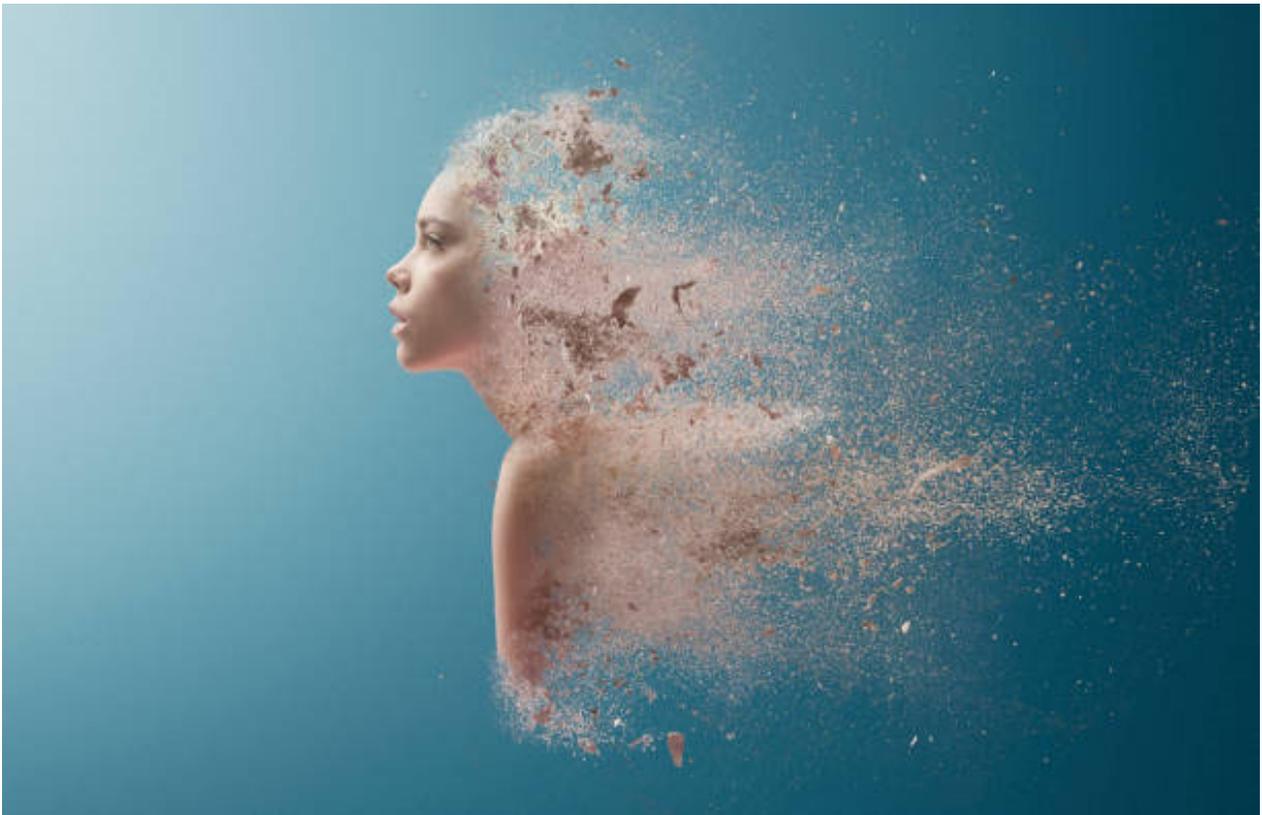


**PERFECT SPEED
IS
TO BE THERE**



**crossing space and
time on
spiritual wheels**

PERFECT SPEED IS TO BE THERE
- crossing space and time on spiritual wheels -
(just a thought on the personal spiritual speed of life)

Today we are living our human history with difficulty. In it, men are dying of thirst, and there is no greater problem in the world than this: not giving men a spiritual sense. We are living with spiritual restlessness. Men cannot live only on refrigerators, budgets, and politics. We can't live this way! If we live without poetry, without beauty, without love, life is not worth to be lived. By working solely to purchase material goods, we will end up building a real prison for ourselves. Let's be free. Stir your emotions, engage your intellect, and inspire you to go further on your journey, living deeper with God, closer to others, and finding new ways of being present and active in this changing world. There is no standing still in spiritual life. We are either moving toward a great future by cooperating with His grace, or we are moving away from Him by rejecting His grace. Let's feel again the wind and the spirit of the One who made us according to his beautiful image. We are created with divine dust of love. We are His beloved children. Amen and Amen.

These pages will help anyone with goodwill focus on personal life as daily meditations upon many things crossing our space and time. God's Word for this journey is present. To wrap ourselves in Scriptures is a unique way to speed up our curiosity for knowledge and feel a presence always available on the path we choose to go. Navigating these pages, I suggest chewing one number or paragraph a day for healthy digestion, avoiding in this way any stress injuries or blood pressure.

If the writing makes you tired, do not hesitate to look at the pictures or photos present for each day and use them as meditation. Readers may write more personal considerations on the free blank margin spaces. Good luck, keep up the necessary speed for a perfect way to be there on time for dinner. Remember, it was the old missionary in Africa who gave the tribe of cannibals their first taste of Christianity.

1. The One who is there



Today has to be a wonderful day, right at the beginning of the New Year. I just feel generous and thankful to God for the wonders surrounding my life from all over. Yesterday I started the beginning of the New Year with the celebration of masses, and a new blessing of thanksgiving was present in the people and prayers of the day. I always wonder about how much God is blessing us every day and during these special occasions.

Where is our transparency to the beauty of God who just came to visit us at Christmas? How do we catch all this spirit if we do not pay attention or do not care about it? What is the meaning of this beautiful birth of the Savior we celebrate at the beginning of this New Year? Has He nothing to do with our delivery too?

I met a family this morning that lost their mother and wife, and I Promise to have for her the best time for the celebration of mama's life on Friday. It is the first of the funerals at the dawn of this New Year. There is time to run things continually in our life, and nobody can stop it because we do not have the power to kill time. But we have another possibility, and this is ours to use that is more powerful than the first one because it is in our control, and we may use it if we know-how. When I was young, I was always tempted to give more credit to the person who was able to do and perform many more things faster so that the perfect speed of the One doing so many things

more quickly and on target was the hero, the blessed, the One. Now I think that this kind of speed is useful only in specific circumstances, but going at the best rate in life is a challenging art. In other words, we have to know how to regulate the speed of our emotions and life-situations, and this is again something not easy to control in the rush of this time we are all in. Everything happens in his own time. What is changing and challenging us is the way to measure that event that took place in a specific moment of life. If we may freeze that moment in time, analyze it, give colour, and be with dignity, then our life is for something and brings us happiness. We need to find a way to practice and learn how to be on time because reaching the perfect life speed is there. With this challenge in mind, I hope to be there in time for that family who lost her young mother with words and presence. The Creator, the giver of life, is the One who is always there. He is in the present, always looking for a companion at the perfect speed of the journey trip of life. Can I, can we do that? I hope so. If we can go at the pace of other people's situations, we will be able to be there with them, at their speed of joy or sorrow, more light and the blessing of the One who is above all the Emmanuel, the One who is always there - God with us will be present.

2. Like a sponge



Sometimes our life is like a sponge. It is thirsty for some meaning of good things that may happen around us. Most of the time, we are not interested in developing our inner life to make us closer to the percentage of our good possibilities to build the best of us. We all have a chance to do our best. Dark moments may happen in the journey and reduce speed and interest like a shadow that leaves us indifferent to time and motivations in our lives. We still conscious of what we are and maybe of what we are doing, but we feel that our spirit sometimes freezes in time and space. We let things go, and only a minimum of attention is just keeping us alive. We may feel the beauty and the power of that divine energy, which is working in our system, and we feel physically and spiritually charged with energy. Like this evening at the funeral home, the few people gathered for the brief moment of prayer in memory of Ann. They were like thirsty sponges drinking with their eyes, hears, and hearts the message that the prayer was carrying on. And the strange feeling that the more you give and the more they were able to absorb. All this gave me a sense of inner peace and a very positive feeling about my mission as a shepherd. The sheep are daily in need of green pasture and freshwater. I know a little about this family's background, but it is easy to understand how there is even today a strong desire for more and fresh spiritual water to quench the thirst for meaning and spiritual orientation. A funeral is probably the best time for this awareness and spiritual wake-up, and this always happens when we start to miss somebody very dear to us, like a parent, a spouse, a child, or a very dear friend.

Will I be tomorrow at the funeral mass able to let them understand that life is a beautiful gift from God to all and that what we do with it is our gift to God? I hope so! I need help to speak words that may refresh and increase their faith in the right direction. Do I have enough water to give? And at the same time, why not try just to be there with them and their pain and bring a refreshing presence of sympathy and hope. By experience, we know how strong and bitter our life may become if the elasticity of a sponge is not available because nobody is pouring water. The community's presence and the cooperation are at work in marvellous and mysterious ways, like stewardship of God's grace. One day when we will open our life before the Lord, what do we have to offer, or what would you like to provide? *"I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink"* these words are for you and me.

3. The words are not enough

Words cannot always express what is happening in a particular stage of life and where or what we call loss is. I find words not still capable of sustaining the many different ways to give experience to feelings and motivations. Sometimes, this communication tool looks very poor and more to say with a gesture or a simple body movement. Think about the role of a smile among friends and so on. More we say besides words! Today's funeral, for example, was a moment of excellent communication that went behind words. I felt a lot of communication in George. His gladness for the celebration and a mixture of different feelings allowed me to touch the simplicity again and the beauty of souls searching for meaning: leaving water so essential in us and anybody else. This desire was also communicated in words like a font of energy suddenly disclosed and available.



I could see it and feel it like a steady rain sweetly touching the dusty ground and restoring it to life. I was there! Somebody has found the written word to touch the hearts of that family, and more will be alive in the future. The story is always relevant because God sees it and knows about those who search for light to shine again into the darkness and make them new. Who searches will find him. The people who are touched by these kinds of situations in life are more open. They receive and listen very well. The responsibility we bear in these situations is probably to be there in that specific time with compassion and to let the divine light shine within us and through us to others. It is not a matter of what to say but rather to be there for them and let it be. At the center of it all is the profound human drama of death and life that can stir the emotions, imagination, and wills of many men and women into a new dimension. Beneath the surface of appearances, when this happens, we are very close or at his presence, and on that occasion, there is no need for any colourful thoughts. Words are not enough, and they fail when they try to describe such a presence's gentle power.

4. Cosmic balance

Today I had a simple but great meeting with representatives of the youth group in this parish. We were preparing for the event to host The Cross that is travelling across Canada. Many young people will come to pray. Songs and prayers are now ready. Everything went in place easy and fast, including The Message of the Holy Father - John Paul II to the youth of the world on the occasion of the XVII World Youth Day (Toronto 18-28 July 2002). Here it is:

MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER
TO THE YOUTH OF THE WORLD
ON THE OCCASION
OF THE XVII WORLD YOUTH DAY



Dear Young People!

I have vivid memories of the beautiful moments we shared in Rome during the Jubilee of the Year 2000 when you came on pilgrimage to the Tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul. By now, World Youth Day has become an essential part of your life and the life of the church. Therefore, I invite you to get ready for the seventeenth celebration of this great international event, to be held in Toronto, Canada, in the summer of next year. It will be another chance to

meet Christ, to bear witness to his presence in today's society, and to become builders of the "civilization of love and truth."

5. "You are the salt ... You are the light of the world."



The theme I have chosen for the next World Youth Day. The images of salt and light used by Jesus are rich in meaning and complement each other. In ancient times, everybody has seen salt and light as essential elements of life.

"You are the salt of the earth..." One of the main functions of salt is to season food, to give it taste and flavour. This image reminds us that, through baptism, our whole being has been profoundly changed because it has been "seasoned" with the new life which comes from Christ (Rom 6:4). The salt, which keeps our Christian identity intact even in a very secularized world, is the grace of baptism. Through baptism, we are reborn. We begin to live in Christ and become capable of responding to his call to "offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God" (Rom 12:1).

Writing to the Christians of Rome, Saint Paul urges them to show clearly that their way of living and thinking was different from that of their contemporaries: *"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what the will of God is, what is good and pleasing and perfect"* (Rom 12:2).

For a long time, salt was also used to preserve food. As the salt of the earth, you are called to protect the faith you have received and pass it on intact to others. Your generation is being challenged, especially to keep safe the deposit of faith.

Discover your Christian roots, learn about the church's history, deepen your knowledge of the spiritual heritage, which has been passed on to you, follow in the footsteps of the witnesses and teachers who have gone before you! Only by staying faithful to God's commandments, to the Covenant which Christ sealed with his blood poured out on the cross, will you be the apostles and witnesses of the new millennium.

Human beings' nature, especially youth, seeks the Absolute and fullness of life. Dear young people, do not be content with anything less than the highest ideals! Do not let yourself be discouraged by those who are disillusioned with life and have grown deaf to the deepest and most authentic desires of their heart? You are right to be disappointed with hollow entertainment and fads and aim too little in life. If you have an ardent desire for the Lord, you will steer clear of the mediocrity and conformism so widespread in our society.

6. "You are the light of the world..."

For those who first heard Jesus, as for us, the symbol of light evokes the desire for truth and the thirst for the fullness of knowledge, which are imprinted deep within every human being. When the light fades or vanishes altogether, we no longer see things as they are. In the heart of the night, we can feel frightened and insecure, and we impatiently await the coming of the light of dawn. Dear young people, it is up to you to be the watchmen of the morning (cf. Is 21:11-12) who announce the coming of the Son, who is the Risen Christ!

The light, which Jesus speaks of in the Gospel, is the light of faith, God's gift, which enlightens the heart and clarifies the mind. "It is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God on the face of

Christ" (2 Cor 4:6). That is why the words of Jesus explaining his identity and his mission are so important: "I am the light of the world; whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (Jn 8:12). Our encounter with Christ bathes life in a new light, sets us on the right path, and sends us out to be his witnesses. This new way of looking at the world and at people, which comes to us from Him, leads us more deeply into the mystery of faith, which is not just a collection of theoretical assertions to be accepted and approved by the mind, but an experience to be had, a truth to be lived, the salt and light of all reality (cf. *Veritatis Splendor*, 88). In this secularized age, when many of our contemporaries think and act as if God did not exist or are attracted to irrational forms of religion, you, dear young people, must show that faith is a personal decision that involves your whole



life. Let the Gospel be the measure and guide of life's decisions and plans! Then you will be missionaries in all that you do and say, and wherever you work and live, you will be signs of God's love, credible witnesses to the loving presence of Jesus Christ.

Never forget: "No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a bushel" (Mt 5:15)! Just as salt gives flavour to food and light illumines the darkness, so too holiness gives full meaning to life and makes it reflect God's glory. How many saints, especially young saints, can we count in the church's history! In their love for God, their heroic virtues shone before the world, and so they became models of life, which the church has held up for imitation by all. Let us remember only a few of them: Agnes of Rome, Andrew of Phú Yên, Pedro Calungsod, Josephine Bakhita, Thérèse of Lisieux, Pier Giorgio Frassati, Marcel Callo, Francisco Castelló Aleu or again Kateri Tekakwitha, the young Iroquois called "the Lily of the Mohawks." Through the intercession of this great host of witnesses, may God make you too, dear young people, the saints of the third millennium! Dear friends, it is time to get ready for the Seventeenth World Youth Day. Yes, now is the time for the mission!

In your Dioceses and parishes, in your movements, associations, and communities, Christ is calling you. The church welcomes you and wishes to be your home and your school of communion and prayer. Study the Word of God and let it enlighten your minds and hearts. Draw strength from the sacramental grace of Reconciliation and the Eucharist. Visit the Lord in that "heart to heart" contact that is Eucharistic Adoration. Day after day, you will receive new energy to help you to bring comfort to the suffering and peace to the world. Many people are wounded by life: they are excluded from economic progress and are without a home, a family, and a job; some people are lost in a world of false illusions or have abandoned all hope. By contemplating the light radiant on the face of the Risen Christ, you will learn to live as "children of the light and children of the day" (1 Th 5:5), and in this way, you will show that "the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true" (Eph 5:9).

7. Dear young friends

Toronto is waiting for all of you who can make it! In the heart of a multi-cultural and multi-faith city, we shall speak of Christ as the one Savior and proclaim the universal salvation of which the church is the Sacrament. In response to the pressing invitation of the Lord, who ardently desires "that all may be one" (Jn 17:11), we shall pray for full communion among Christians in truth and charity. Come, and make the grand avenues of Toronto resound with the joyful tidings that Christ loves every person and brings to fulfillment every trace of goodness, beauty, and truth found in



the city of man. Come, and tell the world of the happiness you have seen in meeting Jesus Christ, of your desire to know him better, of how you are committed to proclaiming the Gospel of salvation to the ends of the earth!

My blessing goes with you. And to Mary Mother of the Church, I entrust each of you, your vocation, and your mission. (From Castel Gandolfo, 25 July 2001 - IOANNES PAULUS II).

8. This message



Things go in place smoothly, probably for you too, when we say and do something with our hearts, being there with absolute openness and simplicity. The best speed always, and we never have to dwell in darkness or be afraid of anything because the rate of God is the best speed for each one of us. It must be a cosmic symphony of light where everything and everybody has his function to be there and to move at that perfect speed.

9. Following the star

Yes, it is Epiphany again. The manifestation to the world and the gentiles about the Savior and the Messiah's presence on earth and among us become visible every year or every time we allowed the light of this feast to shine. If there is no light this day for many, they still follow the wrong star that may bring to a vicious circle of keeping quiet, sitting in the dark with no expectations at all! Why be so miserable? To look at stars, we have to look up. There is a dream, a wonderful dream, for everybody in the sky needs to look at and believe it. If we do not dream, what we may become with our life is something that we call miserable, and this is not funny: it is a sickness! The real Epiphany that we celebrate every year has the power to make us shine like stained glass windows if we only dare to keep our head up, looking up at The Star, the natural light of the world. The figurines of the following picture are with light that is from inside of each personality. From inside, the right light may be communicated, and the only condition to make it possible is that we have to be plugged into the outlet of that energy: the newborn King. Let it be light, and let it be now! This writing is the message that was on the bulletin this weekend at the speed of 3 camels.



10. "The story of the Magi



It is so colourful we may overlook its significance and fail to see its deeper meaning. The wise men represent all of us. Their journey through desert and mountain following a star reflects our search for purpose and meaning in life, which is impossible unless we are guided by faith, which enables us to see beneath the surface of appearances. At the center of it all is the innocence of the newborn child, surrounded by adoration, wonder, and mystery, who can stir the emotions, imagination, and wills of all those drawn into His presence. The story is always relevant because

God sees to it that people who search will find him. He will shed light on our darkness and make us new. Nothing is ever the same again for those who have discovered his light. The responsibility we bear is to let the divine light within us shine through to others. The Gospel of love, forgiveness, and redemption is not something to keep quiet about, but Good News to announce to the world."

11. Walk on the water

This wonderful day of light and nice weather brings me more hope and joy, as I like to walk and see and enjoy the paradise of this Northwest winter. Everything is so bright and shiny. The snow, which covers everything, is like a blessing of silent beauty and purity.

With Bill and Frances on lake Edward, we enjoy our walk. Almost 5 Km across, and along with that perfect flat extension of ice covered with snow, we went. It made us smile as we adventured on the ice. I wonder if the ice will be strong enough to sustain my weight or all of us together, especially when we stand all in one spot and at the center of the lake. Bill knows that the ice is thick enough to hold intense pressure and weight at this season. Trucks and cars may cross with no problem, and so humans! We all smile at the varieties of our considerations. Like children exploring unusual places, we don't lose our curiosity to feel the majesty of space and secrets of that so bright and peaceful walk.

I share the pleasant surprise of being able, like Jesus, to walk on water and how easy it feels and act. We all enjoyed this fantastic afternoon at the lake. Sometimes joy is a feeling that penetrates our life from every side with that simplicity at the right place, at the right moment, we may say, and nature is the ground: one vision, many dreams. Go and dream big!



12. The fence

As life goes back to its regular kind of busy schedule and blessed meetings or job work; my mind is open to a story that came into my hands a few days ago:

"There once was a little boy who had a bad temper. His Father gave him a bag of nails and told him that he must hammer a nail into the back of the fence every time he lost his temper.

On the first day, the boy had 37 nails into the fence.

Over the next few weeks, as he learned to control his anger, the number of nails hammered daily gradually dwindled.

He discovered it was more comfortable to hold his temper than to drive those nails into the fence. Finally, the day came when the boy didn't lose his temper at all.

He told his Father about it, and the Father suggested that the boy now pull out one nail for each day that he could hold his temper. The days passed, and the younger boy could finally tell his father that all the nails were gone.

The Father took his Son by the hand and led him to the fence. He said, "You have done well, my Son, but look at the holes in the fence. The fence will never be the same. When you say



things in anger, they leave a scar just like this one. You can put a knife in a man and draw it out. It won't matter how many times you say I'm sorry; the wound is still there."

If forgiveness is not enough and forgetfulness is very hard to find and practice at the speed of our lifetime, what can we do? Forgive and forget! We may try the magic of these words but remember: the second word doesn't apply to humans; it belongs only to God.

13. All is possible



A great meeting was held in the church for the candidates of Confirmation this year. They all came for the Mass celebration at 7:00 pm, and all join the first talk after that. This year the number is 54, and with their sponsors, parents, and friends, the church was quite full. After a brief presentation to focus on the Sacrament where I express my concern about practicing what we believe, a video was shown to introduce our Bishop Fred Colli's Sacrament. The beauty of this Sacrament is to understand that all is possible if we, allow the Lord, work through us. All is possible if we work with Him. If we are smart enough to confirm in words and deeds what we receive at baptism, our life will be renewed and strengthened at a fantastic pace that will allow our journey to reach that perfect speed. We know that our life will be transformed into this kind of adventure and everything else, even our relations and ways of

seeing things. The real possibility we all have is just sitting in our hands is just there for us to use, and our thought to start is already a great beginning. Do not ask me why, but all is possible if we place our minds on it with the speed of our dreams.

As things go by in our short running marathon of life, we have infinite possibilities to make them run in a specific right way. We know that all is possible for every one of goodwill because we are in the light of the One who created us. If it shines in us and through us, this light will change us in brightness and shine on everything around us. Yes, all is possible, and infinite are the possibilities.

14. It is a miracle to be here

Did you know that every piece of ground where our shoes may touch is a holy land? Did you know that any moment that we have a chance to communicate with any other human is a blessing? Did you know that? I call this a miracle because of any event we have to be; there is something extraordinary. Why? Because most of the time, we are never there, even when we are physically there. It sometimes looks like we are continuously living out of space and thinking about something else. Something is more attractive, more interesting, more exciting to run away and to wonder. This kind of strange wind is always pushing us to fear our capability to stay there. We all know that the desire to run for new challenges may become so strong and appealing when in many situations of our life. Because being there regularly and facing our daily responsibility is too dull. The easy way of turning and going for a better adventure may give us a temporary illusion of a better way of life-speed. This kind of running sometimes is so natural and makes us feel good, so good for the moment. In reality, it is a kind of impatience toward what is



happening for us and around us. The psychosis of the regular is well present in our society and makes us sick. From what are we running? Where are we running? Why are we running at all? Remember the parable of the prodigal son and his desire for freedom? Does he finally arrive at the point of feeding the pigs far away from his fatherly home? So the urge to run out for new adventures speeds up our imagination. We often prefer to run away to be far away and not in touch or even near to solve our present crooked situation. The ways we use time, that moment, the listening, the conversation, the person, the project, our moment of truth, and love are the variety of speed we choose. Time in - time out, and location are making a big difference in our lives. These two words make a significant contribution to the pace of life, the here and now of our being. The "Perfect speed" is to know and be right there to participate in the action of the moment, at the location I am presently in, and to be there in mind, body, and spirit and do something.

15. More than we can image



It is true that generally speaking, we learn, remember, and keep up almost everything by images or pictures. Our mind probably likes photographs and expressions of whole different dimensions of things using global photos more than words. One picture is worth thousands of words. Yes, we want pictures, colours, sounds, and our senses are happy to feel them.

In our way of communicating, we use many images and parables as a simple way to share great truths. Jesus also uses this system in his teaching and a lot of life and practical symbols. The Gospel in today's celebration is an example. Luke 5:12-16: "*Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean*" is the petition of the man covered with leprosy at the border of a city where Jesus was passing by and preaching. We may think and picture this sequence and see the many unique pictures. "*If you choose*" – if you want, all is possible. This choice is fine for us, too, because if we want something, we may reach out to a lot of change in life if we believe things will happen by faith in action. And Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him, and said, "I do choose. Be made clean."

Words and actions working together in the same direction can make a difference, a significant change in a person's life, family, and community. By stretching out our hands, we reach out to others and touch them physically or spiritually. Any touch produces a reaction that follows something like any action. In the same way, any contact makes a change that is felt from both sides. Immediately leprosy left him. I wonder where is the meaning of that sickness that even today paralyzes our lives and destroys so many relations. The leprosy of violence, divisions, selfishness, suffering, war, and more is a disease that may leave us if we allow ourselves to be touched with the power of love, forgiveness, help, peace. Who can do that? Who can stretch out his hand? You and me everybody, if we choose. It is more in the will of God to cure than we can imagine! All life of Jesus is a revelation of this will and power.

Many crowds would gather to hear him and to be cured of their diseases. But he would withdraw to deserted places and pray. This action is another picture of our Christian life and how it should be.

Step 1: hear him, listen to, open mind and heart, and hear God.

Step 2: cure diseases in us first (leprosy) and in others as we reach out.

Step 3: and pray. The spiritual meaning of our journey has to be continually under focus. Prayer is the oxygen of our soul.

Now try to combine all these three steps, and one more picture is reviling the image of a 1-good, 2-better, 3-best - Christian life. Good luck if we choose and want to be made clean. If we do choose this way, we may become more than we can imagine. I love this remarkable speed of life.

16. GPS of Life

How much we may understand our spiritual experience in our life is a beautiful and challenging task. I think that this is the number one expression of the most exciting part of our being. Each one of us has an inner treasure that grows with time through our life journey.

Probably this inner treasure reveals in many details the DNA of the spiritual person living in us. I'm not saying anything new, but I believe that we may end up with more meaning in how we use our daily time as a spiritual path of life. To understand it is easy but to practice it not. We

are also spiritual beings able to meditate and humans in search of wisdom. This dynamic spiritual power that is with us from birth is a fountain of energy beneficial and handy. To be conscious daily that we have this wonderful instrument in our hands and that we may use it as a constant reference for our spiritual location and direction may bring us to a better quality of life. Meditation for a few minutes a day, especially in the morning, allows us to make our lives and relations with people more exciting and positive. This spiritual focusing will bring a new vision to our experience, a new way to see people and things. If we take it seriously, we will feel the change and guide us like a tour guide in and through our time's ups and downs. It will become so useful and always available, being with us continuously as GPS of our journey. In all seasons of our lives, like a bright light, this experience will make us free to see the next step ahead and how to deal, and what kind of decision to make when troubles are on the road. The wisdom of daily meditation is for smart people like you. If you practice it daily as a spiritual path for your life, I guaranty you that in a few weeks, you will be not only a better person, but you will be there at a better speed.



17. More than water



This feast of the Lord's Baptism reminds me of celebrating our baptism and what we became from that day on. When the priest purred water on our head, saying: "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," it was more than washing water on our head ... was a gift. We were reborn as beloved children of God, members of His family forever. Wow, time to celebrate.

18. Walk with Joy is more fun – WYD cross

At 3:00 pm, the **World Youth Day** cross arrived. Look at the time and tell me what that hour in the history of Jesus's life written in the Gospels is. Monsg. George and Fr. Mike were present with some congregation members, and they enjoyed the moment. How could the cross that is an instrument of pain and torture be for us



Christians a sign of joy? The answer is probably hidden in the power of unity and blessing that the cross signifies when people gather around this sign to share a prayer.

19. Welcoming the Pilgrim Cross



This cross blessed during the Holy Year of the Redemption, which the Holy Father entrusted to the youth of the world on Palm Sunday 1984 so that they might proclaim to the whole world that there is salvation only in Christ, who died and rose from the dead. Since then, this cross has been on pilgrimage throughout the world, crossing oceans and continents. During the Year of the Great Jubilee 2000, it was in Rome. This cross is entrusted to the Church in Canada and will visit every diocese of the country we call our home.

We just received this cross from the Church of Notre Dame Du Portage in Kenora; tonight, it will be at St. Mary Church in Fort Frances and tomorrow in Thunder Bay for other celebrations with the Youth of our Diocese. This cross has its speed and is outstanding. All crosses in our life have a kind of speed; they don't last forever. They pass through our lives and live a mark. Let us pray for the grace of an ever-deepening communion between the local churches in Canada and that our connection with the universal church is strengthened through the love of Christ poured out for us on the cross. Do we share our crosses with others? Do we allow others to help us to carry our crosses?

20. In the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit.

"May the Lord who knows all our ways guide our feet and fill our hearts with the joy in the Holy Spirit." Blessed be God forever. Prayer and cross always go together because it is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit who made us in the image of crosses since the beginning of creation. God must have a great sense of blessed imagination when He created Adam and Eve.



21. Pilgrimage of life



At the invitation of Pope John Paul II, now St. John Paul II, all Christians are on a journey that will bring together people from all corners of the world. Let us remind ourselves that this journey is indeed a pilgrimage since our faith in Jesus has called us to respond to this invitation. If life is a pilgrimage, there is movement, an action, and some speed that helps us move toward a finish line, a distance that we count on by the passing years of birthday celebrations.

22. The speed of love.

As Christians, we are invited to live our commitment to Christ with renewed energy, witness the love and forgiveness that Jesus gives, and be ambassadors of new hope and trust in God. Let us indeed be



people open to the call of God and proclaim Christ as the light of the world and Him who is telling us how fast and far goes the speed of love.

23. Love is forgiveness.



We gather together under the cross, the sign of our redemption. Let us call to mind our sins and ask God's mercy to forgive us and renew us today and always with his tender love that embraces each of us, our families, communities, and is fast enough to reach all humanity in the universe at the same time. I like this ultrasonic speed; perhaps one day, I hope to taste this extraordinary speed.

24. The powerful speed of peace

Any time we say the words: "Peace be with you" or "let us offer each other a sign of reconciliation and peace," we allow the four points of the cross to touch our mind, heart, body, and spirit ... The cross embraces and kisses our humanity with the power of compassion and forgiveness that we share. What a wonderful world will be our world if we can become the sign of peace we share.



25. St. Francis was right: Love and peace go together.



"Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, unity; where there is doubt, faith; where there is an error, truth; where there is despair, hope; where there is sadness, joy; where there is darkness, light.

Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life".

26. Blessed, are you - rejoice and be glad!

It is a speech on the mountain on one sunny day but was real joy in the Preacher's eyes and people's ears.

"When he saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he had sat down, his disciples came to him. He began to teach them, saying: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land. Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called



children of God. Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you falsely because of me. Rejoice and be glad for your reward will be great in heaven'. (Mt. 5:1-12)

27. A prayer a day keeps the devil away

The Our Father prayer helps us to fill our hearts with God's love. The Father revealed to us in Jesus as truly human, his love for each one of us, so we ask Him as beloved children to keep us always in his love and to keep us open to the call of his passion. If we trust his guidance, our journey to the final day and beyond will be a memorable ride in the fantastic speed of time and space that goes forever and ever. Amen.

Great is to know that the commitment to pray, be together, and the joy and the real positive feeling of being there, talking to dad - the Father is something special. The cross that open and closes our prayers is the sign of our redemption. Jesus, the One who was on it 2000 years ago, gave us a new dignity when He made us all beloved Children, members of the Family of God, forever. In front of the cross, millions of people have prayed throughout the world and still make their commitment to Christian life. In this time of ups and downs, we, too, light and darkness, joy and sorrow, may do the same with gratitude.



28. Like stain glass windows



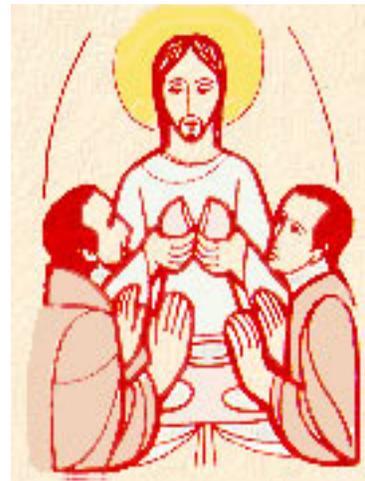
Every year there is a special day when the Bishop visits the church for Confirmation. The Candidates generally have a retreat day in preparation to receive the Sacrament. Some years there are more than 50 young students Gr. 7-8 taking part in the celebration and few from High School also may join. To see so many young people all together for this event is making everybody feel just so great. Some teachers and parents are present too. It is a joy to be there. A spirit of blessing is flashing the day and in the heart of everybody. If we allow the grace and the gift of God to shine in us, we may become like stained glass windows able to reveal the colourful joy and beauty of God through our life. The same beauty and blessing will be enough to sustain our journey in gratitude and fill our lives with peace, like stained glass windows, what we may show and share the beauty of God in our unique and picturesque way of life. The presence of God may amazingly shine through us if we allow it. Look to a stained glass window when the sun is fully shining true and enjoy the colours' brilliant show.

There are many possibilities and choices in each human's life that allow us to manifest the grace and beauty of God. Sometimes we do not let it because we think that we want to show our glory and blessing. Without the sun's light and energy needed to make the stained glass

window alive and perfectly shining, the maker's beauty, and his masterpiece design, the window will be dark. If you look at stained glass windows at night when there is no light, no support of light from inside or outside, nothing is visible; nothing makes sense. The light is making the stained glass shine. It is the grace of God that makes our life shine and not our power. When we allow God to work in and through us, we show his marvellous design and glory. Are we smart enough to let the beauty of the Master shine in and through us? Are our days in the dark of our selfishness or the light and blessing of God's Grace?

29. Sins first and body after

It always happens when we do not think about it. A person comes and wants to talk about something; it is not the right time on our watch and the right place, but the ability to take that moment, to come down and listen, will make a big difference. It only takes a moment to adjust the speed we are going on, perhaps a few minutes, but the result will make a big difference. Like in the life of Jesus when some people one-day brought him a paralyzed man when He saw their faith, he said to the man who was paralyzed, "*Son, your sins are forgiven,*" so we too may look at situations with compassion and forgiveness. Thanks also to those people's faith, probably relatives or friends, who brought that man to Jesus. Why the sins first and the body follow? Besides the show, this miracle is perhaps a great



manifestation of the power and authority of Jesus, The Son of man. The command to forgive on earth sins tells us who Jesus is because only God can forgive sins. And Jesus was making that person OK from inside out. We know that the power of sin is strong and is always devastating. Our spiritual immune system bringing also consequences for our bodies. From inside, we decide for life or death, to do good or bad. When we are free and healthy from the inside, all the rest is also healing at a good speed.

Jesus said to the man who was paralyzed: "I say to you, stand up, take your mat, and go to your home." The mat probably represents his past life. He doesn't need that anymore. He is free to walk now. Our experience, too, needs continuous healing, restoration, and transformation. We also know that compassion and forgiveness from the heart of God are always available.

'To stand' and 'to go' are verbs of movement for people alive, and the best place to be active and start a new life is always our home, our family. When we are free from our sins, we are also free from the paralysis of our bodies. Maybe sometimes we need the same treatment that the paralyzed man received from Jesus. Maybe one day we need again to hear the voice: "stand up ... walk ... go home." Are we paralyzed, or is there some walking speed in our life?

30. The question of authority



Do we spend some time thinking about the changes we are going through in life and how soon everything changes around us? Today the speed of life we are in makes us so restless so under pressure for fast decisions and actions. Do we find time to breathe in some truths and meaning? Where do we find some authority or guidance? Any organization – a civic group, a debating society, a religious order, needs some power to do what it is supposed to ask for and do it properly. There is also a need to develop and grow in understanding, and this takes time. The more dynamic the organization is, the more development within it will be present, and the more painful the situation sometimes will appear. The seed of growth is natural, and

the church has to go for it with no exception because it is a living being.

In the Dogmatic Constitution on the church, #18, we read: *"Christ the Lord set up in his church a variety of offices which aim at the good of the whole body, The holders of office ... are dedicated to promoting the interests of their brothers and sisters, so that all who belong to the People of God ... may attain salvation"*. I wonder if the meaning of a variety of offices or expressions that we know are present in the church could be applied to Christian denominations too? The Christian families could be one expression of the variety of offices and activities and all at work for the good of others. The question of authority remains a significant issue even today. The Bible and all the New Testament writings tell us about the Son of God's presence and meaning among us and the project He did for our salvation.

31. Not only in the Bible.

But how do we know which interpretation of the events and stories in the Bible is the true One? Even today, we are struggling with new signs and new understandings. The Bible (The word of the Lord) is alive and speaks continuously, but the authority to confirm and interpret the meaning. Left to itself, the Bible offers a thousand interpretations. But we have " Catholic Mama Church " and her word in the Magisterium to guide us as we search for the truth.' *God's presence in the history of humanity is the excellent presence and guide, and the infallible One.*' John Newman (1801-1890). Is this authority always present? It must be!



32. Home Sweet Home.



Suppose we look at the Christian churches, the communities of believers. Is this Church that claims to teach with the same infallible authority as the apostles and Fathers?

The answer is what it always was – Rome - Home Sweet Home.

The protestant may object that Rome has added to the faith. In his book *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, Newman argued that Rome had preserved the apostolic faith by developing it. In this way, the character of correct interpretations of the Christian faith was always present as the power to adapt and grow through history. Same growth we

see in our history of life. Knowledge and understanding develop and enlarge our minds, and our body is getting bigger, but our heart is still human.

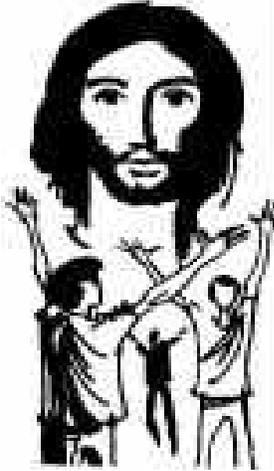
For example, the papacy is a development of Matthew 16:18; the Immaculate Conception is a development of Luke 1:28, and liberty of conscience and the separation of church and state are developments of Matthew 22:21.

33. Here below to live is to change

Difficulties may perhaps always be seen at the level of purity of intentions, interpretation, and authority. Newman argues that in the matter of religion, the stream is not purest near the source. Instead, religious belief is more pristine and stronger when its bed has become deep and broad and full. 'In a higher world, it is otherwise. Here below, to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often. *In other words, here on earth, a person is entirely a well-formed personality not at his birthday but after many and many years of development and relations.*' *We may face continuously the same question as Newman and possibly come to a similar answer. 'But there is a further problem. In religious matters, especially that God's truth is beyond reason and understanding, the authority cannot make fundamental errors. In other words, it must be infallible.'*



34. Christ spoke with authority.



While on earth, Christ spoke with authority. Those who came to believe in him accepted his head as infallible from the Father. But what was to happen after his death? Were his disciples to be in the cold, without proper guidance? Here is where the infallibility of the church comes in.

Infallible is not the magic word that will close any argument and debate about our struggle to understand and keep the Bible and the word of God alive as it always is. It's for us, and it is speaking to us. The Bible and the church's teaching when talking about faith and morals are truly infallible because it speaks to us who are mere human, very fragile, continuously in need of guidance and certainties.

To live is to change, and the way we choose to change, we may grow or destroy ourselves in this process. Which way do you prefer?

35. Too Blessed to be stressed

There is a need for some exercise in the winter season, and in this northwest part of Ontario, the temperature is there just to remind you to do it because tomorrow the weather may change. One of the sports easy to practice and in open fresh air is cross-country skiing. A good hour or two will do the trick to regenerate and bring oxygen to our brain. Some lakes are frozen solid at this time of the year. Many cars and people fishing on ice are enjoying the day with family and friends. So it is nice to walk on water and enjoy the winter breeze. I call this sport 'walking on water' a very far away imitation of the real Master who walked on water 2000 years ago and called Peter to do the same? Does He get you too?



As you cross the lake on ice and feel the beauty and the majesty of space and islands that can be reached only by boat in the summertime is like exploring a new land mysteriously covered with miles and miles of thick ice and snow.

Not to be thankful for all the blessings and opportunities we have in our hands at any season of our life is a blind mistake. Sometimes, a strong cold wind blows against your face, but this is part of this northern country's fun. *'O lord of wind and rain and snow and ice, how wonderful is your presence through all the earth!'* Is God interested to make his presence more visible when we are in a good or bad mood in our life? My friend's answer is blowing in the wind and always at the speed of your location. I may say that besides emotions and cultural backgrounds of our personal life situations, in so many moments, even just feeling the power of the surrounding natural beauty of the day is a blessing. A great feeling of freedom is to think, to know, and be

aware that my family is OK, my business is going OK, and I am here going at the perfect speed. Sometimes we may not think about and realize that we are too blessed to be stressed, and for this reason, many complain should have no sense at all.

