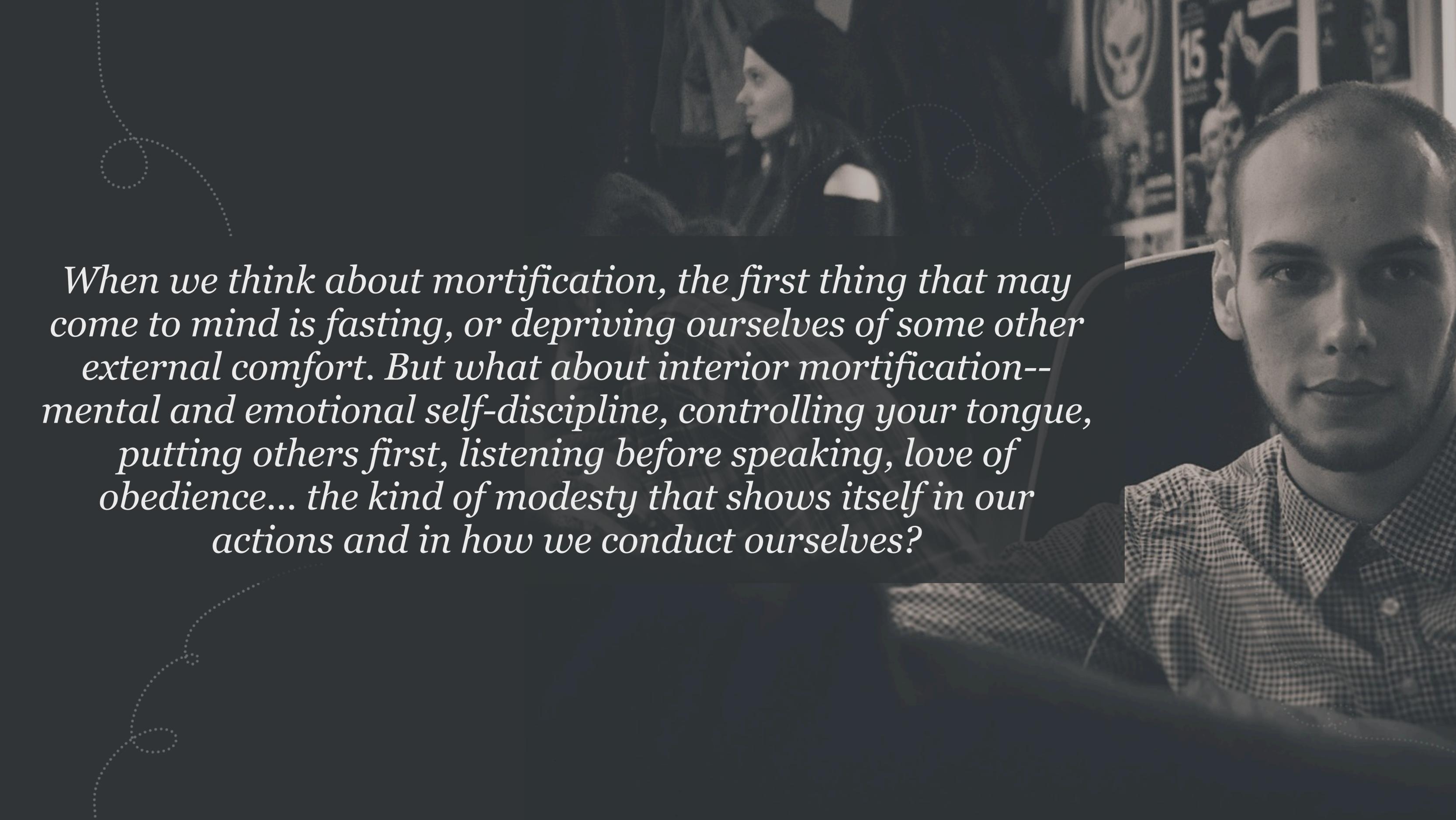


Mortification of the mind and the will

St. Vincent de Paul

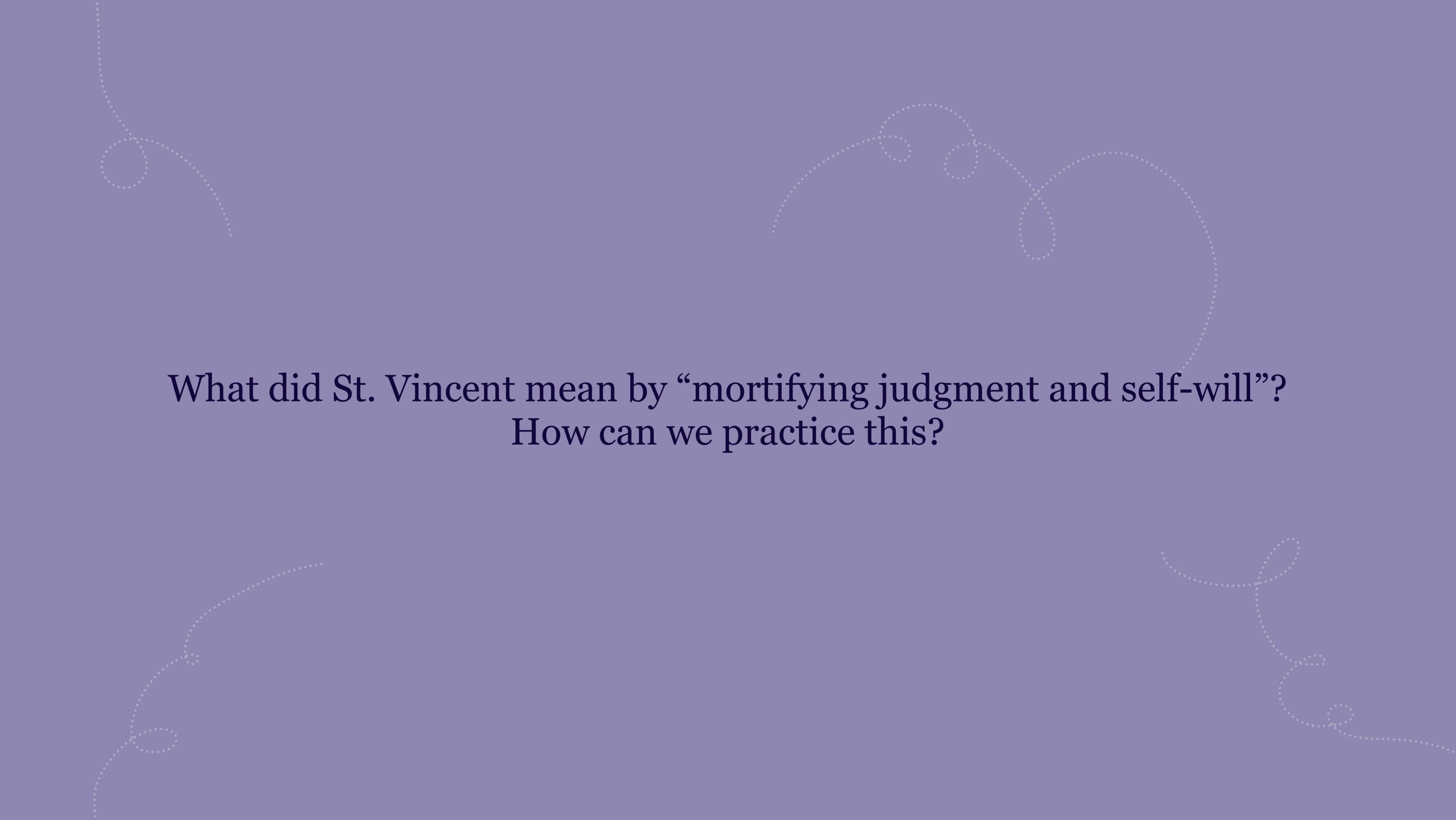


When we think about mortification, the first thing that may come to mind is fasting, or depriving ourselves of some other external comfort. But what about interior mortification-- mental and emotional self-discipline, controlling your tongue, putting others first, listening before speaking, love of obedience... the kind of modesty that shows itself in our actions and in how we conduct ourselves?

“Regarding your intention to work hard at mortifying the judgment and self-will of your seminarians, let me tell you, Monsieur, that this cannot be done all at once but only gradually, gently, and patiently.”

