) of the senses, which should go 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 nonetheless with 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 over eagerness; 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 God's presence.

*Love's Design* by Marcia Allen, CSJ, (Concordia, Kansas) includes reflections on all 100 Maxims. To order a copy, contact Manna House of Prayer at [retreatcenter@mannahouse.org](mailto:retreatcenter@mannahouse.org) or (785) 243-4428.