36. You don't know what is the night (David Maria TUROLDO - 1916-1992)

Tu non sai cosa sia la notte	You don't know what is the night
Sulla montagna	On the mountain
Essere soli come la luna;	To be alone like the moon:
Ne' come sia dolce il colloquio	Also how sweet is the talk
e l'attesa di qualcuno	and the waiting for someone
mentre il vento appena vibra	as the wind just wisper
alla porta socchiusa della cella.	to the door sligtely open of the cell
Tu non sai cosa sia il silenzio	You don't know what silence is
Ne' la gioia dell'usignolo	Nor the joy of the nightingale
Che canta, da solo, nella notte;	which is singing alone in the night
Quanto beata e' la gratuita',	How blessed is the gratuity
Il non appartenersi	Of not belong to
Ed essere solo	And to be alone
Ed essere di tutti,	An to belong to all
E nessuno lo sa o ti crede.	And nobody knows it or believe you
Tu non sai come spunta una gemma	You don't know how the starts
A primavera, e come un fiore	In springtime and like a flower
Parla ad un altro fiore	Speaks to another flower
E come un sospiro e' udito dalle stelle.	And like a sigh, it is heard from the stars
E poi ancora il silenzio	Then again the silence
E la vertigine dei pensieri,	And the vertical of thoughts
E poi nessun Pensiero	And after no one thought
Nella lunga notte,	In the long night
Ma solo gioia	But only joy

Pienezza di gioia	Fulness of joy
D'abbracciare la terra intera;	To embrace all the earth
E di pregare e cantare	And to pray and sing
Ma dentro, in silenzio.	But inside in silence
Tu non sai questa voglia	You do not know this desire
Di danzare solo nella notte	To dance alone in the night
Dentro la chiesa, tua nave sul mare.	In the church, that is the both on the ocean
E la quiete dell'anima	And the peace of the soul
E la discesa nella profondita',	And the fall in the deep
E sentirti morire	And to feel the death
Di gioia nella notte.	Of joy in the night

This Italian poem is just a peaceful word of spiritual simplicity in the life of a person who, by vocation, is never alone because he belongs to everybody. Nobody knows; nobody will believe how peaceful a soul may become when one can dance the joy of life in the deep of the night. Nobody knows or will accept, but a flower can talk to another, and the stars can hear it. Our thoughts may fall and disappear in the deep of the night, and then the joy of our prayer will take place and take us to dance the song of life. Do you know this song? Very much so! The speed of a joyful and peaceful soul, nobody can measure it.



37. And so be it



One of the expressions we usually accept to confirm the truth of what we are saying or doing is: Amen. We use this little word to focus on a specific project, at the end of a prayer, when we understand something we want to perform, and so on. But is the same word well accepted when a tragedy, a painful moment, crosses our way of life? When we become able to see and feel the will of God in any situation of our life journey and to cooperate with that reality as we surrender and accept it, then the "amen" becomes alive in us. This word will change and guide us toward new horizons where we have never been before. It

may sometimes happen to us to feel great because in harmony with what we are doing or saying. The "amen" is a word able to create a future in us and life.

Genesis chapters 1 and 2 are reminders: six days of creation – six great "amen"- well done at the end of each day. *"So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. He blessed them ..."* (Genesis 1:27). Now any time we remember who we are and how God is working inside our history and allowing his will to energize us, we picture ourselves with goodness and meaning. *"God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was perfect. Amen. And there was evening, and there was morning, the sixth day."* (Genesis 1:31)

How many times are we able to capture the goodness of God this way in life? Whenever we are conscious of His presence around or in us, we feel our designer's beauty at work. Though we can't prove it, perhaps we may feel it! We know that God is always present: when a particular person came into our lives, when a significant happening took place, or a specific set of circumstances came together, we feel his touch. "Amen" is our language to communicate with God. If we are open to reply with the same gratitude and the same original enthusiasm He made us, then our life will become a love story with our maker, forever and ever. AMEN

38. Better than chocolate



We gather in the blessing of the Lord when we gather together for a celebration. It is a moment of joy because we celebrate. There is no reason to be together than to be joyful, probably the good news we observe.

The good news that Jesus always preached and is available for us to believe. As humans, sometimes we hardly understand difficult things because we are slow with limitations and done in this way. I may say that we know what chocolate is, but there is always something better and sweeter than that. We see with our eyes, but we know that what our eyes can't see is very limited. Like an iceberg, we see only the top part, but two-third of it is unknown, under the water.

For this reason, when we read the word of God - the Bible, the meaning is more in-depth than our thoughts. Take, for example, the reading of (Mark 3:1-6) when Jesus entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. The Pharisees watched Jesus see whether he would cure him on the Sabbath. The sweetness of the Sabbath gives away for the investigation to accuse him. What is the Sabbath there? What does the law say? Why we go on Sunday to the church? Jesus is answering with another question: *"Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath?"* If Sunday is for us, how should it be then, and what should we do? But they were silent. Sunday is not a day to be silent is the day of spiritual healing. It is the time of being together, is the moment to proclaim the good news, is the opportunity to cure and reorganize our relations, is the day to "stretch out our hands."

That man, who stretched out his hand, his hand is restored and his life too.

What are our hands there for if not to do good on the Sabbath? Hands stretched, hearts reach out, and the relationship restored. Do we not say 'give me a hand' when we need help? So why not use the Sabbath to do something good for our family? Nothing more we know about that man who was cured on the Sabbath, but Sabbath was undoubtedly different for him and the other people around him that day. It was a sweet Sabbath sweeter than chocolate, but some people that day were silent and some complaining!

39. Cleaning or clean light

Cleaning the floor of a significant area may be a challenging activity that probably gives us a sense of a well-done job that makes us feel good about it. Step by step, we realize how much dirt has been there for a long time, and as we do our best to take it off, we feel a sense of freedom, wellness, and liberation as the area starts to shine and smell clean even other



things around look better and in order. That cleaning is rejuvenating all things everywhere. In the same way, how healthy will our spirit be if we keep it clean! The expression: "The Lord is my light and my salvation" in Psalm 27 may give the idea of how our spirit can be kept clean and healthy. If we stay in the light of the Lord, if we keep a window of our life open to that presence, then all in us is exposed to the beauty, the power, and brightness of that fresh presence.

The Psalm prays: *"One thing I ask of the Lord, that will I seek: to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord."* Each of us is called to behold the beauty and the light of the Lord. This light is so naturally fashioned in our spirit, and when this is accomplished, we feel refreshed. When this goodness is part of us, we become strong and face darkness and trouble because the light is more powerful. As the light cannot share its presence with the night, the more we stay within the morning, the more we bring light, hope, freedom, peace, and love wherever we go. Walking around with this kind of light, we do a job better than any cleaning machine and feel good about it. Our natural decision to stay in the morning and follow Him is the right choice, a better job well rewarded at the end. "The spirit in a person is the candle of the Lord, lighted by God, and lighting people to God." - Benjamin Whichcote (1609-1683)

40. From passion to compassion

The story of St. Paul before and after his conversion could be called: "From passion to compassion."



Stories like this one allow us to meditate upon the changes that a person may go through in the experience of life. Focusing on Paul's vocation, before and after his conversion, I would like to call the passionate Paul, or Paul of passion, the One before the conversion. Like a good trucker, he was able to sniff Christians from far away and catch them. Paul was a man of passion and probably very dedicated to his work, as he confessed later in his letters. When you do things with love, you are in the center, making decisions and taking the initiative. You just talk to yourself, and you are convinced that what you are doing is the best, the top of everything. You risk seeing everything under one colour, and there are no reasons in all the world that will make you review what you are doing and if it is good or not. Like Paul, we may become blind and deaf to what others are trying to say to us: the passion vision is giving us high pressure with a lot of energy, but we are blind, and generally, nobody can change our point of view. We are the only center of our decisions. But after a specific time when a tragedy, sickness, or something powerful shaking us, we gain consciousness only at that moment can we see again clearly.

We regain consciousness. "I have chosen you from the world, (the state of passion) to go and bear fruit that will last" (the state of compassion)... *"Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to all creation."* *"And these signs will accompany those who believe: by using my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover."* (Mark 16:15-18). The compassion state is the conversion to work for and with others. Com-*passion* = *passion-with* or *for* others. These others may be the people living with us in the family, people in need, the one working with us, your neighbour. Now there is a big difference in the new way of life that Paul entered. After conversion, his life changed completely, for he was like to be born again. For some people, this change will happen in the middle of life, for others will need more time, and for some others, all life, but it is never too late. "The One whose steadfast love and faithfulness endure forever" (Psalm 117) is the One who has wonderfully made each one of us with passion and compassion. There is always time for a second chance in God's time, and St. Paul got it.

41. Follow me

Proclaim this good news and see! *"The kingdom of God is very, very near, and everyone should change over..."* What shall we do? Sometimes we look into the Gospel and think that what is written here is from the past for the church people or children's stories. But we have no excuses even when we do not want to be involved or do anything involving us in the process. But like St. Augustine of Hippo said: "Light, even though it passes through pollution, is not polluted." and so

the message we have received as Christians is in our hands. It has to be communicated in one way or another. If not, it will explode, and we will explode too. Who said that being a disciple of Jesus is an easy task? He called us by name like in Matthew 4:12-23, and we have no excuses. We are gently trapped. *"Follow me!"* he said to his four disciples, and they left everything to follow him. It is evident that we, his followers, are asked to associate ourselves with him and follow. It looks to me that this fellowship's keyword is in the word 'together.' He called 12 of them, and together they walk with Him, they follow. This passage of St. Paul to Thessalonica's community is revealing the power of being together and messengers. He says: *"We constantly thank God for you because as soon as you heard the message that we brought you as God's message, you accepted it for what it is, God's message and not some human thinking; and it is still a living power among you who believe it."* (1 Thessalonians 2:13). It is our job even today to learn the process of following Him. God created us as a family (Gen 1: 28), and as a family, we go, we proclaim, we help, we love, we build and bring life because we follow Him, the Master, the Rabbi of Nazareth. Follow Jesus, and see how perfectly your role fits in the plan. *"There is more light than can be seen through a window,"* as an old Russian proverb is telling, and it is well known when we experience it as we open the window. When we follow him, we may keep in mind that God's way is the best for us. Not because it's just a call upon many, but because of the One who is calling. God would have no less invitation for us, and we can choose not to settle for less.



42. No empty spaces



We are looking at the people regularly coming to the church on Sunday and picturing them like multicolour candles waiting to be lit by the blessing and the presence of the Lord. After the celebration, they go back to their home, and they bring that light in them all week till they come back again. This light guides our human journey, so essential for our spirit; it is impossible to live without it. It is like fuel for our car to run. This light is food and energy to our soul and is the breath of every living being. This light empowers each moment of our existence. The same idea can be applied to the notion of time. When I say, "I have no time," it is a big non-sense! Time is always running, and there is no place where I can stop or slow it down. Space and time are, for us, the virtual environment where we express ourselves with our limitations. There are no empty spaces for us to be neutral or suspended: all is always running and continuously present. Like a fish in the ocean cannot pretend to swim without the water surrounding him.

In the same way, it is space and time for us. We can't express ourselves without or outside these components of biological parameters. To be conscious of this is to be people of wisdom. We are people on time and in the space of this unique universe full of wonders. There are no empty spaces in the universe, and the same is for our spiritual life. In the area of God, there are no blank spots; His love is everywhere.

43. Children of the light

It's time for the newsletter to the school. A simple thought for the family and parents could be an opportunity for some positive remarks.

It is said that Tennyson was walking one day in a beautiful garden where many flowers were blooming. A friend who accompanied him said: "Mr. Tennyson, you speak so often of Jesus. Will you tell me what Christ means to you?" Tennyson stopped, thought a moment, then, pointing down to a beautiful flower, said, "*What the sun is to that flower, Jesus Christ is to my soul.*" – Anonymous –



Here is the newsletter for the students: Dear students and friends, after the great moment of prayer with the WYD Cross and the amazing day of the retreat, I believe we must feel blessed with all these great opportunities to be together. Jesus will refresh our life with his presence and peace. As Confirmation and First Communion and Reconciliation preparation is going on, what can I say to share my joy with you? Using the same words that the Pope said to the world's youth, '*... you are the light of the world*', I'm hoping that this is what we are called to be. More than a compliment, these words are a reminder of how wonderful it is to stay and grow in friendship with Jesus. Let his presence be in us so that we may become like a candle of the Lord blowing in the wind. Lighted by the Spirit of Jesus and bringing other people close to God, we are facing a wonderful challenge.

We are called to become children of the light! What the sun is to the flowers, Jesus is to our soul. We all are invited to bloom like beautiful flowers in the garden of God because we are children of the light. May the light of the Lord always shine brightly in your heart and your family as we go forward at God's speed.

May the Lord bless with the spirit of unity and peace these children and students with their teachers, and may the light of Christ fill with joy all your days. God of peace and love, you meant for humanity to live in harmony and create to know the light of goodness through which you gave birth to all things. Let them be one; make us one, as you are one in the morning of your blessing in Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

44. You know my thoughts

Can you imagine it? We will see the people's thoughts before they are spoken and as clear as they are original and sincerely created. Wow, this will be amazing! I think that only God has this opportunity and power, but it could be ours, too, if we manage to talk with Him. Listen to Psalm 139: *"O LORD, you have probed me, you know me: you know when I sit and stand; you understand my thoughts from afar. My travels and my rest, you mark, with all my ways, you are familiar. Even before a word is on my tongue, LORD, you know it all. Behind and before you encircle me and rest your hand upon me."*



There is tremendous energy present in our life. To be human is to belong,' and this inner strength is born with us as a gift from our Creator. The real makeup of a person can be found in and through the struggle of life. The inconveniences lead us day after day to understand what a natural human person means. 'Becoming Human' is the formula that leads us to a desire already deep in our hearts,

and before we can whisper a word, He knows already our thoughts.

45. I have lived

A friend of mine in his eighties has shared with me this poem: *"I have seen the sun of summer worn the winter's ragged winds I have watched the universe unfolding I have lived."* When can we say that and feel good about it? At the end of our life or right now?



46. "Talitha cum"



Sometimes as soon as I open the Word of God, the Bible, I start to meditate upon the readings of the day. There is a tremendous feeling of peace that fills the mind and the heart so graciously. Today, for example, this simple page of Mark's Gospel: 5:21-43 is an invitation to stand up, get ready, and reach our miseries.

It is God's will that we are fully alive, people giving glory. He is the God of living beings, not of dead ones! The standing position of our body is telling us that we are alive and ready to reach out. *'Talitha cum,'* which means, *'Little girl, get up!'* is one invitation for all of us to start to get up and begin to walk about again. It doesn't matter how old we are or how many times we fell asleep being tired to deal with our broken places of life. The invitation from the Lord, the Healer, is amazing and powerful. To refuse to get up and walk is a choice but

leads us to a kind of life that is not ours to claim. Fear and selfishness lead us often to the valley of our desolation. There is no laugh in the valley of the dead because there is no action, no hope, no life.

The invitation we often hear is this: 'If you wish to come after me, to be alive, you must renounce yourself, get up from your sleep, and take up your cross that is your life, and follow me ... because I am the Lord of the living and not of death!' Probably the length of one life is not enough to treasure the meaning of these words. The speed of standing up is very close to the best rate.

47. Follow the Carpenter

How good it is to be a sheep, I don't know! But the idea to listen to Shepard's voice will give the flock and every sheep the feeling of protection and security of being OK and in good hands. Listening is a good way to know where we are and what is going on in our life. The action of following is then coming naturally because we all follow something in our life! It could be a star, an idea, a dream, or a project, but do we know



where are we going and why? To recognize the presence of God in our life is a possible task. But to follow his voice is more than action because we need good hearings and trust. How do the sheep listen to the voice of a Shepard if he is not the ordinary man who talks to them every day and walks with them? His presence is the well-known one, always present and rightly called: 'Emmanuel' that is 'God with us.' Our God is not a Shepard present in the extraordinary events of our life, even though sometimes we like to see them but is more like a gentle daily presence. To recognize and to follow him has to be in the regularity of everyday life and the 'ordinary' events. *"Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and ... aren't his brothers and sisters here with us?" (Mark6:1-6)*

In the same way, we don't either recognize his presence. Like the people of his time, we are still questioning Him: *'Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands!'* Is our Lord passing by too fast in the experience of our journey? Is our questioning more void and out of time?

48. With a new pair of sandals

Sandals, shoes, or boots are symbols of protection and movement. Our feet are the instruments to carry all our bodies' weight and move it from one place to another. When Jesus gave his disciples the OK to go and proclaim the good news, he said: *'Take nothing for the journey except staff and a pair of sandals, no bread, no haversack, no coppers in your purses, no two*

tunics. ...' So the disciples are not allowed to take anything, no food, no knapsack, no extra clothing, and no money. The practical consequence of those rules is that they made themselves dependent on the hospitality of those who would receive them. We don't know whether the apostles obeyed those rules. Because we don't always follow them, but we all know that when we have to walk a good pair of shoes or boots, especially in the wintertime, we will do the job.



The walking of the disciples of Jesus tells us how good it must be to go and bring the Good News. Not too many at the time of Jesus were using sandals or shoes, there were too expensive, but at the same time, they were giving the travellers more consistency and power to reach their goal and reach more people. There is something more to be said about sandals: He said to them, *"whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them."* (Mark 6:7-13).

From the sandals, even the dust has to be cleared out if the word, the good news, will not be received. I remember how to shine the shoes before going to a special event was a simple duty of a good clean impression of the person and good for the message. Clean sandals, pure news! Good presentation – a good impression! The message can't be presented dirty; it will be a dirty message that is not original. By no means, these sandals were so important as a transportation tool that they had to be always kept clean and in top functioning shape. If we ask ourselves today what we suppose to wear to bring the good news to the world with efficiency, what can we answer? Are we ready for this, are our sandals in good shape to do so? Are we more preoccupied to share the Good News or the money we need to have to feel secure in our journey? Do we need a new pair of sandals? So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons and anointed with oil, many of who were sick, and cured them. Much work can get done with a new pair of sandals and speed up the message!

49. Never, never give up hope

"A new home I have found at last better by far than those in the past; a mansion truly is not. One room is all I got. Here love, and friendship fully abound. A better place could not be found. When the time has gone, you no longer can cope, never, never, never give up hope."



50. Am I salt?



Christians in the world are supposed to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Probably we are very familiar with these words, and we may also think that: "We are the salt, we are the light." We do not realize that being salt is a pretty hopeless and crazy affair. There was only one person in the Bible, a woman who really could say: "I am salt!" That woman was Lot's wife who turned into salt when she looked back on her past in Sodom and

Gomorrah. She became salt, 100% salt, and nobody around here seems to have been happy about it. Salt, by itself, is no good. The Romans used to throw salt after destroying an enemy and rebellious city as a sign of infertility and condemnation of no life in that place. Salt is killing life and preserves death; it is useless when it is used by itself. Salt only becomes useful when it is used, mixed with other things. With the words of Jesus, we, too, are called to become salt. We are to be the salt of the earth. We should be mixed up with the planet. We should be well mixed up with the reality and situations around us where our story is written. It is there that Christians give meaning and flavour; if not, they are worthless. If Christians say or think: "I am the salt of the earth, they should understand that as a consequence, they should be prepared to be thrown in the cooking pot of human affairs. They cannot just stand in front of the pool. They have to be put in that pot. They have to be mixed with the contents in that pot and practically disappear when making the food tasty and good.

Come on, Christians, let's give flavour to the society we are living in! Christians who are the salt of the earth should first of all be taste-giver and taste-maker in our human reality that is in this life, on this street, in this town, in this country, in this world; here and now! Christians also speak about the light they are supposed to be. Again, very many Christians will eagerly call themselves *the light*. They do not consider standing in their light, just like a candle in an empty room or light under a bucket stands in his light, glorifying its brightness. Light alone is useless, too. Light alone is blinding. Light alone does not make you see anything at all. Light alone is the light shone in the eyes of tortured prisoners to make them confess. Light alone hurts. Light becomes useful when it makes us see things other than itself: the world around us. It becomes of use through us when it corresponds to what Jesus said of it: *You are the light of the world*. We should make things visible; we should light up possibilities; we should brighten our world. There is a mission for each one of us. The message of the Pope to the World Youth Day is the same. The words are written in Matthew 5:13-16 are there for us and ready for action. We should be the salt, but not apart. We are supposed to be light, but not on our own. Trying to live and act like this will be a consolation to others; we will be their hope and comfort. We will make our world all more tasty and good. As salt brings out the taste of things, we are to show forth and celebrate the presence of God's face in the affairs of life and the good things of creation. As salt heals the septic wound, we are to heal the infected areas of our community, our family, and the areas of our society. And salt stings as it heals, so we are not afraid of hurting to heal by

confronting, challenging, correcting, and not judging. In other words, our vocation is to let Christ-in-us as salt and light be seen through our attitudes and actions. The speed of light is fantastic.

51. Go, Gigi, go

How wonderful it is to be free to run and go at God's speed. Every step, every stroke is a blessed time well spend because it is movement and action. I'm living, and all the distances are there to reach. It is a unique experience of freedom. The same kind of space and good feelings, I believe, was in mind and the heart of people listening to Jesus on that specific day when he proclaimed the speech of the mountain:



"When he saw the crowds, he went up the hill, and after he had sat down, his disciples came to him. He began to teach them, saying:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.

Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness,

for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you (falsely) because of me. Rejoice and be glad for your reward will be great in heaven." (Matthew 5: 1-12)

Reflecting on these words of Jesus and the invitation to go and bring the Good News, I feel true to be blessed in doing so. And we know that it is the blessing and not our feelings that have the power to change things. In other words, I would like to say: "Blessed are those who know they don't have it all put together. Blessed are those who are not so secure and yet keep questioning. Blessed are those who know that they have missed the mark and yet keep trying to find it."

It's time to continue to hunger and thirst for justice, for righteousness, for peace. Because hunger and thirst will allow God into our lives, when we keep this attitude and come to acknowledge that we are all empty cups, we will then be in that blessed situation where God can fill us with his grace. Go Gigi go; the sky is the limit! I like this impressive speed.

52. From a distance



People look like fences from far away, but at a better closer look, they are, and we all are simply human in need of healing. Each one shows the scars of the past life on the skin, and some of them are really deep marks they reach even over souls. They are always present and cannot be taken away because they are the tattoos of life's struggle. Forever they will show the marks of our life journey.

The following story is called 'The fence,' a close-up of our life and the life of others. *"There once was a little boy who had a bad temper.*

His father gave him a bag of nails and told him that he must hammer a nail into the back of the fence every time he lost his temper.

The first day the boy had driven 37 nails into the fence.

Over the next few weeks, as he learned to control his anger, the number of nails hammered daily gradually dwindled.

He discovered it was easier to hold his temper than to drive those nails into the fence.

Finally, the day came when the boy didn't lose his temper at all.

He told his father about it, and the father suggested that the boy now pull out one nail for each day that he could hold his temper.

The days passed, and the young boy could finally tell his father that all the nails were gone.

The father took his son by the hand and led him to the fence.

He said, "You have done well, my son, but look at the holes in the fence. The fence will never be the same. When you say things in anger, they leave a scar just like this little one. You can put a knife in a man and draw it out. It won't matter how many times you say I'm sorry; the wound is still there."

The fence will never be the same. Only from a distance, it looks ok, but from a closer point of view, all the wounds still there and need healing: Looking close to people and friends to say I'm sorry is not enough; perhaps it is time to find some way to heal the wounds!

53. Dust to dust

“Remember that you are dust and dust; you shall return.” On Ash Wednesday, the invitation to remember what we are and to mark the beginning of the Season of Lent. We receive on our forehead the ashes as a sign and symbol of our origin and our future. Lent is the springtime of the spirit. This wonderful time of the year is telling us to return with all our hearts to the Lord. These are the words easy to find in the first reading of the day from the prophet Joel 2:12-18: *“Even now,” says the Lord,*



“return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing.” *“Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing.”* Speaking of returning, Lent could be the right time to open our heart to the Lord or let him enter deeper into our life. Return to me with all your heart; keep the Lord in your heart; convert and believe in the Gospel; remember that you are dust, and in the dust, you shall return. With phrases like these, the sign on our forehead at the beginning of Lent is a special reminder. Make every day the best Lent ever! The Gospel of Matthew on Ash Wednesday is challenging our journey through Lent on at least three different levels. The first level is about our way of masking our hypocrisy.

The second level has to do with our spiritual life and prayer. The third level involves how we abuse our bodies to look holy for others and receive more appreciation.

54. Give alms

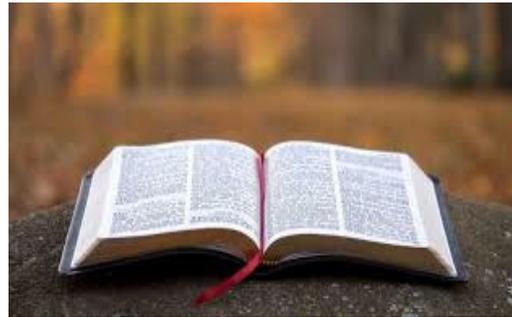


“So when you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and the streets, so that others may praise them. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let the left hand know what the right hand is doing so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” Who are the hypocrites? Jesus scolds the Pharisees and experts in the law. He calls them hypocrites. He does that to blame them for pretending, like good actors, to do everything by words only and no deeds. Originally the Greek word hypocrite just meant “answering.” It represents someone answering in a set dialogue, conversation, or theatre play - the answer given by an actor. A hypocrite is someone whose whole life is a piece of acting without any sincerity behind it at all. Too

many people today are such good actors in pretending to be justified in the face of others and God in the same way. Giving alms has to be done in secret because personal glory or propaganda is more selfish-centred, not interested in the necessity of the person receiving donations. The left and right hand indicate symbolically the action of giving and receiving. If we give because we are interested in receiving more and pretend to be considered by others a very generous or pious people, we rightly deserve to be called Hypocrites. Giving alms without expecting anything back is the first level that helps us be set free from our hypocrisy.

55. Praying

“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners so that others may see them. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will hear and reward you or answer you.” The real secret of this kind of prayer is to keep our hearts in touch with the Father. When we pray, we are not supposed to talk or glorify ourselves; we are talking to Him, the one who knows who we are and our needs before we open our mouth. To pray without expecting the others to clap hands for us is again a great help that sets us free in our dialogue with God to talk to Him like children.



56. Fasting



“And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” Pretending to be a good actor may become one obsession in our life so powerful that sooner or later, we will forget completely about reality and how to deal correctly with our brothers and sisters. Like taking a powerful drug, we became so addicted and so confused about

the real values in life that we risk being hooked to a big distortion of reality. Perception and dissatisfaction, we become puppets in the human form of bodies. Fasting from our appetite of mind and body may help us to be set free.

Fasting in secret could be the key to great spiritual success our true freedom.

Lent is a unique and great opportunity to allow some changes in our life. The joy of Easter is what we all need, and now is the time to change or never!

57. Only a short time in

We were born free with the possibility to choose between life-saving and life-losing. If we are coming from God, we should return to Him because we are made for God's home. But we also have the choice to believe that the kingdom of God is more here and now for what we see and touch.

“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it.” Luke 9:24. We are here only a short time, perhaps to learn something and

practice self-giving. To deny ourselves is not so easy. In other words, we are invited to follow the way to keep our mind, body, and soul on the "follow" for the great adventure - for things above. The future is more bright than the present because if God is our true home, this time and space are just temporary; it is for us to use wisely and cheerfully because there is life, and there is THE LIFE. Is it true that as we go, we get heavier? We may accumulate so many things and wealth at the bottom of the mountain, but how can we take it up to the top. Perhaps we can dedicate ourselves more to the way of generosity and sharing, and in doing so, we might get lighter and climb the mountain. Take it or lose it: *"What does it profit them if they gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit themselves?"* When we take up the luggage of our life and go up, we have to remember that our life is the only thing we have to take up. Yes, we are here only for a short time!



58. Next time

Next time when you pray to God for something, ask yourself this question: "If you were God, what would you do? Then ask yourself, "Am I better at being God than God is?"

59. Being holy

I used to think that being holy meant doing the right things and avoiding doing the wrong items or what is not so good. Probably the one who perfectly observes all the commandments may enter into this classification. But who can really and perfectly do that? "Being holy" for a Christian should be heart-centred and not merely action-centred. "Being holy" means being compassionate, just as Jesus was compassionate. "Being holy" means allowing the Spirit of Jesus to live within us. In other words, "Being holy" means becoming Christ's heart and Christ's hands. How much holiness can one get? As much as to be in the right place at the right moment. But this is not holiness; it is just a way to be at the perfect speed of life.



60. What is in your wallet?

After a meeting, if we do not leave with a positive attitude and feel good about it, there is probably something wrong with it! Things sometimes are not easy, but we look ahead with great hope. At this time, the story of our life is going to be written. Of course, it is interesting to know that we are not alone in our journey. In search of the way, the truth, and the life, we go but with the "Grace of God." There is more to receive than to worry about it. Just be there, just face reality, and let the "Grace" be our guide. The wrong attitude is to worry too much. So let it be; let "Grace" be our map. May God's Grace be always in your wallet!

61. Ask, search, knock

"Everyone who asks receives; everyone who searches finds; everyone who knocks will have the door opened." (Matthew 7:7-12). What Jesus advocates are a proactive approach to having our needs

met. Many times we acknowledge what we need and then go after it. We don't sit back and wait for things to happen or expect other people to read our minds about what we need. If we need to sustain our well-being or increase our peace, hope, motivation, joy, even physical and emotional satisfaction, it is up to us to ask, seek, and knock.



Are there certain needs in your life that you believe other people should be aware of without you expressing them? Do you become irritated and blaming when your needs are not met, even though you never openly talk about them? Hinting doesn't count. If there is something you need, you should be able to express it to God's family members, like a friend, a teacher, an employer, or anyone who can help you. Put shame aside, therefore, and stop being afraid to appear human. Don't expect others to be mind-readers. Tell people where you are hurting; let others know what you need from them. Only those who ask will receive it. That isn't easy. When you start to question yourself about some event or situation, you might gain some awareness of things you never knew before. The one who asks always receives. If you have no questions, you won't be answered. And in the end, you risk mistaking a stone for bread, a snake for fish, and your sickness for health. Ask, search, knock; there is nothing wrong in doing so, but sometimes we get stuck as we set back for no actions. All this could be called the sickness of our century; that is: we do not commit ourselves to ask, search and knock because we are so strangely lost, empty, and without the energy that we do not even know what to ask or what to search for or why to knock! When that paralysis happens, can somebody act in the function of a healer? I think so! *Everyone who asks will receive; whoever seeks shall find, and to him who knocks it shall be opened.*

62. A long journey in small steps

"A long journey begins with small steps."

This reality can be proven when we may try to organize anything in our life. Small things put all together will help to create what we have in mind. Patience and endurance are to be constantly present. It is also the formula for healthy growth, both physically and spiritually.

Best wishes for the journey! Always in God's speed.



63. Anonymous Blessing

"May your journey be a pleasant one, may the wind sustain you gently, may the sea touch your land, and the sky surrounds your life with blessings. May the sunshine be on your face, and the rains come down on your field like a gentle dew be in your soul with peace. May God keeps you in the palm of his hand till we meet again."

64. Being great out of clay



“But whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant” (Matthew 20:26). The word “Humility” comes from the same root (humus) as the word for dirt. It is also the word from which we get the word “human.”

Let's go to the Bible story of creation. Genesis 2:7 says: *“The Lord God formed man out of the clay of the ground.”* “Human” is the definition for human-made out of clay: the man from humus. Our original composition; in the history of the universe, our presence is very simple and fragile.

Therefore, to be humble simply means to be human according to our original composition. And our dream of greatness always has to remember the blessing of our original design. In the words of Jesus, to be a “servant to all” means we have a chance to become great. The incredible speed of life.

65. Seven times seventy times

Here is an inspirational way to start counting. If, for Peter, seven was a high number of thinking to forgive a brother, can you imagine a number related to a stranger on the way of forgiveness? The number 490 is 70×7 , but the great quality of the number 7 was already one indication of great value. What Jesus means is that we should forgive and forgive and never stop ignoring. That was quite clear in the mind of the people who were listening and, among them, the disciples.



Doesn't this seem unreasonable? After all, “I have my limits,” “there is only so much I can take,” and “I can handle strike one, even strike two, but strike three, and you are out!” What Jesus encourages is that we develop forgiveness as a permanent frame of mind, with no limits or conditions. Matthew 18:21-35 tells us that forgiveness has to become our general policy for any offences against us and no matter who, no matter how often. In this way, forgiveness may become an act of self-liberation when practiced as a way of life. No debts are so big and impossible to deal with if such a kind of forgiveness is applied. Who is going to pay back anyway?

Let's put the image of the parable in perspective. The “huge amount” owed by the servant was literally “ten thousand talents.” A talent equalled 6,000 denarii's. A denarius was a day's wage. So we're talking 60 million days' wages. If you worked six days a week from the age of ten and lived to be eighty, you'd have to live 2,747 lifetimes to make enough money just to pay the debt! “A mere fraction” was literally “one hundred denarii” or a hundred days' wages. The comparison is shocking. The way we sinners offend each other is nothing compared to how we offend God in the way we may say that. We can never pay God what we own, not in a million years, no matter what we do. But we can easily let each other off the hook; it's up to us, and in proportion, probably one to one million is the quantity and quality of debts that the Lord forgives us. Do we not say it every time we pray with the “Our Father”? “And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us ...” The condition “sine qua non” for our forgiveness is our action of forgiveness first and unconditional! When we establish one drop of forgiveness, the reaction is like the circular waves expanding on a large surface of the water when a single stone

strikes it. The quantity of water that is vibrating is close to the proportion of 1 to 1 million times. The size of the impact is great and goes in all directions. Search your soul for anyone against whom you hold a grievance, and for your well-being, let it go, and this is a good speed for human life.

66. Law and Love



There is no opposition between love and the law. Love differs from the law because it prompts us to do what the law requires and more without being told. Like children, we often have difficulty with the things we are supposed to do. Asking children to wash their hands before meals or brushing their teeth afterward may become a hard request. It is very difficult to convince them that you don't ask them to do those things just to annoy them, but because they are good for them. When those children grow older, they sometimes have the same difficulty with the Ten Commandments, not

realizing what Moses said: "Observe them, that you may have life."

Similarly, the Ten Commandments law is there for a better human society, a healthy one able to organize itself for the good of all. No wonder Moses added: "Tel them to your children and your children's children." Jesus didn't come to abolish the Law or the Prophets but to fulfill it with love in action, and for this, he gave up his life. We all must like this kind of speed of life.

67. Unglued

Millions of people today claim they don't know what to believe in anymore. It's not just a feeling of disintegration; it may touch each one of us as individuals. It is not uncommon, for example, to hear people comment that they are becoming "unglued." When we talk this way, we are probably saying that we have lost a sense of integrity; we are missing something that ties our lives together. The same confusion in the people at the time of Jesus when he was casting out demons and some of them start to say: "*He cast out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons.*" (Luke 11: 14-23)



They also were asking for a sign from heaven to confirm what Jesus was doing.

The answer to Jesus' was that "*Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and house falls upon house.*" When we are divided in ourselves, we're guaranteed stressful living and ultimate breakdown. What Jesus suggests is that we become day after day persons of integrity. If we don't want to feel "Unglued," we need to work at pulling ourselves together. The antidote to "Falling apart" is the consciousness to work on and pursue an integrated life. We have great Christian values to follow and to achieve. "Glue" ourselves together by eliminating double standards and living a fully Christian life could be the solution that will help to dissolve our

confusion. Establishing our priorities and values and stick to them with positive and good cheerful living. We are called to focus on what should be important in our lives and what isn't worth the time and effort in the long run. Nothing can better help build our integrity than a commitment to truth. In other words, say what you mean and mean what you say!

68. Blindness



A new vision is available for those who want to free themselves from falsehoods that surround our lives and suffocate us with darkness. If we are born as children of the Light, why stay continuously in the night. Why not change vision? Miracles can always happen and sometimes are just a matter of willingness to see and stay in the light. As Christians, we are called to view life through the eyes of Jesus, and we still blind until we do not reach that point. It's good to consider that as we grow in faith, the mind of Jesus increasingly becomes the light in which we judge

and see everything. If this is so, then like Paul in the letter to the Galatians, we may say: *"I live now not with my own life but with the life of Christ who lives in Me"* (Gal. 2:20). If the truth is the foundation of our lives, an inner vision or faith will also become the way to understand and concentrate our energy, focusing on that vision.

How can we open our inner eyes to become a personal expression and an original flashlight of the beauty and the blessing of the light that is Jesus Christ? This kind of inner vision takes time, and often one life is not enough. Two men look out through the same window: One sees the mud, the one the stars. For this reason, we may understand the expression: "the blind see and those with sight are blind because they do not see."

69. Clear vision is from inside

God does not see as we see because we look at appearances, while God looks into the heart. What criteria would you use to judge, think, decide, and build your own life? If we have the vision to penetrate the deeper realities and how God sees things, our way will be much better. But such a concept is a gift of God, a special gift we need like water in the desert. This gift is available, but we must ask for it many times because we often forget to see it with the eyes of God.



70. Rise, walk, and dance

The music of the day is calling us to rise and walk. For thirty-eight years, man couldn't function properly physically because he was ill, probably lame or paralyzed. For thirty-eight years, he has been a person marginalized and living a kind of life 'lying there' like an expression of

spiritual and social welfare. This story is available in John 5:1-16 and was happening during the



festival of the Jews in Jerusalem. How could this man enjoy the festival if he was nailed to the ground due to his infirmity? How could this man jump in the pool if no one helped him? Jesus's command, "*Stand up, take your mat and walk,*" made him a new person. He took up his mat and began to walk. He starts to dance a new life. The lesson here is to reveal something extra. Most of us never get what we want out of life because we sit around waiting and hoping for it to happen. Indeed, sometimes we don't achieve the happiness we desire because we expect

someone else to provide it for us. Because of our perpetual laziness, we may love to have other people do things for us. We may want others to solve our problems, carry the blame for our mistakes, bear all the responsibilities, and even decide for us! It doesn't mean that we can't depend on others, but we are called to take full responsibility for ourselves. To stand up, take up our life, and walk is to be alive. To walk is to dance the joy of the creation, a pleasure that gives our body energy and is also expressed in social life. The secret is to constantly change, walk, and dance again as though no one is watching us!

71. Let it go



The experience we may receive as we dare to stay close to somebody dying is amazing. Yes, you want to go and let it go, but it is not so easy, and most of the time, we are not ready! Marie, you are a special soul, yes, you are prepared, and we pray with you. Where you are going now, we ought to be one day. Let's say a prayer knowing that the Lord always remembers his covenant because his love is forever, and we are his beloved children.

72. Give thanks to the Lord

"O give thanks to the LORD, call on his name, make known his deeds among the peoples! Sing to him, sing praises to him, tell of all his wonderful works! Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice! Seek the LORD and his strength; seek his presence continually! Remember the wonderful works that he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he uttered, O offspring of Abraham his servant, sons of Jacob, his chosen ones! He is the LORD our God; his judgments are in all the earth. He is mindful of his covenant forever, of the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations, the covenant made with Abraham, his sworn promise to Isaac, which he confirmed to Jacob as a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant, saying, "To you, I will give the land of Canaan as your portion for an inheritance." When they were few, of little account, and sojourners in it, wandering from nation to nation, from one kingdom to another people, he allowed no one to oppress them; he rebuked kings on their account, saying, "Touch not my anointed ones, do my prophets no harm!" When he summoned a famine on the land and broke every bread staff, he had sent a man ahead of them, Joseph, who was sold as a slave. His feet were hurt with fetters,

his neck was put in a collar of iron; until what he had said came to pass, the word of the LORD tested him. The king



sent and released him, the ruler of the peoples set him free; he made him lord of his house, and ruler of all his possessions, to instruct his princes at his pleasure and teach his elder's wisdom. Then Israel came to Egypt; Jacob sojourned in the land of Ham. And the LORD made his people very fruitful and made them stronger than their foes. He turned their hearts to hate his people, to deal craftily with his servants. He sent Moses his servant and Aaron, whom he had chosen.

*They wrought his signs among them and miracles in the land of Ham.
He sent darkness and made the land dark; they rebelled* against his words.
He turned their waters into blood and caused their fish to die.
Their land swarmed with frogs, even in the chambers of their kings.
He spoke, and there came swarms of flies and gnats throughout their country.
He gave them hail for rain and lightning that flashed through their land.
He smote their vines and fig trees and shattered the trees of their country.
He spoke, and the locusts came, and young locusts without number;
which devoured all the vegetation in their land and ate up the fruit of their ground.
He smote all the firstborn in their land, the first issue of all their strength.
Then he led Israel with silver and gold, and none among his tribes stumbled. Egypt was glad when they departed, for dread of them had fallen upon it.
He spread a cloud for a covering and fire to give light by night.
They asked, and he brought quails and gave them bread from heaven in abundance.
He opened the rock, and water gushed forth; it flowed through the desert like a river.
For he remembered his holy promise, and Abraham, his servant.
So he led forth his people with joy, his chosen ones with singing.
And he gave them the lands of the nations, and they took possession of the fruit of the peoples' toil, to the end that they should keep his statutes and observe his laws." (Psalm 105)*

Praise the LORD all you people of goodwill and have a nice trip; the speed is just perfect!

73. The journey of hope with dignity

The celebration of the cross during Lent Season is a journey of hope surrounded by great feelings. For example, the 10th Station representing Jesus stripped of his garments keeps this in mind while you visit a nursing home or take a tour at the hospital. What a painful moment this was in the whole way of the cross. Jesus was stripped of his garments, losing his dignity. *"Dear Lord, in my life years, there are times when I have to lose my dignity too. When others have to do for me, I can no longer do those personal things for myself, I feel a strong sense of shame, but then I realize they stripped Me of My dignity. So that gives me the courage to accept what has to be. May I always join my feelings with the way You felt when Your dignity was stripped."*



74. Broken wings

Considering visiting for one week every day, some people in the hospital may enrich our life with a unique experience. As we notice



many bodies wounded or crushed by different kinds of illnesses, we go under a sort of purification and liberation. We became more human! When our journey starts to slow down and we become more dependable, we know and learn, like birds with broken wings, that it is time to hurry up and get ready for the final fly. Even though we may never surrender to this idea, but we know and see it happening continuously in other people. *Our wings will eventually stop flapping one day. Probably at that point, we will reach the new consciousness of the perfect speed of life.*

75. Brother Judas, where are you

It is always a point of great interest when our Lord's Passion narration is read in the church on the Palms Sunday and during the Holy Week.