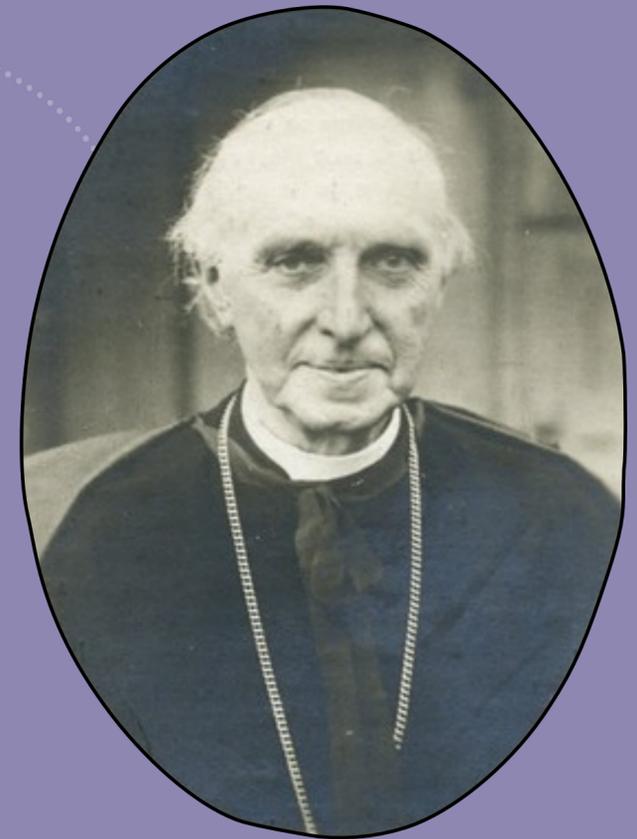
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What did St. Vincent mean by “mortifying judgment and self-will”?
How can we practice this?

In researching this theme, I came across an essay called “Practice of Christian Mortification”, by Cardinal Désiré Mercier of Belgium (1851-1926). He challenges us with 19 recommendations on mortification of the mind and the will. I believe they will help us understand more fully what St. Vincent meant when he said: “Model yourselves on those who excel the most in mortification.”

