

**December 13, 2020**

## **Imitate Christ**

### **Philippians 2:1-11**

If you've never read *The Imitation of Christ*, written in the 1400s by Thomas à Kempis, I highly recommend it. It is one of the most influential books in my spiritual life. My paperback copy, which has been in every bedside table I've owned since graduating college, is hanging onto the spine by the thinnest of threads. The book is literally a step-by-step guide to imitating the life of Christ (according to Thomas à Kempis). He wrote it as a senior monk instructing new monks on the monastic life. It is a joyless, stark, and harsh book. There are no hugs. No feel-good stories. Nothing to make you feel good about yourself...well, except the path to salvation, of course. The instructions are clear, and I can 100% guarantee, you are not following them all. No one is.

Thomas à Kempis is a downer, but he's right. Every time I read a section like this, I start to rankle: "Certainly when Judgement Day comes, we shall not be asked what books we have read, but what deeds we have done; we shall not be asked how well we have debated, but how devoutly we have lived."<sup>1</sup> But then I think about it, and I know Thomas the Taskmaster is right. My own pursuit of knowledge is a form of pride, and while God wants us to use the brains God gave us, that pursuit is not always focused on Christ.

In this season of anticipation, let us use this time to focus on the life of Christ, on the kind of person he became, the model that he was. As we wait for the celebration of Christ's birth, let's focus on how we can be more like him. When reading a text like *The Imitation of Christ*, it can be overwhelming. Where should I start? What should I do first? Am I too far gone? The student book author offers some advice: "Jesus knew this Christian life would be difficult for us. Thankfully, he left us the Holy Spirit to teach us everything and remind us of everything he told us (John 14:26)."<sup>2</sup>

In the end, we should all be striving to be more Christlike in our own way and time. That might mean becoming a monk like Thomas à Kempis, or it might mean seeking peace with a neighbor instead of continuing an argument. "Therefore, continue in your simple but staunch faith, and approach the Sacrament with reverent humility and securely entrust to God all that you are unable to understand."<sup>3</sup>

1. What qualities of Christ will you try to imitate this week?
2. What parts of a Christlike life are hardest for you to attain?
3. Are you well suited for the monastic life? Why or why not?

Rachel Mullen is the features and acquisitions editor for *Christian Living in the Mature Years Magazine*.

<sup>1</sup> Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* (Vintage, 1998), 7.

<sup>2</sup> From Adult Bible Studies, Winter 2020-21, by Taylor Mills (Cokesbury, 2020); page 19.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* (Vintage, 1998), 214.