The action of our brother Judas is always present. I call him brother because he is still one of us, known as one of the apostles designated to take care of the community finance. It is like putting a fox in charge of the hen house. But this is part of the revelation of God, which is the way God wants our cooperation. Jesus trusted Judas, regardless of his track record, past or present. Isn't this the same for each one of us? The first letter of John says: *"We love because God first*

loved us." 1Jn 4:19. It follows that we trust because God first trusted us. We accept it because we have first been accepted. We believe in one another because God first believes in us. The unconditional love of God for us is helping us to enlarge our way to love. Dear brother Judas, you were made with love, and love will make your life better. If only you had known his forgiveness when He called you "Friend"! Dear brother Judas, I pray for you, and you pray with me tonight.

76. Ask forgiveness once again

There's a time for everyone to turn before the Son and ask forgiveness once again. As we look towards the Lord, we feel His love outpoured. Our lives are nourished every day. We stand before you with our hearts anew, singing praises to your name. Forgive us our sin And heal us from within come back into the fold. And give us the strength to carry on. You have washed away the tears And tended to our fears to stay beside us all the way. - G.Palko -

77. Leave her alone

"The house was filled with the scent of the ointment." John, 12, 1-11).



Mary must have loved Jesus very much. Her gesture makes her different from all the others. Jesus had told his disciples many times that he would suffer and die and come back again on the third day. They didn't believe it. They didn't pay attention, but Mary did. She

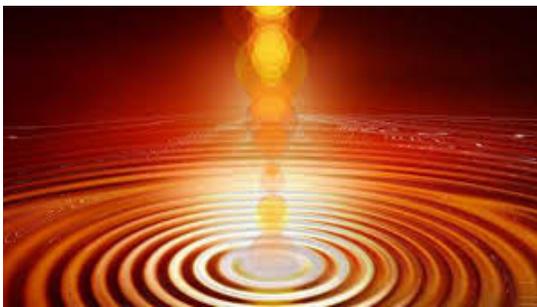
anointed his feet with that expensive perfume as a sign of welcome and refreshment for the journey. The feet of Jesus were directed toward Jerusalem, the place for him to accomplish his mission: to die and give life to us. The feet of Jesus were in touch with the ground, with the dust of the world. They were in contact with each one of us. Our humanity has been anointed with the perfume of love and liberation. The dust of our hearth has been visited by the Son of God's healing power and life. Isn't this anointing more than a gesture of thanksgiving? Was that probably how Mary expressed her gratitude to Jesus for what he did to Lazarus, her brother? We may have different points of view, but when Jesus said to Judas and all the others present, *"Leave her alone, let her keep it for the day of my burial."* And we know that when this happened, the time of his passion and death on the Calvary was very close. Even though that expensive nard was used to balm the dead person's body, Mary is anointing now that body: a living body. I think that there is more than love involved in the action of Mary. There is trust, life, and devotion that transcend the human elements of feelings and understanding. Why do we balm the bodies after they are dead? Why don't we pay more attention like Mary to the bodies of the people we live with when they still alive? She was not embalming a dead friend and would remain dead; she was anointing one who was going to be alive, always active! I wonder if it is not now, and here the time for you and me to use the oil of gladness and love. Now is the time to anoint and kiss, help, and share because tomorrow could be too late! We may fill our homes today with this kind of scent; *'the house was filled with the scent of the ointment'*... and everybody seems to enjoy that. The perfume of love is always available in our life. Because we have been created with love, and we know that it is still with us when we need it.

78. Brother Peter's loyalty

The suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus are part of one of the greatest historical dramas with a profound loyalty lesson. None of us should point the finger at Peter and the others without considering our disloyalty. How often in a day do we betray our convictions for monetary gain or our values for the sake of keeping up appearances? How often do we lie to save our face? Perhaps there have been times we abandoned those who counted on our support because we were busy with other things. Have we lost friends because we were not there for them in times of need? Are there members of our families who suffer because we shirk our responsibilities to them? The drama of the passion of Jesus is the drama with a blessed ending. And we are all involved in one way or another. In that celebration of the Passover night, the words of Jesus to the twelve's: *"Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me"* and to Peter: *"Will you lay down your life for me? Very truly, I tell you, before the cock crows, you will have denied me three times"* are words also for all of us. God's self-revelation in the passion of Jesus tells us and gives us the real meaning of His unconditional love. Dear brother Peter did you know about this that night? Did you know that nothing, no suffering, nor the agony of betrayal and denial, not even death, will ever separate us from the love of God?



79. No, surely is not I, Lord



Jesus took the road of nonviolence to redeem us, the way of unconditional love, and this is very powerful. The apostles were the best friends of

Jesus; they were his close disciples, and we all know the big gap between words and deeds. On the way to the cross, all abandon him. In the Creed, we say that the church is "apostolic." There is a relation to the meaning of the term "*apostolic*" and us today. Of course, the church foundation is base on the 12 apostles called by the lord. But the *apostolic* word could also tell us that we, too, as believers and followers in the *apostolic church*, sometimes share in the betrayal, abandonment, and denial. Even though the apostles did, even though we may be quick to declare like one of them, it is surely not our intention to do such a thing. The answer in that night is sometimes also on our lips: "No, surely is not I, Lord!"

80. The cross is our telescope

After so many years, we still look at the cross and the meaning of it. *'The cross is not just a meaningless drama taking place on the stage of history, but it is a telescope through which we look out into the long vista of eternity and see the love of God breaking forth into time. It is an eternal reminder to a power-drunk generation, a generation growing in nuclear and atomic weapons, saying love is the only way. (Yeah) Love is the only answer. (Amen) And I believe that the kingdom of God will finally emerge. (Amen) There is still a voice crying even this day, saying, "Love your enemies. Bless them that curse you. (Yes) Do good to them that hate you. Pray for them ...' - Martin Luther King, Jr.*



81. One day, we shall win with love

Do you remember what Martin Luther King, Jr (1929-1968) said in that sermon delivered at the



Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, at Christmas, 1957? *"To our most bitter opponents, we say: we shall match your capacity to inflict suffering by our capacity to endure suffering. We shall meet your physical force with soul force. Do to us what you will, and we shall continue to love you. Throw us in jail, and we shall still love you. Bomb our homes and threaten our children, and we shall still*

love you. Send your hooded perpetrators of violence into our communities at the midnight hour and beat us and leave us half-dead, and we shall still love you. But be ye assured that we will wear you down by our capacity to suffer. One day we shall win our freedom, but not only for ourselves. We shall appeal to your heart and conscience that we shall win you in the process, and our victory will be a double victory."

82. Do this in memory of me

The night most Holy, and it must always be kept that way, is the night we celebrate the Passover-Eucharist. It's the night of gathering of friends around the table of the Lord. It's the night of special intimacy when Jesus called the twelve for the first Eucharist: the celebration of Passover alive in his Body and Blood given to them and so to us. The Pope, our beloved John Paul II in his letter to all the priests, says: "*Dear Priests, With deep emotion I am sending you this traditional Holy Thursday Letter, taking my seat beside you as it were at the table in the Upper Room at which*



the Lord Jesus celebrates with his Apostles the first Eucharist: a gift to the all-church, a gift which although veiled by sacramental signs, makes him "really, truly and substantially" present in every tabernacle throughout the world... How great is this vocation of ours, my dear Brothers Priest! Truly we can repeat with the Psalmist: "What shall I render to the Lord for all his bounty to me? I will lift the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord" (Ps 116: 12-13)

It is also the night to say thanks for the Priesthood. It is a vocation for us all to be thankful. Any time we celebrate the Mass and do the remembrance of Him, we observe that night of love and blessing. For this, we are all thankful forever and ever. Amen.

83.A He suffered this way

Good Friday is the day we celebrate as Christians the action and the sacrament of our redemption. On the way of the cross and through his passion, he gave us a special gift: His love sealed forever by a covenant. Cecilia pass me this reflection or meditation on the reality of the intensity of Jesus on that Good Friday. Here it is: (For Italians only - if not, escape to the next paragraph # 83.B for translation.)

Così ha sofferto

Ripubblichiamo la richiesta di molti lettori, un articolo apparso recentemente. E' la descrizione degli dolori sofferti da Gesù, durante la sua passione, fatta da un grande studioso francese, il Dott. Barbet che l'ha redatto sulla scorta dei vangeli e della Sindone. Potrà essere una efficace e straordinaria meditazione per la Quaresima.



Io sono soprattutto un chirurgo; ho insegnato a lungo. Per tredici anni sono vissuto in compagnia di cadaveri; durante la mia carriera ho studiato a fondo l'anatomia. Posso dunque scrivere senza presunzione. Gesù entrato nel Getsemani – scrive l'evangelista Luca – pregava più intensamente. E diede in un sudore " come gocce di sangue" che cadevano fino a terra il solo Evangelista che riporta il fatto è un medico, Luca. E lo fa con la precisione di un fenomeno rarissimo. Si produce in condizioni eccezionali: a provocarlo ci vuole una spossatezza fisica, accompagnata da una scossa morale

violenta causata da una profonda emozione, da una grande paura. Il terrore, lo spavento, l'angoscia terribile di sentirsi carico di tutti i peccati degli uomini devono aver schiacciato Gesù. Tale tensione estrema produce la rottura delle finissime vene capillari che stanno sotto le ghiandole sudoripare, il sangue si mescola al sudore si raccoglie sulla pelle; poi cola per tutto il corpo fino a terra. Conosciamo la farsa del processo imbastito da Sinedrio ebraico, l'invio di Gesù a Pilato ed il ballottaggio fra il procuratore romano ed Erode. Pilato cede e ordina la flagellazione di Gesù. I soldati spogliano Gesù e lo legano per i polsi a una colonna dell'atrio. La flagellazione si effettua con delle strisce di cuoio multiple su cui sono fissate delle palline di cuoio e degli ossicini. Le tracce nella Sindone di Torino sono innumerevoli; la maggior parte delle sferzate sono sulle spalle, sulla schiena, sulla regione lombare e sul petto. I carnefici devono essere stati due, uno da ciascun lato, di ineguale corporatura. Colpiscono a staffilate la pelle, già alterata da milioni di microscopiche emorragie del sudore di sangue. La pelle si lacera e si spacca; il sangue zampilla. A ogni colpo Gesù trasale in un soprassalto di dolore. Le forze gli vengono meno: un sudore freddo gli imperla la fronte; la testa gli gira in una vertigine di nausea, brividi gli corrono lungo la schiena. Se non fosse legato molto in alto per i polsi, crollerebbe in una pozza di sangue. Poi lo scherno dell'incoronazione. Con lunghe spine più dure di quelle della acacia, gli aguzzini intrecciano una specie di casco e glielo applicano sul capo. Le spine penetrano nel cuoio capelluto e lo fanno sanguinare (i chirurghi quanto sanguina il cuoio capelluto). Dalla Sindone si rileva che in forte colpo di bastone, dato obliquamente, lascio sulla guancia destra di Gesù una orribile piaga contusa: il naso è deformato da una frattura dell'ala cartilaginea. Pilato, dopo aver mostrato quell'uomo straziato alla folla inferocita glielo consegna per la crocifissione. Caricano sulle spalle di Gesù il grosso braccio orizzontale della croce; pesa una cinquantina di chili. Il palo verticale è già piantato sul Calvario. Gesù cammina a piedi scalzi sulle strade dal fondo irregolare, cosparso di ciottoli. I soldati lo tirano per le corde. Il percorso, fortunatamente, non è molto lungo, circa 600 metri. Gesù, a fatica, trascina un piede dopo l'altro; spesso cade sulle ginocchia. E la spalla di Gesù è coperta di piaghe. Quando egli cade a terra, la trave gli sfugge e gli scortica il dorso. Sul Calvario ha inizio la crocifissione. I carnefici, spogliano il condannato; ma la sua tunica è incollata alle piaghe e il toglierla è atroce. Avete mai staccato la garza di una medicazione da una larga piaga contusa? Non avete sofferto voi stessi questa prova che richiede talvolta l'anestesia generale? Potete allora rendervi conto di che si tratta. Ogni filo di stoffa aderisce al tessuto della carne viva: a levare la tunica, si lacerano le terminazioni nervose messe allo scoperto dalle piaghe. I carnefici danno uno strappo violento. Come mai quel dolore atroce non provoca una sincope? Il sangue riprende a scorrere; Gesù viene disteso sul dorso. Le sue piaghe si incrostano di polvere e di ghiaietta. Lo distendono sul braccio orizzontale della croce. Gli aguzzini prendono le misure. Un giro di succhiello nel legno per facilitare la penetrazione dei chiodi orribile supplizio! Il carnefice prende un chiodo (un lungo chiodo appuntito e quadrato), lo appoggia sul polso di Gesù, con un colpo netto di martello glielo pianta e lo ribatte saldamente sul legno. Gesù deve aver spaventosamente contratto il volto. Nello stesso istante il suo pollice, con un movimento violento si è posto in opposizione nel palmo della mano; il nervo mediano è stato leso. Si può immaginare ciò che Gesù deve aver provato: un dolore lancinante, acutissimo, che si è diffuso nelle dita, è zampillato come una lingua di fuoco, nella spalla, gli ha folgorato il cervello. E' il dolore più insopportabile che un uomo possa provare, quello dato dalla ferita dei grossi tronchi nervosi. Di solito provoca una sincope e fa perdere la conoscenza, il Gesù no. Almeno il nervo fosse stato tagliato netto! Invece (lo si constata spesso sperimentalmente) il nervo è distrutto solo in parte: la lesione del tronco nervoso rimane in contatto col chiodo: quando il corpo sarà sospeso sulla croce, il nervo si tenderà fortemente come una corda di violino tesa sul ponticello. A ogni scossa, a ogni movimento, vibrerà risvegliando dolori strazianti. Un supplizio che durerà tre ore. Il carnefice e il suo aiutante impugnano le estremità della trave; sollevano Gesù mettendolo prima seduto poi in piedi; quindi facendolo camminare all'indietro, lo addossano al palo verticale. Poi rapidamente incastrano il braccio orizzontale della croce sul palo verticale. Le spalle della vittima hanno strisciato dolorosamente sul legno ruvido. Le punte taglienti della grande corona di spine hanno lacerato il cranio. La povera testa di Gesù è inclinata in avanti, poiché lo spessore del casco di spine gli impedisce di appoggiarla al legno. Ogni volta

che il martire solleva la testa riprendono le fitte acutissime. Gli inchiodano i piedi. E' mezzogiorno Gesù ha sete. Non ha bevuto dalla sera precedente. I lineamenti sono tirati, il volto una maschera di sangue. La bocca è semi aperta e li labbro inferiore comincia a pendere. La gola secca, gli brucia ma egli non può deglutire. Ha sete. Un soldato gli tende, sulla punta della canna, una spugna imbevuta di bevanda acidula in uso tra i militari. Tutto ciò è una tortura atroce. Uno strano fenomeno si produce sul corpo di Gesù. I muscoli delle braccia si irrigidiscono in una contrazione che va accentuandosi: I deltoidi, i bicipiti sono tesi e rilevati, le dita si incurvano. Si direbbe un ferito colpito da tetano, in preda a quelle orribili crisi che non si possono descrivere. E' ciò che i medici chiamano tetania, quando i crampi si generalizzano: i muscoli dell'addome si irrigidiscono in onde immobili; poi quelli intercostali, quelli del collo e quelli respiratori. Il respiro si è fatto a poco a poco più corto. L'aria entra con un sibilo, ma non riesce più ad uscire. Gesù respira con l'apice dei polmoni. Ha sete di aria: come un asmatico in piena crisi, rosso, poi trascolora nel violetto purpureo e infine nel cianotico. Gesù, colpito da asfissia, soffoca. I polmoni, gonfi d'aria, non possono più svuotarsi. La fronte è imperlata di sudore, gli occhi gli escono fuori dall'orbita. Che dolori atroci devono aver martellato il cranio!. Ma cosa avviene? Lentamente con uno sforzo sovrumano, Gesù ha preso un punto di appoggio sul chiodo dei piedi. Facendosi forza, a piccoli colpi, si tira su alleggerendo la trazione delle braccia. I muscoli del torace si distendono. La respirazione diventa più ampia e profonda, i polmoni si svuotano e il viso riprende il pallore primitivo. Perché questo sforzo? Perché Gesù vuol parlare: "Padre, perdona loro: non sanno quello che fanno". Dopo un istante il corpo ricomincia ad afflosciarsi e l'asfissia riprende. Sono state tramandate sette frasi pronunciate da Lui in croce: ogni volta che vuol parlare dovrà sollevarsi tenendosi ritto sui chiodi dei piedi: inimmaginabile! Sciami di mosche, grosse mosche verdi e blu ronzano attorno al suo corpo; gli si accaniscono sul viso, ma egli non può scacciarle. Dopo un po', il cielo si oscura, il sole si nasconde: d'un tratto la temperatura si abbassa. Fra poco saranno le tre del pomeriggio. Gesù lotta sempre: di quando in quando si solleva per respirare. E' l'asfissia periodica dell'infelice che viene strozzato. Un tortura che dura tre ore.

Tutti i suoi dolori, la sete, i crampi, l'asfissia, le vibrazione dei nervi mediani, gli hanno strappato un lamento: "Dio mio, Dio mio, perché mi hai abbandonato?".

Ai piedi della croce stava la madre di Gesù. Potete immaginare lo strazio di quella donna? Gesù grida: "Tutto è compiuto".

Poi a gran voce dice: "Padre nelle tue mani raccomando il tuo spirito".E poi muore.

Fisicamente e spiritualmente parlando noi siamo stati rigenerati attraverso la passione e morte del nostro Signore e Salvatore; un dono che ha cambiato l'universo e il nostro destino per sempre.

83.B Good Friday is the day we celebrate as Christians the action and redemption sacrament. On the way to the cross and through his passion, he gave us a special gift: His love sealed forever by a covenant. Cecilia pass me this reflection or meditation on the reality of the intensity of Jesus on that Good Friday. Here it is:

So he suffered

We re-publish the request of many readers, an article that appeared recently. It is the description of the pains suffered by Jesus during his passion, made by a great French scholar, Dr. Barbet, who drew it up based on the Gospels and the Shroud. It can be an effective and extraordinary meditation for Lent.

'I am primarily a surgeon; I have been teaching for a long time. I lived in a corpse company; during my career, I have studied anatomy thoroughly. I can, therefore, write without presumption. Jesus entered Gethsemane - reports the evangelist Luke - prayed more intensely. And he gave in a sweat "like drops of blood" that fell to the ground. The only Evangelist who reports the fact is a doctor, Luke. And it does so with the precision of a very rare phenomenon. It is produced in exceptional conditions: to provoke it takes physical exhaustion, accompanied by a violent moral shock caused by deep emotion, by a great fear. The

terror, the fright, the terrible anguish of feeling laden with all the sins of men must have crushed Jesus. This extreme tension produces the rupture of the very fine capillary veins under the sweat glands. The blood mixes with the sweat it collects on the skin; then, it runs all over the body to the ground. We know the farce of the trial staged by the Jewish Sanhedrin, the sending of Jesus to Pilate, and the ballot between the Roman procurator and Herod. Pilate yields and orders the scourging of Jesus. The soldiers undress Jesus and tie him by the wrists to a column in the atrium. The flagellation is carried out with multiple leather strips on which some leather balls and small bones are attached. The Turin Shroud traces are innumerable; most of the lashes are on the shoulders, back, lower back, and chest.

The executioners must have been two, one on each side, of the unequal build. They stab the skin, already altered by millions of microscopic hemorrhages of blood sweat. The skin tears and splits; the blood gushes are there. At each blow, Jesus starts in a jolt of pain. His strength fails, a cold sweat beading on his forehead; his head is spinning in dizziness of nausea, chills run down his spine. If it weren't strapped very high by the wrists, it would collapse in a pool of blood. Then the mockery of the coronation. With long thorns harder than those of the acacia, the torturers weave a helmet and apply it on the head. The thorns penetrate the scalp and cause it to bleed (surgeons how much the scalp bleeds). From the Shroud, it is noted that with a strong blow of the stick, given obliquely, I leave a horrible bruised sore on the right cheek of Jesus: a fracture of the cartilage wing deforms the nose. Pilate, showing the man to the angry crowd, gives him to him for crucifixion. They load the large horizontal arm of the cross on the shoulders of Jesus; it weighs about fifty kilos. The vertical pole is already planted on Calvary. Jesus was walking barefoot on the uneven streets strewn with cobblestones. The soldiers pull him by the ropes. Fortunately, the path is not very long, about 600 meters. With difficulty, Jesus drags one foot after the other; often falls to the knees. And Jesus' shoulder is covered with sores. When he falls to the ground, the beam escapes him and scratches his back. On Calvary, the crucifixion begins. The executioners strip the condemned, but his tunic is glued to the wounds, and to remove it is atrocious. Have you ever removed the gauze from a dressing from a large bruised sore? Haven't you suffered this test that sometimes requires general anesthesia? You can then realize what it is. Each thread of cloth adheres to the fabric of living flesh: to remove the tunic, the nerve endings exposed by the wounds are torn. The executioners give a violent tear. How come that excruciating pain doesn't cause syncope? The blood starts to flow again; Jesus is stretched out on his back. His wounds become encrusted with dust and gravel. They spread him out on the horizontal arm of the cross.

The torturers take the measures. A round of gimlet in the wood to facilitate the penetration of the nails horrible torture! The executioner takes a nail (a long pointed and square nail), places it on the wrist of Jesus; with a clean blow of the hammer, he drives it and bangs it firmly on the wood. Jesus must have contracted his face seriously. Simultaneously, his thumb, with a violent movement, placed itself in opposition in the palm; the median nerve was injured. One can imagine what Jesus must have felt: an excruciating pain, very acute, which spread in the fingers, gushed like a tongue of fire, in the shoulder, it struck his brain. It is the most unbearable pain a man can experience, the one given by the large nerve trunks' wound. It usually causes syncope and causes you to lose consciousness; Jesus does not. At least the nerve had been cut clean! Instead (it is often found experimentally), the nerve is only partially destroyed: the nervous trunk lesion remains in contact with the nail. When the body is suspended on the cross, his nerve will be strongly stretched like a violin string stretched on the bridge.

With each shock, each movement, it will vibrate, excruciating awakening pain. The torture will last three hours. The executioner and his assistant grasp the ends of the beam; they lift Jesus by placing him first-seated and then standing; then making him walk backward, they lean him against the vertical pole. Then they quickly snap the horizontal arm of the cross onto the vertical bar. The victim's shoulders crawled painfully on the rough wood. The sharp points of the great crown of thorns have lacerated the skull. The poor head of Jesus is tilted forward since the thickness of the helmet of thorns prevents him from resting it on the wood.

Every time the martyr raises his head, the sharp pangs start again. They nail his feet. It is noon Jesus is thirsty. He hasn't drunk since the previous evening. The features are drawn. They face a mask of blood. His mouth is half-open. The lower lip begins to hang down. His throat is dry, it burns, but he can't swallow. He's thirsty. A soldier hands him, on the barrel's tip, a sponge soaked in sour drink used by the military. All of this is excruciating torture. A strange phenomenon occurs in the body of Jesus. The muscles of the arms stiffen in a contraction that is accentuated: The deltoids, the biceps are tense and raised, the fingers are curved. It looks like tetanus wounded, prey to those horrible crises that cannot be described. Doctors

call tetany when the cramps are generalized: the abdominal muscles stiffen in motionless waves, then the intercostal ones, those of the neck, and the respiratory ones.

The breath gradually became shorter. The air enters with a hiss but can no longer get out. Jesus breathes at the top of his lungs. He is thirsty for air: like an asthmatic in full crisis, red, then fade into purple violet and finally into cyanotic. Jesus, struck by asphyxiation, suffocates. The lungs, swollen with air, can no longer empty. His forehead is beaded with sweat; his eyes come out of their socket; what excruciating pains must have hammered the skull! But what happens? Slowly with superhuman effort, Jesus took a foothold on the nail of the feet. Strengthening himself, with small strokes, he pulls himself up, relieving the pull of the arms. The chest muscles relax. Breathing becomes wider and deeper, the lungs are emptied, and the face returns to its primitive pallor. Why this effort?

Why Jesus wants to speak: "Father, forgive them: they don't know what they are doing." After a moment, the body begins to sag again, and asphyxia resumes. Seven phrases pronounced by him on the cross have been handed down: every time he wants to speak, he will have to rise, holding himself upright on the nails of his feet: unimaginable! Swarms of flies, large green and blue flies buzz around his body; they rage on his face, but he cannot drive them away. After a while, the sky darkens, the sun hides: suddenly, the temperature drops. It will soon be three in the afternoon. Jesus always struggles: from time to time. He gets up to breathe. It is the periodic asphyxiation of the unhappy person who is strangled. The torture probably lasts three hours. All his pains, thirst, cramps, asphyxiation, vibrations of the median nerves made him cry: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

At the foot of the cross stood the mother of Jesus. Can you imagine the torment of that woman? Jesus cries out: "Everything is finished." Then in a loud voice, he says: "Father into your hands, I commend my spirit." And then he dies.'

Physically and spiritually speaking, we had been made new through the passion of our Lord and Saviour, a gift that forever has changed our universe and our destiny.

84. Silent Lamb

Immediately after the last words of Jesus on the cross: "*Father into your hands I commend my spirit.*" there was an earthquake and dark ... but after all these events, there was silence, a deep silence that is for all Christians the time to listen deep at the level of our heart the meaning of life, our future, and destiny ... It's time for silence and peace.

85. Time to understand



Do you know that prayer helps us to understand? Prayer gives us time to understand, and I believe the words of St. Francis's (1181-1226) prayer may help us to do so:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, unity; where there is doubt, faith; where there is an error, truth; where there is despair, hope; where there is sadness, joy; where there is darkness, light. Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. It is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

86. He is risen – A L L E L U I A

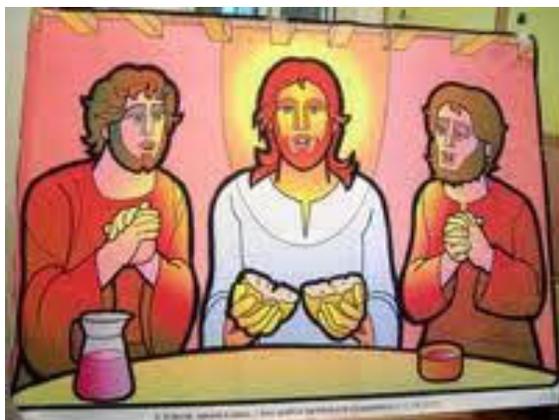
On Sunday, the first day of the week, the stone had been removed from the tomb's entrance. The body of Jesus was not there. The tomb was empty. That is what Mary Magdalene saw and Peter and John too. Then the disciples returned to their homes. But Mary Magdalene stood weeping outside the tomb. Tell us, Mary, what or who did you see that morning that made you run to bring the good news to the disciples?

"You saw, and you believed! Blessed are those who do not see and yet believe!"



87. The body of Christ

The two disciples of Emmaus are believers in their journey of life, and probably they are the simple and real representation of our way to believe: they are always in our local churches. Who are they anyway? In the story of Luke 24:13-35, we see Cleopas and his companion walking with Jesus. Was it Cleopas's wife? We don't know. We do know they were upset. The rumour of the resurrection wasn't so clear yet, and they had been hoping for some better ending of the story. They talk and argue as we do when things are not going in our way. We, too, often do not recognize his presence. Like them, our eyes can't see. Jesus was with them and talking, revealing the scriptures. When they arrive at Emmaus,



there was an invitation to stay. They sit down at the table. *"He takes bread, says the blessing, and breaks it."* Then they recognize him, and he disappeared, leaving them with their bread in their hands. Jesus left them with a clue about recognizing him and how to make themselves recognizable in the bread he left them.

Is the Eucharist one of the best ways to recognize His presence among us? Yes, it is! The scene of Jesus' on the road to Emmaus with the two disciples is a Christian liturgy model. As the bread is broken and shared, Jesus is present. At the crucial moment when the presence of the Lord is realized, Jesus vanishes from their sight. Why? He is now present in the bread! Again this reality is contemplated in the celebration of the Eucharist. When the minister holds the host before us at communion time and says, "The body of Christ," we reply, "Amen!" That is our "Yes" to his presence. The risen Christ lives in us again. He disappeared into us. No matter what road we walk, he is there. He is always with us. In this way, we know for sure that we celebrate his eternal presence in words and figures of speech and in the life we are living. Any brother or sister is potentially the sacrament of the presence of the Lord. St. Paul didn't miss this point when he declares that we are the "Body of Christ" and that it is what we are.

88. Peace be with you

One of the first words we found on the mouth of Jesus himself when he stood among the disciples after the resurrection is, *“peace be with you.”* It’s a new kind of peace that the Lord is giving to his friends. It’s the peace that brings unity to our mind, body, and soul. It’s the peace that dissipates the doubts arising in our hearts and cleanses us from being frightened—any shadow of ghosts and illusions that are always trying to make our life a nightmare.



89. Look at my hands

The Lord said to his disciples: *“Look at my hands and my feet ... touch me and see ... I have flesh and bones ... give me something to eat.”*



The risen Lord shows his wounds, and he keeps the marks of the scars after the resurrection. His injuries would not make sense if they were not connected to his resurrection. In Christian life, we know that suffering never makes any sense without that connection. There are moments in our lives where we can’t escape suffering and pain. We also know that the resurrection’s new reality is waiting for each of us after every Good

Friday. One of the risen Christ’s real enigmas is that the wounds are still present in his body. Why wouldn’t they be somehow healed? Why wouldn’t his body be whole and perfect? Perhaps to be able to recognize the Risen Lord, the wounds must be visible. They remind us, like in a picture, that the signs of his passion are also present in our brothers’ and sisters’ wounds because they are, we are the body of Christ. His injuries will always be visible to help us to see and perhaps to believe.

90. And they caught nothing but 153 fish too many!

In John 21:1-14, we are introduced to a simple and positive story that I call a love story. We may hear Jesus asking Peter if he does love him, and on the other side of the coin, we know that the Lord is in love with his friends: he also cooked breakfast for them that day. So what happened that day? Peter and some others had gone out fishing. They had caught nothing. When they approached the lakeshore, they saw a man who asked them for some fish. This manifestation happened soon after the



resurrection, and they were still unable to recognize the new presence of the Lord. The truth is that night, they were out on the lake by themselves, and they caught nothing. The same may happen to us: what can we do without the presence of God in our life? When they told him that they had caught nothing, he suggested they throw the net out once more. They did and caught 153 big fish. This super great quantity of fish surprise them all and overpowered their expectations. As we can see, this time, the Lord is with them! When God is in our life, everything is possible, and I mean everything! On the shore was that huge number of fish that probably represented the different varieties of fish known at that time in that region.

The net also may be a symbol of the new living Christian community and her salvation message to all people. Peter and the company must have understood that all that fish symbolized their mission to the world was for them to start. Forgiveness and reconciliation is the meal or breakfast that is ready for the disciples on the shore of the world and is the same Lord who had that prepared for them. This is all a kind of storytelling us again. How deep are the value of God's presence and love who calls us "children"? The mission and action of the disciples still on today and is the mission of the church. From this moment on, the disciples will catch men, isn't our mission too? Let's go fishing!

91. "As you go ..." Mt10:7-15



Whenever I get in touch with the mission, the disciples received it from the Master; I feel more part of this story to be shared. "As we go ..." as we journey into the seasons of life and spend time dealing with our business, communities, family life, or else... the invitation from the Lord is always there and persistent. We have to proclaim the Good News of The Kingdom. It is a proclamation that requires action and not

just words. "*Cure the sick – raise the dead – cleanse the lepers and drive out demons ...*" This is what Jesus said to His Apostles, and this is what He says to us after 2000 years. In our lives, many things come at different times, but this mission is persistent. The suggestions Jesus told them and is telling us today is to travel very light as we go. A trip will be too slow when we bring many things with us. What we need to take in our life is just essential because too many material things will slow down the journey and lose focus and interest in what we have to do. We have to cure – raise – cleanse, drive out. As we go and get older, we tend to get bigger and accumulate more than we need. By experience, Jesus knew that we ought to travel more lightly and trust Him and the mission more than our possessions.

To wish peace and cure the sick are the best actions we are asked to do. When a leper is cleansed, he is at peace. When a person is free from demons is at leisure. I wonder if what Jesus told his first Apostles could be a great suggestion for us, too, as we journey in our life. Wherever we go as we go, we have to travel very light.

92. The plural things of life

The Gospel tells us about Jesus encountering a man with an unclean spirit in the synagogue at Capernaum. Isn't it interesting that the first unclean spirit that Jesus confronts is in the holy place, the place of worship? And what marks this man? Though he is a single person, an individual, he speaks in the plural: "*What do you have to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us?*" The diabolical is, literally, a scattering power: *diabalein*. Sin separates us from one another, but it also divides us interiorly, setting one part of the self against another. We've all experienced this: our minds are divided, our wills are split, and our emotions rise against our deepest convictions. What trouble are we in! The authoritative voice of Jesus brings the man back to himself. And friends, this is precisely the effect that Jesus' voice has had up and down the ages. When we allow his word to reach deep down within us, we get knitted back together. When Jesus becomes the clear center of our life, then our mind, our will, our emotions, our private life, our public life—all of it—finds its pleasant place around that center. This focus is one of the greatest speeds of life!



93. The healer in action



Many times we see Jesus in action. We are reading from the section of Mark's first chapter that gives us a sort of "day in the life" of Jesus. And it is quite a day! Our Gospel opens just after the dramatic expulsion of a demon in the Capernaum synagogue. After entering the house of Simon when Jesus cured Peter's mother-in-law. We notice that he takes her by the hand and brings her to her feet so that she can be of service. What does sickness do to us? It draws us in around ourselves. Once she is cured, Simon's mother-in-law commences to serve, to be for the other. Then the entire town comes to his door. He spends the whole evening curing presumably hundreds who were variously afflicted.

Mark presents Jesus as a healer, *soter*, which means "the bearer of the *salus*" or health. In him, divinity and humanity have come together; in him, the divine life and divine power are breaking. God's deepest intentions appear; what God plans for us in the kingdom to come is now historically anticipated. It is already present. For sure, the action of Jesus was and is faster than our thoughts. Jesus was curing the people very fast at the speed of their faith.

94. Naked I came

'Naked I came from my mother's womb, naked I shall return. The Lord gave, the Lord has taken back. Blessed



be the name of the Lord! If we take happiness from God's hand, must we not take sorrow too? Proclaim the Gospel, insist on it in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, and exhort, do all with patience and in a manner that will teach men.' (Job 1:21,2:10)

This way is also the best way to learn about yourself. To teach people something good is a good speed to master our life too.

95. To be present

Our lives come laden with richness, but we aren't sufficiently present with what is



there. Sometimes we aren't as lucky. Our health and our lives must be radically threatened or taken from us before realizing how rich these already are, if only we made ourselves more present. To be present is to be there able to feel, taste, and touch in time the blessings of people, things, and situations. The gift of being present is the best speed of life. Rarely are we enough inside our skins, present sufficient to the moment, and sensitive enough to the richness present in our lives. God and the moment don't have to be

searched out and found. They're already here. We need to be aware we need to be present, to be there. Augustine had been searching for love and God, and he eventually found them in the most unexpected of all places, inside of himself. God and love had been inside of him all along, but he had not been inside of himself. There's a lesson here: We don't pray to make God present to us. God is already present, always present everywhere. We pray to make ourselves present to God.

96. No sunshine is available

We tend to think that to live in the light means that there should be a kind of special sunshine inside of us, a divine glow in our conscience, a sunny joy inside us that makes us constantly want to praise God and feel the breeze of sacredness surrounding our attitude. But that's unreal. What does it mean to live in the light? To live in the morning means to live in honesty, pure and simple, to be transparent, not to have part of us hidden as a dark secret. This way of living may also be a way for and become the joy of life. Spiritual health we love to find maybe not far from us.



97. To live in the light

Spiritual health lies in honesty and transparency, and so we live in the light when we are willing to lay every part of our lives open to examination by those who need to trust us.



- To live in the light is always to tell our loved ones where we are and what we are doing.

- To live in the light is to be able to let those we live with listening to what's inside our cell phones, see what's inside our emails, and know who's on our speed dial.
- To live in the light is to have a confessor and to be able to tell that person what we struggle

with, without having to hide anything.

To live in the light is to live in such a way that our lives are an open book written by the truth of our daily life for those who know us. Can we reach this speed of life?

98. Is God getting angry?

Scripture and Christian tradition do, of course, speak of God as getting angry, but that, as Christian theology teaches, is anthropomorphism. That is, it is a projection of human thought and feeling into God. In saying things such as God is angry with us, or God is punishing us for our sins, we are not, in essence, telling how God feels about us but rather how we, at that moment, think about God and how we feel about ourselves and our actions. We feel angry at ourselves for what we have done, and we want God to be responsible for this. This way is not fair for God and even less for us.



99. Not easy to forgive ourselves

God doesn't hate us when we do something wrong, but we hate ourselves. God doesn't wreak an act of vengeance on us when we sin, but we beat ourselves up whenever we do; and God never withholds forgiveness from us, no matter what we've done, but we find it very difficult to forgive ourselves for our



transgressions. This is because we can't reverse the damage done, but we may find consolation and relief if we find a way to fix it in our lives. This way to live will become a permanent Commitment for life, not only for our transgressions but also for the others. *'forgive our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.* It is true of an angelic razor and a winepress of God's fury, but those are names for the experience of discontent and self-hatred inside us whenever we are unfaithful have nothing to do with God's nature. God's love is always bigger than our sins and transgressions. God's speed is waiting for us to speed up in forgiveness but never in competition.

100. Finding our loved ones after death

An angel spoke those words to Mary Magdalene on Easter morning. She had come to the tomb where Jesus had been buried, hoping to anoint his dead body with spices, when an angel told her that *'it is futile to look for the living among the dead.'* That strange statement speaks not only of Christ's resurrection. Still, it reveals as well a deep secret, one central to understanding the communion of saints: How do we remain in contact, in love, in communication, and a real community of life with our loved ones after they have died? How do we find our loved ones after death separates them from us? The angel of the resurrection tells us how: By seeking for them among the living, not among the dead. We do not find our loved ones in their graves. It is good to visit graves and go to the cemetery like we do all the time and pray for them. Perhaps invisible angels sit there, at the graves of our loved ones, and send us back into life to seek for them at other places. Just as Mary Magdalene did not find Jesus in his tomb, we, too, will not find our loved ones there. Where will we find them?



101. Do not be afraid

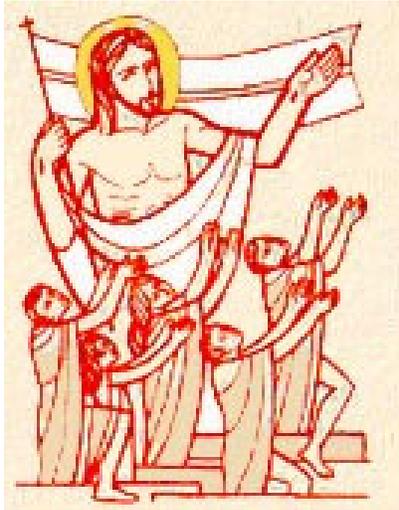


After the Resurrection, the angel vision at the tomb of Jesus speaks clearly: (Lk 24:6-9, Mt. 28: 5-9). Then the angel said to the women in reply, *“Do not be afraid! I know that you are seeking Jesus the crucified. He is not here, for he has been raised just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead, and he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him.’ ”* Then they went away quickly from the tomb, fearful yet overjoyed,

and ran to announce this to his disciples.

102. We believe in the communion of living

We will meet the ones we can no longer touch by placing ourselves in situations where their spirits flourish and used to be. Our loved ones live where they have always lived, and it is there that we will find them. What does that mean? Simply put, we find our deceased loved ones by entering into life, in terms of love, faith, and virtue, in the way that was most distinctive to them. We contact them and connect ourselves to them when, in our own lives, we shape the infinite richness of God's life and compassion in the way that they did, when we pour ourselves into life and respond to situations as they did in their daily journey of life. Our loved ones are not dead to us. One of our faith's central points is that we believe in the communion of saints and life everlasting. The life we are talking about it is everlasting. Our loved ones are alive, doing what they've always done, and they are waiting for us, filled glass in hand, perhaps dancing life at the center of the circle of celebration, the banquet table of Heaven.



103. Breakthrough Prayer

*Holy Spirit, breathe life back into my home;
Holy Spirit, breathe life back into my relationships;
Holy Spirit, breathe life back into my dreams;
Holy Spirit, breathe life back into my finances;
Holy Spirit, breathe life back into my family;
Holy Spirit, breathe life back into my church;
Holy Spirit, breathe life back into my life.
In the mighty name of Jesus, Amen!*



If you use this prayer, life will be restored in your ways. Your breakthrough will be on the way! The speed of God's grace is amazing. It is already yours before you ask for it.