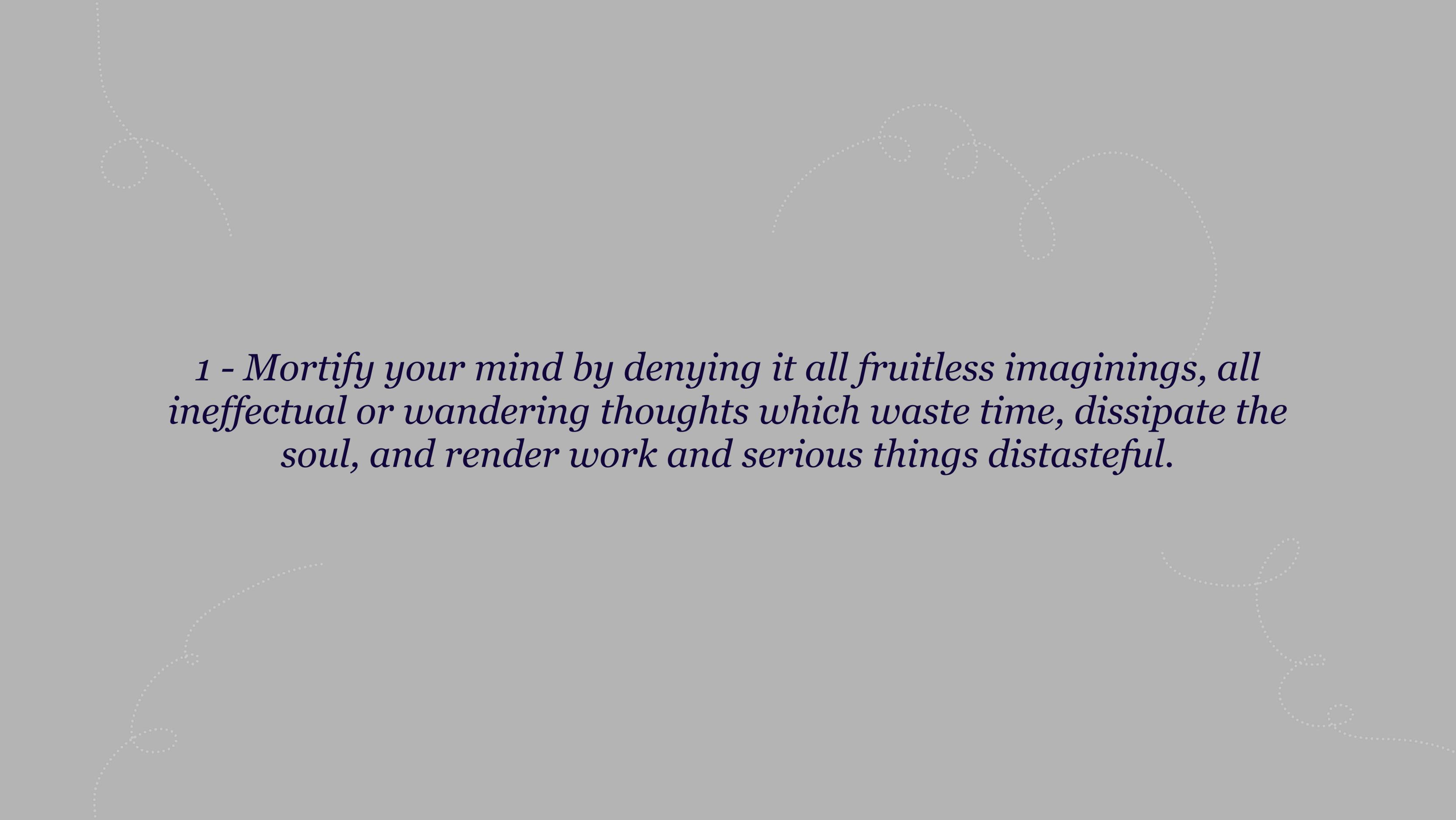


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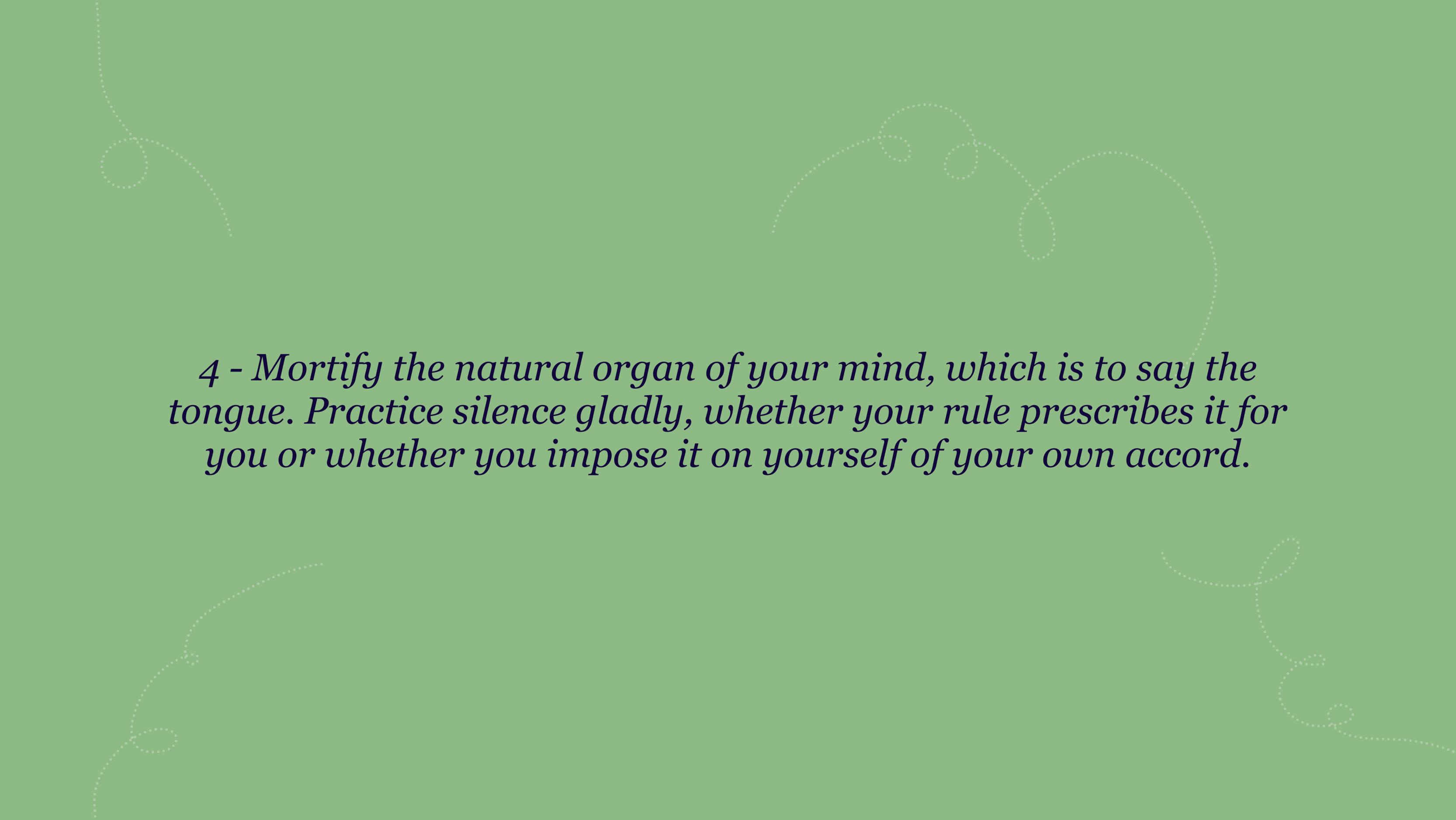
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1 - Mortify your mind by denying it all fruitless imaginings, all ineffectual or wandering thoughts which waste time, dissipate the soul, and render work and serious things distasteful.