104. When God made man



When God made man, he gave him all the earth. All growing things, with every bird and beast; Then Adam named them at the Lord's command. He subdued the greatest of them and the least. In his image, God created man, And when from dust he fashioned Adam's face, The likeness of his only Son was formed:

His Word incarnate, filled with truth and grace.
 To God the Father and Christ his Son
 And blessed Spirit, heaven, and earth give praise. Creation with tremendous voice cries out: All
 holy is the mighty Lord of Days. Prayer from: - Stanbrook Abbey Hymnal

105. Is The Church the 8th Sacrament Of Christ?

Traditionally, the Church has restricted sacraments to seven as true mediations of God’s grace since the twelfth century. However, Vatican II has taught that the Church is also herself the sacrament of Christ (LG, 1, 48). If, on the one hand, the Church is the dispenser of sacraments which Christ empowered her to do, how can the Church, on the other hand, be the sacrament herself? Let’s explore what the concept of the Church as a sacrament of Christ entails. To do this, we need to present the meaning and nature of the Church as a sacrament of Christ. Let’s go through the word *Church* meaning and reflect upon it.



106. Meaning of Church and Sacrament



The word church etymologically comes from the German words pronounced as *kirk* and *Kirche*, among others. The earlier Greek word from which these two words come is *Kuriakon* or *Kyriakos*. Its root, *Kurios*, which means lord understands the meaning of *Kuriakos*.’ Hence, *kuriakos* means ‘about the lord.’ It follows that Germanic words *Kirk*, *Kirche*, which rendered the English word ‘church’ told, ‘the lord’s house.’ Initially, the

meaning of church referring to worshipers’ building is what the word church signified. However, the Greek word *ekklesia*, meaning ‘called out,’ was used to render the word church about the congregation or assembly of people. It was equally used to translate the Hebrew word *qahal*, meaning ‘convoked assembly.’

107. St. Paul imageries

In the New Testament, Paul uses imageries such as Christ’s body, heirs of God, to refer to the assembly of the people called by God to witness the passion, death, and resurrection of



Jesus (cf 1 Cor. 12:27). He also talks about the actual building where people gather to revere God (cf. 1 Cor. 11:18, 14:19). It can be inferred from the preceding that church in one sense refers to the actual building and, in another reason, to an assembly of believers. Moreover, seen from Paul's ecclesiology church designates a spiritual body of Christ, which the Church Fathers, such as St. Augustine, reaffirmed by teaching that the Church constitutes Christ's body as a collective reality of persons. Pope Pius XII promoted this doctrine in his encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi* when he reiterated that Christ's body is the visible Church dispersed all around the world to carry out the work of Christ's redemption (*Mystici corporis Christi*, 44). In this regard, the "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," *Lumen Gentium* developed and emphasized the universal nature of the mystical body. By declaring that, "All men are called to this union with Christ, who is the light of the world, from whom we go forth, through whom we live, and toward whom our whole life strains" (LG, 3). It is this unity of all people in Christ and with Christ that in the Catholic faith, the church is characterized as 'one, holy, catholic and apostolic.'

108. Church as mystery



The word sacrament comes from the Latin term *Sacramentum*, which Tertullian used technically to translate the Greek word *mysterion* as applied to pagan religious ceremonies confined only to a given religion's initiates. In ancient Greece, *mysterion* referred to the term used to describe the experience of high spiritual power. Meanwhile, *Sacramentum* in the ancient Roman world meant an oath of allegiance made by soldiers to their commander and Rome's gods, which involved a religious

ceremony in a sacred place. It also told a pledge of money to be held in escrow at the temple by two disputing parties. Tertullian used *Sacramentum* to explain the ceremony of Christian initiation, rites baptism and confirmation, administered to recruits. During the fifth century, the concept of sacraments as signs of sacred reality by which any religious symbol or material became a sacrament like sacred statues; was prominent owing to the definition of a sacrament by Augustine as a 'visible sign of invisible grace. However, during the twelfth century, the word sacrament's Christian application became more restricted to seven sacraments. These are fundamentally understood as signs instituted by Christ to give grace. As can be observed, the above definition is patterned after Augustine's doctrine of sacraments, which viewed religious symbols and ceremony or anything sacred to be sacraments. However, sacraments are not merely signs; rather, they cause the reality of what they are pointing to be present, as Thomas Aquinas noted. Sacraments are the vehicles of grace that they convey, and they are necessary for salvation. As such, sacraments are true signs of Christ's presence.

109. Understanding the Church as the sacrament of Christ

One of the most profound and paradigmatic achievements of the Vatican II council is the emphasis placed on the Church's Christocentric nature. This definition has resulted in a growing consciousness that Christ intended to save the whole world. In this vein, the Church has undergone a renewed vigour and enthusiasm to make Christ present everywhere and to everyone through her constant mandate of spreading Christ's saving works. Theologians agree that the Church is the sacrament of Christ because she makes Christ present. Some theologians see the Church as a secondary sacrament since she carries on the mission of Jesus, who "was the primary sacrament, the sign of God's presence and divine action in the world." In Christ, God was made manifest, and it is in the Church that Christ is made visible through his continuous self-communication in the sacraments. The Church's conception as a sacrament of Christ brings to the fore a perpetual and fundamental relationship. The Church has with Jesus her participation in the economy of redemption. Vatican II affirms this when it declares that the Church is "the universal sacrament of salvation" (LG, 48). In other words, the Church's relationship to Jesus is one modelled on the continuous operation and manifestation of God's presence in humanity's history until the second coming of Jesus. Consequently, the Church must exist as a typical and enduring sign and proclaimer of the message that salvation is found in Jesus Christ.



110. The church as an expression of God's grace



The whole idea of understanding the Church as a sacrament is that Jesus intended his presence in the world to be continuous and perpetual until the eschatological close of the world. He explicitly told his disciples; "*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you;*

and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age (Matt. 28: 19-20)". This statement, among others, supports the concept of Jesus as the founder of the Church. It seems to be the starting point of understanding the Church as his sacrament. Karl Rahner sees the Church as a fundamental sacrament and a basis of other sacraments when he maintains that by instituting the Church, Christ equally instituted the other sacraments.

Moreover, Rahner contends that: “The Church is the abiding presence of that first sacramental word of definitive grace ... By the very fact of being in that way the enduring presence of Christ in the world, the Church is truly the fundamental sacrament, the well-spring of the sacraments in the strict sense. It follows that by administering sacraments, the Church makes the saving presence of Christ tangible. As the Church dispenses the sacraments in which grace is effected, the Church, as a visible expression of this grace, is herself a sacrament of Christ.

111. The church in action

One could ask how the Church as a sacrament of Christ is realized. In other words, one would be interested to know how the Church as a symbol or sign concretely functions as sacraments do in effecting the grace they signify. The Church's concept as a sacrament of Christ is to be viewed as a rich theological exploration. The technical employees of the term sacrament, as applied to the seven sacraments of the Church. Based on Pauline theology, *mysterion* does not refer to something



secret but rather to recognizable God's salvific acts in human history as in Jesus's life (cf. Eph. 1: 9-10). In early Christian writing, especially in the fifth century, *Sacramentum*, which rendered the Greek term *mysterion* indicated the visible divine saving operation or event in human history. Therefore, from this broader perspective, the Church is a sacrament since its historical existence presents God's saving grace by the Holy's power that continues to sustain her existence. “The Church in her visible historical form is herself an intrinsic symbol of the eschatologically triumphant grace of God; in that Spatio-temporal visible form, this grace is made present.” - Karl Rahner

In line with the above, it can be stressed that the Church only functions as the sacrament of Jesus insofar as she is the living reference to Jesus and a sign to pointing to the final establishment of the Kingdom of God. The people of God constituting the ‘mystical body’ of Christ, the Church presents to the world the saving grace of the Lord through the various ministries and charisms of her members. Wonderful gifts we have in our hands.

112. Both hands of the church

On the one hand, as a mystical body of Christ represented by the communion of the faithful, individual members of the Church makes Christ manifest when they show deep belief in God and practice what they believe. They offer their constant communion with him in worship and service, which is exhibited in the



execution of their ministries and charisms. In a nutshell, individual church members manifest Christ in their striving for perfect and holy lives. On the other hand, through the head of the mystical body of Christ, sacramentally represented by ordained ministers, the Church manifests Christ as she carries out her mission in *martyria* (witness) when she proclaims the word of God. Also, in *leitourgia*, she celebrates sacraments and *diakonia* (service) when she exercises charity ministry. Through *martyria* the Church proclaims the gospel of Christ by announcing to all people the message of salvation wrought in Christ and by which she invites all people to the reality of attaining salvation. By preaching the word of God, the Church participates in the prophetic ministry of Christ. Like when she is *preaching good news to the poor, proclaiming release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, and proclaiming the acceptable year of the Lord* (Lk. 4: 18-19).” Similarly, by celebrating sacraments, the Church relives and makes present the paschal mystery of Christ to all humanity. In doing so, she participates in the priestly office of Christ.

113. The beacon of peace and justice

The Church also gives witness to the love and benevolence of God to all people. For this reason, the Church stands out in the world as the beacon of peace, justice, and beloved by carrying out works of charity, speaking against injustices, and preaching unity. In this way, the Church takes part in Christ's leadership through this leadership is to be understood in terms of service as Christ himself taught and lived (Matt. 20: 26-27, John 13:14).



114. Mystery in the mirror



Exploring the Church's concept a the sacrament of Christ to the world, her light has to enlighten all people. Also, the technical usage of the word sacrament to the seven Christian sacraments we know with the broader theological inquiry of the Church as a sacrament of Christ perhaps the Church may be seen as the eighth sacrament. However, we need further reflection on the Church as the visible sign of Christ and her task to present his mystery and operations as other sacraments do. Therefore, the Church we are in always has to be a sign of Christ's presence.

115. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" Mt. 5:8

Even when our actions are all in line, it is still hard to live with a chaste heart, a chaste attitude, and pure fantasies. The purity of heart and intention is very difficult. To be chaste does not mean that we become asexual. Chastity is not about denying our sexuality but about properly channelling it. To be chaste is to be pure of heart. That's the biblical notion of purity. Jesus does not ask us to pray for virtue. He asks us to pray for "purity of heart": Blessed are those pure of heart; they shall see God. They also channel their sexuality properly. What is the purity of the heart? To be pure of heart is to relate to others and the world in a way that respects and honours the full dignity, value, and destiny of every person and everything. To be pure of heart is to see others as God sees them. - Ron Rolheiser



116. Are we pure in heart?



The purity of heart would have us love others with their good (and not our own) in mind. Karl Rahner suggests that we are pure of heart when we see others against an infinite horizon, namely, inside a vision that sees the other's dignity, individuality, life, dreams, and sexuality within the biggest ambiance of all, God's eternal plan. The purity of the heart is the purity of intention and full respect in love. Given the power of sexuality inside us and the strength of our human drives and yearnings in general, it is not easy to live a chaste life. It is even more difficult and rare to have a pure spirit, an immaculate heart, chaste daydreams, and chaste intentions. Our hearts want what they

want and pressure us to ignore the consequences. We can easily feel a certain aversion to praying for chastity. But that is because we do not understand purity properly: It is not a deadening of the heart, a stripping away of our sexuality, but a deeper maturity that lets our sexual energies flow out in a more life-giving way. - Ron Rolheiser

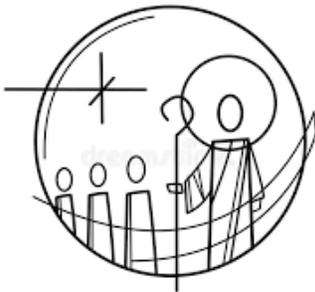
117. Give something to eat

(Lk 15:32-39) When the disciples initially approach Jesus and ask him whether they should go into the neighbouring towns and buy bread, their question betrays that they are unaware that they are with the bread of life. They will understand it later. They are in the presence of that it is the object of all the world's hunger and which, in its bounty, is unlimited and infinite. Yet, they want to go off and buy food elsewhere because that is what humans do when hungry. The lesson contained in this is when you are with the bread of life, there is no need to go off to buy food, or anything else, elsewhere!



You have all the resources you need to feed every kind of hunger if you believe Him. The disciples' wanting to go off to buy food elsewhere betrays their lack of awareness of this. They didn't see the contradiction, the irony, in their request. They didn't understand the equation's meaning: so little food, so many people. A few small loaves of bread and a few fish are hopelessly inadequate to feed a crowd of thousands. It goes against common sense to put such a pathetically meagre fare before so many people. How can five loaves and two fish feed a crowd of thousands? They will find the answer later when they saw it, and they were satisfied. It takes time to measure the presence of the Master's capacity in their life and who He is as the bread of eternal life offered at the Passover meal.

118. And keep this always in mind



"Now I have something to tell your elders (priests-shepherds): I am an elder myself and a witness to the sufferings of Christ, and with you, I have a share in the glory that is to be revealed. Be the shepherds of the flock of God that is entrusted to you: watch over it, not simply as a duty but gladly, because God wants it, not for sordid money, but because you are eager to do it. Never be a dictator over any group put in your charge, but be an example that the whole flock can follow. When the chief shepherd appears, you will be given the crown of unfading glory."
(1 Peter 5:1-4) Wow, something to keep always in mind.

119. The body of Christ

When we say the Body of Christ, we refer, at the same time, to Jesus, the Eucharist, and the community of faith, the believers. This expression is not a figure of speech. To say that the body of believers is the body of Christ is not to say something that Scripture does not tell us. The reverse is true. Scripture, in particular St. Paul, never tells us that the body of believers replaces Christ's body, nor that it represents Christ's body, nor even that it is Christ's mystical body. It says simply: "We are Christ's body." This reality must



also be understood physically. To say that the body of believers is the body of Christ is not anymore a figure of speech than to say that the Eucharist is the body of Christ. The Eucharist and the body of believers are not like the body of Christ. Each is the body of Christ. The mystery of presence and reality. At this speed, nobody can stop you.

120. Who are you, Coronavirus?



I do want to make this a time for some more prayer. I am haunted by what this virus is doing to lives all over the world. My prayer is for those suffering, those with compromised health living in deadly fear of catching it, for those who have lost their jobs and don't know how they will get through this. For millions of refugees living in unsafe situations with no place to go and now with less hope than before, those caught at home in conditions of family violence, for kids who are lonely for companionship and play and are frustrated and bored. We have millions of people in Italy, New York, and China trapped in their houses and cannot even go out for a walk. Also, people without healthcare cannot get the medicines they need and the general loneliness that so many are experiencing in isolation. A lot of prayers are needed. We are learning how to be grateful for friendship, support, and prayer. *It isn't often that the whole world feels this vulnerable time that we lose the illusion we control. It's a sobering time, a reflective time, a time to recognize that we are just human, and a time to count our blessing!*

121. God's goodness

What comes through with blinding clarity is our ability to forgive is the measure of our Christianity's depth. The forgiveness that we offer others is the indispensable condition that makes it possible for us to receive God's forgiveness and to pray meaningfully: 'Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.' It is in pardoning that we are pardoned. Our failure to offer pardon means that we have forgotten God's goodness or have not fully appreciated the unconditional forgiveness we have received from him. In God's goodness speed, we trust our life.



122. This time of trial



Just as Mary was close to her crucified son, so the Church is called to be close to the crucified of today: the poor, the suffering, the humiliated, the insulted. How can the Church stay close to these? I hope, like Mary. It is not enough to pity their sufferings or even to try to alleviate them. It is too little. Anyone can do this, even those who know nothing of the resurrection. The Church must transmit hope, proclaiming that suffering is not absurd, that it is meaningful, because there will be a resurrection after death. She must give the reason for

the hope that she has (see 1 Pet 3:15). People need hope to live just as they need oxygen to breathe. The Church also needs hope to advance in history and not be crushed by internal and external trials. Pope Francis urged us to live this time of trial "with strength, responsibility, and hope." Let's take his appeal for hope in trusting God.

123. Time for sister Hope

Hope has been and still is the poor relation among the theological virtues. The poet Charles Péguy has a beautiful image in this regard. He says that the three theological virtues - faith, hope, and charity are like three sisters: two grown-ups and one still a child. They walk together on the street holding hands, the two big ones on the sides, and the little girl in the center. The little girl is, of course, Hope. Everyone seeing them says: "It is certainly the two grown-ups who drag the girl in the center!". They are wrong: the little girl



Hope drags the two sisters because if hope stops, everything stops. Perhaps there's something you've ardently hoped for, hoped that God would intervene, and nothing happened. The next time you open again, and nothing happened, think about it. Things before all your supplications and tears, maybe despite some indications that God would listen to you this time. If you go on hoping again and again, if you never cease to expect, you become addicted to hope right to the end.

124. Greater grace you ask for

To live by grace, you allow God to delude you, deceive you on this earth as often as he wishes. More than that, it means being happy deep down in some remote corner of your heart that God didn't listen to you because, in this way, he has allowed you to show him another proof of your hope, to make yet another act of hope, which is increasingly more difficult for you each time. God has granted you a much greater blessing than the one you asked for: the grace



to hope in him. He has eternity to let us “forgive Him” for the delay!

125. Sister Hope, where are you?



However, we must remember that hope is not just a beautiful and poetic interior disposition, as difficult as you like, but that it doesn't call for an activity or specific tasks and is, therefore, in the end, pointless. On the contrary, to hope means precisely that there is still something we can do, a duty to be done, and that we are not, therefore, at the mercy of vain or crippling inactivity. Thus, even when in vain we have done our utmost to change a difficult situation, we still have something great to do that will keep us occupied and keep desperation far from us, and that is to endure patiently to the end. Mary did as she hoped beneath the cross, and she is now ready to help us do the same. Faith - (Hope) - Charity = The three sisters we must have as companions for the journey. Hope is what will sustain us in the days yet to come. It also will make it possible for us to experience joy in this present day, no matter what sorrow presently afflict us. Again, death is not the end. We were made for life. We were made for joy. And in Christ, that life and happiness will be ours. Death brings the fulfillment of that life and happiness, but we can live in it now. Even during grief. Even in war. Even amid plague and poverty and confusion. If we are in Christ, we have nothing to fear from the terrors of the world. The life inside us cannot be killed. Nobody can rob us of the hope that fills us - the hope of eternal life. "O death, where is thy sting?" 1 Cor. 15:55

126. That morning of the resurrection

'But Mary stayed outside the tomb weeping. And as she wept, she bent over into the tomb and saw two angels in white sitting there, one at the head and one at the feet where the body of Jesus had been. And they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken my Lord, and I don't know where they laid him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus there but did not know it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" She thought it was the gardener and said to him, "Sir, if you carried him away, tell me where you laid him, and I will take him." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni," which means Teacher.' (John 20:11-18)



127. Are you looking for me?



On the morning of the resurrection, Mary Magdala meets the newly risen Jesus, but she did not recognize him. He approaches her and asks (in words that repeat his question at the opening of the Gospel): “*What are you searching for?*” She explains that she is searching for the body, the dead body, of Jesus. He says just one word to her in response: “Mary.” He calls her by her name and, in that, she recognizes him. In

Jesus’ response to Mary Magdala, we learn the answer to life’s most fundamental question: Are you looking for me? Ultimately all our searching is for one thing: to hear God’s voice, lovingly and individually, call us by name. There comes a moment in the night for each of us when nothing will console us other than this, hearing our names pronounced by the mouth of God.

128. Struggling to be inside the Present Moment

During the last years of his life, Thomas Merton lived in a hermitage to find more solitude in his life. But isolation is a very elusive thing, and he found that it was continually escaping him almost impossible to hold it, catch it, or find it. One morning, however, Thomas sensed that for this moment, at least, he had found it. But what he experienced was somewhat of a surprise to him. It turns out that solitude is not some altered state of consciousness or even some

heightened sense of God or the transcendent in our lives. As he experienced it, Isolation was being fully inside his skin, inside the present moment, gratefully aware of the immense richness inside the ordinary human experience of the moment. Solitude consists of being enough inside of your own life to experience what is there. But that’s not easy. We rarely find ourselves truly inside of the present moment. Why? Because of the way we are built. We are overcharged for this world.



When God put us into this world, as the author of the Book of Ecclesiastes tells us, he put “timelessness” into our hearts, and because of that, we don’t make easy peace with our lives, and in the time we are. We read this in the famous passage about the seasons’ rhythm in the Book of Ecclesiastes: 3,1-11. There is a time, and a season for everything, we are told: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to gather in what is produced; a time to kill, and a time to heal and the text goes on. But after listing this natural rhythm of time and the seasons, the author ends with these words: God has made everything

suitable for its own time **but has put timelessness into the human heart** so that human beings are out of sync with the rhythms of this world from beginning to end. The Hebrew word used to express “timelessness” is Haolam, a term suggesting “eternity” and “transcendence.” Some English translations put it this way: God has put a sense of past and future into our hearts. Perhaps that captures it best, at least in terms of how we generally experience this in our lives.

129. The past

We know from experience how difficult it is to be inside the present moment because the past and the future won't leave us alone. These experiences are forever colouring the present. The past haunts us with half-forgotten lullabies and melodies that trigger memories. We live with loves that have been found and lost, with wounds that have never healed, and with inside feelings of nostalgia, regret, and wanting to cling to something that once was so real and present in our lives. The past is forever sowing restlessness into the present moment all the time we indulge in memories.



130. The future

And the future pushes itself into the present as well, offering us promises and threats, forever asking for our attention, sowing anxiety into our lives, and permanently stripping us of the capacity to simply drink in the present. The present is forever being coloured by obsessions, desires, headaches, and anxieties with little to do with people we are sitting with at the table of the present time. The future has surprises; we are not able to catch them yet.



131. Restless present

Philosophers and poets have had various names for this: Plato called it “a madness that comes from the gods”; Hindu poets have called it “a nostalgia for the infinite”; Shakespeare speaks of “immortal longings,” and Augustine, in perhaps the most famous naming of them all, called it an incurable restlessness that God has put into the human heart to keep it from finding a home in something less than His infinite and eternal love: ***You have made us for yourself, o Lord and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.***



132. The happy clock limitation

And so it isn't easy to be peacefully present in our own lives, cozy inside of our skins. But this "torment," this human limitation, has its purpose. In a remarkable passage that both names the struggle and suggests what Henri Nouwen puts it this way: Our life is a short time in expectation, a time in which sadness and joy kiss each other at every moment. There is a quality of sadness that pervades all the moments of our life. It seems that there is no such thing as a clear-cut pure joy, but that even in the happiest moments of our existence, we sense a touch of sadness. In every satisfaction, there is an awareness of limitations. In every success,



there is a fear of jealousy. Behind every smile, there is a tear. In every embrace, there is loneliness. In every friendship, distance. And in all forms of light, there is the knowledge also of surrounding darkness. This intimate experience in which every bit of life is touched by a bit of death can point us beyond the limits of our existence. The image and likeness we are made of is colling and making us look forward in expectation to that day when all will be ok, and our hearts will be filled with perfect joy, a joy that no one shall take away from us. The clock we measure our time is chronologically almost perfect for now, but we also need another watch that gives sense to our present journey. We need a clock that measures time at the speed of eternity.

133. Are you ready?

Following some considerations about death and how to prepare for it is interesting and challenging our present. He shared a conversation about this inevitable topic of life with an elderly monk at a retreat. The monk shared with him about the ups and downs of 50 years of monastic life. At the end of this, he said to him: "Give me some hints on how I should prepare to die! What should I do to make myself more ready for death?" The heaviness of such a question is enough to intimidate a person with a spirituality deeper than ours. When it's



asked by someone twice our age whose heart seems already deeply charitable, faith-filled, and wonderfully-mellowed through years of quiet prayer, then perhaps the best answer is silence. It is not easy to find an offer or a new solution to this specific question. But it's a good question. How do we prepare to die? How do we live so that death does not catch us unaware? What are we supposed to do so that we don't leave this world with too much-unfinished business? *Had*

that old monk cornered Jesus and asked him the same question he asked, I suspect Jesus might have said: Prepare for death by living more fully now. Work at loving more deeply, less selfishly, more affectionately, and more gratefully. 'Tell those close to you that you love them, and death will never catch you like a thief in the night.'

134. Ready 1.



The first thing that needs to be said is that anything we do to prepare for death should not be too morbid or be something that distances or separates us from life and each other. We don't qualify for death by withdrawing from life our regular life. The opposite is also true. The amusement places are created not only for profit but often to distract our minds from the pressure of social, spiritual, or moral and financial troubles we do not want to face, and they are a burden. So we need some time of distraction, even if it is just for a moment, that frees our minds from thinking about it. What prepares us for death, anoints us for it, is a deeper, more intimate, fuller entry into life as we believe in our tradition of faith. We get ready for death by beginning to live

our lives as we should have been living them in the fullness of time and space we are. How do we do that? Good question!

135. Ready 2.



Somebody suggested that the kingdom of heaven is open to all who are willing to grab it and to look to sit down in it. That has to be also done with the people we loved so much in this time of life. We would like to spend eternity with them. So we prepare for death in the way we share even now the blessing of life, faith, and love. In the Kingdom, we would like to sit down, if possible, at a table with him or her, the family and friends we cherish. The best way we can prepare to die is to begin to stretch our hearts to love ever wider and wider and start to love in a way that takes us beyond the natural narrowness and discrimination within our

hearts. Beyond our temperament, wound, timidity, ignorance, selfishness, race, gender, religion, circumstance, and our place in history, we can be ready.

136. Ready 3.

We prepare to die by pushing ourselves to love more deeply. In that sense, the best preparation for death for each one of us is an ever-widening entry and participation in life. In this way, we are fully alive, not half-dead. Ready to enter the perfect experience at the speed of the resurrection.



137. Unconditional love.



John Powell, in his book - Unconditional Love - tells the story of a young student who was dying of cancer. In the final stages of his illness, he came to see Powell and said something to this effect: *"Father, you once told us something in class that has made it easier for me to die young. You said: 'There are only two potential tragedies in life, and dying young is not one of them. These are the two tragedies: If you go through life and don't love and if you go through life and you don't tell those whom you love that you love them.'"*

138. Fully alive.

The story of a young fellow who had cancer at the age of 24 reminds us of something interesting. When the doctors told him that his cancer was terminal, he realized how much he loved his family. He had been able to tell his family and others how much they meant to him. He had expressed love. People ask him: *'What's it like being 24 years old and dying?'* He told them: *'It's not so bad. It is better than being 50 years old and having no values!'*

139. Loving deeply.

We prepare ourselves for death by loving deeply and expressing love, appreciation, and gratitude. Jesus says as much. When the woman at Bethany poured an entire bottle of expensive ointment on his feet and dried his feet with her hair, he commented on her lavish expression of affection and gratitude by saying: "She has anointed me for my impending death."



What he meant should not be piously misinterpreted. He wasn't saying: "Since I'm soon to die, let her waste this ointment!" He was saying rather: "When I come to die, it's going to be easier because, at this moment, I am truly tasting and enjoying life. It's easier to die when one has been, even for a moment, fully alive."

140. Time to do so.

What makes it difficult for us to die, beyond all the inborn instincts inside us that want us to live, is not so much fear of the afterlife or even fear that there might not be an afterlife. What makes it hard to die is that we have so much life yet to finish, and we end it by loving more deeply and expressing our love more freely as we have time to do so.

141. The sound of silence

*Hello darkness, my old friend
I've come to talk with you again
Because a vision softly creeping
Left its seeds while I was sleeping
And the vision that was planted in my brain
Remains
Within the sound of silence
In restless dreams, I walked alone
Narrow streets of cobblestone
'Neath the halo of a street lamp
I turned my collar to the cold and damp
When the flash of a neon light stabbed my eyes
That split the night
And touched the sound of silence
And in the naked light, I saw
Ten thousand people, maybe more
People talking without speaking
People hearing without listening
People writing songs that voices never share
And no one dares
Disturb the sound of silence
"Fools," said I, "You do not know
Silence like cancer grows
Hear my words that I might teach you
Take my arms that I might reach you."
But my words, like silent raindrops, fell
And echoed
In the wells of silence*



*And the people bowed and prayed
To the neon god, they made
And the sign flashed out its warning
In the words that it was forming
And the sign said, "The words of the prophets
Are written on the subway walls
And tenement halls."*

Whispered in the sounds of silence. - Songwriters: Paul Simon

What is best: "a life of silence" or to sit in "the silence of life."? In the silence of life, God is speaking but not in the land of silence. Nothing so much approximates the language of God, as does silence. It's a language we need to practice - this is the way we may listen to God's voice. "When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven ... " (Rev. 8,1).

" And after the fire, a sound of sheer silence ..." 1King 19,12

" Listen to me; be silent, and I will teach you wisdom ..." Job. 33,33

" My soul would soon have lived in the land of silence ..." Ps 94,17

142. The well that nothing exhausts?

Perhaps this is the fundamental basis for our hope. For all of us, there are times in life when we seem to lose a clear vision of our future, when we look at the world or ourselves and, consciously or unconsciously, think: "It's too late! This situation has gone too far! Nothing can redeem this situation! All the chances to change this have been used up! It's hopeless!" But is this natural, depressive feeling, a loss of hope may share his or her bitterness so present in our fragile mortal life. Not necessarily. This feeling has to have the maximum flavour of the moment. Indeed it is when we feel this way when we have succumbed to the sense that we have exhausted all of our chances, it's then that hope can arrive and replace its counterfeits, wishful thinking, and natural optimism.



143. What is hope?



We generally confuse hope with either wishful thinking or natural optimism, both of which have little to do with hope. Wishful thinking has no foundation. We can wish to win a lottery or to have the body of a world-class athlete, but that wish has no reality upon which to build. It's pure

fantasy, a dream with open eyes in the middle of the day. For its part, optimism is based upon natural temperament and has little to do with hope. We may say that the optimist is chained to cheerfulness. Hope isn't a wish or a mood; it is a way of life that needs to be grounded on a sufficient reality. What kind of that acceptable reality shall we look at today? Somebody says that our hope should not be dropped on what we see on the news of the world each night because that news constantly changes and, on any given night, can be so negative to provide us with little ground for hope. He's right. Whether the world seems better or worse on a given evening is hardly sufficient cause for us to trust that in the end, all will be well. Things might change the next night drastically.

144. Hope in God's well

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a man of hope rather than of optimism, in answer to a question, once suggested that there are two sufficient reasons for hope. Asked what would happen if we blew up the world with an atomic bomb, he replied: That would set things back a few million years, but God's plan for the earth would still come about. Why? Because Christ promised it and, in the resurrection, God shows that God has the power to deliver on that promise.



Hope is based on God's promise and God's power. But there is still another reason for our hope, something else that grounds our hope and gives us sufficient reason to live in trust that eventually all will be well, namely, God's inexhaustibility. Beneath us and our universe, there is *a well that nothing can exhausts*. To discover this well is to know that hope has no limits.

145. It is never too late

And it is this super generous well of God which we so often forget or slim down to the limited size of our hearts and imaginations: God is an extravagant God, very gracious, almost unimaginable in the scope of physical creation, a God who has created and is still creating billions upon billions of universes. Moreover, this extravagant God, beyond our imagination in creativity, is equally unimaginable in patience



and mercy. There is never an end to our number of chances. There is no limit to God's patience. There is nothing that can ever exhaust the divine well of his mercy and compassion. It's never too late! God's creativity and understanding are inexhaustible more than billions and billions of galaxies. Hope to open us to contemplate this unlimited time, space, and will of the one whose name is *"I Am Who I Am."*

146. God's hands safer than our own



Everything that Jesus reveals about God assures us that God's hands are much gentler and safer than our own. God is the father of the prodigal son (Lk. 15:11-32), and, as we see in that parable, God is more understanding and more compassionate to us than we are to ourselves. In that parable, we see how God does not wait for us to return and apologize after we stray and betray. God runs out to meet us and doesn't

ask for an apology. We see too in the stories just preceding the prodigal son's story how God does not leave us on our own after we sin, to come to our senses and return repentantly to him. Rather he leaves the ninety-nine others and comes looking for us, anxious, longing, and ready to carry us home, despite our sin.

147. Infinite chances.

Jesus gives us also the assurance that God does not give us just one chance, but seventy-seven times seven opportunities, infinite possibilities. We don't ruin lives forever by making a mistake or even by making that mistake again. St. Paul's farewell message in the Letter to the Romans assures us that, even though we can't ever get our lives fully right, it doesn't matter because, in the end, nothing, absolutely nothing, can separate us from God's love and his forgiveness. In this life and the next, we are in hands far safer and gentler than our own.



148. The God we trust.



God is not a God of punishment but a God of forgiveness. God is not a God who records our sins but a God who washes them away. God is not a God who demands

perfection from us, but a God who asks for a contrite heart when we can't measure up. God is not a God who gives us only one chance, but a God who gives us infinite opportunities. God is not a God who waits for us to come to our senses after we have fallen, but a God who comes searching for us, full of understanding and care. God is not a calculating and parsimonious God in his gifts, but an extravagant God who sows seeds everywhere without regard for waste or worthiness. God is not powerless before evil and death, but a God who can raise dead bodies to life and redeem evil and hopelessness. God is not a God who is arbitrary and inconsistent, but a God who is utterly reliable in his promise and goodness. God is not stupid and unable to deal with our complexity, but a God who fashioned the depth of the universe and deepest recesses of the human psyche. Ultimately, God is not a God who cannot protect us but is a God in whose hands and in whose promise we are far safer than when we rely upon ourselves. - Ron Rolheiser, OMI (some in 142-148)

149. Spirit of God: who are you?

We first meet the person of the Holy Spirit in the opening line of the bible: *"In the beginning, there was a formless void and the Spirit of God - as wind hovered over the waters."* In the early chapters of the scripture, the Holy Spirit is presented as a physical force, a wind that comes from the very mouth of God. He shapes and orders physical creation but is, in fact, the energy that lies at the base of everything, animate and inanimate alike: *"Take away our breath, and everything returns to dust."* The ancients believed that there was a soul in everything, and that soul, which was God's breath, held everything together and gave it meaning. They also understood that this same breath that animates and orders physical creation is spiritual, the source of all wisdom, harmony, peace, creativity, morality, and fidelity. God's breath was understood to be as spiritual as it is physical, as harmonious as it is creative, and as wise as it gives life to everything. For them, the breath of God was one force and never did contradict itself. The physical and the spiritual world were not set against each other. One spirit was understood to be the source of both. God's image in us is 100% physical and 100% spiritual, but for some reason, we incline to divide or deny this unity. Perhaps so often, we deny what we can't see or comprehend. We need to understand things in that same way. In all his and her fullness, we need to let the Holy Spirit animate our lives and bring to unity what we are made.



150. The season to grow

The desert spares no one. Nights eventually find us all. We have our good seasons, but we have seasons too where we lose relationships, lose health, lose friends, lose spouses, lose children, lose jobs, lose prestige, lose our grip, lose our dreams, lose our meaning, and end up humbled, alone, and lonely. But that's a place too, a valid and important one. Inside that place, our souls are being shaped in ways we cannot understand but in ways that will stretch and widen them for a deeper love and happiness in the future. Life is always a new Season to grow in wisdom and more.

151. We are Children



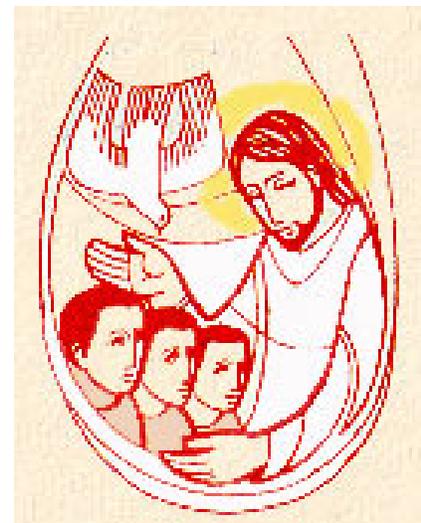
"Think of the love that the Father has lavished on us by letting us be called God's children, and that is what we are. My dear people, we are already the children of God, but what we are to be in the future has not yet been revealed; all we know is that when it is revealed, we shall be like him because we shall see him as he is." (1John 3:1-2)

The privilege of being a child of God is an amazing gift, and since we are children of the same Father, we are family. This incredible gift is already present, so we do not have to wait in

the future to be thankful to the Father, who loves us so much.

152. They all answer, "Yes."

There is something new in our life every day according to the circumstances we are going through. The old part of us is also accumulating more and more every day, so the old is getting bigger, gathering more staff for the present and always available when we need it. Is this what we may call knowledge or wisdom. In Matthew's Gospel, there is an interesting quotation of Jesus about what is New and Old we may train for the Kingdom of God: *"Do you understand all these things?"* They answered, *"Yes."* And he replied, *"Then every scribe who has been instructed in the Kingdom of heaven is like the head of a household who brings from his storeroom both the new and the old. When Jesus finished these parables, he went away from there."* (Mt. 13.51-52). Now the scribes were legal experts in first-century Judaism.



Jesus is instructing his disciples about the Kingdom of God, telling them to evangelize and catechize the world. There is a treasure hidden in the Old Covenant and manifest in the New. In his gospel and ministry, Matthew follows this pattern: he continually cites the Old Testament to

explain its fulfillment in Jesus in the New Testament. The OT prepares or is fulfilled in the NT as the NT is prefigured in the OT. To understand is a gift, and knowing the Bible's storeroom, both the new and the old News is a blessing. "Do you understand all these things?" They answered, "Yes." What shall we answer?

153. Clean water

"I shall pour clean water over you, and you will be cleansed; I shall cleanse you of all your defilement and all your idols. I shall give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I shall remove the heart of stone from your bodies and give you a heart of flesh instead. I shall put my spirit in you and make you keep my laws and sincerely respect my observances." (Ezekiel 36:25-27).

Aren't we made all new at Baptism? Wow, nice washed!



154. Only two cheeks you have

In Matthew 5:39-40, Jesus says: "If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also." Scholars point out that in specifying the right cheek, he refers to a certain practice when a superior would strike a subordinate with the back of his right hand. The left hand was considered unclean and never used in public, even for something as base as slapping another. To hit someone in this way was intended for much more than simply inflicting physical pain. It was an act that asserted superiority and power over another. Picture the scenario: Someone is standing in arrogance, facing the person he is about to hit. He strikes with the back of his right hand, and thus the slap falls on the right cheek of the other. Now, if that other person turns her face to offer her left cheek, the attacker



can no longer hit her in the same way. He can still strike her, but no longer with that same gesture that asserts superiority over her but benevolence like a caress. At a deeper level, the fundamental chemistry of things is being challenged and redefined. The formerly victimized person has made a clear statement that the old order of things is now over by a simple body shift. She has directly placed herself in a position where she cannot be struck again as a subordinate or slave. She can still be struck, but to strike her now, in this new position, is very different than it was previously. To hit her now is to see yourself in a different light, as unjust, as vile, as someone whose time has passed. The striking now with the palm on the right cheek torn out to be like a caress, more like a blessing than a strike, more like a sign of friendship. During Jesus' passion, he is often struck, but never in such a way that it takes away his dignity. Jesus

had so positioned himself so that anyone who hit him found himself standing in front of a mirror that brutally exposed his illusion, pettiness, violence, and distance from the truth.

A higher, morally superior violence can never defeat power. It can only be exposed and shown to be what it is, vile and degrading to the person's soul perpetrating it.

155. How God works

"Then the LORD said: Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD; the LORD will pass by. There was a strong and violent wind rending the mountains and crushing rocks before the LORD—but the LORD was not in the wind; after the wind, an earthquake—but the LORD was not in the earthquake; after the earthquake, fire—but the LORD was not in the fire; after the fire, a light silent sound". (1King 19,11-12).

We tend to understand power by how it works in our world. There it works through popularity, through mass media, through historical privilege, through financial clout, through higher education, through special genius people, and, not infrequently, through raw aggression, greed, and spectacular events of nature or in the extraordinary events like miracles. But even a quick reading of scripture tells us that's not how God works. God works more through anonymity than through the headlines, more through the poor than the powerful, and more through those outside the circles of power than those inside them. When we examine how God works, we see it's no accident that Jesus was born outside the city and that after he was crucified, he was also buried outside the city. God's work in our world generally does not make the headlines. God never breaks into our world or our consciousness by showy displays of power. In a quiet, touching soul, God works more discretely, touching the conscience, in the sound of sheer silence where we are being touched, caressed, and loved by Him. We tend to understand power as residing in financial influence, political clout, charismatic talent, media influence, physical strength, athletic prowess, grace, health, and attractiveness. All of these are not bad in themselves. But, looked at more deeply, as we see in the birth of Christ, God's word bypasses the centers of power and is present instead of in the simplicity of hearts and consciences of those outside the city and simple.



156. We are all citizens



As human beings of this land that we call the world, we are all citizens of land with children entitled to specific identities with rights and duties in common. These are important identities, key parts of our self-definition, and they do demand certain loyalties, responsibilities, and tasks to make a moral claim on our freedom. We may never take these for granted and think

we don't owe anything to them. But we too easily lose perspective, as do whole countries, cultures, and religions. Too often, we lose the sense that we are also citizens of other realms, and each of these makes certain demands and moral claims on us. We are not just citizens of one country, members of one religion, family members, and members of one race and gender. We are citizens of the whole world, one with all who believe, brothers and sisters with all who are sincere, and part of humanity's one family. And these wider loyalties constitute our deepest identity. Jesus said as much: *"Who is my mother? Who are my brothers and sisters? Those who hear and keep the word of God are mother, brother, and sister to me!"* In saying that, Jesus redefined both our citizenship and our loyalties. Real family, real country, natural religion, and authentic identity are not based upon blood relationship, skin colour, gender, church affiliation, or shared geography. What makes real family, country, religion, or identity is a shared spirit, the Holy Spirit of charity, joy, peace, patience, goodness, long-suffering, faith, fidelity, gentleness, and honesty. These transcend all other boundaries of country, religion, family, race, and gender. They are what we ultimately ask for our participation in loyalty.