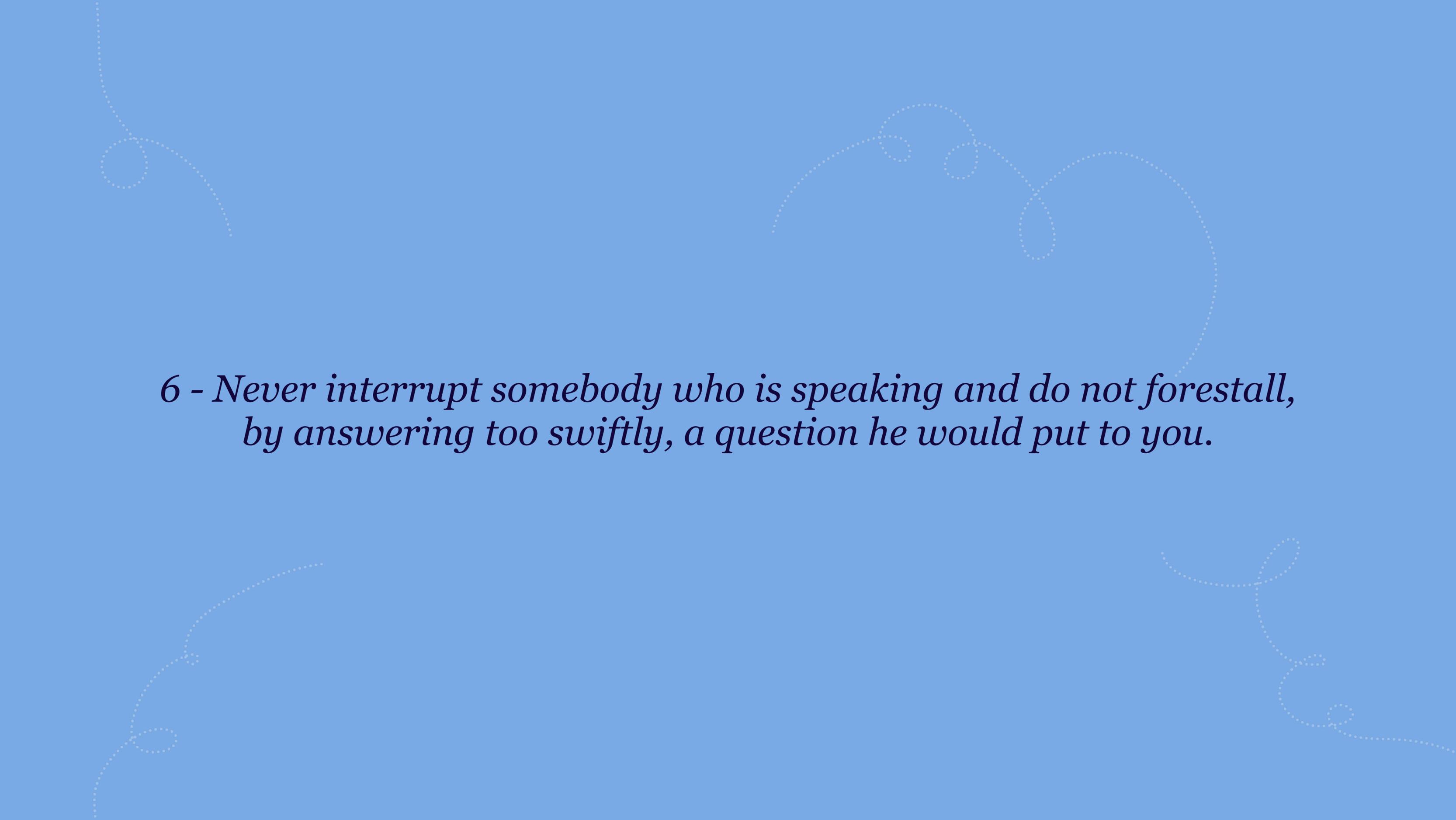
2 - Every gloomy and anxious thought should be banished from your mind. Concern about all that could happen to you later on should not worry you at all. As for the bad thoughts which bother you in spite of yourself, you should, in dismissing them, make of them a subject for patience. Being involuntary, they will simply be for you an occasion of merit.

3 - Avoid obstinacy in your ideas, stubbornness in your sentiments. You should willingly let the judgments of others prevail, unless there is a question of matters on which you have a duty to give your opinion and speak out.

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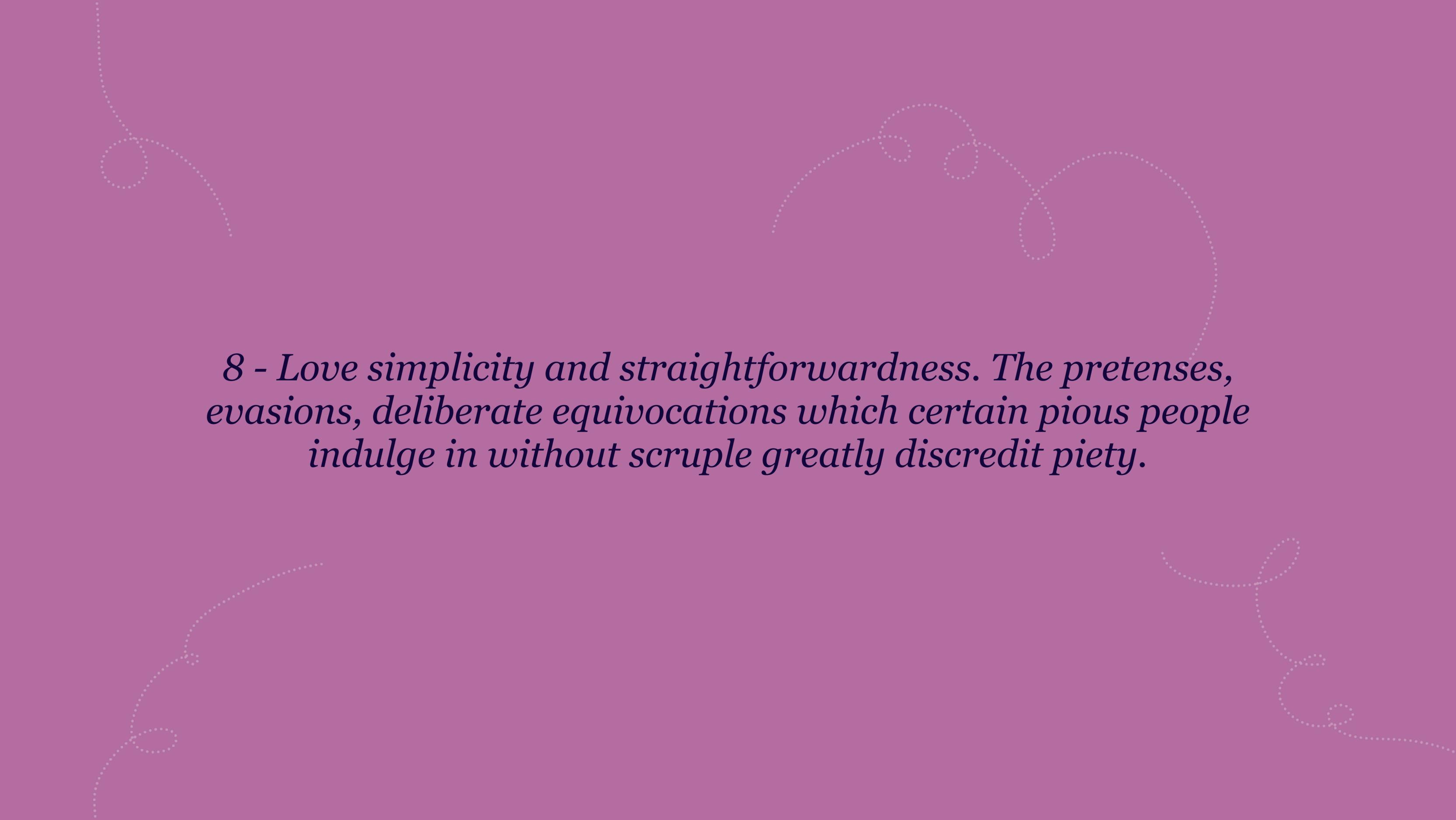
4 - Mortify the natural organ of your mind, which is to say the tongue. Practice silence gladly, whether your rule prescribes it for you or whether you impose it on yourself of your own accord.