Our humanity and our faith make us citizens of many worlds. We are for complete loyalties to not name intolerance, narrowness, racism, sexism, self-interest, and indifference to others' suffering as a virtue. I believe this thought's evolution will bring to our humanity a fresh and healthy new way of life. We are made for it.

157. How dry we were



"The hand of the LORD came upon me, and he led me out in the spirit of the LORD and set me in the center of the broad valley. It was filled with bones. He made me walk among them in every direction. So many lay on the surface of the valley! How dry they were! He asked me: Son of man, can these bones come back to life? "Lord GOD," I answered, "you alone know that." Then he said to me: Prophecy over these bones, and say to them: Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Listen! I will make breath enter you so you may come to life. I will put sinews on you, make

flesh grow over you, cover you with skin, and put breath into you so you may come to life. Then you shall know that I am the LORD. I prophesied as I had been commanded. A sound started up as I was prophesying, rattling like thunder. The bones came together, bone joining to bone. As I watched, sinews appeared on them, flesh grew over them, skin covered them on top, but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me: Prophecy to the breath, prophesy, son of man! Say to the breath: Thus says the Lord GOD: From the four winds come, O breath, and breathe into these slain that they may come to life. I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath entered them; they came to life and stood on their feet, a vast army. He said to me: Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel! They are saying, "Our bones are dried up, our hope is lost, and we are cut off." Therefore, prophesy and say to them: Thus says the Lord GOD: Look! I will open your graves; I will make you come up out of your graves, my people, and bring

you back to the land of Israel. You shall know that I am the LORD when I open your graves and make you come up out of them, my people! I will put my spirit in you that you may come to life, and I will settle you in your land. Then you shall know that I am the LORD. I have spoken; I will do it—oracle of the LORD." (Ez. 37:1-14)

158. Meat to soul-bodies



For sure, the prophet Ezekiel's vision - the valley with dry bones - How dry they were, reveals God's power to turn Israel's defeat and destruction of the situation of the Juda exile in Babilon an occasion of renewal and life restoration. The bones coming to life with this wonderful graphic description of being covered with flesh could also point to a new life in Christ and the resurrection of the body on the last day. We will receive back our body but transformed like the body of Jesus after the resurrection. God's breath - spirit - the gift of creation was life for Adam

and Eve is always at work and still sweet promise in the time that He pleases. This new flesh on the dry bones is a manifestation of the power of the one who says I am the Lord, the same person who gave life to and invited Adam and Eve to participate in the gift of creation. *"Bone of my bones - and flesh of my flesh,"* Adam said when he saw Eve for the first time. Eve became the mother of all living beings. God's motherhood is given to humanity, so all the mothers the gift to cover bones with flesh - they give meat to soul-bodies, wonderfully and marvellously they procreate.

159. Faith is a call to believe

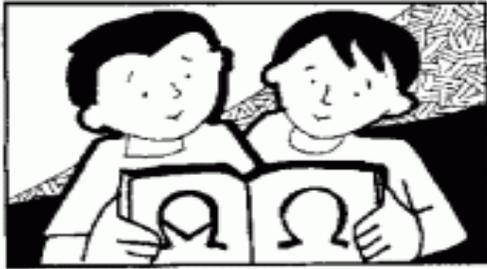
By Fr. Daniel Cardó (#158-162)

Fr. Daniel Cardó received his doctorate from Maryvale Institute and held the Benedict XVI Chair for Liturgical Studies at St. John Vianney Theological Seminary in Denver. He is also a visiting professor at the Augustine Institute. Fr. Cardó is the author of What Does It Mean to Believe?: Faith in Joseph Ratzinger's Thought. The act of Christian faith has an essentially real character that constitutes perhaps the most serious challenge for those who take the action of faith: to believe "that the fate of all history, our fate, depends on one individual: Jesus of Nazareth." By considering that everything depends on one individual man, Jesus of Nazareth, the Christian faith affirms its originality in the context of the history of religions, and at the same



time, its greatest challenge: the eminently personal character of faith. “Only God is absolute,” but at the same time, this absolute has the characteristic of being “relative,” Creator and revealer, or as the previous tradition says, “Person.” God is not an abstract idea, an eternal spirit far from us, and impersonal first mover: God is a personal being.

160. God has a name



The name of God manifests His being: “God has a name, and God calls us by our name. He is a Person, and He seeks the person. He has a heart, and He seeks our heart.” However, God's name revealed to Moses in the burning bush does not tell us everything. Only in Jesus, in His reputation as His person's expression, does God fully communicate His message about Himself. His name contains the word Yahweh but adds His mission: Yeshua—to save. “**I am who am**’—

thanks to Jesus, this now means: **‘I am the one who saves you.’** His being is salvation.” This salvation is offered to us in the person of Jesus Christ, through the gift of faith. Like Simon Peter that day at the district of Caesarea Philippi by faith, we may answer: “*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*” (See Mt. 16.13-20)

161. I believe in you

The personal dimension of faith remains fully manifested in Jesus Christ. In our relationship with Him, we can understand the depth of a fundamental affirmation by Ratzinger: the central formula of our Christian faith “is not ‘I believe in something,’ but *‘I believe in you.’*” As Christians, we do not believe in a vague and distant divinity, in some spiritual foundation of the universe, but in God as a real person with whom we have a relationship of true communion and discover the meaning of His presence and our lives.



162. God made man



At the same time, we can't say that Jesus Christ is only a man with a privileged relationship with God, like one of the prophets. He is God-made man, and therefore He is the full answer to the desire for the infinite that dwells in the human heart, a solution that is both infinite and close to us. We can see the meaning of the world in His life as a person we can encounter. From this revelation, we can live with faith and trust Him as the basis for a new existence. We can understand why religion is both “standing firm” and “understanding.” We are

dazzled by the newness of this life we experience.

163. I believe - I trust you

This personal dimension of faith frees it from all possible refuge in limited theories and brings it to the realm of confidence. To say, "I believe," means to say, "I trust you," or even as much as I rely upon you." For this reason, the simplicity that wells up from love and gives us the absolute certainty for living, even during difficulties, is amazing. "There will be moments in life when, in all kinds of gloom and darkness, faith falls back upon the simple, 'Yes, I believe you, Jesus of Nazareth; I believe that in you was revealed that divine purpose which allows me to live with confidence, tranquility, patience, and courage.'" It bears repeating that we do not believe that faith is easy or that everything will always be clear to our senses. We believe because we trust, and from that trust, we accept what is told and offer to us. "As long as this core remains in place, man is living by faith, even if for the moment he finds many of the details of faith obscure, not clear to our practical human logic."



164. Mourning loved ones



Our culture doesn't give us easy permission to mourn. Its underlying ethos is that we move on quickly from loss and hurt, keep our grief quiet, remain strong always, and get on with life. But mourning is vital to our health, something we owe to ourselves. Without mourning, our only choice is to grow hard and bitter in the face of disappointment, rejection, and loss. And these will always make themselves felt. We have many things to mourn in life: *We are forever losing people and things. Loved ones die, relationships die, friends*

move away, a marriage falls apart, a love we want but can't have obsesses us, a dream ends in disappointment, our children grow away from us, jobs are lost, and so too one day, our youth and our health. Beyond these many losses that ask for our grief, there's the need to grieve the simple inadequacy of our lives, the perfect symphony, and consummation that we could never have.

165. How do we mourn formula

How do we mourn so that our mourning is not an unhealthy self-indulgence but a process that restores us to health and go



ahead in the journey? There's no simple formula, and the recipe is different for everyone. Like loving, Grieving has to respect our unique situation, what we're comfortable with and not. But some things are the same for all of us as human beings. First, there's the need to accept and acknowledge our loss and the pain we're holding. Denial of either loss or hurt is never a good friend. The frustration and helplessness within which we find ourselves must be accepted and accepted with the knowledge too that there's no place to put the pain except to give it back to the earth itself, to the heaviness of the oceans from which ultimately comes the saltwater which makes up our tears. Our tears connect us always to the oceans that spawned us.

166. Mourning is a process



Also, mourning is a process that takes time, sometimes a lot of time, rather than something we can achieve quickly by a simple decision. We cannot simply will our emotions back to health. They need to heal, and healing is an organic process. Many things are involved, but one in a special way. What's involved? In many instances, there's the need to be angry, the rage for a time, and feel disappointment, loss, unfairness, and anger. Loss can be bitter, and that bitterness needs to be accepted with honesty and the courage and discipline to not let it have

us, prisoners, forever, or lash out at others. And for that to happen, for us not to lay blame and upset others, we need help. All pain can be borne if it can be shared, and so we need people to listen to us and share our pain without trying to fix it. Pride is our enemy here. We need humility to entrust others to see our wounds.

167. Healing is in the waiting

Finally, not least, we need patience, long-suffering, perseverance. Mourning can't be rushed. Like the body's healing, the soul's recovery is an organic process with its non-negotiable timetable for unfolding. But this can be a major test of our patience and hope. We can go through long periods of darkness and grief where nothing seems to be changing, the heaviness and the paralysis remain, and we're left with the feeling that things will never get better, that we will never find the lightness of heart again. But grief and mourning call for patience, patience to stay the course with the heaviness and the helplessness. The Book of Lamentations tells us that sometimes all we can do is put ourselves to the dust and wait. The healing is in the waiting.



168. You are greater than your wounds



Henri Nouwen was a man very familiar with mourning and loss. An over-sensitive soul, he sometimes suffered depression and obsessions that left him emotionally paralyzed and seeking professional help. On one such occasion, while working through a major depression, he wrote his deeply insightful book, *The Inner Voice of Love*. There he gives us this advice: *“The great challenge is living your wounds through instead of thinking them through. It is better to cry than to worry, better to feel your wounds deeply than to understand*

them, better to let them enter into your silence than to talk about them. The choice you face constantly is whether you are taking your hurts to your head or your heart. You can analyze them in your head, find their causes and consequences, and coin words to speak and write about them. But no final healing is likely to come from that source. You need to let your wounds go down into your heart. Then you can live them through and discover that they will not destroy you. Your heart is greater than your wounds.” We are greater than our wounds. Life is greater than death. God’s goodness is greater than all loss. But mourning our losses is the path to reach and possess those truths. ***‘Stir your emotions, engage your intellect, and inspire you to go further on your journey of living deeper with God, closer to others, and finding new ways of being in a changing world.***

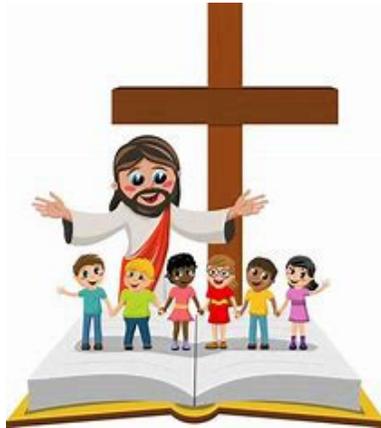
169. Build a house

In Luke’s conclusion to the Sermon on the mountain, we see someone - we perhaps are that person - who came to Jesus to listen to him, and Jesus said, who *“hears my words and acts on them. That one is like a man building a house, who dug deeply and laid the foundation on rock; when a flood arose, the river burst against that house but could not shake it because it had been well built.”* (LUKE 6:43-49) We are rooted in God; then, we can withstand anything precisely because we are linked to that power that created the cosmos and everything in it. We will be blessed at that deepest level, and nothing can finally touch us. The one who does not take Jesus’ words to heart *“is like a man who built a house on the ground without foundation. When the river burst against it, immediately it fell, and great was the ruin of that house.”* When the inevitable trials of our life



come, what we have built on pleasure, money, power, or fame will give way. So the question is a simple one: Where do you stand? How goes it with your heart? Where are your treasure and foundation? On what, precisely, is the whole of your life built?

170. Exaltation of the Holy Cross



Jesus is speaking to Nicodemus, and he tells him, *“God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”* (JOHN 3:13-17) Why does the Son come? What was his mission? Is it because God is angry? Because God wants to lord it over us? Because God needs something? No, he comes purely out of love, out of God’s desire that we flourish as his beloved children: *“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.”* It is not to work out his anger issues that the Father sends the Son, but that the world’s justice might be restored in a special covenant relationship. Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s salvific intent, displayed throughout the Old

Testament many covenants. He wanted to bring the divine life even into the darkest places of human stubbornness. He hunted us down at the level of our sins in the dark of our selfishness. The Father, in short, sent the Son into time, history, and the human condition. But then the Father sent him further, into our sin and dysfunction, and finally down into hatred, violence, rejection, and death itself.

Aren’t these the crosses and miseries of our humanity? At the deep level of our sickness, Jesus, the healer, cured us deep down to our chromosomes level and beyond. The speed of the Father’s love went so far for love of us his beloved children made according to his image of love very well reflected originally in the face and likeness of Jesus. Any time we are in any situation of pain and suffering, we cannot forget this and also that our sketch originally, or design details in the instruction book of creation, is in the shape of a cross. We are made like crosses. If we open our arms horizontally, we see the picture. God’s design is unbelievable.

171. The immortal in you

Many scientists and philosophers believe that you are no more than a machine. There is no afterlife by their account, and you are no better than any other kind of animal. The existence of humanity, according to such thinkers, is purely the outcome of chance events. There never was any tendency, natural or supernatural, to produce life and the human mind. The universe is hostile or indifferent toward



you, and you occupy no special place within it. At the heart of this story of humankind lies not science but a rarely expressed philosophical assumption that modern science, at least in principle, tells all there is to know about you and the world. *The Immortal in You* demonstrates how an astute use of common sense and a study of common human experience reveal that there is more to you—much more—than science could say. What is this Immortal in me? I believe that this modern response to the ancient exhortation "Know thyself" may deliver a wealth of fresh, powerful, and uplifting ideas about what it is to be human. When we eventually try to know the inner image that takes us back to the Creator, our Designer, we will start to seriously feel the truth about ourselves regardless of the variety of beliefs in our society. I like the idea of getting in touch with the immortal in me.

172. Friendship to God

Children have friendship toward their parents as to a good exceeding themselves because their parents are their benefactors since they are to their children the cause of being and nurturing and instruction. Such too is the friendship of man to God. - Thomas Aquinas



173. The truth will make us free



A deduction is a rarer form of reasoning. But all of us use it from time to time. I remember Max, seven years old, first deduction when I visited his school class, and he raised his hand for a question. The conversation went like this: 'Max, Father, are aliens real? Me, Hm. You know Max, I'm not sure. Max. (indignant) Father! Of course, aliens aren't real. Aliens are monsters, and monsters aren't real.'

If Max is right, he is right in his deduction definition of aliens, but how does he prove it? Science loves to follow the rules of investigation with the tools it has available. This interesting form of reasoning sometimes brings us into the sphere of sciences, searching for what is real and measurable. If *the truth will make us free* (Jn.8,32), how do we prove the mind and the presence of God? The answer I believe could be available not lost in the cosmos but in searching for what is immortal in us, who designed us, and who designed the designer. Wow, at full speed of our life, it is now the time for this type of perfect speed in search of the truth that really will make us free.

174. You shall not kill

Killing is not just a brute external act; it is, in its more common form, a subtle internal thing. All of us break the fifth commandment in countless ways. We do it in the negative and suspicious judgments we make about each other. Almost every minute of our lives, we are making judgments of others, and in doing that, we are killing those around us, shooting them through the heart just as surely as if we were doing it with a gun. What breaks the fifth commandment is not only the brute act of murder or even the physical acts of bullying or abuse. Paranoia, false suspicion, harsh judgment, cynicism, and negativity, be it in word or attitude, also kill. Thus, for example, in our envy of others, we destroy their spontaneity. In our criticism of others, we destroy their enthusiasm. In our neglect of our children and our refusal to bless them with our affirmation, we help kill their capacity to love others. With our suspicions, we kill trust. With our cynicism, we kill the ability of the community to build. In our broken commitments, we kill relationships. In our infidelities, we kill the bond that makes for the family. In our laziness, we kill creativity. In our abuse of food, alcohol, and drugs, we destroy our bodies. In our excesses, we kill enjoyment. And in our constant habit of first depreciating before appreciating, we kill the very best with which God surrounded creation; we kill the original blessing of God. In the harsh thoughts, we have we kill each other's capacity to be free and joyous. Small wonder that death, sadness, harshness, coldness, fear, suspicion, and joylessness are almost everywhere. You shall not kill! You shall not negate the goodness of creation by preferring death to life! Do not silence a heartbeat – not just with a gun, but also not with harsh words, paranoid thoughts, suspicious judgments, empty cynicism, broken commitments, and blessings that are never given. - *Ron Rolheiser, OMI*



Thank you, Ron, for your reflection. I like the invitation of this commandment and your invitation to reflect upon our infidelities. If there is more kindness in all of us, then there are more life and goodness of creation for everyone.

175. Covenant - "*I am yours - you are mine.*"



More than a personal relationship, God wants to make us part of his family. That happens through covenants, which are not the same thing as contracts. **A covenant is a permanent exchange of persons.** It creates a family. Covenants are made by an oath sworn in God's name. The covenant is like in the sacrament of Marriage is to say to each other - the parties: "*I am yours - you are mine.*"

176. The clown story

The story of a clown who, on seeing his circus in flames, is sent to a nearby village to ask for help and alert the people to the fire's danger may become our story. However, the village residents think it is a trick to call their attention to the circus, and they clap and laugh while the clown desperately tries to convey that what he says is important, that the situation is urgent. As the laughter increases, the flames finally arrive at the village and consume it along with the circus. This story is always present in today's people who are



not too at home with church language. Anyone who tries to talk about the Christian faith risks no trust like the clown in the above story. Our time and the confusion in our society that does not think or believe anymore are clear. Faith is not something important but only an individual opinion. Agnosticism and skepticism are like the idle speed of mind that goes nowhere. What do you believe makes you go! True or false?

177. Somebody home

The Christian faith does not consist of learning facts or building theoretical systems, but rather in welcoming a Person and accepting what He teaches. Faith comes through an encounter with that person, *Jesus of Nazareth*, and the experience of His friendship.

178. God's thirst

"If you knew the gift of God! You would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." Jn 4:10. The wonder of prayer is revealed beside the well where we come seeking water: there, Christ comes to meet every human being. It is he who first seeks us and asks us for a drink. Jesus thirsts; his asking arises from the depths of God's desire for us. Whether we realize it or not, prayer is the encounter of God's thirst with ours. God thirsts that we may thirst for him. - (2560 CCCB)



And He was there, and the woman was there seeking for water perfect speed of life and faith, a true experience of friendship and trust.

179. What shall I do?



Worker Mario: *"I dug this hole I was told to, and the following day I put the earth back as per instructions. But it won't all go back in. What shall I do?"* Canadian Foreman (after good consideration): *"There is only one thing to do - you'll have to dig the hole deeper."*

'Love your work. Love the people with whom you work. From love and goodness will also spring your joy and your satisfaction.' - St. Pope John Paul II. Work is love made visible, so we may ask God to give us work until our life shall end and life until our work is done properly.

180. Like a man

Jesus Christ, although he shared God's nature, did not try to cling to his equality with God; but emptied himself, took on the form of a slave, and became like a man: not in appearance only, for he humbled himself by accepting death, even death on a cross. For this, God has raised him high, and given him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bend, in heaven, on earth, and under the ground, and every tongue will proclaim "Jesus Christ is Lord," to the glory of God the Father. (Phil. 2) The mission of Jesus was done at the speed of the love of God the Father. For us, He came not only with the great name of Saviour but also as Emmanuel - God with us.



181. It is not fair



The parable of the vineyard that Jesus tells in today's Gospel (Mt.20:1-16) is one of the most interesting of all. One of the main purposes of a parable is always to upset us and push us to decide what to do at this time of our life journey. We know the story's outline well: a landowner goes out to hire workers for his field, engaging them at different times during the day. Then, at the close of work, he pays each the same wage. When those hired earlier complain, the owner contends, *"Am I not free to do as I wish with my own money? Are you envious because I am generous?"* Do any of us find this answer satisfying? Don't most

of us instinctually side with the complainers? Have you noticed that the one virtue that even little children seem implicitly to understand is justice: "It's just not fair!" Well, this just doesn't seem fair for us too. But we should look into this story with better eyes. Like the prophet Isaiah remind us that God's ways are not our ways; we have to change the lens to see clearly. The parable as a good story lesson for our life is not undermining justice but is offering a clear generosity of the landowner and His mercy for all. It shows the righteousness that flows from God's vision of things that surpass our human ways. God's heart and love have no restrictions.

182. Follow me

In today's feast of St. Matthew, the Gospel written by him shares the call he had when working at the tax booth. Jesus tells the tax collector, "*Follow me.*" Mt. 9:9-13 The call of Jesus addresses the mind, but it moves through the mind into the body and through the body into the whole of one's life into the most practical decisions to make. "Follow me" has the sense of "apprentice to me" or "walk as I walk; think as I think; choose as I choose; see as I see; be with me."



Discipleship is a call to a radical change reworking of the self according to the pattern and manner of Jesus. Upon hearing the address of the Lord, Matthew "got up and followed him." The Greek word behind "got up" is '*Anastas*,' the same word used to describe the Resurrection (*anastasis*) of Jesus from the dead. If we follow Jesus is indeed a kind of resurrection from the dead, it is like entering into a new life since it involves the transition from a lower form of life to a higher one. Those who have undergone a profound conversion tend to speak of their previous former experience as a kind of illusion, something not entirely real. The father of the prodigal son can say, "This son of mine was dead and has come to life again." So conversion is an *anastasis*, arising from death - a new life for a new adventure of life. Matthew followed the Lord, and he became one of the twelve. Thanks to him, we now have a written Gospel. The Good News of the one who was an eye witness of Jesus's life with the experience of a tax collector. Matthew went through a change, and if you hear the same voice telling you, "follow me," what would you do?

183. Life is worth living

"I desire mercy, not sacrifice. Because I have come to call not the righteous but sinners." (Mt. 9:13) If we are sinner, the call is just right for us. If we believe that we are not sinners, we are not supposed to be called at all. Where do you stand?

184. The church is a mission

Jesus sends his disciples on a mission: *"He summoned the Twelve, and he sent them to proclaim the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick."* Luke 9.1-6

As members of the family of God, his Mystical Body, we share the mission of evangelization. Our culture's subjectivism is pushing us to think of our spiritual lives in an individualist way, as the cultivation of their friendship with God. But we know that as Christians, we exist not for ourselves but the world. Pope St. Paul VI articulated the same truth: *the Church doesn't have a mission; the Church is a mission.* We are people for an assignment in action; a task is present in words and actions—an excellent reminder to keep a good speed of life for the glory of the kingdom of God.



185. Prayer for homesick children



The relief and consolation of anyone who has tried to sustain a prayer life over a long period result from our connection with the Father. The great mystics tell us that once we are beyond the early honeymoon stage of prayer, the single greatest obstacle to sustaining a life of worship is simple boredom and the sense that nothing meaningful is happening. But that doesn't mean that we are regressing in prayer. It often means the opposite. If we pray only occasionally, we might well experience some pretty deep emotions in our prayer. However, if we pray faithfully every day, year in and year out, we can expect little excitement, lots of boredom, regular temptations to look at the clock during prayer but a very deep, growing bond with our God. As part of our daily life, the blessing will eventually guide us in a special intimacy with God and feel at home with Him. We are homesick children for the love of God, and we need to feel his presence in our prayers. The speed of persistence is very good.

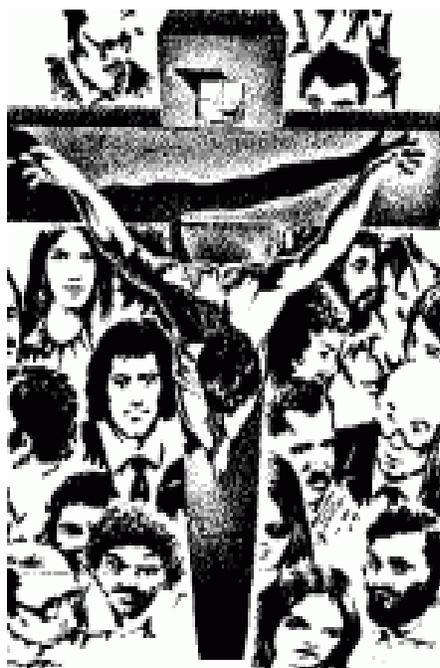
186. Sister Vanity

Vanity of vanities, says Qoheleth (The Teacher), vanity of vanities! All things are vanity! What profit have we from all the toil which we toil at under the sun? One generation departs, and another generation comes, but the world forever stays. The sun rises, and the sunsets; then, it presses on to the place where it

rises. Shifting south, then north, back and forth goes the wind, constantly shifting its course. All rivers flow to the sea, yet never does the sea become full. To the place where they flow, the rivers continue to flow. All things are wearisome, too boring for words. The eye is not satisfied by seeing, nor has the ear enough of hearing. What has been, that will be; what has been done, that will be done. Nothing is new under the sun! Even the thing of which we say, "See, this is new!" has already existed in the ages that preceded us. There is no remembrance of past generations, nor will future generations be remembered by those who come after them. (Ecclesiastes 1.2-11)

Sister "Vanity" as a companion of our life, can you teach us wisdom and teach us life?

187. Why suffer this way?



Once when Jesus was praying in solitude, and the disciples were with him, he asked them, *"Who do the crowds say that I am?"* They said in reply, *"John the Baptist; others, Elijah; still others, 'One of the ancient prophets has arisen.'"* Then he said to them, *"But who do you say that I am?"* Peter said in reply, *"The Messiah of God."* He rebuked them and directed them not to tell this anyone. He said, *"The Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised."* Lk.9;18-22. Why the Son of Man went through this great suffering and humiliation on the cross for us? Why He "must suffer greatly"...? Why not done in an easy different way? If God is love and creates us with passion, the original image in us reflects God's image itself as love. Adam and Eve were made according to God's image, and so Jesus of Nazareth, too, was contemplating the same vision of the love of God. Our humanity's sin in Adam and Eve as a broken image of this love needed

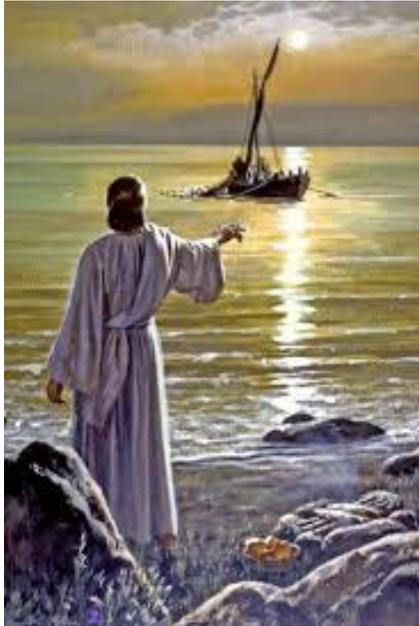
divine intervention to be fixed again. In other words, we need Power from outside of us to clean the mess of sin because our humanity was made in the image of the divine, and only the power of the divine could be able to restore it. Well, this is a deep show of love and strength that brings our poor and lost humanity back to life: *"and on the third day be raised."* The speed of God's love for us is amazing, and our sufferings make us go at the same pace.

188. We are on the same boat

On March 27, 2020, Pope Francis affirmed our common *"belonging as brothers and sisters."* It reminded us that, despite the demands of distancing and isolation during the crisis time of the

pandemic virus, “we are on the same boat” and are all “called to row together... So we cannot go on thinking of saving only ourselves or a few of us, but only together and with the grace of God that we can do this ...”

189. Specific moments



The next day John was there again with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he said, “Behold, the Lamb of God.” The two disciples- heard what he said and followed Jesus. Jesus turned and saw them following him and said to them, “What are you looking for?” They said to him, “Rabbi” (which translated means Teacher), “where are you staying?” He said to them, “Come, and you will see.” So they went and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day. (John 1:35-39).

How specific moments in life change the way we are because they happen to us? Defining moments shape our lives, but we don't have to wait for them to happen. We can be very present and be the authors of them. What about if a teacher could design a lesson that students were still reflecting on years later? What if a priest could deliver a sermon and make the people remember a year later into a moment of growth? What if you had a better sense of how to create lasting memories for your kids? Why would we want to create these moments? Probably to enrich our life, to connect with others, to make memories that will last longer. If our lives are measured in moments and defining moments are the ones that endure in our memories, we may truly consider them as a specific and positive milestone of our growth and experience of faith. This kind of work is very true and positive for our faith journey. Wow, the speed of the specific moments is so close to the perfect pace of life.

190. Life is worth living

“I am a mortal, the same as all the rest, and a descendant of the first one formed of earth. And in my mother’s womb, I was moulded into flesh in ten months—body and blood, from the seed of a man, and the pleasure that accompanies marriage. And I too, when born, inhaled the common air, and fell upon the kindred earth; wailing, I uttered that first sound common to all.” (Wisdom, 7:1-3). Michelangelo’s (1475-1564) sonnet on old age gives us an inside of his personality. The Italian is on one side of the doorway. An English translation stands opposite. Realizing that his time on earth is coming to an end, Michelangelo muses over his fate, on lost loves and misplaced passions. In doing so, the



depth of his melancholy genius and genuine faith is revealed.

*"The course of my long life hath reached last,
In fragile bark o'er a stormy sea,
The common harbour, where must render be
The account of all the actions of the past.
The impassioned phantasy, that, vague and vast,
Made art an idol and a king to me,
It was an illusion, and but vanity
The desires that lured and harassed me.
The dreams of love that were so sweet of yore,
What are they now, when two deaths maybe mine,
One sure, and one forecasting its alarms?
Painting and sculpture satisfy no more
The soul now turning to the Love Divine,
That oped, to embrace us, on the cross its arms."*

He did not finish this Pieta' for his old age, or he did not finish it on purpose, and the man in the back behind Jesus' body is him in the representation of Nicodemo.

191. Amen - I say to you



"What is your opinion? A man had two sons. He came to the first and said, 'Son, go out and work in the vineyard today.' He said in reply, 'I will not,' but afterward, he changed his mind and went. The man came to the other son and gave the same order. He said in reply, 'Yes, sir,' but did not go. Which of the two did his father's will?" They answered, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Amen, I say to you, tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you. When John came to you in the way of righteousness, you did not believe him; but tax collectors and prostitutes did. Yet even when you saw that, you did not later change your minds and believe him. (Mt. 21:28-32). Which son do you want to be? Speed up your life with actions if you're going to hear and follow the Father's call; it is also one of the best ways life can sustain itself.

192. Keep the moments

"An argument arose among the disciples about which of them was the greatest. Jesus realized the intention of their hearts and took a child and placed it by his side, and said to them, "Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me. For the one who is least among all of you is the one who is the greatest." (Luke 9:46-48).



Jesus tells his disciples that he will be rejected by men who will kill him, and then he will rise from the dead. Having just heard a vision of self-forgetting love, the disciples commence arguing about which of them is the greatest. At this point, Jesus proposes a solution. He sets a little child in their midst and says, *"Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me."* The children are capable of What? They are capable of being commanded. They have not yet learned the path of disobedience, and they are open to any interesting suggestions. Also, little children can live radically in the present moment, to be lost in play or the contemplation of something beautiful. Most of us live either in the past (savouring faded glory or licking old wounds) or in the future (aspiring, hoping, fearing what might come). But God is available; grace is available now to all his children.

Most of us are like people on a bus, passing through the most beautiful country scenery imaginable, but we have our interest down and are arguing about who has the first place on the bus! We cannot "keep the moments in place" because we are big boys now and think smart enough. But at this speed, we lose to catch the blessings of life and the beauty of God's suggestions.

193. Naked



Then Job arose and tore his cloak and cut off his hair. He fell to the ground and worshiped. He said, "Naked I came forth from my mother's womb, and naked shall I go back there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD!" (Job. 1:20-21). Like Job, we came into this world with nothing, so everything we have is indeed a blessing from God's bounty, even our suffering. Perhaps we do

not understand, and of course, we avoid any suffering, but sometimes we do not have a choice. Job's decision of faith is that God was worthy to be blessed and praised in any circumstances of life. I know that this is not an easy thing to digest but do we have any alternative? I believe that Job's decision of faith to see only God's hand in all these life events is a choice of true wisdom we may treasure too. It never occurs to him to curse God. All secondary causes vanish even when we also, suffer and there is no immediate answer for a reason. It was the Lord who gave; it was the Lord who removed, and in the Lord alone must the explanation of these strange happenings be sought for an answer. Though we can say that God tested and *strengthened* Job's life and faith. Perhaps there is no evident *comfort* from God, but probably in any happy or painful time of our life, we have a chance to become more human and prove that our faith is genuinely pure and naked like Job.

194. For you are my Father

Upon meditating on Jesus' prayer, "*Father, into your hands I commit my spirit*" (Luke 23:46), Charles de Foucauld (1858-1916) wrote: "It is the last prayer of our Master and our beloved. May it be our prayer, and may it be not only our final prayer but the prayer of our whole life": *Father, I abandon myself into your hands: do with me what you will. Whatever you may do, I thank you: I am ready for all, I accept all. Let only your will be done in me, and all your creatures - I wish no more than this, O Lord. Into your hands, I commend my soul: I offer it to you with all the love of my heart, for I love you, Lord, and so need to give myself, to surrender myself into your hands without reserve, and with boundless confidence, for you are my Father. Amen.*



195. Between choices



The way we see things around us makes us thanking and feeling differently. The world isn't divided up between big-hearted and small-minded people. Our days are divided up between those moments when we are big-hearted, generous, warm, hospitable, unafraid, wanting to embrace everyone and those moments when we are petty, selfish, over-aware of the unfairness of life, frightened, and seeking only to protect ourselves and our safety and interests. All this looks like the same

situations we find in life when driving a car or a motorcycle. The road offers changes, the weather changes, and the way to ride and face challenges our way. So the good driver is the one who can deal with all these ups and downs and in control. How do we control the speed of life and the way we see things around us?

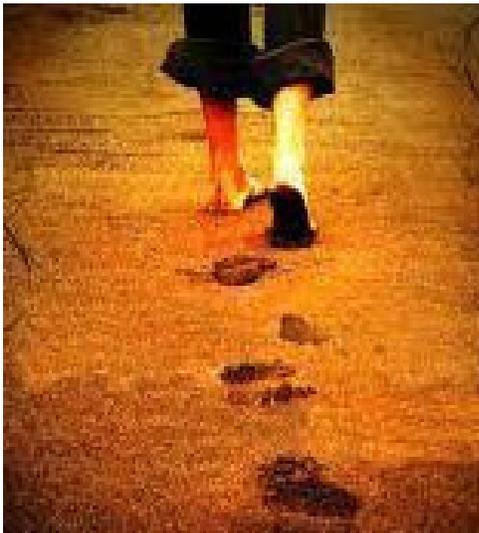
196. Who can say

"To the reproaches of his friends, Job answered: "How can a mortal be just before God? God is wise in heart and mighty in strength; who has withstood him and remained whole?... Should he come near me, I do not see him; should he pass by, I am not aware of him; Should he seize me forcibly, who can resist? Who can say to him, "What are you doing?" (Job 9.1,14-16).



Even if we do not clearly understand what is sometimes going on in our lives, I believe God knows better, and His program for each of us is always the best. The sooner we syntonize with His will, the better and happier; we find ourselves for the journey of life. So what is God doing in your life? In God's speed rests our best rate.

197. I will follow you



As they proceeded on their journey, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." To another, Jesus said, "Follow me." (Luke 9.57,59).

'I will follow you & follow me' two different ways to be followers for the Kingdom of God. If we can put both ways together, we will find our life going at an incredible speed of heart, mind, and body; the perfect place. Do you remember Ricky Nelson's song: I Will Follow You also present in the movie 'Sister act - I will follow Him - "I will follow you, follow you wherever you may go. There isn't an ocean too deep, a mountain so high it can keep me away. I must follow you ever since you touched my hand, and I know that near you, I always must be, and nothing can keep you from me. You are my destiny. I

love you; I love you, I love you And where you go, I'll follow, I'll follow, I'll follow You always be my true love, my true love, my true love. From now until forever, forever, I will follow you, follow you wherever you may go. There isn't an ocean too deep, a mountain so high that it can keep me away from my love. I love you, and I love you, I love you and where you go ..."

198. Prayer - Spiritual Evolution

God invites us into a relationship with Him that is both personal and communal. He speaks to us through His Son, Jesus Christ, the Word-made flesh. Prayer is our response to God, who is already telling or, better yet, revealing Himself to us. Therefore, prayer is not merely an exchange of words, but it engages the whole person in a relationship of love and trust with God the Father, through the Son, and in the Holy Spirit. I believe that humans on any stage of evolution hold some spark of God inside them, in the form of feelings and emotions. Prayer needs a heart filled with feelings and emotions, and this is what we all are. We like to pray to Someone, and if we have our hearts filled with good feelings, prayer happens by itself. Even when we suffer and things are not going well, our prayer is always the best we can do, and we know that Someone is listening. The evolution process happens when we pray because we do not change God's mind, but we change. That is why when we pray, our mind and heart go through spiritual evolution.



199. Because it is eternal



"I understood that the Church is a body composed of different members, the most essential, the noblest of all the organs would not be wanting to her. I understood that the Church has a heart and that this heart is burning with love; that it is love alone, which makes the members work, that if love were to die away, apostles would no longer preach the Gospel, martyrs would refuse to shed their blood. I understood that love comprises all vocations, that love is everything, that it embraces all times and all places because it is eternal!" (Story of A Soul, Chapter XI - St. Therese Little Flower) St. Therese of Lisieux had a problem in her mental prayer: she used to fall asleep! But she wasn't overly upset by this weakness: *"I think how little children please their parents just as much when they are asleep as when they are awake; I think how doctors put patients to sleep to do operations. And finally, I think how "the Lord sees our weakness, he remembers that we are but dust"*

(Autobiography, manuscript A). What matters in mental prayer is not what we do, as what God does in us.

200. Made with love

An interesting question of Jesus to the scholar's identification of the greatest commandment:

"You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself." (LUKE 10:25-37). If all of religion is about awakening the deepest desire of the heart and directing it toward God, it is about the ordering of love toward the most worthy of love.

But, Jesus says and invites us to consider that the most important and necessary implication of this love of God is compassion for one's fellow human beings. Why are the two commandments so tightly linked? Perhaps the best answer is because of who Jesus is. Christ is not simply a human being, and he is not simply God; rather, he is the God-man, the one in whose person divinity and humanity meet. Therefore, it is impossible to love him as God without loving the humanity he has embraced in his person. Those who know Christ Jesus, fully divine and fully human, realize that the love of God necessarily draws us to a passion for the human race. Each person in the world is created according to God's divine image and has a human body that reflects the Maker's touch. For this reason, I believe the integrity and spiritual consistency of the greatest commandment is a unique, indivisible unity.



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201. Quite an assumption



Joseph and Mary are having breakfast. Mary puts down her coffee and says: *"You know, Joe, at the end of my life, I'm going straight to Heaven!"* Joseph looks up from his newspaper and replies: *"That's quite an assumption, Mary."*

202. Fratelli tutti

"I desire that, in this our time, by acknowledging the dignity of each human person, we can contribute to the rebirth of a universal aspiration to a fraternity—the fraternity between all men and women. "Here, we have a splendid secret that shows us how to dream and to turn our life into a



wonderful adventure. No one can face life in isolation. We need a community that supports and helps us, in which we can help one another to keep looking ahead. How important it is to dream together. By ourselves, we risk seeing mirages, things that are not there. Dreams, on the other hand, are built together". Let us dream, then, as a single human family, as fellow travellers sharing the same flesh, as children of the same earth which is our common home, each of us bringing the richness of his or her beliefs and convictions, each of us with his or her voice, brothers and sisters all." "Bravo," Papa Francesco. If we globally engage this kind of speed and believe in it, we will have a perfect rate to go and dream big.

ENCYCLICAL LETTER - *FRATELLI TUTTI*- OF THE HOLY FATHER FRANCIS ON FRATERNITY AND SOCIAL FRIENDSHIP - *Given in Assisi, at the tomb of Saint Francis, on 3 October, Vigil of the Feast of the Saint, in the year 2020, the eighth of my Pontificate.*

203. We are all one



"There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor a free person; there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3: 28).

The most basic social divisions of the time of Jesus and each carried a clear evaluative weight and heavy to break. Free men were a lot better off than slaves; Jews had huge advantages over Greeks, and males were seen as superior to

females. But not anymore, in light of the kingdom of God that Jesus announced everyone is free and equal because, with baptism, the person enters into the family of God and is a member forever. Wow, this was and is a special gift to all children of the family.

204. Mary and Martha

The account of Jesus' visit with Martha and Mary. I have a different perspective from the standard view of balancing the active versus the contemplative life. But both ways are as good as the people understanding them and choosing the one or the other way. In service of God's way of ordering the world, Jesus allowed women into his inner circle. The story of Martha and Mary gives us a very interesting clue in this regard. Martha is in the space reserved for women: she is in the kitchen preparing the meal. But Mary is in the place reserved for men: she is sitting at the feet of the rabbi. It is the attitude of the disciple listening and contemplating the words of the lord. I believe Martha and Mary's ways are both good, but each



of us is born with a specific inclination. Can we be 50% like Martha and Mary? This way will be just the way to perfection as a perfect speed in life.