5 - Prefer to listen to others rather than to speak yourself; and yet speak appropriately, avoiding as extremes both speaking too much, which prevents others from telling their thoughts, and speaking too little, which suggests a hurtful lack of interest in what they say.

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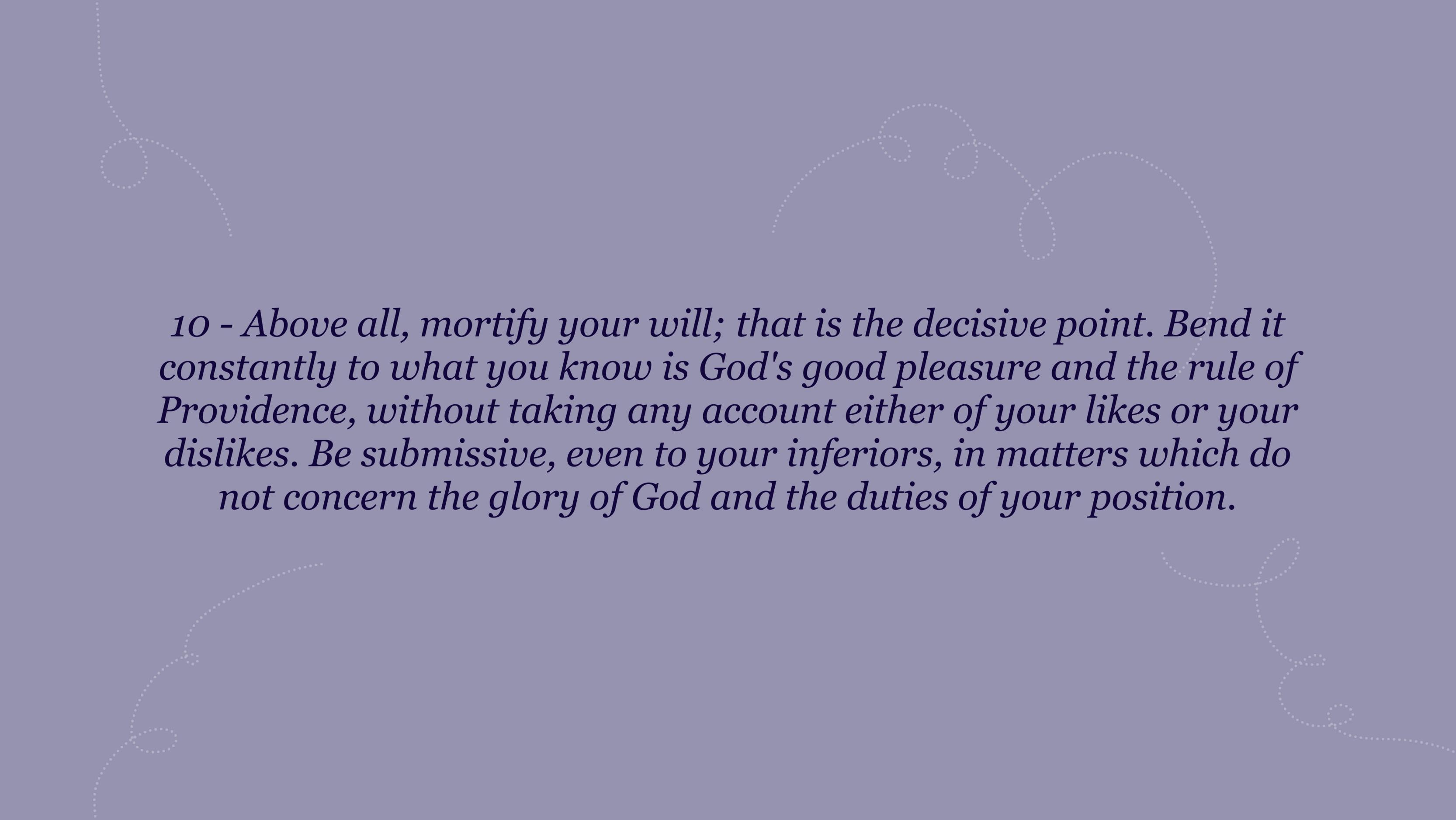
6 - Never interrupt somebody who is speaking and do not forestall, by answering too swiftly, a question he would put to you.