205. Spirit pregnancy



Looking at how Mary gave birth to Jesus, we see that it's not something that's done in an instant. Faith, like biology, also relies on a process that has several distinct, organic moments. It is the same process by which we give birth to trust in the world? First, like Mary, we need to get pregnant by the Holy Spirit. We need to let the power of the Spirit and his word take such root in us that it

begins to become part of our actual flesh, our life. Then, we have to lovingly gestate, nurture, and protect what is growing inside us until it's sufficiently strong so that it can live on its own, outside us. Eventually, what we have nurtured and grown inside of us must be given birth outside of us when it is ready. This process will take time, and nine months are just the right time, but more time is needed to complete the process. However, birth is only the beginning of motherhood. Mary gave birth to a baby, but she spent years nurturing, coaxing, and cajoling that infant into adulthood. The infant in the crib at Bethlehem is not yet the Christ who preaches, heals, and dies for us. Finally, motherhood still has one more phase. As her child grows, matures, and takes on a personality and destiny of its own, the mother then must let be, painfully stretched in understanding and in letting go for the son or daughter to find his or her way to be. All of this is what Mary went through to give Christ to the world: pregnancy by the Holy Spirit; gestation of that into a child inside of her; excruciating pain in birthing; nurturing that new life into adulthood; and pondering, meditating, and looking sometimes painfully to see what that new life can become on its own. Our task is to give birth to Christ. Are we good enough to do it? Can we do it, or are we not interested at all?

206. Brother's keeper

Cain kills his brother Abel and then hears God ask: *"Where is your brother Abel?"* (Gen 4:9). His answer is one that we all too often give: *"Am I my brother's keeper?"* The parable of the Good Samaritan also shows that *"the existence of every individual is deeply tied to that of others: life is not simply time that passes; life is a time for interactions."* See (Lk 10:25-37). All of us have in ourselves something of the wounded



man, something of the robber, something of the passers-by, and something of the Good Samaritan. If this is true, which one character of the parable is dominating your life? Where is my brother? Which speed am I on?

207. Millions upon millions



“And I tell you, ask, and you will receive; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.” (LUKE, 11:5-13). The most common and regular prayer is the petition one. It is also the very commonest form of worship in the Bible as we also raise our minds and hearts to God

daily. We can hear and almost see the prayers of many people: “O God, please help me! O Lord, save my child! Free my family from this trouble!” If we could place a net capable of catching prayers as they fly their way to heaven from hospitals and churches, we would count millions upon millions of them. The blessing of our Father’ is nothing but a series of petitions, and Jesus urged his followers to persevere in prayer. It is good to have a Father who likes to hear our petition prayers and never get tired. Wow, we are his beloved children, and He loves to listen to our voices all the time.

208. Give freely

As Jesus told his disciples: *“Without cost, you have received, without cost, you are to give” (Mt 10:8).* Life without fraternal gratuitousness becomes a form of frenetic commerce, in which we constantly weigh up what we give and what we get back in return. God, on the other hand, gives freely, to the point of helping even those who are unfaithful; he *“makes his sun rise on the evil and the good” (Mt 5:45).* There is a reason why Jesus told us: *“When you give alms, do not let your right hand know what your left hand is doing, so that your alms may be in secret” (Mt 6:3-4).* We received life freely; we paid nothing for it. Consequently, all of us can give



without expecting anything in return, to do good to others without demanding that they treat us well in return. Thanks, Papa Francesco, for reminding us about this Christian law we sometimes forget on purpose. The generosity of life is always a good speed to go on living. (140. ENCYCLICAL LETTER *FRATELLI TUTTI* OF THE HOLY FATHER FRANCIS ON FRATERNITY AND SOCIAL FRIENDSHIP)

209. Payback with a blessing

"You should all agree among yourselves and be sympathetic; love the brothers, have compassion and be a humble mind. Never pay back one wrong with another or an angry word with another one; instead, pay back with a blessing. That is what you are called to do so that you inherit a blessing yourself." (1 Peter 3:8-9).

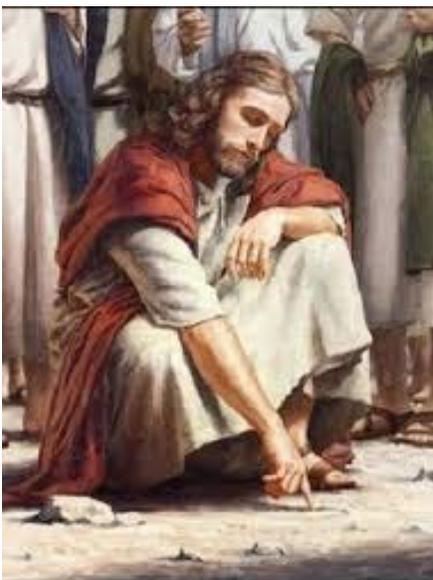
Christian life in a nutshell and it is a blessing when we can practice it. But life together sometimes brings disagreements for various reasons, but it will be a really good blessing if done properly and with the grace of patience. The speed of patience is helping us to slow down the rush of life and see more clearly.

210. Happy Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving is a time to get together with loved ones and reflect on our blessings. The gatherings this year may be smaller than in past years, making us perhaps reflect more deeply on those we are most grateful for in our lives, and as we place God first, the family and friends will follow. For as children, we always need a family to feel at home. Knowing that we have a Father who loves and cares about his children and is still available even when we have lost the earthly one. *"O God, our Father, whose mercy and goodness is infinite; we give you thanks for the gifts You have bestowed upon us, forever seeking your divine love, may you grant our petitions and protect us from all evil. We know we are never alone when we are in your hands!" HAPPY THANKSGIVING!*



211. Beelzebul



"He was driving out a demon that was mute, and when the demon had gone out, the mute person spoke, and the crowds were amazed. Some of them said, "By the power of Beelzebul, the prince of demons, he drives out demons." Others, to test him, asked him for a sign from heaven. But he knew their thoughts and said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself will be laid waste and house will fall against house. And if Satan is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? For you say that it is by Beelzebul that I drive out demons. But if it is by the finger of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you." (Luke 11: 14-20).

Beelzebul was another name for Satan linked to a pagan idol worshiped at Ekron, a Philistine town. It translates something like "Prince Baal," a well-known god of

Canaanites, the "prince of demons'. Demon, devil, Satan, diaries, all name for the devil come from the Greek word 'dia-ballo,' that means deceiving. Any situation of confusion, separation, division, fight, deception, misunderstanding, or cheating is perhaps a revelation of the presence of an evil spirit. Jesus explained that He has driven out the demon with the finger of God. Power image of freedom in the kingdom of God. One finger of God more powerful than Beelzebul and all sorts of evil. Wow, let's keep this in mind when we think of the power of the devil. God's power is number one for all situations!

212. Paralyzed faith

"When we don't know how to pray, the Spirit in groans too deep for words prays through us. So every time we are face-to-face with situations that leave us stuttering, mute, and so without heart that all we can do is say, "I can't explain this! I can't accept this! I can't deal with this! It is senseless! My emotions paralyze me! I am paralyzed in my faith!" When we no longer have the heart to pray, it can be consoling to know that this paralyzing exasperation is our prayer – and perhaps the deepest and most sincere prayer we have ever offered." - Ron Rolheiser



Thank you, Ron, for this consoling aspect of our human struggle in praying. Even at this level of paralyzed faith, the prayer works, and the speed of life goes on.

212. Madre io Vorrei - Mother, I would like

Io vorrei tanto parlare con te di quel Figlio che amavi: io vorrei tanto ascoltare da te quello che pensavi: quando hai udito che tu non saresti più stata tua e questo Figlio che non aspettavi non era per te... Ave Maria. Io vorrei tanto sapere da te se quand'era bambino tu gli hai spiegato che cosa sarebbe successo di Lui e quante volte anche tu, di nascosto, piangevi, Madre, quando sentivi che presto l'avrebbero ucciso, per noi. Ave Maria. Io ti ringrazio per questo silenzio che resta tra noi io benedico il coraggio di vivere sola con Lui ora capisco che fin da quei giorni pensavi a noi per ogni Figlio dell'uomo che muore ti prego così ... Ave Maria. (Pier Angelo Sequeri)



- Mother, I would like (translation)

Mother, I would like I would very much like to talk to you about that Son you loved: I would very much like to hear from you what you thought: when you heard that you would no longer be yours and this Son you did not expect was not for you. Hail Mary. I would like to know from you if when he was a child, you explained what would happen to him and how many times you

too, secretly, cried, Mother, when you felt that soon they would kill him, for us. Hail Mary. I thank you for this silence that remains between us. I bless the courage to live with Him alone. Now I understand that you were thinking of us for every Son of man who dies since those days. I beg you like this Hail Mary. (Pier Angelo Sequeri)

213. Two baskets of prayers

There is a story about how God sent two angels to earth to listen to humanity's prayers. One angel was asked to collect all the blessings in which people asked God for something. The other angel was asked to collect all the prayers of thanksgiving. The two angels descended on earth and began their task. They agreed to meet in a month with their findings. The angel collecting prayers asking God for something soon became extremely busy. There were prayers that people had to help them earn more money or win a lottery. There were prayers for God to cure people of illnesses. There were many prayers for the



improved health of one's children, spouse, parents, siblings, relatives, and friends. The angel filled the basket with blessings that people had for worldly objects such as a bigger house, new car, the latest computer, jewelry, expensive clothing, and new toys for their children. Some people prayed to God for a husband or wife, for children, or better relationships. In the meantime, the other angel travelled far and wide, looking to fill the basket with prayers of thankfulness. One day passed, then two days, and then the third, but no prayers of gratitude were heard. The angel visited the young and elderly, men and women, people of all countries, religions, and all classes. Still, not a prayer of thankfulness was heard. All that this angel heard were prayers asking for things. Wondering whether he was missing something, this angel contacted the other angel to ask whether her basket of blessings was getting filled.

"Oh, yes! I have not only filled one basket but many more," said the angel.

For the rest of the month, the two angels fulfilled their mission and were ready to return to God. The angel collecting prayers of the request was laden with many baskets. The angel gathering prayers of thankfulness hardly had any in the basket. There were a few prayers of gratitude, but a tiny amount compared to the prayers of requests. When God was presented with these findings, he said. *"This is nothing new." "You now have an idea of what it is like being God. People are always praying for something from Me, which is all right because they think of Me. But few ever thank Me."*

215. Stay with us

"Stay with us, Lord Jesus, as evening falls: be our Companion on our way. In your mercy, inflame our hearts and raise our hope so that, in union with our brethren, we may recognize you in the scriptures and the breaking of bread."



Easy prayer to say as the day is closing, and we go to rest. The time we spend sleeping is a blessing and recharging time for body and spirit. The resting speed of life is precious and comfortable when we know that our Companion is still with us.

216. Here I am; send me!

"The mission, 'Church on the move,' is not a program, an enterprise to be carried out by a sheer force of will. It is Christ who makes the Church go out of herself. In the mission of evangelization, you move because the Holy Spirit pushes you and carries you". God always loves us first, and with this, love comes to us and calls us. Our vocation comes from the fact that we are sons and daughters of God in the Church, his



family, brothers, and sisters in that love that Jesus has shown us. However, all have human dignity founded on the divine invitation to become children of God. Also, the freedom of faith calls us into the heart of God. May the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, Star of Evangelization, and Comforter of the Afflicted, missionary disciple of her Son Jesus, continue to intercede for us and sustain us." *Rome, Saint John Lateran, 31 May 2020, Solemnity of Pentecost - Franciscus*

217. Don't mention it



A little girl was going to a party, and her mother told her to be a good girl and remember when she was leaving to thank her hostess. When she arrived home, the mother asked if she had thanked her hostess and the little girl replied: 'No, the girl in front of me did and the lady said, 'Don't mention it' - so I didn't.' Sometimes we do the same in our relationship with God. We have priests and nuns praying for us in the daily mass and liturgies, so why do I have to thank God? Praising God and being thankful every day is just a good way to remember that all in our life depend on His generosity. And because we have short memories, it is better to write down these two words: "Thank you" on the mirror of our bathroom so that we will remember to say it all the time we visit the room. To be thankful is to remember we are human, and all we receive is a gift. A "Thank You" prayer a day keeps the devil away.

218. No wonder

St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) is an outstanding example of how contemplative life can well up and overflow into action. In addition to all this, she wrote much on contemplative prayer, and her writings are still standard works today. She was declared a Doctor of the Church by Pope Paul VI in 1970. A favourite story about St Teresa illustrates the intimate relationship that the saints have with God. When she was on one of her innumerable journeys across Spain, her horse threw her as she crossed a river. Soaked to the skin, she looked up to heaven and said, *"If this is how you treat your friends, no wonder you have so few of them!"* We should bring everything to God in our prayers, even our reproaches. In the end, a reproach is simply our way of offering up to God our incomprehension of what he is giving us.



219. God is on



Some of St. Teresa of Avila quotes: *"The feeling remains that God is on the journey, too."* - *"To have the courage for whatever comes in life - everything lies in that."* - *"For prayer is nothing else than on terms of friendship with God."* - *"Let nothing disturb you. Everything passes away, except God. God alone is sufficient."* - *"Pain is never permanent."* - *"Don't let your sins turn into bad habits."* - *"God saves us from gloomy saints."* - *"Christ has no body now, but yours. No hands, no feet on earth, but yours. Yours are the eyes through which Christ looks compassion into the world. Yours are the feet with which Christ walks to do good. Yours are the hands with which Christ blesses the world."* Meditating on these words, the

speed of life comes to the right and comfortable pace.

220. Do not be afraid

Jesus tells us: *"Do not be afraid. You are worth more than many sparrows."* (Luke 12:7). The pontificate of Pope John Paul II started with the words, "Be not afraid." On the day of his solemn inauguration, Oct. 22, 1978, Pope John Paul II looked out upon the crowd in St. Peter's Square, and he preached a rousing, poetic homily. He issued several challenges at its climax, each punctuated with those words, *"Be not afraid."* When he visited the United States in 1987, he told the young people of Los Angeles gathered in the Universal Amphitheater, *"Dear young*

people of America, listen to his voice. Do not be afraid. Open up your hearts to Christ." This strong commendation is an invitation to live from the one who conquered death forever in the power of the resurrection. In any situation of our life, we must remember these words and trust that life is always stronger than death, and for every problem, we go through, there is still a solution.

221. Give to God



What does it mean to: *"Give therefore to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God the things that are God's?" (Mt. 22:21)*. The less you have of Caesar's, the less you have to render to Caesar. The mark on the coin is that of Caesar; it is the mark of his property. Therefore give Caesar this money; it is his. It means that Caesar, having created money, is its master. The word *"render"* means *"give back."* The first half of the saying could

thus mean, *"It's Caesar's coin--go ahead and give it back to him."* and what belongs to God? The possible answers range from *"Pay your tribute tax to Caesar, and your temple tax to God"* to *"Everything belongs to God - even Caesar."* Is it all at 50% - 50% way of life? Is our life 50% human and 50% divine? My time, possessions, tools, things are 50% mine, and 50% belong to God? Perhaps after better calculation, 100% at the end belong to Him! What do you think?

222. Give back

I asked myself, *"What can you and I give back to God?"*

Money? It is not because He needs our money – *He owns all things (Psalm 50:12)* – and it is not the money he needs, but rather our response to his love! Speaking of time, what about that? Maybe your time, but the Scriptures declare that God inhabits eternity (Isaiah 57:14). I'm sure He enjoys spending time with us like a child and father. After all, isn't that why Jesus came to us – so that God could continue to play and love us and us with Him? But honestly, a God that inhabits eternity seems to have all the time in the world for us. What about space, such as a building? Solomon had this thought when he built his famous temple, but even still relented that even heaven cannot contain God's presence: (1 King, 8:27). He *fills* heaven and earth (Jeremiah 23:24). Doesn't God already possess all the things we call good things? Surely He does. Otherwise, it would be impossible for Him to give them to us. Surely all things must belong to God – He is the Creator of all things (Psalm 50:12).



223. Worship



So what can a man or woman give to God? We know from Jesus that the Father seeks those that worship Him *“in spirit and truth”* (John 4:23). We can all surely worship something. We give it our time, our attention, our thoughts, our respect, our adoration, and our love. Making it a true priority in our life to worship God *“in spirit and truth”* is something that He likes! And only you can choose to do it freely. Your praise – your

worship – is a gift from God, and it is something He wants to do because you think of him, and you find time to stay with Him!

224. Love

Have you told God today that you love Him? Have you explained just how much He means to you and how dear to your heart He is? Take a moment away from your busy life or any other plans you have to make an appointment with the Lord. Tell Him, *“I will set apart this time – maybe 10 minutes ... to do nothing but praise and feel his presence in meditation.”* At that time, think that it is because of God that we can love. God created us in His image and likeness. He is the God of love. A wonderful way to speed our life in the right direction.



225. Trust



We define faith as believing that God is who He says He is despite any evidence you may possess or observe. He will do, and that everything He says is true – without exception or reservation. Faith is our decision to believe God and trust Him beyond our many reasons, regardless of any evidence that looks not clear to us. The Scriptures tell us that God gave a measure of faith to everyone (Romans 12:3).

But like a muscle, it is up to us to exercise it, use it, apply it, and choose which direction to go. The Bible says that Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness (James 2:23). The Scriptures say that it is impossible to please or connect with God (Hebrews 11:6)! The speed of faith is always more secure than our acceleration for intuitions. Do we trust Him?

226. Free Will

A free will is an interesting option because it seems to encompass all that goes before it. God gave men a choice (Deuteronomy 30:19), and for most decisions in life, we may echo that choice in many ways. The power of will is a great gift and a wonderful tool to make our lives more interesting. If the free will is also in friendship and present with Grace, then all our life is truly open to going at a remarkable speed.



227. Go for extras



Maybe go the extra mile to bless someone, help somebody else in the name of the Lord and make it known unto them you are doing it because you love the Lord, and the Lord loves them. Maybe you could find a local shelter and help feed the poor. Or perhaps you could find a Christian and Godly charity that does good things in the name of the Lord and donate money or useful belongings to them. Seek the scriptures

and the word and the heart of God for your circumstance. Ask the Lord to speak to you through them. I am confident He will. Like prayer, some friendly activities for people in need will keep our body in shape for the speed we are in our life.

228. Only you

Ask yourself a question only you can answer. Is there anything in your world, your life, or your mind (among your choices) that you would not give up if God asked for it? I hope that list is not long. If it is, perhaps you can work on emptying it in your heart. You know about the jealousy of you (Exodus 20:5)! Such is His love for you! We know that if that list holds a few things in our lives, we will travel more easily. God faithfully came to be always with us and loves to be in our journey. I'm sure He will never abandon us if we allow Him to be with us.

229. Second chance

The beauty of life is that it always gives a second chance. At any given moment, life can surprise us with another opportunity, giving us the possibility to try something one more time, to recreate ourselves anew, and to start again. God is not only the God of second chances; He is the God of *another* option. It is good news because most of us mess up the second chance

fairly quickly. One of the amazing facets of God's character is His incredible patience with us. Psalm 86:15 says it well: *"But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness."* Micah 7:18 says, *"Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever because He delights in steadfast love."* The Bible is full of people who received second chances and even third and fourth chances: Peter, Jonah, Mark, Samson, David, and others. All trophies of God's grace. What about us?



230. No sin of despair is allowed



When we have wronged someone, we have no right to demand another chance. But we should work to earn another option by a continued demonstration of repentance and change. Even God has no limit on forgiveness. In Romans 1:18-32, the apostle Paul warns us what happens when we continue to disregard God's patience and reject His call to repentance. Three different times, the phrase "God turned them over" appears. When we insist on running our lives the way we want rather than the way God

wants, He lets us. Eventually, when our hearts are hardened against Him, He lets us go. At that point, sin has become our god. There may come a time in a human relationship when the same thing has occurred – when forgiveness has been offered and restoration made possible. Still, one party refuses to repent and rejects all efforts to reconcile. It may be time to end that relationship but not time to despair or close the connection. When many chances are no longer working, we may just, for a moment, consider that the Ocean of God's mercy is bigger than our imaginations, sorrows, and thoughts. God does everything possible to draw us to repentance, offering forgiveness and second and many more chances (2 Peter 3:9). God's grace is our last perennial hope and has no limits because the patience of God has no limits. Who can stop us if we go at this speed?

231. I am the LORD; there is no other.



"I have called you by your name, giving you a title, though you knew me not. I am the LORD, and there is no other. There is no God besides me. I who arm you, though you know me not, so that toward the rising and the setting of the sun, people may know that there is none besides me. I am the LORD; there is no other." (Is 45:5-6)

The Bible speaks of false gods that exist, but they have no real substance. The mind and hands of humans created many of them. They never assume that these gods have any reality. They are the imagination of those people who worship them. Only one God exists. Since the God of the Bible has given us reason to believe in His existence, whatever He might say on other gods' matters is final. Because God says, He is the only God who exists that solves the question. There are no other true gods. There is no competition in the universe. The universe belongs only to the One who has called each one of us by name.

232. Living deaths

Often we feel and live a condition of suffering, solitude, or in situations of impairment so extreme as to deprive our existence of all happiness and meaning. Like in this pandemic situation, we live with the fear of this powerful virus, but viruses are not living things. Viruses are complicated assemblies of molecules, including proteins, nucleic acids, lipids, and carbohydrates, but on their own, they can do nothing until they enter a living cell.



Without cells, viruses would not be able to multiply. Therefore, viruses are not living things. We, as living organisms, suppose to host what is good and beneficial for us and others. The choice is ours to make. Do we think about this, or we do non-care like sleeping deaths? Are we living deaths or deaths living?

233. Walk by faith

If you want to walk by faith, you need to release your fear to God and accept the path He leads you down. All is easier said than done, of course. You may not become completely fearless, but you can be courageous and learn to act according to God's will even when you are afraid of what lies ahead. During trials, we may wonder if we have enough faith. Our world seems

designed to undermine trust and to promote doubt. How can we stand in our faith? I believe all



is possible if we walk by living faith. The Bible describes both a dead faith and a living faith. The residing faith can grow and be active in good times and bad times. Do we have enough faith to move mountains? Do we have the right type of faith? How can we know what faith is? The Bible tells us: *Nehemiah 8:10 Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength. In (Isaiah 41:10), 'So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.'* Also, *(Exodus 15:2), The Lord is my strength and my*

song; he has given me victory. In the New Testament, we have many quotes: *"the just shall live by faith" Galatians 3:11.* Faith allows us to see the faithfulness of God. He is love and always acts according to His laws to define love (Romans 13:9-10). Living faith is an active faith. We show our belief in God and His way of life by striving to live, trusting our loving God for what He says in the scripture and what He did and does for us. There is no weak speed in life when we walk by faith.

234. Faith in action

"Lord, I don't know why You want me to carry this thing. I can't eat it, and it's awfully heavy. But, if this is what You want me to do, I'll carry it for You."



235. Your knowledge



"Through perfect wisdom and spiritual understanding, may you reach the fullest knowledge of God's will. So you will be able to lead the kind of life which the Lord expects of you, a life acceptable to him in all its aspects, showing the results in all the good actions you do and increasing your knowledge of God. You will have in you the strength, based on his glorious power, never to give in, but to bear anything joyfully." (Colossians 1:9-11) This passage of scripture is an invitation to walk worthy of the fact that God the Holy Spirit lives within you. Walk worthy of the fact that you have a

new family name: Christian. Walk worthy of the fact that you have a home in Heaven reserved for you. Walk worthy of the fact that you have a glorious inheritance awaiting you. Do not disgrace the family name. Walk worthy of the Lord. Paul says, is the goal of being filled with the knowledge of God's will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding that makes our life strong. Not simply so that you can have an experience that will puff you up in your mortal body, but so that you will have knowledge that will build you up in Christ, that will lift you into the heavenly realms where you are seated with Christ. If you do not suffer from heights will be good and wonderful to live in that place forever.

236. The tragedy

"The tragedy of life and the world is not that men do not know God; the tragedy is that knowing Him, we still insist on pretending He doesn't exist and do what we want." I believe we have a duty to encourage one another to look into this dilemma and with words of thanks or appreciation. We keep all of us on our feet for this kind of reality. We do not add or take anything from God's existence and performance but blessed are the people able to start to speak such words and call others to think.

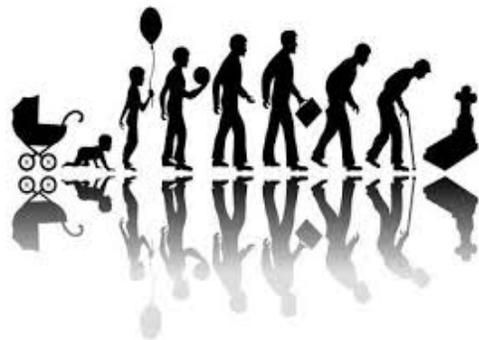


237. Gloomy Christian

Christian is a person of joy. A gloomy Christian is a contradiction of terms, and nothing in all religious history has done Christian more harm than its connection with sad and long faces. If there is no joy in heaven, I won't go there. What do you think?

238. In all transactions

Life cannot be divided into compartments in which God is involved, and in others, he is not affected. The fact is that God does not need to be divided into certain departments of life and kept out of others. He is everywhere, all through life, and in every activity of life. He hears not only the words spoken in his name; he hears all words and cannot be such a form of words that evade bringing God into any transaction. We will regard all promises as special if we remember that all commitments are made in the presence of God.



239. Prayer



"I thank you for my friends, for those who understand me better than I understand myself. For those who know me at my worst and still like me. For those who had forgiven me when I had no right to expect to be forgiven. Help me to be as true to my friends as I would wish them to be to me."

I like this prayer for friends because we often forget to be thankful for friends.

240. Dust of love

"When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them [a scholar of the law] tested him by asking, "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to him, "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This commandment is the greatest and the first. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments." (Mt. 22:34-40).



Love is truly seeing and caring about another human being's existence and welfare. It wants to be there for someone, support them, help them grow, make a difference in someone's life, share in, and care about someone else's happiness and struggles other than your own. Even when it's hard, to love is to will the good of the other first. We can love because God first is loving us as He created us with special dust of love.

241. Halloween



Halloween is a name that means nothing by itself. It is a contraction of "All Hallows Eve," and it designates All Hallows Day's vigil, more commonly known today as All Saints Day. Hallow, as a noun, is an old English word for saint. As a verb, hallow means to make something holy or to honour it as sacred. "Hallow" — or divine person — refers to the saints celebrated on All Saints' Day, which is November 1. Halloween is just an old-fashioned way of saying "the night before All Saints' Day."

Let's celebrate Halloween without forgetting God and the saints. Parents are the ones who must make concrete decisions on how to educate their children according to the circumstances in their neighbourhood. The act of a child dressing up and asking for candy, in my opinion, does not necessarily entail, in itself, anything specific or evil. Let's not attribute mystical importance to a cheerful practice. We can take advantage of this celebration to teach our children how to celebrate it without fundamentalisms and in a Catholic manner. At the same time, they have fun without being too far to know about our call to become holy with all the Saints we celebrate at Halloween.

242. Place at Home

"Think of the love that the Father has lavished on us by letting us be called God's children, and that is what we are. My dear people, we are already the children of God, but what we are to be in the future has not yet been revealed; all we know is that when it is revealed, we shall be like him because we shall see him as he is." 1 John 3:1,2



Jesus is declared to be the Son of God by a voice speaking from Heaven. Jesus is explicitly and implicitly described as the Son of God by himself and various individuals who appear in the New Testament. Jesus is called "son of God," while followers of Jesus are called "sons of God."

In Judaism, "Sons of God" usually refers to the righteous, like Seth's children. Also, all of the earliest sources interpret the "sons of God" as angels. To be called sons and daughters of God means we are set apart, belong to His family, and have a place in His home. We have the right to be confident and thankful unashamed of our spiritual roots bearing the gift of being children of God's Family, and this is what we are. Wow, Isn't this a special privilege?

243. God's speed



"Be careful, my child, in all you do, well-disciplined in all your behaviour. Do to no one what you would not want to be done to you. Give your bread to those who are hungry and your clothes to those who are naked. Whatever you own in plenty, devote a proportion to almsgiving. Bless the Lord God in everything; beg him to guide your ways and bring your paths and purposes to their end." (Tobit 4:14-15,16,19).

Tobit's words are an invitation to bless God, praise him, and thank him for all the blessings he gives us. All we have

and all we are is originated through God's mercy and grace! If you look into the Old and New Testament, and especially the Psalms, prayers offer numerous blessings on God. We can also provide blessings through our prayer, singing, and even working. Even when we sleep, all our life could become a time of blessing the Lord God for his love and presence. In this way, we stay connected with the fountain of life that is our creator. Our speed of life will match with his, and this is truly the best-blessed speed we can join about for our human journey of life.

244. Ghosts faith

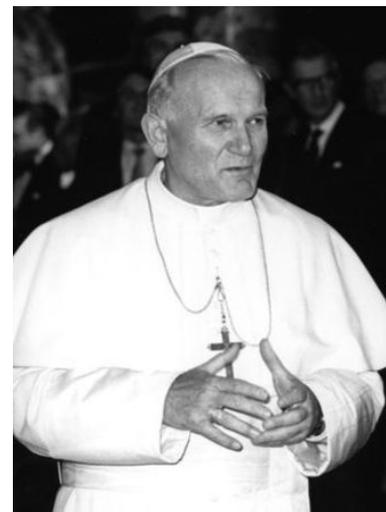
What does the bible say about ghosts? Well, virtually nothing, except a few New Testament references to His disciples thought Jesus was one: *"When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said and cried out in fear." Matthew 14:26 - "Look at my hands and my feet. It is I! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."* (Luke 24:39). Jesus did not deny the



existence of ghosts; He simply said He wasn't one. So really, what in the world are the ghosts? The Greek word used in each of these verses is "Fantasma," which means "appearance" or "apparition, spectre." The spirits do not appear often but rarely and perhaps in our imagination or around the time of Halloween when videos and commercials bombard us in connection with the feast of All Souls. Sometimes we use the expression: you look like a ghost when someone looks pale or sick. I use the same concept when I see a parishioner returning to church after many months of absence or only around Christmas or Easter. Practicing our faith makes us more present and alive in the church's community; if not, we just become in a certain way "ghosts," and probably somebody's faith may be classified as a "Ghost Faith."

245. Priestly prayer

Holy Mass for the ordering of new priests homily of John Paul II, now St. John Paul II ... - Christ addresses his prayer to the Father. He prays aloud before the twelve chosen by him. He prays in the Upper Room on Holy Thursday after instituting the sacrament of the new and eternal covenant. This prayer is commonly called the "priestly prayer." It says like this: "I have made your name known to the men you have given me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one" (Jn 17,6.15). "Sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I too sent them



into the world; for them, I consecrate myself so that they also may be blessed in the truth ... "(Jn 17: 17-19). You are "constituted for the good of men" (Heb 5: 1). The priesthood is the sacrament in which the Church expresses herself as the society of the People of God. It is the "social" sacrament. Priests must "convene" the individual communities of the People of God around them but not for themselves! For Christ!" A good reminder from St. John Paul II's heart is telling all priests about their vocation and remembering to be always good shepherds.

246. Speed of Love

"When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them [a scholar of the law] tested him by asking, "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to him, "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. The greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments." (Mt. 22:34-40).

Love is the hinge that binds the two tablets of the law. For we can't love God, whom we can't see if we don't love our neighbour, whom we can. But the love we are called to is far more than simple affection or warm sentiment like in Hollywood videos. We must give ourselves totally to God—loving with our whole beings, with all our heart, soul, and mind. Our love for our neighbour must express itself in concrete daily actions. To love is to will the good of the other like Jesus did for our humanity, for each one of us. The speed of love works in how we allow it to move us on the way for others. Keep this speed always on your hands' throttle, and at God's rate, reach your destination.



247. The present time



Jesus said to the crowds, "When you see a cloud in the west rising, you say that it is going to rain—and so it does, and when you notice that the wind is blowing from the south, you say that it is going to be hot—and so it is. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky; why do you not know how to interpret the present time?" (Luke 12:54-59).

We need to be able to discern the good and the presence of God in our world, and we also need to be able to identify and interpret the workings of

the evil one in our present time. We can find that our minds are challenged and, at times, find that even the most basic truths of humanity are attacked and distorted. Our societies present us with countless moral choices, so we may find ourselves drawn here and there and get very confused. Take, for example, abortion, euthanasia, and traditional marriage. These moral teachings of our faith are continually under attack within the various cultures of our world. The human person's very dignity and the dignity of the family as God designed it is called into question and directly challenged to find an answer and interpretation. Another example of confusion within our world today is the love of money. Many people are caught up in the desire for material wealth and have been drawn into the lie that this is the only way to happiness. Interpreting the present time means we see through any confusion of our day and age and make good choices. Reflect, today, upon whether or not you are willing and able to let the Holy Spirit cut through the confusion so manifestly present all around us. Are we ready to allow the Holy Spirit of Truth to penetrate our minds and lead us into all truth? The meaning of our present time is the only way to survive the confusion we are in this current time. God acts in and through all the ordinary events and dynamics of the world. Are we able to see and hear the signs of his presence? *Prayer: "Lord, help us to interpret the present time and to see the goodness you offer us and manifest in so many ways. Give us courage and wisdom so that we may follow you, seeking what is good. Jesus, we trust in You." Amen.*

248. On the other side

On this black slate tombstone, the following sobering epitaph could still be read: *"God has decreed all flesh shall die, No age from death is free; And you, my friend, who now pass by, Must shortly lie with me."* It kind of makes your blood run cold just reading this chilling pronouncement. And yet, of course, it's true. The death rate is 100%. No one escapes — it's just a matter of time. Here on earth, the prospect of death makes normal people afraid. Dying people fear the suffering and pain of their final days and not



knowing what is on "the other side." In Revelation 1:18, the conquering Christ says, *"I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades (Hell)."* *"Jesus said to her, 'I am the Resurrection and the Life. The one who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?'" (John 11:25-26).* So there is life, and it is "THE LIFE" on the other side because this kind of vision is not a dream. If Jesus has given us these words, they must bring what they say and the truth they proclaim. The speed of eternity has no limits.

249. Walk the cemetery



On some bright, sunny day, may I recommend a slow, reflective walk in a cemetery? And as you ponder the meaning of life and death, see yourself, your soul in time. According to the Bible, the souls still exist in one of two worlds, not visible to us. Pause sometimes at one of the oldest stones and read the inscription. In this most unlikely of settings, you just may come across a nugget of eternal wisdom, left by the dead for the living you and me walking among the deaths but with a vision of life that is eternal. With this prayer from (Psalm 39:4) “O LORD, help me understand my mortality and the

brevity of life! Let me realize how quickly my life will pass and how eternal is your love for me.” may we ponder and meditate upon the gift of life and the beauty of the new one.

250. Gotten lost

Have you ever been lost? Did you ever need to travel a long distance to meet someone in a city where you had never been before? While you were travelling all those unfamiliar streets, did you ever feel like you might be on the wrong road? That somewhere you may have taken a wrong turn? Were you unsure which way you



should go from there? Did you finally conclude that you were lost? Most of us know that feeling. At times like those, what you need is a roadmap or a good working GPS. If you're able to find one, you anxiously unfold it and begin to study it carefully or hold the button to go back. You're trying to find out just where you are and where you want to be. You wonder where you went wrong. But most of all, you want to know how to get back onto the right road and reach your destination. I believe every one of us is a traveller through this brief life, trying to find our way to Heaven. At some time or another, we have taken a wrong turn and gotten lost, and we all need to find the true way again. We need something or Someone to show us the right way. Do you have anything available or anybody to trust if you are in this situation? Read (John 14:6) *Jesus said to him, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”*

251. Forever young



"Nobody stays young forever. Moreover, ageing doesn't formally announce its arrival. You're mostly blind to it until one day you see yourself in a mirror, see a recent photo of yourself, or get a diagnosis from your doctor. Suddenly you're hit on the head with the unwelcome realization that you're no longer a young person. That usually comes as a surprise. Ageing generally makes itself known in ways that have you denying it, fighting it, and with some bitterness. But that day comes around for everyone when you're surprised, stunned, that what you see in the mirror is so different from how you have imagined yourself, and you ask yourself: "Is this me? Am I this old person? Is this what I look like?" But it is good to know that the soul doesn't age. It matures. You can stay young in the soul long after the body betrays you. Indeed, we're meant to be always young in spirit. God and nature's ageing process is designed to force the soul, whether it wants to or not, to

delve ever deeper into the mystery of life, community, God, and itself. Our souls don't age, they mature, and so we can always be young in spirit. So, in the end, ageing is a gift, even if unwanted. Ageing takes us to a deeper place, whether we want to go or not." Thanks, Fr. Ron Rolheiser, for this splash into our soul's youth place we may be forever young in our soul and feel the freedom and the breeze of this good perennial speed of life.

252. May the force be with you

"There will always be those who say to you that you are too young and delicate to make anything happen. People don't see the part of you that may explode. Don't let these voices drown out the sound of your powerful heartbeat. You are the first drop of rain in a big storm that follows like a hurricane. Your power builds beyond you. You need to grow up to find greatness and let your courage change weakness and conquer death. You are so much stronger than what the others have ever believed you could be. The world is waiting for you to set it on fire. Trust in yourself and burn to bring the victory of life. The faith in the One who gave you life is the force that will always be in you." (Anonymous)



253. No Man Is an Island



“Our Christian destiny is, in fact, a great one: but we cannot achieve greatness unless we lose all interest in being great. Greatness is illusory, and if we pay too much attention to it, we will be lured out of the peace and stability of the being God gave us and seek to live in a myth we have created for ourselves. And when we are truly ourselves, we lose most of the futile self-consciousness that keeps us constantly comparing ourselves with others to see how big we are.” — Thomas Merton

If no one is truly self-sufficient, everyone must rely on the company and comfort of others to thrive. An island would never mingle with other parts of the land, but humans cannot do that because an island cannot move by itself and is bound where it is, but that is not the same for human beings because we have the desire to connect with others and we can. Also, the islands do not float. Islands are the tops of underwater mountains. The base is at the bottom of the ocean, and the bottom is connected with all the continents. For the same reason, the interconnectedness of all people and with God makes sense. We depend on one another, and we have all interconnected ground to stand for.

254. You are my destiny

“Love is our true destiny. We do not find the meaning of life by ourselves alone - we find it with another.” — Thomas Merton

These words help us to look into the mystery of the Other who called us into existence, and this is my sharing and thanksgiving prayer: “I knew You loved me before I met You because You created me. I think You dreamed me into life before the beginning of time and space, and I know I will love you forever because I am made according to your image of love. I have been waiting all my life, and I know that everything will be even clearer in the next one. Thanks, my beloved One.”



255. Look ahead



When we think about our future or destiny, isn't it better to believe we can control our future by making deliberate, conscious decisions than just being passive, waiting for extraordinary things to happen in our own lives? Everything goes back to creating an experience for

ourselves that is in line with our authenticity. With the same attention, we can perhaps shape our journey. Ask yourself where you want your life to be in a few years and work for it. Understand what you value and what makes you real. Decide what and who you want to keep in your life. If you do not control your future or destiny, I believe someone else will. If Someone else is God, all is just well, and all is fine but don't just sit back and let someone or something else guide you along; take the wheel and drive towards your destination, your future, your destiny is already happening! This kind of speed of life is always very peaceful and secure.

256. Who are you?

"If you want to identify me, ask me not where I live, or what I like to eat, or how I comb my hair, but ask me what I am living for, in detail, ask me what I think is keeping me from living fully for the thing I want to live for." — Thomas Merton

We have our unique qualities, making life easier and more fun than trying to be someone else. To be who we are' also means understanding that we should be ourselves most of the time. It is not an easy task but not impossible. What we are in the way we present ourselves and the things we do is no enough. Who we are is the person underneath all that. Perhaps like Thomas Merton, the answer to what we live for is becoming a picture of what we are.



257. The Sabbath day



He was teaching in a synagogue on the sabbath. And a woman was there who for eighteen years had been crippled by a spirit; she was bent over, completely incapable of standing erect. When Jesus saw her, he called to her and said, "Woman, you are set free of your infirmity." He laid his hands on her, and she at once stood up straight and glorified God. But the leader of the synagogue, indignant that Jesus had cured on the sabbath, said to the crowd in reply, "There are six days when work should be done. Come on those days to be cured, not on the sabbath day." The Lord said to him in reply, "Hypocrites! Does not each one of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his ass from the manger and lead it out for watering? This daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound for eighteen years now, ought she not to have

been set free on the sabbath day from this bondage?" When he said this, all his adversaries were humiliated; and the whole crowd rejoiced at all the splendid deeds he did. (Luke 13:10-17). Jesus observed the Sabbath (Luke 4:16) and never suggested a change. He did, however, reject a strict legalistic interpretation of the Old Testament commandment. He said Sabbath observance was not a duty that humanity owed to God. Rather, God made the Sabbath a day of rest for humanity's benefit (Mark 2:27). Jesus and His disciples did not observe the strict Jewish rules against doing any work on the Sabbath. Jesus giving life to that woman who had been crippled for so many years did respect the Sabbath. If rest restores our energy to heal on the Sabbath, it is a restoration of life, and all Sabbaths are supposed to be the days we revive and cure our lives. "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Exodus 20:8). Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." Sunday has the same meaning because Sunday is the day of new life, the Resurrection day. Sunday is the day to "stand up straight and glorified God."

258. My refuge

'You are my hiding place and my shield; I hope in your word. When disaster strikes, where do you turn? You are my hiding place and my security; I hope in your name' (Psalm 119:114). 'He who dwells in the shelter of the Highest will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.' (Psalm 91:1-2).

Hey, we all have storms. We all go through dark times. I do, and you do. But



if we are men who are men of God's Word, the women who are women of God's Word, we sail through those storms because we trust the One who is our shield and our hiding place.

259. Muster seed



He set another parable before them, saying, "*The Kingdom of Heaven is like a grain of mustard seed, which someone took, and sowed in his garden; it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches*" (Luke 13:18-19). The mustard seed is known for its faith because, having no other option, it must choose to trust God and give everything it has to either become a tree or die trying. The mustard seed is one of the smallest seeds, but it grows into a huge plant. In this parable, Jesus teaches that although the Kingdom of God started

small, with Jesus and the disciples, it would grow and spread across the world. These words are God-breathed. They're alive and full of power. They're like seeds that will produce for sure something if we put it in the ground of our hearts. God wants us to plant the seed of His word in our lives. We have to plant that seed ourselves in our garden. The plant won't jump up and produces itself immediately. We need to do it as we hear His word. Nothing will happen unless we plant the Word of God in our hearts. The speed of growth of God's word in us could be slow but is the right speed for a strong faith in the future. Everything in nature starts slowly like the departure of a rocked living our planet ground.

260. Like yeast

"The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough" (Luke 13:20-21).

The kingdom of God may have small beginnings, but it will increase. Yeast is microscopic, and only a little is needed into the dough. Yet, given time, the yeast will spread through all the dough. Similarly, Jesus' domain started with twelve men in an obscure corner of Galilee, but it has spread throughout the world. The gospel makes progress. Also, the kingdom of God exerts its influence from within, not from without.

Yeast makes dough rise from inside. God first changes the heart of a person, and that internal change has external manifestations. The gospel influence in culture works the same way: Christians within a culture act as agents of change,



slowly transforming that culture. Although the kingdom of God works invisibly, its effect is evident to all. Yeast does its job slowly, secretly, and silently, but no one can deny its impact on bread. The same is true of the work of grace in our hearts. The nature of yeast is to grow and to change whatever it contacts. When we accept Christ, His grace grows in our hearts and changes us from the inside out. As the gospel transforms lives, it exerts a pervasive influence in the world at large. As we *“reflect the Lord’s glory, we are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18)*. The Lord's glory always has his speed that leads us and all things in the universe to move at the lovely right speed of grace.

261. Wise or Fool



"For he sees wise men die; likewise, the fool and the senseless person perish and leave their wealth to others. Their inner thought is that their houses will last forever, their dwelling places to all generations; they call their lands after their names. Nevertheless, man, though in honour, does not remain; he is like the beasts that perish." (Psalm 49:10-12).

Like in the writer of Ecclesiastes (6:1-2), the psalmist noted that we couldn't take our material wealth with us into the next world. But there is a possibility in which we *can send it on ahead*. Jesus spoke of using our present material resources to store up treasure in heaven (Mark 10:21). Our material wealth can do us good in the world to come, but that happens through a kingdom-minded generosity more than accumulation. We never learn and live enough to trust charity more than collection.

262. Immortality

As human beings, we hunger for immortality. History tells us about the names of emperors, kings, people in power, and many others; they that trust in riches believe their estates will last forever, beyond their own life to all generations. They memorialize themselves by calling their lands after their names. The ambition still of many takes little care to know that their names are written in heaven, but strive to propagate them, as they are able, upon the earth, Nimrod by his tower, Absalom by his pillar, Alexander by his Alexandria. But their name and glory



pass away in the dust of time. Men have even called countries by their terms. The speed of time lets our names be written on the ground, but it is as if they are written on the water sooner or later.

263. Honour in time



Though a man or woman may have some measure of honour in time through estates or descendants or memorials, *he/she still dies* – just like an animal dies. Therefore, the truly wise man or woman does not trust in riches or boast in wealth. He/she prepares for eternity by trusting God and making their boast in the LORD loving Him first without forgetting to love also 'the neighbour' not as in a competitive game. It is the ability to think and reason that sets human beings apart from the remainder of creation. Yet how animal-like we are perishing when we fail to consider our days' shortness and prepare for how we will spend eternity! We must find a way to learn and

understand what immortality truly is. I am curious to know after this present time how it will be the speed of eternal life!

264. Two ways

The way of those who are foolish is the way that values the material over the spiritual. It does not prepare for the world to come. To be a descendant of the one who trusted and boasted in riches and approve of his world view is also foolish. Grace is not hereditary. Each generation has to find a way of faith and grace as God's gift, but sometimes only worldliness goes from generation to generation. The race of fools never dies out. We



have to remember our original blessings and follow the way of the wiser. Therefore if we are spiritually smart enough, we may also understand that if we agree with our words, often benefiting from our power and prestige, we will even die and be no more one day. Jesus conquers death once forever, and we need the lenses of faith and the eyes of the resurrection to see our future.

265. Victory



Every graveyard tells of the power that death has over humanity. Yet God is greater than the power of the grave, and in Jesus Christ, we can even overcome the grave saying, *O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?* (1 Corinthians 15:55). The wisdom of the grave is just a reminder. The Bible's knowledge is also like a switch that leads and shares more power and light in the eye of our minds. The words '*But God*' always make a significant difference. The great '*But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me*'... (Psalm 49:15) is one of the mountain-tops of Old Testament hope, and it brings out into the open the assurance of victory over death in which all the New Testament finds life.

We know that the word *redeems* or *redemption* is a commercial term, meaning 'to buy,' 'buy out,' or 'buy a slave so that he or she need never again return to the marketplace.' Spiritually, it refers to God's work in buying us out of sin's marketplace and setting us free. It is interesting to consider that the 'he' and 'me' confirm that this is not salvation at arm's length but face-to-face. Also, the word '*receive*' is more positive than it may sound to us, like in Genesis, 'God took him' (Genesis 5:24). Who can do this? No one but only God. Are we confident that God would '*receive*' the one who trusted in Him and made his boast in the Lord? Are we going at God's speed, or we still in our mortal calculations?

266. Afraid of what?

Most of us are not consciously afraid of another's prosperity or when his house glory is increased. Yet we may be afraid of thinking that they prosper at my expense or because perhaps material things matter more than spiritual things do. We may be fearful because maybe God does not govern the universe as unbelievers think. We are afraid because maybe there is no reward for the righteous or punishment for the wicked in the world beyond; there is no honest government to the universe; afraid because the jerks of the world won't get what is coming to them. The Scripture assures us that our reasons for fear are unfounded. The fool who trusted and boasted in riches can take nothing with him to the world beyond. His glory shall not descend after him; all the praise he will ever deserve he has had in this life. But for the uprights, the opposite is true; their glory shall ascend after them, and they will, in some sense, be



brought to glory (Hebrews 2:10) and even obtain God's glory in the world to come (2 Thessalonians 2:14). For those who trust and boast in riches, this world is the best they will ever have. For the upright who look to God for their redemption, this world is not enough. Did you notice how generally there are not too many titles close to the name on our tombs? Worship, Honour, Lordship, and His Grace, will alike find their titles ridiculous in the grave. Hell knows no aristocracy. So why be afraid if we now prepare to have our names written in Heaven?

267. One night for 12



Jesus was about to choose His disciples. In one sense, there was nothing in Jesus' three years of ministry before the cross more important than this. These were the men who would carry on what He had done, and with them, the work of Jesus would be extended to the whole world. No wonder Jesus gave this critical choice an entire night of prayer. Do we pray when something important is happening in our lives? Jesus was God, yet He did not simply use His infinite knowledge to pick the apostles. Instead, He prayed all night. Like

every other struggle Jesus faced, He faced this one as a man, as a son who needed to seek the will of His Father and rely on the power of the Holy Spirit just as we do when we pray. One night alone in prayer might make us for sure new men when we pray, our soul changes. In worship, we do not change God's mind, but we change our minds for God's best will for us. And most of the time, we renew our poverty of soul to better spiritual wealth, from trembling to confidence and trust. When we tune up our prayer for the will of God, the perfect speed of our life comes along, and all will be just fine. It may be called 'Perfect Speed.'

268. 12 are called

He called them, and for that matter, they belonged to Jesus. Disciples never belong to any man; they only belong to Jesus. They are His disciples, the ones who follow and stay with Him. A disciple was a learner, a student, but in the first century, a student did not simply study a subject; he followed a teacher. There is an element of personal attachment in 'disciple' lacking in 'student' because a disciple



lives with the Master. From among the group of His followers (the larger group of disciples), He picked twelve apostles. Jesus chose twelve apostles from them because this was the foundation of the newly chosen people, and as Israel had twelve tribes, Jesus would also have twelve apostles. The idea behind the ancient Greek word for *apostle* is 'ambassador.' The Greek word is *Apostolos*, which means 'sent one.' It describes someone who represents another and has a message from their sender. In this broader sense, Jesus was also an apostle because the Father sent him. We all may join the same idea if we believe that God sends us into this world for a purpose.

269. The names

"Simon, whom He also named Peter, and Andrew his brother; James and John; Philip and Bartholomew; Matthew and Thomas; James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called the Zealot; Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot who also became a traitor." (Luke: 6:14-16).



We do not know much about most of these men. Peter, James, John, and Judas, we know something about him. Yet of the other eight, we pretty much only know their name. Their fame is reserved for heaven, where their names are on the twelve foundations of God's heavenly city (Revelation 21:14). There are many interesting connections with this group. There are brothers James and John, Peter and Andrew; business associates Peter, James, and John were all fishermen. Opposing political viewpoints Matthew, the Roman-friendly tax collector, and Simon, the

Roman-hating Zealot, will betray Jesus: Judas Iscariot. Judas's surname of Iscariot probably indicates that he was a man from Kerieth: he thus seems to have been the only Judean among the twelve with that specific name. As we can see, the twelve titles are usually arranged in pairs probably because he sent His Apostles out two by two, and this was a logical way to list them. The variety of personalities and backgrounds of the apostles make me thinking that being a disciple of Jesus is an honour but not a privilege: anybody may be called to follow.

270. Why me

A man once asked a theologian, 'Why did Jesus choose Judas Iscariot to be his disciple if He knew that one day he was going to betray Him?' The teacher replied, 'I don't know, but I have an even harder question: Why did Jesus choose me?' ***God didn't come to earth in the flesh for just 33 years.***



Christ didn't leave us when he ascended into heaven. We, the Christian community, continue the incarnation. We are the Body of Christ. We do not represent Christ, replace Christ, or become only his mystical body. We ARE the Body of Christ, and we continue to give physical flesh to God. All this has tremendous implications for how we pray, seek healing, look for guidance, understand the religious experience, and for how we "bind and loose" our loved ones.

271. Healing touch

"Jesus came down with them and stood on a level place with a crowd of His disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem; and from the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon. They came to hear Him and be healed of their diseases, as well as those who were tormented with unclean spirits. And they were healed. And the whole multitude sought to touch Him, for power went out from Him and healed them all." (Luke 6:17-19).



Jesus came down His disciples to serve and bless a crowd defined as a multitude. Jesus not only taught them *about* serving others; He wanted them to help Him, probably to learn something about it or for the sake of the work. Here they seemed to work as a team, probably helping the sick reach Jesus and dismissing them soon after working like nurses bringing patients to the Doctor. Jesus could have done it all by Himself, but He wants our cooperation most of the time. Some have also observed that 'Jesus came down with them and the area around the Sea of Galilee – including the traditional Mount of Beatitudes, where the Sermon on the Mount is said to be delivered. It is like a mountain when looking from the Sea of Galilee, but like a level place when one stands on or above it. As He is coming down to meet, the crowd reviles again who Jesus is

and his desire to be with us. Down to our level and needs because as 'The Emmanuel,' He is 'The God with us' and as Saviour, He came down to our sick humanity level to heal and restore us. At this amazing speed, we all have a chance to touch Him and to be healed.

272. You are citizen

"Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit." (Ephesians 2:19-22).

Paul refers to Christians of Gentile background. They should not regard themselves as “second-class citizens” in God’s kingdom in any regard. They are not only full citizens but also in full communion and equal members of God’s household. It is also good for us to come after 2000 years. Because we are one body and have the same access to God, it also follows that we are all built upon a common foundation that St. Paul is telling us. That foundation is the original apostles and prophets. Their enduring revelation, recorded in the New Testament, tells us even more about the foundation. In the New Testament, probably the prophets are the New Testament authors who were not strictly members of the core apostolic group. Those who ranked next to the Apostles in the government of the church. They were not in every case distinct from the Apostles: the apostleship probably always including the gift of *prophecy*, but all the Apostles themselves were considered *prophets* speaking the word of God. Today there are no more 'apostles or prophets' as Paul means here, but with baptism, we are all 'Priests - Prophets and Kings.' Wow, it is not only a great privilege but a way of life that is calling us to go even now at the speed of Evangelization.



273. Cornerstone



"Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone." (Act.4:11)

This cornerstone means at the tip of the angle is the capstone or binding stone that holds the whole structure together. Often, the royal name was inscribed on it: it was a very important stone. This stone, placed at the extreme corner, binds the other rocks in the building together,

was and still is the stone in the structure, the one on which its stability depended. So who are we, the other stones? We are called the building's living stones because we are alive and visible rocks in the church's scaffolding. But the *cement* keeping us together is something else; it is wholly divine; it is the Spirit of God, binding us all together by articulating each one of us all about the Head, the Lord our cornerstone. Nice to be close to the corner of the building.

274. Holy Temple

As we keep to our common foundation, God's people's whole building grows together beautifully, as a holy temple where God dwells in beauty and glory. It tells us that the Church is a building perfectly designed by the Great Architect. It is not a haphazard pile of stones, randomly dumped in a field. God *arranges* the Church according to his purposes and design. It is never to be an empty house that is virtually a museum with anyone *living* inside. The Church is to be both God's living place and His people, a holy and set apart location. The priests offer the spiritual sacrifices of lips and hearts so-called sacraments and praises to God. When Solomon's temple was built, the stones were prepared far from the temple building site. It was said that you couldn't hear the sound of a hammer or chisel or other iron tools at the site (1 Kings 6:7). In the same way, God prepares us first with Baptism, Communion, Confirmation, and then He fits us into His building. Are you already in the establishment or just waiting for your location in the Holy Temple?



275. Mama Church



Someone said: '*The Father chooses his house, the Son purchaseth it, the Holy Ghost taketh possession of it.*' For sure, the everlasting Father builds his church into this splendour of and by His grace. But we know that all churches on earth need purification and glorification as we all need. The Church is Holy, but the stones need to be sanctified by His presence and grace. We should praise God for His glorious action of power and love for us. See what all these words about the Church may help us to picture the ever beauty of The Church: There is nothing

as *noble* as the Church, seeing that it is the temple of God. There is nothing so worthy of *reverence*, seeing God who *dwells* in it. There is nothing so *ancient* since the *patriarchs* and *prophets* worked to build it. There is nothing so *solid* since *Jesus Christ* is the *foundation* of it. There is nothing so *high* since it reaches as high as the *heavenly places in Christ Jesus*. There is nothing so *perfect* and *well proportioned* since the *Holy Spirit* is the *architect*. There is nothing more *beautiful* because it is adorned with building stones of every age, every place, every people, from the highest kings to the lowest peasants, with the most brilliant artists and the

simplest believers. There is nothing more *comfortable* since it is spread over the whole earth. There is nothing so *Divine* since it is a *living* building, *animated* and *inhabited* by the *Holy Spirit*. Mama Church is for all his children the best place to be and the most interesting playground.

276. Dear God

A small boy from a low-income family wrote to God for help. His letter, addressed simply 'To God', asked if he could send \$ 100.00 to buy food and clothing badly needed for his family. He said his father was out of work, and his mother was ill, and they had no money. A Post Office official intercepted the letter and read it. He decided to give it to the local Rotary Club. The Club investigated and found the family was indeed in need. However, as they only had \$ 80.00 in their benevolent fund, they gave that. Some weeks later, the Post Office official noticed another letter addressed "To God." He opened it and read: "*Dear God, thanks for the money you sent, but next time could you please deal direct? Those Rotary blokes took a commission out of it.*"



277. Do you believe this?



Death, where is your victory? Death, where is your sting? Now the sting of death is sin, and sin gets its power from the Law. So let us thank God for giving us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:55-57).

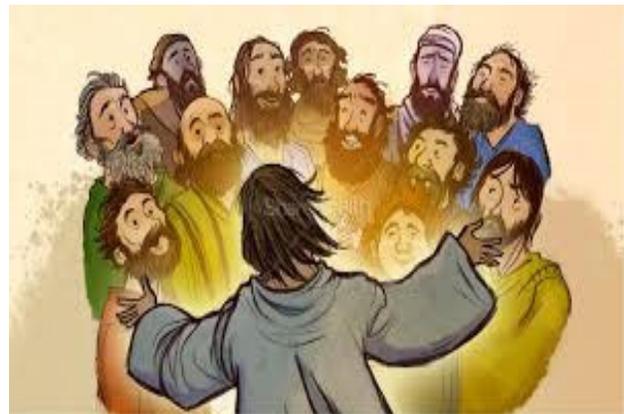
A resurrected body is not a resuscitated corpse. It is a new order of life that will never die again. Death is defeated by resurrection. In the Gospels, we have many apparitions of Jesus after the resurrection and his body; even with all the marks of crucifixion, it was a different body.

The painful riddle of death has a remedy, and Jesus's resurrection proves it." Paul's triumphant declaration, "Death is swallowed up in victory!" reminds us who at the end is the winner. Knowing death is a defeated enemy because of Jesus' work, Paul can almost taunt death and mock it. Death has no power over the person found in Jesus Christ. We will not fear death; why should we? Even if death looks like a dragon, but her sting is gone. Their teeth are broken, like

an old lion, wherefore should we fear her? Death is no more able to destroy us, but she still is like a messenger sent to bring us to the golden gate wherein we shall enter and see our Saviour's unveiled face forever. The principle of resurrection also proves that we are not under the law any longer. We are no longer subject to the penalty of the law (death), and we are set free from sin. But this is also an invitation for us. We must not only *work*, but we must *labour* – put forth all our strength, and we must work and do everything *in the Lord* – under his *direction*, and by his guidance, for without him, not even our resurrection will be available. The resurrection speed needs our cooperation and trust in the One who is 'The Resurrection and the Life.' Do you believe this?

278. Abide in Me

By this, we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. (1 John 4:13-15).



Plainly, Christians can say, “*We know.*” We don’t have to merely “*hope*” we are saved and “*hope*” we will make it to heaven, thus having no assurance of salvation before we pass from this world to the next. We can know, and we can know now, on *this* side of eternity, our future and destiny. We abide in Him, and He in us: Our taking in Jesus is not a one-sided affair, with us struggling to abide in Him and Jesus trying to escape us. Just as real as it is that we should stay in Him, He does indeed take in us as we become more day after day 'one body in Christ.'

Jesus said in John 15:4, *Abide in Me, and I in you.* And in John 15:7, He said, *If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you.* One of the ways Jesus abides in us – lives in us – is through His Word and the sacraments life. The Eucharist is especially the sacrament of transformation into the Body we receive. The abiding becomes genuine and real to transform us and all the universe into one great energy-body of love. We must allow his Word and sacramental presence to abide in us. If this is missed, there is no transformation, no connection, no life abiding in us. Eventually, we become like low walking deaths on this planet, which already has many decay signs.

279. Be calm

"With the coming of the evening that same day, Jesus said to them, "Let us cross over to the other side." And leaving the crowd behind, they took him, just as he was, in the boat; and there were other boats with



him. It began to blow a gale, and the waves were breaking into the boat so that it was almost swamped. But he was in the stern, his head on a cushion, asleep. They woke him and said to him, "Master, do you not care? We are going down!" And he woke up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Quiet now! Be calm!" And the wind dropped, and all was calm again. Then he said to them, "Why are you so frightened? How is it that you have no faith?" They were filled with awe and said to one another: "Who can this be? Even the wind and sea obey him." (Mark 4, 35-41).

In the mixed turmoil we see in our societies today, we must first reclaim the right to live out our faith through trusting more God's action in our lives as He is in the boat of our time and space. Many times in the most painful situations of experience, we may think and ask: "Where is God in all of this? Why is God letting this happen? Why is God asleep? Why is He not helping?" Then, it may happen that a flood of calm and peace, such as we had never experienced in our lives before coming to us. No magic lights went on, no divine voices were heard, and we made no claims of "miracle" afterward, but, for one second, we realized that no matter the storm, no matter the loss, and no matter even death itself, God is still in charge of this universe. One second of realization was all it took, and calm returned. In the stories of our lives, God is still in the order of this universe and nothing else. The first Christian creeds had only one line: Jesus is Lord! Ultimately that says enough, and it says it all. God still is in charge, even in death and darkness. But, we know that during the stormy moments of life, when our very souls are in fear of drowning, it will seem like God is asleep, comfortable, his head on a cushion. The real challenge in our lives' stories; calm is only a second of realization away. What calms the storm in life is not that all of our problems suddenly disappear but that, within them, we realize that, because God is still in charge, all will be well, and all our troubles, even the shadow of death itself, will go away. All will be well because even asleep, and God is still the lord. If we believe this, we also will feel that unique calm, which only God's presence can give.

280. Do not worry

"Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day's trouble be sufficient for the day."

(Mt., 6:25. 34). Worrying won't stop the bad stuff from happening; it just prevents you from enjoying the good of the day. Sometimes we have to regain a positive attitude in our life and place better trust in God for our future. Do not worry about the world coming to an end today because it's already tomorrow in China. As beloved children of God, we know that He will never abandon us, and in His hands, we will always find peace of mind, body, and spirit. I love this speed of life!



281. Have a nice trip



We know that Human Beings are religious by nature. This is irrepressible in us. In many different civilizations, the worship of one divinity or many is always present naturally for humans. We have an innate desire to render what is due to God. Yet liberalism, first through indifference

and then through hostility to true religion, misdirects souls away from their highest good. In so doing, liberalism also misdirects civilization itself. Do we have a cure for this 'virus'? Is religion a right given to us by the state? Is it opium for the masses? Is it a private opinion with no role in the public sphere? I believe that true religion is relevant to justice and law and necessary for civilization to thrive. Faith is meant to reconnect us to the very source of who we are: beings created by a loving creator. I hope that many of us can flourish, be guided, and reach the light of a brighter future and see a more robust civilization. This speed probably will bring us to a beautiful destination that is out of this world. Have a nice trip!

282. Religion & Politics

Where shall we find truth, goodness, and justice? What does our society value? What virtues (and vices) do our laws and customs reward, and what sins (or purity) do they punish? What rights and liberties and privileges will politicians and their parties go to great lengths to defend, and which ones do they abandon as soon as it is expedient to do so? What areas of human (and divine) concern are considered “out of bounds” for politics and are thus left to recede into an increasingly walled-off sphere of the private? It doesn't take an especially keen political mind to realize that the answers to these questions in modern America—and really across the Western world—are not encouraging for people who take the Catholic faith seriously. Of course,

none of us are obligated to consent to the pressures of a corrupt culture, and neither could an ethical culture compel us to be good. But, as Servant of God Dorothy Day said, we can and must try *“to build that kind of society where it is easier for people to be good.”* Every aspect of our ordinary lives encourages us one way or the other: toward justice or injustice, truth or falsehood, good or evil. There is no avoiding these fundamental concepts, no way to be safe and still in between them, no neutrality. All this is because our laws and customs ultimately emanate from what we value most of all, from what we place on the highest pedestal, from what we honour above all in our ordinary life. In other words, society emanates from worship. And, just like for every person on earth, what we worship will either be God, or it will be something or someone other than God. How everything in our life plays out, as individuals and as societies, depends on this decision. - Scott Hahn and Brandon McGinley.



283. Best way to grow



“Learn where there is wisdom, where strength, where understanding; That you may also discern the length of days, and life, where light for the eyes, and peace.” (Bar. 3:14).

A canon of wisdom drawn from the scriptures of all the major world religions, mystical literature, philosophy, psychology, and human experience tells us that the journey to maturity and compassion is extraordinarily paradoxical and that the best way to grow is by our mistakes or in time of trial. Somebody said that the best wines have to be aged in cracked, old barrels. And so even the human soul mellows, takes on the character and comes to compassion only when there are real cracks, painful ones, in the body and life of the one who carries it. Our successes bring us glory, while our pain brings us character, compassion, and maturity. Pain, and sometimes only pain, serves to mellow the soul. It will make us more human and more able to understand others when they suffer. The best way to grow is in the time of suffering if we can make this time our precious time for compassion or participation in Christ's passion. At this speed, we know-how to gas up our journey of life for a better understanding.

284. Life insurance

"I tell you, make friends for yourselves with dishonest wealth so that when it fails, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings. The trustworthy person in very small matters is also responsible for great ones, and the person who is dishonest in very small issues is also wicked in great ones. If, therefore, you are not trustworthy with illegal wealth, who will trust you with true wealth? If you are not faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is yours? No servant can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." (LUKE, 16:9-13).

Jesus is teaching us to approach wealth with wisdom. St. John Chrysostom (Early Church Father who served as Archbishop of Constantinople. He died: September 14, 407 AD) has a special remark on the right approach to money: *"Those who love money are*



fierce in the pursuit of it, like wild animals pursuing their prey. They betray, cheat, or exploit their closest friend when gold and silver are to be gained. They learn to make their consciences as numb as fingers on a cold day. Their eyes become blind to the suffering they cause, and their ears deaf to the cries of those whose lives are ruined by them." Those are strong words, and they shook the people at the time who heard them. And they shake us today. But we can listen very well to those words. What's the ground of all this for John Chrysostom? Why does he say it? His words may be an invitation for us today too. Because everything we have—our bodies, our life, our breath, our minds, our accomplishments, and, yes, our wealth—is a sheer gift given to us by a generous God. Therefore, it ought never to be hoarded only for our purposes but always used for God's purposes. The speed of wisdom may be slower, but any life insurance will never cover us if we serve the acceleration of wealth.

285. The new heaven and a new earth



'I saw a new heaven and a new earth; I saw the holy city, and the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, as beautiful as a bride all dressed for her husband. Then I heard a loud voice call from the throne, 'You see this city? Here God lives among men. He will make his home among them; they shall be his people, and he will be their God.' (Apocalypse 21:1,2) The idea of a new earth with a unique atmosphere and sky is a familiar theme in the Scriptures. Many of the prophets, both Old and New Testaments, spoke of this new heaven and new earth. The Bible uses the word *heaven* in three senses. The *first heaven* is the earth's atmosphere, the "blue sky." The *second heaven* is outer space, the "night sky." The *third heaven* is the place where God lives in glory.

When the Scriptures speak of a new heaven, they mean a new “blue sky” and a new “night sky,” the place where everything is new. These new things (city, heaven, and earth) *are not and never can be* man's achievement, but only a gift from God who makes all things unique and beautiful. John used the most striking, beautiful image he could think of for his time. The most beautiful thing a man will ever see is his bride coming down the aisle, ready to meet him. John said that this is how beautiful the New Jerusalem will be. God desires to live in close fellowship with man, and man's purpose is to be a people in the family of God, rejoicing and celebrating forever. The dream of John's vision is a unique speed of blessing and life. Wow, everything will be just wonderful!

286. Who am I?

“Who among you would say to your servant who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field, ‘Come here immediately and take your place at table’? Would he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare something for me to eat. Put on your apron and wait on me while I eat and drink. You may eat and drink when I am finished’? Is he grateful to that servant because he did what was commanded? So should it be with you? When you have done all you have been commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants; we have done what we were obliged to do.’” (LUKE 17:7-10)



The proper response to a King is obedience. The King commands, and the servant responds—simply, promptly, unhesitatingly. A courtier or a messenger might not understand the rationale for, or consequences of, what the King has told him to do, but he does it, trusting in the wisdom and power of the one who sends him. The word "obey" is derived from the Latin *obedire*, to listen attentively, to heed, obedience. In the presence of God the Lord, and we servants should listen, bending our ears and our wills to his word. How is that in life? We often question why things are happening in this way for us? Do we trust the King, or we trust more ourselves?

287. Spirituality of maintenance

We all struggle in life in many different ways. First, sometimes we work hard to maintain ourselves, stay healthy and stable, keep normal, not fall apart, or fall into chaos and depression. It takes real effort just to maintain and support our ordinary health, stability, and happiness. Then, at another level, we struggle with the complexities of life that overwhelm us, like one breakdown, one lost relationship, one lost job, one death of a loved one, or one sickness that we cannot even foresee or control. Another part of us that works differently is forever reaching



upwards, struggling to grow, achieving higher things, not wasting our riches and gifts, and living a more admirable, noble, and generous life. Perhaps we need a spirituality of maintenance, a spirituality that helps us maintain our normal health, stability, and ordinariness. Also, we need a spirituality that keeps us and our minds on things above, leading us to become better Christians. But the challenge to grow spiritually is to choose a spirituality that maintains us alive when we descend into the frightening underworld of chaos, depression, loss, insignificance, darkness, evil forces, and death itself. Life reveals itself above us and below us and on the flat plain of ordinariness. So let us trust our faith in the light and the power of the One who loves us because we are not dead yet, and it is never too late to open our hearts and drink at the fountain of life that reveals itself quietly as eternal.

288. Is it right?

Is religion a right given to us by the state; is it opium for the masses; Is it a private opinion with no role in the public sphere? It is true that religious liberty, justice, and peace, perpetuated by secular-liberal culture: that religion is a private matter? These questions challenge our idea of religion and its role in society. To be “neutral” concerning the King of kings, to Christ, our saviour and redeemer, elevating other goods above Him are becoming today the most popular social idolatry that enforces personal idolatry. Like society, the soul that strives to be secular finds itself not liberated but subjected to new gods. If Jesus Christ is not at the top of the soul’s hierarchy of goods, something or someone else will be. By definition, idols are jealous gods, soon demanding more than we were originally willing to give: more sacrifice of the virtue of religion to achieve more wealth, more autonomy, more pleasure, more success, more prestige. They eventually accept nothing less than the worship, sacrifice, and adoration reserved only for Jesus. We see this also in personal psychology: individuals and families. Many people feel like everything they have doesn’t matter and is about to fall apart unless they can have *something else*: a bigger house, another relationship, a lucrative promotion. The materialist view of reality assumes that only what we can see, touch, and taste matters. But, if we have souls, and if those souls are made to conform to a divine and unchanging order, and if genuine harmony of mind, body, and community can only come from that order, then we can see all these inferior goods, such as prosperity and pleasure and autonomy. These kinds of goods are not healing medicine but idols that bring disorder. Pope Benedict XVI called this disorder “dictatorship of relativism,” and its forerunner is secular liberalism running in today’s world humanity. Today, more than ever, we need the presence of Jesus; we need his healing touch and love in our society, our families, and in the mind, body, and soul of each of us.



289. Special daily prayer

"First of all, then, I ask that supplications, prayers, petitions, and thanksgivings be offered for everyone, for kings and all in authority, that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all devotion and dignity. It is good and pleasing to God, our saviour, who wills everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." (1 Tim. 2:1-4)

If we wish to live in peace concerning our civil leaders daily, we must bear in our hearts the same commitment to pray for them diligently while not failing to find ways to invite them to take part in the great works God is accomplishing in the world. Prayer may change in a good many things around us, and this is politically correct!

290. Amen

'How rich are the depths of God – how deep his wisdom and knowledge – and how impossible to penetrate his motives or understand his methods! Who could ever know the mind of the Lord? Who could ever be his counsellor? Who could ever give him anything or lend him anything? All that exists comes from him; all is by him and for him. To him be glory forever! Amen.' (Romans 11:33-36)



Paul realizes that God's wisdom and knowledge are beyond him. The quotations from Isaiah 40:13 and Job 41:11 emphasize both God's wisdom and His sovereign power; no one can make God their debtor. All plans in the universe came from God. It wasn't the man's idea. Let's work on a project to go to God because this is the best for us. In our spiritual journey of life and death, it is all of Him. Everything could only happen through Him, and the great work of Jesus on our behalf is through Him that brings salvation. It's not for me; it's not for you; it's all to Him. It's for His pleasure that we are created, and we find our fulfillment in bringing Him glory and honour. The fact that Paul can't figure out God's understanding makes him glorify God all the more. When we understand some of the greatness of God, we worship Him all the more passionately because of what we are as His beloved Children. The best prayer we may say here on earth is the 'Amen.'

291. Heroes

The most powerful books ever written are not written on paper but in the lives, faces, and witnesses of real people who inspire us and whose lives we want to emulate. For many centuries this was an important way Christian spirituality was taught and learned. The life of the saints was a special invitation for all of us to imitate. The same reasons ranging from how many of the saints' lives were written to the fact that many people today see the rich and famous



as the “lives of the saints,” is confusing our understanding today. The saints are the heroes and models for our journey to eternal life. But the champions in sport or material success are only good for themselves with honour pictured in the hall of fame. We are the poorer for this. What do the saints of old still have to tell us? Who are the saints of today, the Heroes in the Hall of Fame of the Kingdom of Heaven?

292. Worship

Thanks, Scott, for reminding us of the importance of the Eucharist. *'For the past eight months, we've lived through the COVID pandemic. We know what it's like to be locked out of our parishes, unable to attend Mass, and unable to receive the Eucharist. We feel the hunger stirred in our souls. Even if there is another lockdown, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass will go on. And the Mass will continue to be the source of all blessings. We give so little, and yet God gives us everything. He gives us His only Son in the Eucharist. Because, in reality, religion is the ultimate duty. Especially in the Mass, we see the path to salvation. Even for those outside the Church and even for her persecutors. There is nothing so important as our duty to worship. Don't be discouraged by earthly affairs. Remember that our citizenship is in heaven. Our highest commitment is to give praise and thanks to God during our time on earth. There is no higher form of worship than in the Holy Sacrifice of Mass.'* - Scott Hahn.



293. The adventures of Pinocchio



Who doesn't know Pinocchio and his adventures? When and from whom did we know them? Difficult to answer. Pinocchio is part of everyone's memory. Few things are as deeply rooted in the popular Italian culture as well in other countries. But this means that in returning to reading, meditating to and understanding Pinocchio's adventures, one can understand the deepest needs of that humanity that is present and is our own.

Men's needs are a great way to understand their meaning of life, their religious sense. Our Soul is written as if it is a book of theology, which, chapter by chapter, follows Pinocchio's adventures. The difference between puppet and son, unwillingly or willingly, remains the truth of contemporary mankind drama. Will we be able to find true freedom in the love of a Father who is in heaven? Our journey of life like Pinocchio may end properly in the heart of a Father, who made us with love, and by his grace, he wants us to be safe Home after a life of human experience on the theatre of this planet. The dream of papa' Geppetto is to have a real beloved child, not a puppet, to share his love. In the same way, God is the father waiting for each of us to return home as his beloved children.

294. Prayer for Life

O Mary, bright dawn of the new world, Mother of the living, to you do we entrust the cause of life: Look down, O Mother, upon the vast numbers of babies not allowed to be born, of the poor whose lives are made difficult, of men and women who are victims of brutal violence, of the elderly and the sick killed by indifference or out of misguided mercy. Grant that we all who believe in your Son may proclaim the Gospel of life with honesty and love. Our beloved spiritual Mother blesses all children and the people of our time. Obtain for them the grace to accept the Good News of the Gospel as a gift ever new. Fill our hearts with the joy of celebrating it with gratitude and courage. Help us bear witness to it firmly, build, together with all people of goodwill, the civilization of truth and love. We ask you this praise for the glory of God, the Creator, and lover of life. Amen.



295. Forgiveness

Guard against foul talk; let your words be for the improvement of others, as occasion offers, and do good to your listeners; otherwise, you will only be grieving the Holy Spirit of God who has marked you with his seal for you to be set free when the day comes. Never have grudges against others, or lose your temper, or raise your voice to anybody, or call each other names, or allow any sort of spitefulness. Be friends with one another and kind, forgiving each other as readily as God forgave you in Christ. (Ephesians 4:29-32).



There are many ways to grieve the Holy Spirit. We can neglect holiness and grieve the *Holy Spirit*. We can think in purely materialistic terms and grieve the *Holy Spirit*. The new man or woman controls his or her emotions of bitterness, wrath, anger, and so forth. When such things do emerge, he can deal with them in a manner of glorifying God. Aristotle defined bitterness as “the resentful spirit that refuses reconciliation.” Wrath speaks of an outburst of the moment; anger speaks of a settled disposition. Both must be put away in the new life of Christ. The new man seeks to show kindness, tenderheartedness, and forgiveness to others that God shows him. If we treat others as God treats us, we fulfill everything in our Christian life. Our forgiveness to others is patterned after the forgiveness of Jesus towards us. When we think of the amazing way God forgives us, it is shameful for us to withhold forgiveness from those who have wronged us. God keeps reaching out to us for reconciliation, even when we reject Him again and again.

We also know that God requires no probationary period to receive His forgiveness. God's forgiveness offers complete restoration and honour. God puts His trust in us and invites us to

work with Him as co-labourers when He forgives us like an extension of His hands and heart. If anyone who is a Christian finds difficulty in forgiveness, I will give him three words. Here they are! *'For Christ's sake.'* When we forgive for Christ, sweetness will come in our mouth, in our heart, and our soul. It isn't that we must forgive because Jesus *will* forgive us. We forgive because He *has* forgiven us. It is a historical fact of Christ that once for all put-away sin by God's sacrifice to bring us the love and forgiveness of God the Father into our hearts.

296. Order Now

'A prayer a day keeps the devil away.' True or false? Every day, the time of prayer, even at your local church, is always recommended for a healthy Christian life. Work and pray to transform ourselves into God's likeness—whether it's through silent contemplation, singing the psalms, or prayerfully working with your hands. The church offers various possibilities of this kind of work as a prayer, and part of that work is making delicious and precious time for God! Our lifetime prayer is Grade A, all-natural ingredients. This holy and creamy time for God isn't just delicious; it's also healthy for both you and the environment! Contemplate an order today of your prayer and discover the uniquely delightful taste of the love of God for you as a holy and creamed blessing of Faith, Hope, and Love! It is guaranteed to work or your many-time buck!



297. My house shall be



'Then Jesus entered the temple area and proceeded to drive out those who were selling things, saying to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves.'" And every day, he was teaching in the temple area. The chief priests, the scribes, and the people's leaders, meanwhile, were seeking to put him to death, but they could find no way to accomplish their purpose because all the people were hanging on his words.' (Luke 19:45-48).

On that day, Jesus cleansed the temple. The temple was the economic, political, and religious center of life for all Jews people. And it was seen as the very dwelling place of God on earth. It was the place where heaven and earth met, where the harmony between divinity and humanity

was achieved—at least in principle. The prophets constantly remind the nation that the temple and its rituals have been perverted in many different ways. *Is it not written, “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.”* (Isaiah 56:7). The point was that Isaiah prophesied, and Jesus demanded that the temple be a place for *all nations* to pray. The activity of all those who bought and sold in the outer courts made it impossible for any seeking Gentile to come and pray. Prayer was impossible in that uproar of buying and selling and bargaining and auctioneering. Those who sought God’s presence and blessing were being debarred from it by the very people of God’s House.

One of the messianic expectations was that the anointed one would purify the temple. What Jesus is doing is exactly this kind of cleaning. He is the Messiah who is trying to turn the temple once more into a place of prayer.

As we keep this image of Jesus clearly in our minds, we may take a further step. St. Paul said that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. So the true dwelling place of God is now in the very bodies of the followers of Jesus.

Suppose we bring this insight together with the image of Jesus cleansing the temple. We and our life, body, and self are meant to be a temple where God is praised. Every aspect of our life is meant to be turned to the Lord, dedicated to him. Jesus’ presence did housecleaning that time and could be for us a good thing to take too. Wonderful news happened soon after. After running the merchants out of the temple courts, he boldly continued His public teaching and healing work. He could continue because the people wanted to hear Him. Space was now made available for people to listen to the Word and praise God. How much is the area in our life free to listen to His word?

298. Power up

How was a helpless baby asleep in the straw be the answer to prayers for a saviour? How will this baby ultimately triumph? Do gentleness and meekness inherit the earth? How can "prayer and fasting" cast out all demons, including violence? Jesus gives us the answer of personal power of "prayer and fasting" because, in the end, all power is coming from the finger of God. Nurturing "prayer and fasting from poison things in our life" helps us find the way inside to connect to the ultimate source of all Being, the Ultimate Power, the power that Jesus called his "Father." And this power, and this power alone, ultimately stands.



299. Sick sheep



When a shepherd in South Italy was asked if his sheep would follow a stranger's voice, he replied: 'Yes, when they are sick; but never when they are well. A sick sheep will follow anybody.' Do we do the same when we are sick, or better, are we still trusting The Shepherd's voice?

300. Evel never turns into a saint.

There lived an old tiger in a forest. The tiger could not hunt animals as she used to do when she was young. It was becoming difficult to get prey. The tiger thought, "I have lost my strength and speed of my youth. Unless I find some trick, I will starve to death". After long thoughts, the tiger struck upon a plan. She began to keep on saying, "I am very old. I have turned into a vegetarian. I can do no arm. I will not hunt animals," and so on. Soon these words spread in the jungle.



Innocent animals came to respect the tiger, thinking that the tiger had turned into a saint. The tiger pounced on animals when they came to his cave. These words fell in the ears of a fox. The fox began to think, "Can a tiger become a saint?" He was eager to find the truth. Stealthily, the fox approached the tiger's cave. He minutely and carefully examined the footprints of animals. She found all prints going towards the cave but not returning from the shelter. She told all animals in the forest. "The tiger is a cheat. Don't go to the cave". The tiger had to starve to death. If we do not feed negative desires and evil thoughts in our minds and hearts, we have the chance to get rid of them as we do not provide them with food to survive.