*7 - Always have a moderate tone of voice, never abrupt or sharp.
Avoid **very, extremely, horribly**; all exaggeration.*

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8 - Love simplicity and straightforwardness. The pretenses, evasions, deliberate equivocations which certain pious people indulge in without scruple greatly discredit piety.

9 - Carefully refrain from using any coarse, vulgar or even idle word, because Our Lord warns us that He will ask an account of them from us on the day of judgment.

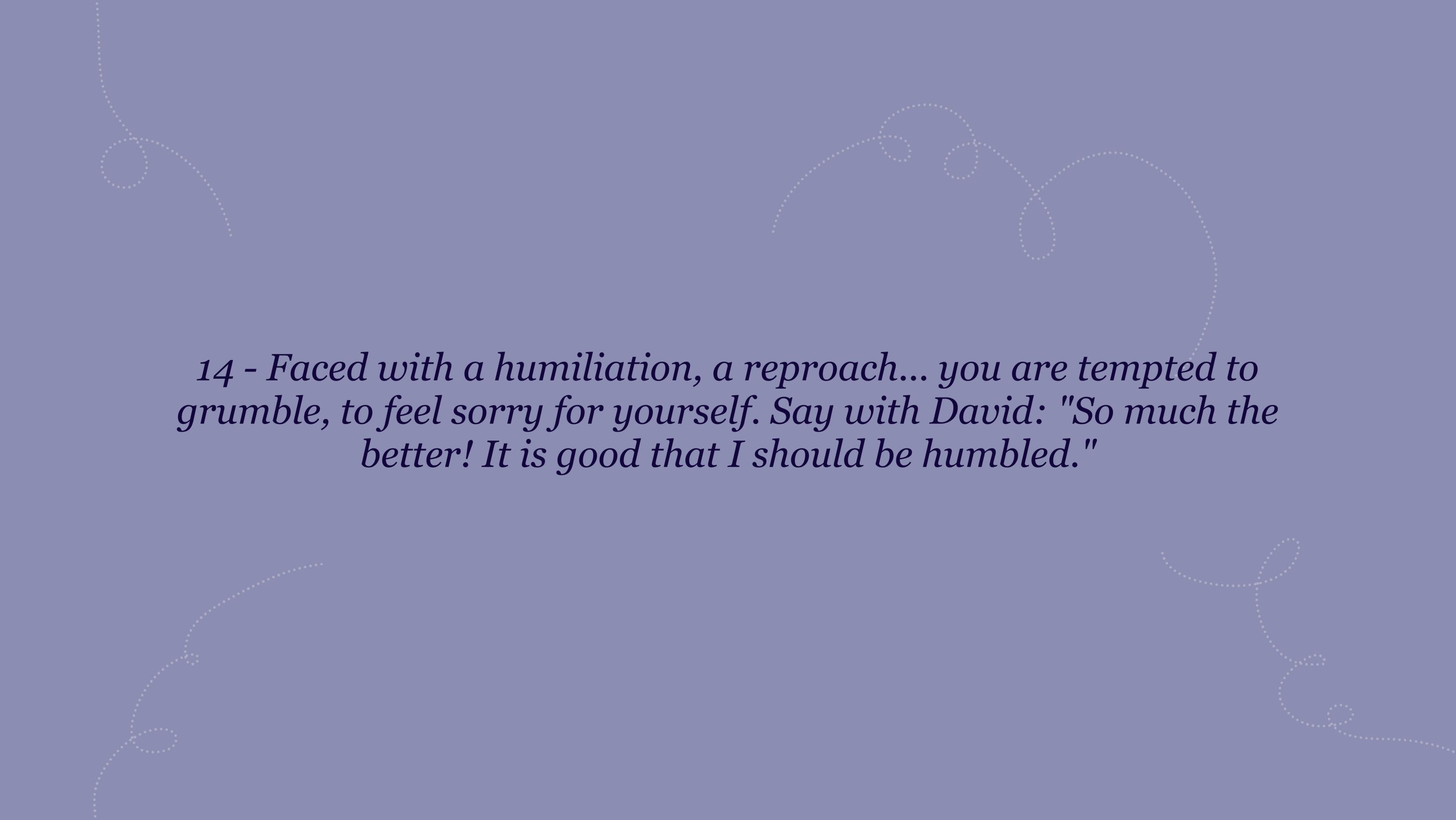


10 - Above all, mortify your will; that is the decisive point. Bend it constantly to what you know is God's good pleasure and the rule of Providence, without taking any account either of your likes or your dislikes. Be submissive, even to your inferiors, in matters which do not concern the glory of God and the duties of your position.

11 - Look on the smallest disobedience to the orders or even the desires of your superiors [bosses, parents] as if it were addressed to God.

12 - Remember that you will practice the greatest of all mortifications when you love to be humiliated and when you have the most perfect obedience towards those to whom God wishes you to be subject.

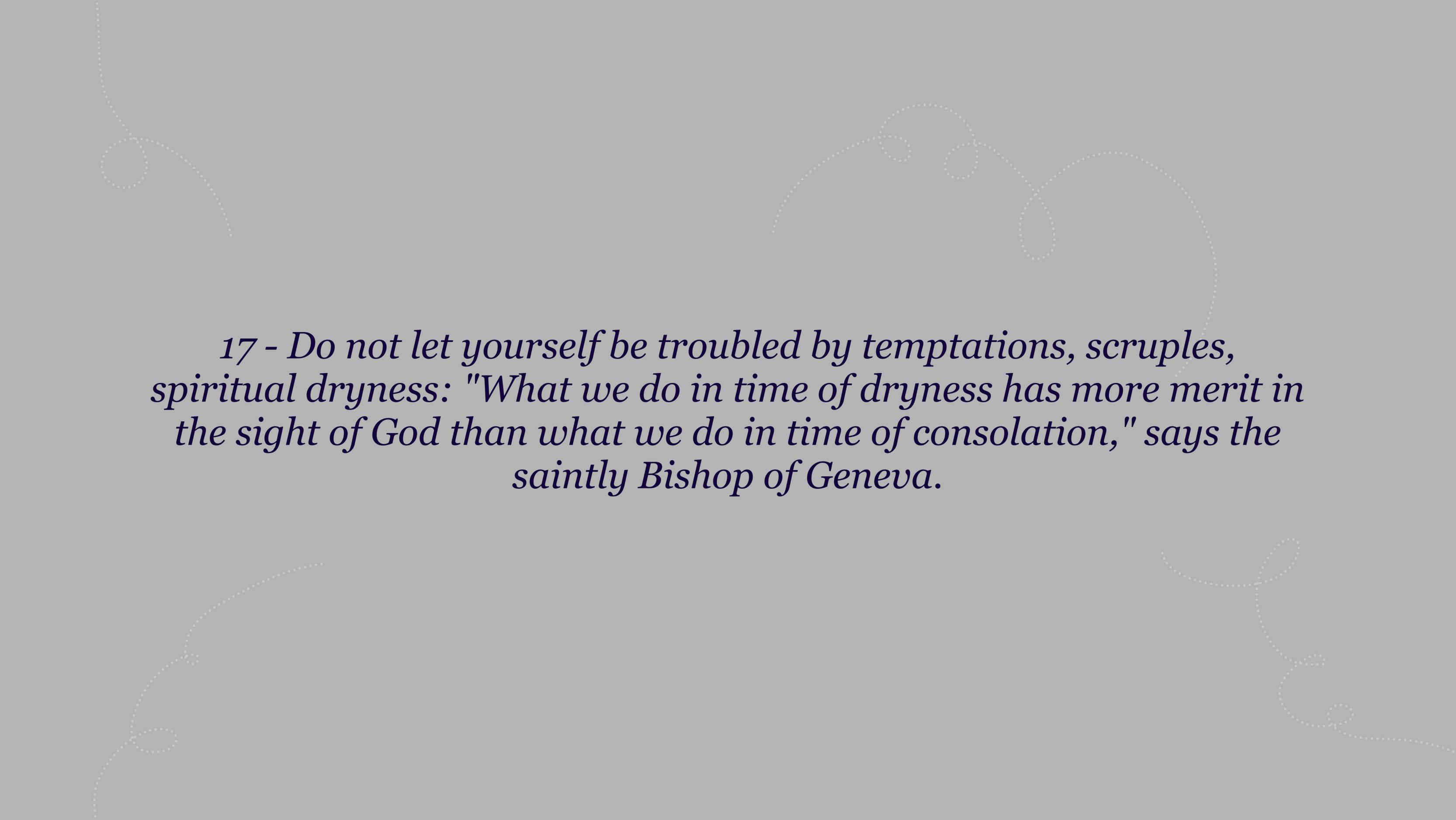
13 - Love to be forgotten and counted as nothing; it is the advice of Saint John of the Cross, it is the counsel of the Imitation of Christ: speak seldom either well or ill of yourself, but seek by silence to make yourself forgotten.



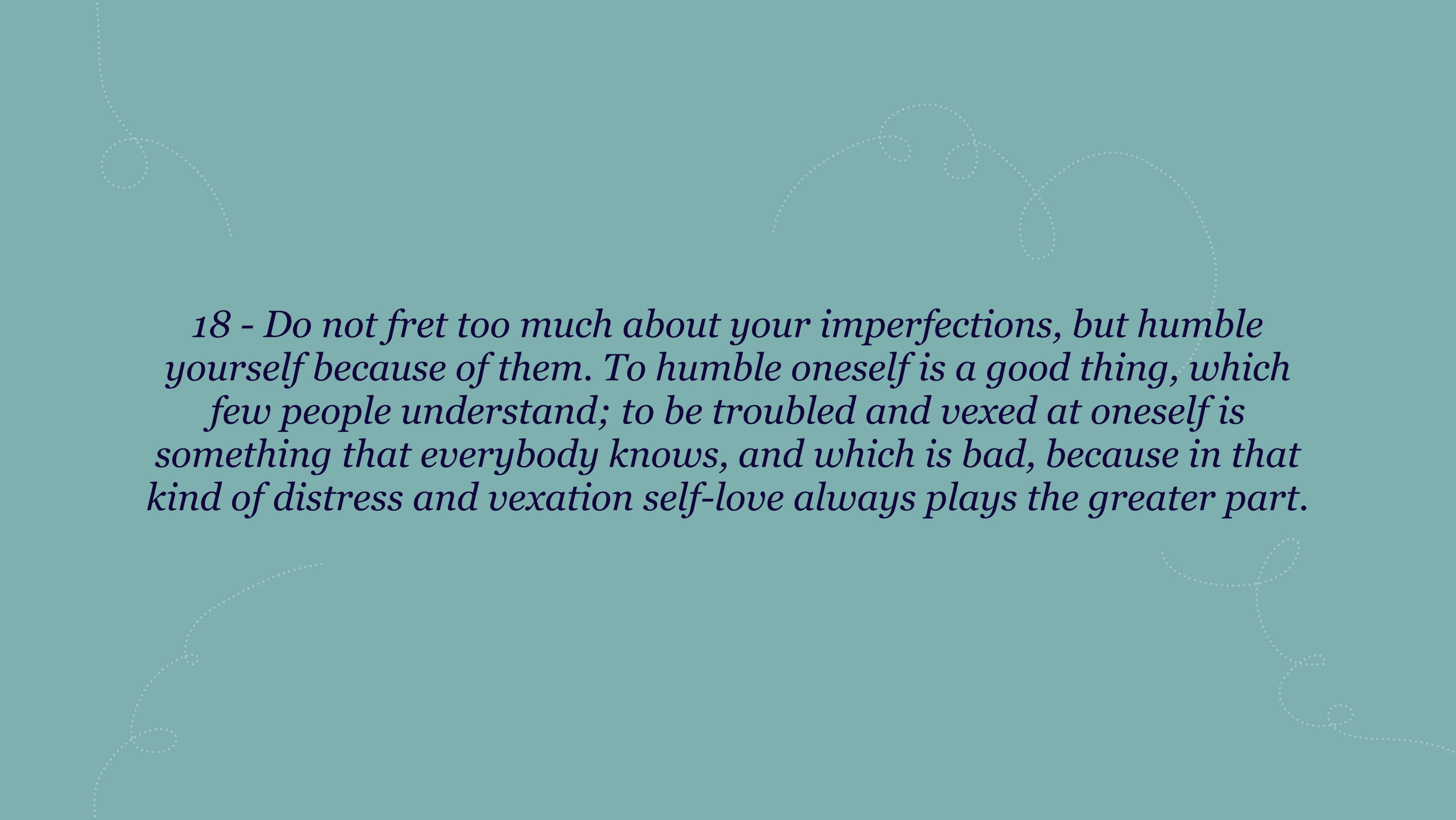
14 - Faced with a humiliation, a reproach... you are tempted to grumble, to feel sorry for yourself. Say with David: "So much the better! It is good that I should be humbled."

15 - Entertain no frivolous desires: "I desire few things," said Saint Francis de Sales, "and the little that I desire, I desire very little."

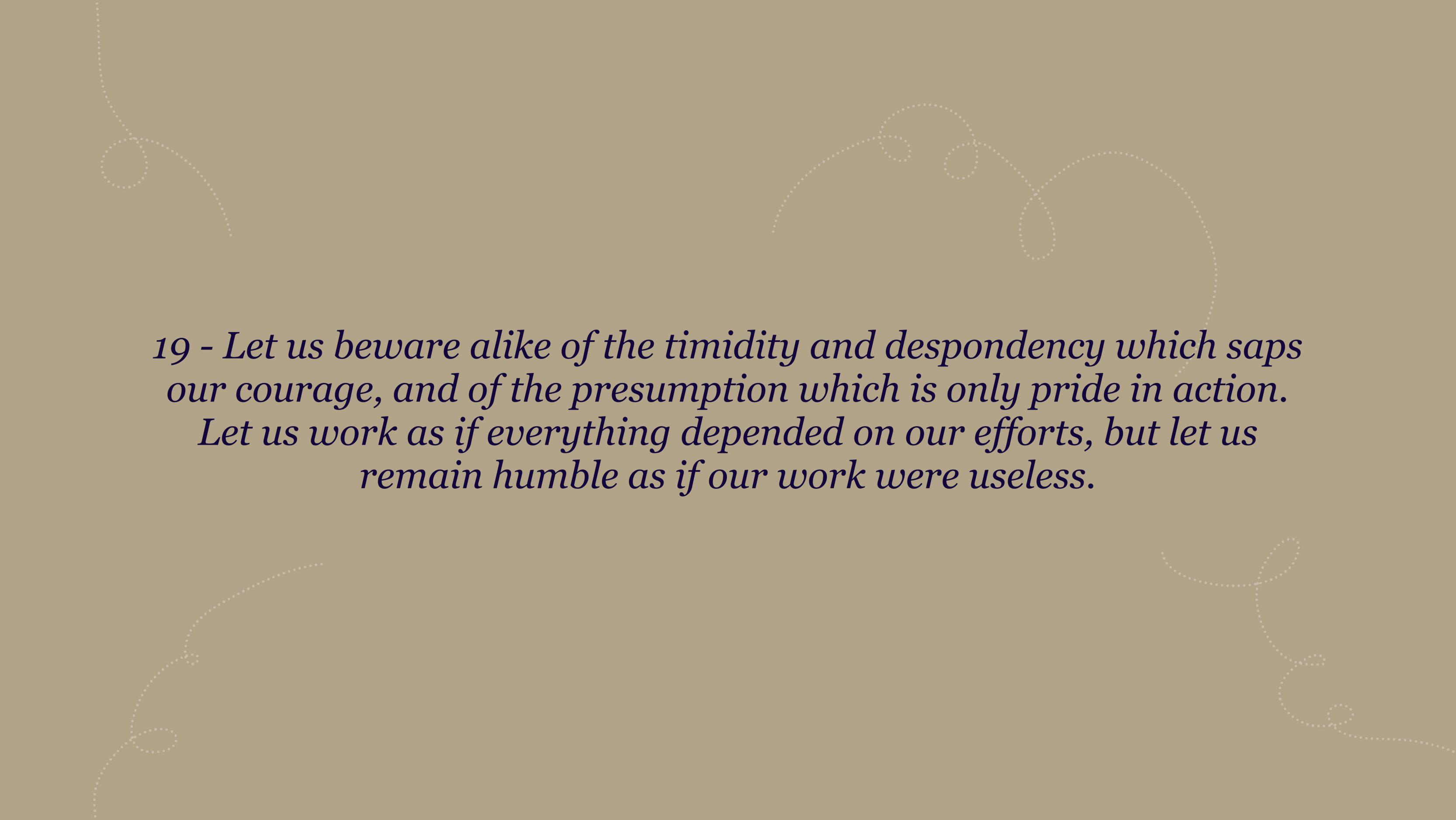
16 - Accept with the most perfect resignation the mortifications decreed by Providence, the crosses and the labors belonging to the state of life in which Providence has placed you. "There, where, there is less of our choice," said Saint Francis, "there is more of the good pleasure of God." We would like to choose our crosses, to have a cross other than our own, to carry a heavy cross which would at least have some fame, rather than a light cross which tires us by being unceasingly there. An illusion! It is our cross we must carry, not another, and its merit is not in what sort of cross it is, but in the perfection with which we carry it.



17 - Do not let yourself be troubled by temptations, scruples, spiritual dryness: "What we do in time of dryness has more merit in the sight of God than what we do in time of consolation," says the saintly Bishop of Geneva.



18 - Do not fret too much about your imperfections, but humble yourself because of them. To humble oneself is a good thing, which few people understand; to be troubled and vexed at oneself is something that everybody knows, and which is bad, because in that kind of distress and vexation self-love always plays the greater part.



19 - Let us beware alike of the timidity and despondency which saps our courage, and of the presumption which is only pride in action. Let us work as if everything depended on our efforts, but let us remain humble as if our work were useless.

“Mortification, like all the other virtues, is acquired only by repeated acts, and especially this kind [mortification of the self-will], which is the most difficult. So, you must be satisfied with leading your charges toward this step by step, without expecting to attain it for a long time to come because there is a long way to go, except when God is pleased to dispense with the usual means.”

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*St. Vincent, perfectly mortified in heart and mind,
Pray for us.*

Sources:

<http://www.catholicapologetics.info/morality/general/mortification.htm>

Depaul University Quotes Database: What Did Vincent Say?

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