301. Two small coins



When he looked up, he saw some wealthy people putting their offerings into the treasury, and he noticed a poor widow putting in two small coins. He said, "I tell you truly, this poor widow put in more than all the rest; for those others have all made offerings from their surplus wealth, but she, from her poverty, has offered her whole livelihood." (Luke 21:1-4)

Jesus saw a certain poor widow putting in two small coins. Jesus sees us when we give. He notices how much we offer but is far more interested in the faith and heart in giving than simply the amount. According to some calculations, a mite or small coin's value can be determined like this: a denarius is one day's wage and equals six meahs; one meah equals two pondions; one pondion equals two issarines; one issarine equals eight mites. When you figure it all out, two mites is 1% of a denarius – 1% of a day's wage. She gave two mites, not just one. The widow

might have kept one coin for herself, and no one would blame her if she did. Giving one meant giving half of all her money. Instead, she shared with staggering generosity. Jesus did not say that she put in more than *anyone* of them. He said that she put in more than all of them – all of them put together.

God loves the cheerful giver. Jesus shows us that God does not *need* our money. If God needed our money, then *how much* we give would be more important than our *heart* in giving. Instead, it is *our* privilege to give to Him, and we need to share because it is good for us, not for God. The woman was poor because she was a widow and had no husband to help support her. Jesus had just criticized the scribes as those *who devour widow's houses* (Luke 20:47). The alone widow made a spectacular contribution. Perhaps a scribe consumed her house. Sometimes we say, "I'll give when I have more." The widow had virtually nothing yet was a generous giver. All this means that we can all please God with our giving. But we know that we never can please God with giving because everything we have is already his. Perhaps He sees it and is pleased, but our sharing is cooperation in time, treasures, and talents that already belongs to Him.

302. God loves you

A little boy visiting the house of an elderly woman was intrigued by the coloured wall writing from the biblical text: 'You God sees me.' Noticing the child's interest, the kindly woman took the writing from the wall and explained it to the child. '*Some people will tell you,*' she said, '*that God is always watching to see when you are doing wrong - so he can punish you. I don't want you to think of this writing in that way. Every time you read the words, "You God, sees me," I would rather have you remember that God loves you so much that he cannot take his eyes off you.'*



303. No fear



"There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love." (1 John 4, 18)

In virtually every instance in scripture where God appears within ordinary life, either through an angel, a unique phenomenon or through an appearance of the resurrected Christ, the first words He says are invariable: "*Do not be afraid!*" The soothing of fear, not its intensification, is the normal criterion that the voice we hear comes from God, and it is his love speaking.

With that in mind, Fr. Ron Rolheiser is offering ten principles, all rooted in the person and revelation of Jesus, that hopefully can help us purify our image of God so that our faith might cast out fear rather than make it bigger.

These are the principles he suggests inviting us to live in less fear:

- God's insight and understanding surpass our own.
- God's compassion and forgiveness are overwhelming and exceed our own.
- God respects nature, our human make-up, and our innate human limitations.
- God is a blessing parent, like a father, not a threatened one.
- God can handle our questions and doubts, and anger.
- God reads the heart and can tell the difference between wound and malice.
- God gives us more than one chance, opening another door every time we close one.
- God desires our salvation and the salvation of our loved ones more than we do.
- God is the author of all that is good.
- God can, and does, descend into hell to help us.

Our best choice *today* is to receive and walk-in, the transforming love of God. We know all the judgment we ever deserved – past, present, and future – was poured out on Jesus Christ on the cross. If our relationship with God is marked by trust in this love of Him and not fear, then we have been made new and perfect in the love of God– that is, complete and mature – just amazing. The speed of God's love has no limits!

304. Not a bowl of cherries

"Before all this happens, however, they will seize and persecute you, they will hand you over to the synagogues and prisons, and they will have you led before kings and governors because of my name ... By your perseverance, you will gain your souls."
(Luke 21: 12,19)



The Lord tells us to expect persecution until the end of time. When will the Church stop being persecuted? I believe all persecution will be over when the Lord returns, and not before. None of the saints lived a serene life, a life free of worry, threat, persecution. In the same way for our Christian life, we, for sure, expect our lives not to be a bowl of cherries but a continuous struggle. In the Bible or the great tradition of the Church, we find the confirmation of this persistent betray and hate not only from family members but also from relatives and friends. All of this, Jesus reminds us, is because of his name. But He assures us of his support and invites us to endure all kinds of trials because, in this way, we gain our souls.' The words of Jesus encourage us to go through the negativity of our faith persecutions as a system for purification. Eva Cassidy's song reminds us to cheer up even when things and days are difficult: "No storm can shake my inmost calm, while to that rock I'm clinging. Since love is Lord of heaven and earth, how can I keep from singing?"

305. Maranatha



Advent Season is a time to sing a song of waiting because somebody is coming at Christmas. For about 98% of our lives, we live in Advent, waiting for the “Messiah,” for “Christmas,” to come. Time for great expectation is the advent of our lives. Nobody lives a fully fulfilled life. Ninety-eight percent of life is spent waiting - waiting for this moment to end and something else to start or to come. We wait for a season of life to pass and the next to come. As we wait to meet those persons and circumstances or celebrations, we feel the desire for happiness continuously dancing in us like an

incredible yearning. All this tells us that no one person, no one thing, no one achievement, no one experience, and no one combination of persons or things will ever fully bring peace and soothe what inside us ask for attention, fulfillment, and love. We know that it's not easy to find peace and rest in this life when that desire is so strong and waiting is hard. Every love song is an Advent song, and all human longing echoes Augustine's words: *“You have made us for yourself, Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”* Advent is the season that celebrates this. The 'Maranatha' - 'come to us' song of expectation could be the melody of great anticipation for our soul at this time. (Maranatha "O Lord, come!"), it is a prayer for the early return of Christ. If the Aramaic words are divided differently (Maran-Atha, "Our Lord has come"), it becomes a declaration of faith. We find this word in 1Cor. 16:22; at the end of St. Paul 1st. Letter to the Corinthians.

306. Memento mori - “remember your death.”

“Be vigilant at all times and pray that you have the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent and to stand before the Son of Man.” (Luke 21, 36).

Jesus directs us to be vigilant about his coming again. On that day, our world will end. How are we going to deal with that day? And this is why so many of the spiritual masters emphasize the importance of leading ourselves to address this matter. St. Benedict tells his monks to hold their death before their mind's eye every day. All forms of prayer are, in one sense, coming face-to-face with eternal things as we relate to God and his kingdom. To be in continuous and regular prayer is a good thing and allows us to keep our relationship



with the Lord as one that keeps us healthy in mind, body, and spirit. Being regular of Reconciliation's sacrament, bringing our sins before Christ, and seeking forgiveness help us keep our souls in better shape. Keeping our life in order and maintaining our relationships in good repair at peace with everybody is the perfect speed for Christian life. *Memento mori*

“remember your death;” following the Christian spiritual tradition is not a human limitation but the best thought of our freedom that tune us up for eternity.

307. Be happy

'I want you to be happy, always happy in the Lord; I repeat, what I want is your happiness. Let your gentleness be evident to everyone: the Lord is very near.' (Philippians 4:4-5)



The apostle says, 'Rejoice in the Lord always.' Very happy people, especially those who are very happy in the Lord, generally are peaceful people. I believe that joy in the Lord is the cure for all discord and misunderstandings. Paul's joy wasn't based on a sunny optimism or positive mental attitude as much as it was the confidence that God is

always in control, and we can trust Him. It was a joy in the Lord. Intended we should be happy because we still and are beloved children of God at the end of the day. Paul used an interesting ancient Greek word (*epieikeia*) that is translated as 'gentleness' here. A good example of this quality is when Jesus showed gentleness with the woman who was taken in adultery in a set-up and brought to Jesus. He knew how to deliver a holy gentleness to her. If we describe a person who is free to let go of His anxieties and all the things that cause him or her stress because he knows that the Lord will take up his cause, this person must be holy. When we show this gentleness to everyone, not just to whom we please, we may become messengers of the beauty of God. When we live with the awareness of Jesus' soon return, it makes it all the easier to rejoice in the Lord and show gentleness to all. We know that Jesus will settle every wrong at His return, and we can trust Him to make things right in our selfish and falling-apart world.

308. His gift

'To some, his gift was that they should be apostles; to some, prophets; to some, evangelists; to some, pastors and teachers; so that the saints together make a unity in the work of service, building up the body of Christ. In this way, we are all to come to unity in our faith and our knowledge of the Son of God, until we become the perfect Man, fully mature with the fullness of Christ himself.' (Ephesians 4:11-13)

Interesting to know who established these offices. They are the work and appointment of Jesus, not men. Though some pretenders may lay claim to them, the offices themselves are a Divine institution and not a human invention. Paul described these offices.

+ **Apostles** are special ambassadors of God's work, though not in the same authoritative sense of the first-century apostles. Those first-century apostles were used to provide a foundation of the new Church.

+ **Prophets** speak forth words from God in complete consistency with the Old and New Testaments' foundation. Sometimes they speak in a predictive sense, but not necessarily so,

and they are always subject to the discernment and judgment of the church leadership. We may have some prophets today but at a different level of prophecy.

+ **Evangelists**, who are specifically gifted to preach the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ.

+ **Pastors and teachers** who shepherd the flock of God primarily (though not exclusively) through teaching the Word of God. "Teaching is an essential part of the pastoral ministry; it is appropriate, therefore, that the two terms, *pastors and teachers*, should be joined together to denote one order of ministry."



These gifts are given at the discretion of The Lord, working through the Holy Spirit. The purpose of these gifts of leadership is also clear. It is that **saints** or God's people might be *equipped* for the work of ministry as service so that the body of Christ would be built up, expanded, and strengthened. Equipping also has the idea of "to put right." These ministries work together to produce strong, mended, fit Christians. God's people do the real work of ministry. Leaders in the church have the first responsibility to equip people to serve and to direct their service as God leads. We know that the primary purpose of the Church is not only to have more numbers in the community but to *proclaim the Good News and baptize* and let everybody of goodwill become members in the Body of Christ.

309. God's time - Advent

We need to be patient and let things unfold in their proper time; that is God's time. Looking at



the history of our journey as humans, we cannot help but be struck by the fact that God seemingly takes always his time in the face of our impatience. The Scriptures are often a record of longing desires not ever fulfilled in the short time of our birthday's expectation. As human beings, we often get impatient. It's like an exception when God intervenes directly and decisively to resolve a particular social or familiar tension. We are always longing for a messiah to take away our pain and troubles, but mostly

those prayers seem to fall on deaf ears. Why does God seem so slow to act? Is God not paying attention to our situations? Why is God not answering faster when we're suffering so deeply? Why is God so slow to act in the face of our human impatience?

Human birth helps answer that question. Gestation cannot be hurried, and there is an organic connection between the pain a mother experiences in childbirth and the delivery of a new life. And that's also true of Jesus' birth. Advent is a gestation process that cannot be rushed. Tears, pain, and a long season of prayer are needed to create the conditions for the kind of pregnancy that brings forth a messiah into our world. And messiahs can only be born inside a particular

type of womb, namely, one within which there's enough patience and willingness to wait to let things happen on God's terms, in God's time, not ours. God's time and speed are perhaps the best way and best rate for us to reach our destination safe and sound.

310. Commandments for Marriage

1. You shall not take your partner for granted.
2. You shall not expect perfection from each other.
3. You shall be patient, loving, understanding, kind, and true.
4. You shall tend the garden of love daily.
5. You shall take great care that your partner's trust is never violated or diminished in any way.
6. You shall not forget your wedding vows, remembering especially those important words, 'For better or worse.'
7. You shall not hide your true feelings. Mutual love provides a bright sunlit room where the heart's things can be discussed freely and without fear.
8. You shall always respect each other as an individual. Degrading words and a sharp tongue cause grave distortions. Endearing terms ennoble, lift up, engender peace.
9. You shall give your marriage room to grow. Both partners should be willing to face the future, together with confidence and trust. Today is a better day for them than yesterday, and tomorrow will find them closer still.
10. You shall, through all your days, reverence God, the Creator, never forgetting that it is he who has made you.



311. Media give us truths



Digital innovations have revolutionized how the media distributes, and people consume the news, often with unforeseen consequences. This situation has confused users looking at 'news' on their phones, often sharing it blindly with their networks without knowing the source or where it came from. It has also destroyed the traditional business model that has long supported local journalism and news production, leaving many people with fewer reliable local sources.

Simultaneously, it has produced myriad opportunities for engagement digital and mobile technologies are essential to engagement in the 21st century. The better we understand how

the media landscape has changed, the better equipped we will be to separate the wheat from the chaff in this information age. *"There is mutual suspicion between secular journalists or secular newspapers and faith-based readers,"* said Tim Morgan, former senior editor at Christianity Today. *"Although church attendance has gone down, there are still many people who have a Christian worldview. Journalism attracts many people, agnostics, atheists, and others who are not interested in religion. Religion is treated as a sideshow at the major papers."* Why? Do media outlets tend to put negative stories on the newspaper or website's front page or near the top of a newscast? Journalists tend to emphasize the negative, figuring that most of the time, when something positive happens, it's expected and not news. If the word is a human way to present reality must be done with respect, sincerity, and beauty. The world we live in needs 'Beauty.' Any time we say or come close to the truth, joy is present in life and the desire of living. Yes, we should be open to new ideas and ask questions. That way, we'll be able to thoughtfully take positions on any issues and be free to be in the light, hope, and truth at the end of each day.

312. Words and action

"Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock. And everyone who listens to these words of mine but does not act on them will be like a fool who built his house on sand. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. And it collapsed and was completely ruined." (Mt. 7:24-27)



In Jesus' illustration of the two builders, each house looked the same from the outside. Our life's real foundation is usually hidden and is only proven in the storm, and we could say that the storms come from both heaven (rain) and earth (floods). A storm (rain, floods, wind) was the stronger in power to generations that didn't have nuclear weapons. Jesus warns us that the foundations of our lives will be shaken at some time or another. Time and the storms of life will prove the strength of one's foundation, even when it is hidden. We may be surprised when we see who has truly built upon the good foundation. We should test the foundation of our life *now* rather than later because now is the time to build our lives and make the necessary changes looking at our future and destiny. Why, if we do not act on the words of Jesus, are we foolish? The answer is about our faith and on what we build a life. Faith and trust in the word of Jesus are the right choices for our life. When the inevitable trials come, the passion for pleasure, money, power, or fame will give way, will be like sand or dust blowing in the wind of time. But a life built on faith in God doing his will be on the rock of eternity. I believe that Faith is a higher passion for men worth to be found and nourished. Do you have this kind of passion too? On which ground are you standing?

313. Prelude to Christmas



“Rejoice, highly favoured one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!” and “For nothing will be impossible with God.” (Luke 1:27,37)

The angel Gabriel said three things to Mary. These were certainly true of Mary, who had a unique privilege among any person ever to live. She was highly favoured. That the Lord was with her, she was blessed. The rosary prayer that begins “Hail Mary, full of grace” is accurate. Mary was full of grace, and she was a strong believer. But Mary’s

grace was a special grace that she received from God. The angel Gabriel also closes the visit with the assuring words for Mary: *“For nothing will be impossible with God.”* The point is clear. More literally, one could translate this *for no word of God shall be powerless*. God will perform what He has said. ‘For nothing’ (literally, ‘no word’) ‘will be impossible for God,’ recall the divine promise of a son addressed to Sarah in Genesis (*Genesis 18:14*). In so doing, provide another confirming example of God’s ability to carry out His promise to Mary. If ‘nothing will be impossible with God’ in our own words means that “everything is possible with God’s presence and action.” But what is amazing in this Christmas introduction is the gentleness of God for our human decision. It looks like He is asking for our permission, consent, and participation. The speed of God’s love for humanity is always at a gentle pace.

314. No room

“And she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn.” (Luke 2:7)

The word translated *swaddling cloths* comes from the ancient Greek word meaning “to tear,” meaning they were torn strips of fabric wrapped around Jesus. The focus of this story is on space and location. No room! No space for hospitality! With Fr. Ron Rolheiser, I may say that in these expressions, I see too the reason



why there is so little of Christ left in Christmas. It is not so much, I believe, our excesses in shopping, decorating, or partying that deprive Christ of a place, as it is our busyness, preoccupations, hurriedness, and schedule which fill the inn and leave no site for him. Our hearts and lives are too full for Christ to have a place. That sounds like a harsh judgment, and it

is. However, we are not bad people, nor are we, deep down, inhospitable. Beneath all the hurry, pressure, and preoccupations, our hearts are warm, unselfish, and welcoming. Then why aren't we more generous and more hospitable? In brief, because we haven't the time. There is not enough space within our lives for Christ this Christmas. Love and hospitality are not abstract. To have Christ in our lives involves something much more than creating time for him, time for the poor, time for hospitality, time for celebration, time for prayer, time for the itinerant couple who show up unannounced on a busy night. We must create some room in the inn of our life, our families, and our heart!

315. One day only

"But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." (2Peter 3:8)



What seems like forever for us is but a short time for God, just as an hour may seem to be an eternity for a child but a moment for an adult. Peter quoted this idea from Psalm 90:4: *'For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it is past, and like a watch in the night.'* All-time is as nothing before him because, in the *presence* as in the *nature* of God, all is *eternity*; therefore, nothing is *long*, nothing *short*, before him; no *lapse* of ages impairs his reading of time and purposes. All things are equally near and present to his view; the distance of a thousand years before an event's occurrence is no more to him than would be a day. With God, indeed, there is neither past, present, nor future. His name is 'I AM.' I AM in the present; I AM in

the past, and I AM in the future. Just as we say of God that he is everywhere, we may say that he is always around in space; he is everywhere in time. We are living in and with time-space, but for God, it is not a limitation. He is in time and space, but He created time-space for our amusement. I believe that Peter did not give some prophetic formula, saying that a prophetic day somehow equals a thousand years. He instead communicated a general principle regarding how we see time and how God sees time. When we use this verse as a rigid prophetic key to read or interpret something in the present or the future, we open the door for magic errors. God sees time with a *perspective* we lack because even the delay of a thousand years may well seem like a day against the back-cloth of eternity. Furthermore, God sees time with an *intensity* we lack; one day, one hour, one minute, one second with the Lord has the value of a thousand years if we can count them. The intensity and the power of God's love for each one of us are immense and will take us more than a thousand years to measure it.

316. Unworthy

“I baptize with water, but there stands One among you whom you do not know. It is He who, coming after me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose.” (John 1:27)



John the baptizer's real function was not to teach ethics but to point people to Jesus. 'Make straight the way of the Lord' is a call to be ready, for the coming of the Messiah was very near. John explained to the religious leaders that *he* was not the focus of the work he was doing but the One who was already among them. John's job was to prepare the way for the One who was already present. To untie the strap of a sandal (before foot washing) was the duty of the lowest slave in the house. Among Rabbis and their disciples, there was a teacher-student relationship that had the potential for abuse. A Rabbi might expect unreasonable service from their disciples. One of the things that were considered "too low" for a Rabbi to expect from his disciples was the Rabbi's sandal strap's untying. Every service which a slave performs for his master', said one rabbi, 'a disciple will perform for his teacher, except to untie his sandal-strap because that was a duty of a slave, not of a student. John said that he was *unworthy* to do even this. Who then was the One already present with such power and authority?

317. Serving appearances

"So they answered Jesus and said, "We do not know." And He said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things." (Matthew 21:27)



When we think of the extraordinary things Jesus had been doing, we cannot be surprised that the Jewish authorities asked him what right he had to do them. They answered only after carefully calculating the political consequences of either answer. They replied, saying: 'We do not know.' They didn't seem interested in answering the question honestly, only cleverly. This answer showed that they were more interested in the multitude's opinions rather than the truth of God's will, so Jesus didn't answer their question either. They could not say, 'Of men,' for they were cowards. They would not say, 'Of heaven,' for they were hypocrites. How many times do we compromise our answers and actions just because we do not want to let the truth come to light and perhaps disturb our reputation? We know that Jesus kindly and compassionately meet the needs of the hurting multitude of people in need and cure many of them. But Jesus didn't show much patience with those who arrogantly questioned Him and hoped to trap Him in His own

words. Jesus never fell into their trap, giving them the opportunity through words and actions to understand, review, and change attitude too. If the truth will make us free, why do we persist in thriving in the prison of our blind stubbornness of show serving appearances?

318. Full of grace

“Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you!” - “Rejoice, highly favoured one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!” - “For with God, nothing will be impossible.” - And Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” (Luke 1:28, 37, 38)



The angel Gabriel said to Mary three specific things. These special things were certainly true of Mary, who had a unique privilege among any person ever to live. She was highly favoured; the Lord was with her, and she was blessed. However, I believe that all these things are true of any real believer in Jesus. We are highly favoured as Mary was (Ephesians 1:6 'to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. '), the Lord is with us (Matthew 28:20 'and behold, I am with you always, to the close of the age. '). We are blessed (Ephesians 1:3 ' Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. '). Our Catholic prayer that begins “Hail Mary, full of grace” is not only

accurate but special. Mary was full of grace, and so is each one of us as believers. We know that Mary’s grace was received, not the grace to give to others, and in the same way, we too are recipients of God's grace when like Mary, we become open to receiving it. We have to keep in mind that 'With God, nothing shall be impossible.': More literally, one could translate this expression in this way: '*for no word of God shall be powerless. God will perform what He has said.*' Like Mary, the maidservant of the Lord, we too are not in the position to debate with God, our father, who loves us but to accept what He says. Mary then responded with an affirmation of faith. Mary's words: “Let it be to me according to Your word” are the proper response of every believer to every promise of God. Mary also took more trust in the Lord than we might think. Mary agreed to receive a pregnancy that would be seen as suspicious, and this in a culture that had a potential death penalty for adultery. Mary also identified herself with sinners so that the purpose of God's will of love would be even better fulfilled. Spiritually speaking, there are similarities between God's work in Mary and His work in every believer. Something to ponder about: Jesus lives within the believer spiritually, as He did in Mary physically; Jesus lives within us spiritually by His word, as He did in Mary physically; Jesus is made visible to the world also through us, as He was through Mary physically.

I am thinking about the words of Jesus. To underline the physicality of God's action in Mary and into us when he said to the disciples, ‘These are my mother, and sister, and brother; the ones who do the will of God.’ These words confirm our spiritual and special connection. We bear as close a relationship to Christ as did the Virgin mother, and we in some sense take the same

position spiritually which she took up corporeally and faithfully about him. The Virgin Birth is unique. Many mythologies have legends about a god who had sexual relations with a woman and produced offspring, but the idea of a *virgin birth* is unique to Christianity. The "full of grace" Lady is also a special model for our spiritual speed of life.

319. Restlessness



We come into this world with insatiable desires, many talents, boundless energy, and grandiose dreams. At some point, reality sets in, the daydreams are over, and reality comes in. We find ourselves in one particular place, in one specific job, perhaps with a particular partner, with a particular family, with a particular set of friends, and with one very concrete set of domestic commitments and duties, which are probably go. However, all this may be a picture that fell short of our expectations. We all need some old guidance, some magus, man or woman, to tell us that all is good and will be fine.

If you feel restless! Good! You're supposed to feel that way! It doesn't mean your life and situation aren't good! They are good the way they are!" Karl Rahner once named it this way: There can be a real danger in fantasizing too much about real daily happiness. There is no other happiness in this world outside of tranquillity, accepting that all symphonies remain unfinished. Part of the foundation of love is solitude and self-denial. We must learn how to take who we are and weep in peace, maybe non allowing others to know about it. This kind of life speed brings us to want more and desire more, but it is up to us to control the accelerator of our glorious dreams.

320. Three rules

Lou Holtz said: *"I follow three rules: do the right thing, do the best you can, and always show people you care. You've got to make a sincere attempt to have the right goals, to begin with, then go after them with reasonable effort, and remember that you can't achieve anything great without the help of others."*

"Three Rules for Living a Good Life" came from a commencement address Holtz gave at the Franciscan University of Steubenville a few years ago. Here are some quotes I like from his speech: *"Everybody needs*



four things in life: Something to do, someone to love, someone to believe in, and something to hope for." He has a simple and logical formula that can help: *'Do what is right. Do everything to the best of your ability. Show people that you care.'* He also said: *"Life's a matter of choices. Whoever you are, good or bad, it's going to be because of the choices you make. No matter your age, you have to have something you want to accomplish, what gets you up every day. Everything indeed starts with a dream or a goal, or a purpose. It doesn't have to be big, lofty things."* I also like the way he closed his speech, saying: *"I don't know how people function without faith in Jesus Christ."*

Thanks, Lou; there is a lot of simplicity and power in your speech that is good not only for young graduated students but for everyone who likes to keep dreams alive and for a good, almost perfect speed of life.

321. Praise the Lord - A

'Praise the LORD, all you nations! Extol him, all you peoples! His mercy for us is strong; the faithfulness of the LORD is forever. Hallelujah! - Praise the Lord!' (Psalm 117)

This psalm is the shortest song in the collection of psalms, but there is none greater or grander



in its expression of praise. Many other psalms call on Israel to praise Yahweh, but here all the Gentiles are called to praise Him. This invitation showed a largeness of heart that God intended Israel to have from the beginning, pointing to the truth that in Abraham, all the world's peoples were to be blessed (Genesis 12:3). For the most part, the Jews looked with little sympathy on their Gentile neighbours and had no desire to laud Jehovah and be saved as they became proselytes of

Judaism. But where the love of God is strong in the heart of all people of goodwill, it overleaps the bounds of custom and racial prejudice and yearns that all the world should know and love and welcome the Saviour in their lives. Since this Psalm is one of the six Egyptian Hallel Psalms (113-118), sung as part of the Passover service, Jesus would have sung Psalm 117 with His disciples (Matthew 26:30, Mark 14:26). We may think that on the eve of His crucifixion, he had all the peoples, all the Gentiles in his mind for salvation, and calling and embracing on the cross all people to Himself from every tribe tongue. The psalmist called upon all peoples to share in God's grace and praise God intelligently because His mercy is strong and He is faithful, providing in this way reasons why He is worthy of worship.

Some suggest that all you peoples refer to the Jewish people only. Paul's quotation in Romans 15:11 leads us to believe that this is a call to the nations and makes this a strong missionary psalm. The invitation to all you peoples, all you gentiles, is, without doubt, a call for us too. We are the gentiles of this time, but when we praise and exalt Him, we become family with the nation of believers. Wonderful connection in the story of our human family, so 'Praise the Lord.'

322. Praise the Lord - B

A further reason for praising God is that not only does God have great lovingkindness, but that merciful kindness is toward us. By 'us,' the psalmist has in mind Israel and *all peoples* as mentioned in the previous verse. It may also be that the 'us' of verse two has already found room for the 'you' implied in verse one by seeing Israelites and Gentiles as one people under God's mercy. God is to be praised not only for His loyal love but also for His truth. His ever-enduring fact means that He will not change in His love and goodness to us because He is in his nature merciful forever. When mercy and truth are praised together like this, it reminds us that *the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came to us through Jesus Christ* (John 1:17). We can believe that not only is his love so great in-depth and height (Rom 5:20; 1 Tim 1:14), it is also lasting because that love endures forever. Once again, all peoples and all nations are called to say, *Hallelujah!* At the speed of today's life, if we find a short time for prayer or no time at all, the word Hallelujah will be just right or better than nothing at all.



323. Go into that cave.



"Because Christ is born in a cave, all who wish to see him must bend must stoop, and the stoop is the mark of humility. The proud refuse to bend. Therefore they miss divinity. Those, however, who are willing to risk bending their egos to go into that cave find that they are not in a cave at all, but they are in a universe where sits a babe on his mother's lap, the babe who made the world." - Ven. Fulton J. Sheen

Thanks, Fulton, for teaching us again how to meet the Lord our Saviour with the eyes of humility. 'The word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory.' (John 1:14.)

The message of Christmas is that to know God, we must know Jesus. 'It is in him that we live and move and have our being.'

324. Have to Serve Somebody

*'You may be an ambassador to England or France
You may like to gamble; you might like to dance
You may be the heavyweight champion of the world
You may be a socialite with a long string of pearls*

*But you're gonna have to serve somebody, yes
Indeed you're gonna have to serve somebody
Well, it may be the devil, or it may be the Lord
But you're gonna have to serve somebody*

*You might be a rock 'n' roll addict prancing on the stage
You might have drugs at your command, women in a cage
You may be a businessman or some high-degree thief
They may call you doctor, or they may call you chief*

*But you're gonna have to serve somebody, yes you are
You're gonna have to serve somebody
Well, it may be the devil, or it may be the Lord*

But you're gonna have to serve somebody...' - Bob Dylan - Slow Train Coming - Columbia Records-1979



Yes, Bob, you are right. We all place something or someone at the top of our hierarchy - something we put on the pedestal of worship. Religion is inescapable. There is no such thing as an irreligious person or an agnostic society. We 'gotta serve somebody.'

325. It is Right and Just



'The cross is the central reality of all human existence. It is the intersection of all the axes of reality: the temporal and the eternal, the subjective and the objective, the good and the evil, the human and the divine. It is the source of all meaning, reason, action, purpose, and end of creation. The cross is also an inexhaustible metaphor for the most important truths that shape our world and experience. When it comes to justice, we can imagine two kinds of relationships, represented by the Cross's beams: the vertical and the horizontal. The vertical represents the duties in justice that we owe to God-that is, the virtue of religion. The horizontal represents the duties in justice we owe to one another-namely the distributive and commutative justice that makes society possible. The horizontal can't stand on its own. Our fellow men's relationships rely on our shared relationship with Christ for their stability and justice. If the vertical

beam is eroded, the horizontal will be in an unstable and untenable situation. Justice in earthly relationships depends on justice in the heavenly relationship that every individual and society has with God and His Church. Justice is cruciform.' - (Scott Hahn & Brandon McGinley in "It Is Right And Just")

Thanks, Scott and Brandon, for this particular explanation of the metaphor of the Cross. I believe that God created us in the Cross's shape because when we open wide our arms, we look like little crosses. This design is probably a reminder that staying connected vertically and horizontally is personally and socially just and right.

326. Meditation

Try to meditate on Neil Diamond Lyrics: "**Be** " - "**Dear Father**" - "**Anthem**" (from "Jonathan Livingston Seagull" soundtrack). Some words of the lyrics may be changed as a personal prayer for the day. I have found them easy and useful



for meditation on the speed of life. Trying to place some flesh (daily personal experiences even from the past) on these lyrics is easy to find a moment of free spiritual recollection.

"Be "

Lost - On a painted sky - Where the clouds are hung - For the poet's eye you may find him if you may find him

There - On a distant shore - By the wings of dreams - Through an open door - You may know him - If you may

Be - As a page that aches for a word - Which speaks on a theme that is timeless -While the sun - God will make for your day

Sing - As a song in search of a voice that is silent - And the one God will make for your way

"Dear Father"

Dear Father -We dream, we dream - We dream - While we may

Who are we to need - We need, we need - While we wait - While we wait

"Anthem"

Sanctus - Kyrie - Sanctus - Kyrie - **Kyrie** Gloria - Gloria **Holy** - Holy Holy - **Gloria**

327. Epiphany



"When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of King Herod, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage." When King Herod heard this, he was greatly troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. Assembling all the chief priests and the people's scribes, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it

has been written through the prophet: 'And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; since from you shall come a ruler, who is to shepherd my people Israel.' Then Herod called the magi secretly and ascertained from them the time of the star's appearance. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search diligently for the child. When you have found him, bring me word that I too may go and do him homage." After their audience with the king, they set out. And behold, the star that they had seen at its rising preceded them until it came and stopped over the place where the child was. They were overjoyed at seeing the star, and on entering the house, they saw the child with Mary, his mother. They prostrated themselves and did him homage. Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed for their country by another way.' (Matthew 2:1-12)

The story of the Magi at the beginning of the new year in the feast we celebrate of Epiphany is a summary of the principal dynamics of the spiritual life. Watching the night sky with scrupulous attention for signs of God's purpose, the Magi evoke the importance of alertness in the spiritual order of life. We must keep our eyes open to see what God is up to this year or wants to tell us.

They saw the star; they moved, despite the length and difficulties of the journey. Sometimes we too know what God wants us to do, but we do not pay attention and don't act, either out of fear, laziness, or the influence of other things in our lives. As the chief priest and scribes of the people and even King Herod, we are too busy with many other things. The Magi teaches us to move and pay more attention to the most important reality we are supposed to pay homage in life. When they spoke to Herod of a new King's birth, they found not consent but opposition. When we walk the path that God has laid out for us, we, too for sure supposed to expect resistance. The wise men came to Bethlehem and gave the child their precious gifts, probably the best they had. When we come to Christ, let's break open the very best of ourselves and make it a gift for him. *'After all this, they returned to their home country by another route.'* As we may understand, at the end of the Magi story, when they went back to their life by another road, we know why they did it; of course, no one comes to Christ and goes about the same way he came! Nobody can remain the same person after the real encounter with the 'Newborn King.'

Like the magi, let's keep our eyes open, let's make our journey of life in search of not gold, frankincense, and myrrh, but Who the gifts bring us to at the speed of the light of Bethlehem star - our faith.

328. Remembering who we are

'God created mankind in his image; in the image of God, he created them; male and female, he created them.' (Genesis 1:27)

Because we are made with the highest quality ingredients, including the best dust of the universe, the most sophisticated genes, and the fragrance of the spirit of God, we must always remember and cheer our Maker. The face of God



is close to us and is hidden in all world's mirrors. Like St. Teresa of Calcutta, we may say: '*For he alone is the way that is worth following, the light that is worth lighting, the life that is worth living, and the love that is worth loving.*'

329. Speed up



The future is written in the palms of our hands but hidden in our hearts. The power to change our destiny lies in our hands. With our hands, we do many things: we build, we destroy, we rebuild. If we choose wisely, we will reap the benefits of a good choice. If we choose wrongly, we will all suffer the consequences. To think about our future and our involvement is a valuable action about what we could achieve as individuals and as families, especially when we stood together, set aside our prejudices and fears, and reached out beyond our ego.

Humanity has always been pioneers, explorers, adventurers. And there is a new horizon for us to push to - the greatest frontier in human history is still available. We read stars, dream about impossible things, but deep in our hearts, we explore and understand where we may find energy and clarity. We must search and hope for a brighter future, but we must follow our hearts too. Real peace, prosperity, and unity are written in the palms of our hands but need our hearts' participation. The speed of our future has the engine in our hearts. At God's speed, all is possible.

330. Turn it over

It was already late, and his disciples approached him and said, "This is a deserted place, and it is already very late. Dismiss them so that they can go to the surrounding farms and villages and buy themselves something to eat." He said to them in reply, "Give them some food yourselves." But they said to him, "Are we to buy two hundred days' wages worth of food and give it to them to eat?" He asked them, "How many loaves do you have? Go and see." And when they had found out, they said, "Five loaves and two fish." (Mark 6:35-38)

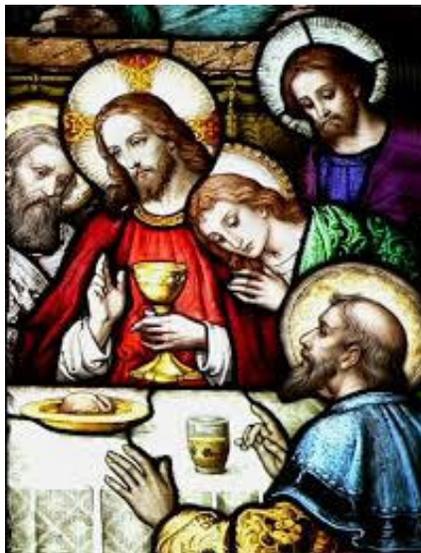


The hungry people who gather around Jesus in this scene are symbolic of the hungry human race, starving from Adam and Eve's time for what will satisfy. In imitation of our first parents, we have tried to fill up the emptiness with wealth, pleasure, power, honour, the sheer love of domination—but none of it works because we have all been made by and for God. We know that God is nothing but love. God has resources that we don't know anything about, so we can trust Him and be at peace even when we can't figure out how He will provide. Like the disciples

that day, we have limitations for thinking and acting in a small way; our capacity and generosity are always short. “Jesus, if we had that kind of money, we would never spend it on one meal for this crowd. They annoy us, and they would be hungry again in a few hours. Shouldn’t the money be spent on something else?” But Jesus will perform an extravagant miracle because He wanted to sit down to a dinner with the multitude – because He loved them - because He is the ‘Emmanuel.’ God’s way of provision always begins with *what we already have*. He wants us to use what we already have received. Better we don’t foolishly pray for more from God if we don’t use what He already has given in a personal and unique way. It is when we conform ourselves to the path of love that we are filled. Probably the five loaves and two fish symbolize that which has been given to us. All that we have received is already a grace from God. If we appropriate it, we lose it. But if we turn it over to Christ, we will find it transfigured and multiplied, even unto the world’s feeding - the family of God. God’s speed of love surpasses our imagination all the time because our rate of love is a learning process that never ends.

331. Intimacy

When Jesus had said these things, He was troubled in spirit and testified and said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me.” Then the disciples looked at one another, perplexed about whom He spoke. Now there was leaning on Jesus’ bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved. Simon Peter,

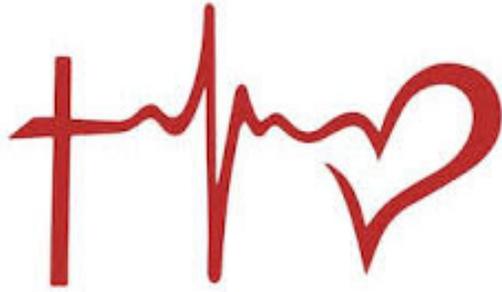


therefore, motioned to him to ask who it was of whom He spoke. Then, leaning back on Jesus’ breast, he said to Him, “Lord, who is it?” (John 13:21-25)

The fact that Peter *beckoned* to the disciple whom Jesus loved in an attempt to obtain information about the identity of the traitor suggests that he was not next to Jesus; otherwise, he could have spoken to Him directly. John hides behind the love of Jesus, which proves that John gloried in the love of Christ because he is the one leaning back on Jesus' breast. Reclining was the posture reserved for special meals, such as parties, wedding feasts, and the like. We know that the disciples were at the festival of Passover; it was a Passover meal. What is contained in this image? It is a mystical image of intimacy and of listening. Simply put, the image is this: If you place your ear on someone’s chest, you can hear that person’s heartbeat. The Beloved Disciple, then, is the person who is so intimate with Jesus that he or she hears his heartbeat and, from that perspective, looks out at the world with the heartbeat of Jesus. To be a true disciple of Jesus is to have our ear tuned to his heartbeat as we journey out into the world. For John and all who want to be a disciple, if we do this, we will always be at the right places, go at the right speed, have the proper perspective, and still dare to do the right thing.

332. Beloved

'Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God, and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him.' (1John 4:7-8)



The ancient Greek translation begins strikingly – (*agapetoi agapomen*) “those who are loved, let us, love.” We are not commanded to love one another to earn or become worthy of God’s love. We love one another because we are loved by God and have received that love and live in light of it. John’s emphasis on love among the people of God is powerful. To love one another is to be living in the body of Christ. When we experience God in our lives, John says it will show by our love for one another. Of course, this love is not perfected in the life of a Christian on this side of eternity. Though it may not be perfected, it must be present – and it should be growing. WE can’t truly grow in our *experience* of God without also growing in love for one another. With John, we may boldly say, he or she who does not love does not know God. The love John speaks of comes from the ancient Greek word (*agape*); it is the concept of a self-giving love that gives without demanding or expecting re-payment – it is the God-way of love.

Since this is God’s kind of love, it comes into our life through our relationship with Him. If we want to love one another more, we need to draw closer to God. Let’s use this image: every human connection is like a triangle. The two people in the relationship are at the base of the triangle, and God is at the top. As the two people draw closer to the top of the triangle, closer to God, they will also draw closer to one another. Weak relationships are made strong when both people draw near to the Lord! It is because men are created in the image of God, an image that has been defaced but not destroyed by the Fall, that they still can love.

However, noble and however highly motivated, human love falls short if it refuses to include the Creator who is love. This is a glorious truth, even for non-believers. Love describes the character and heart of God. He is so rich in love and compassion that it can be used to describe His very being. When we say God is love, we are not saying *everything* about God. Love is an essential aspect of His character and colours every aspect of His nature. But it does not eliminate His holiness, His righteousness, or His perfect justice. Instead, we know the holiness of God is loving, and the character of God is loving, and the justice of God is loving. Everything God does, in one way or another, expresses His love. He hates nothing he has made, and because God is *love*, He cannot *hate*. 'He causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends his rain on the just and the unjust.' We know that we shall never let it be thought that any sinner is beyond the reach of divine mercy so long as he or she is in the land of the living. When we try to say that *love is God*, we do not think of true love, the God-kind of love. Instead, we are thinking of erotic desires, or namby-pamby, have-a-nice-day kind of love that values being “nice” more than wanting what is best and lovely for the other person. I believe that God's love is true for us, and if we let it transform our lives, it changes our mind, body, and spirit, and in this way, we come to know the love of God better in our terrestrial journey.

333. Seven points



Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948). Gandhi believed that at the core of every religion was truth (Satya), non-violence (ahimsa), and the Golden Rule. Interesting his seven points to consider for a healthy and free human being. He said that man self destroy when:

1. *He plays politics without principles*
2. *Has wealth without work*
3. *Has intelligence but without wisdom*
4. *Does business without morals*
5. *Trust science but has not humanity*
6. *Believe in religion but has no faith*

7. *Practice love (eros) but without everyday self-sacrifice*

Faith and Rison are like the two tracks of a railway that never come together but are always parallel. But the transits that keep them together are the revelation we had received in the Bible, the wonderful dialogue and relationship between God and humanity. Shall we keep the tracks of our life in this order?

334. Sing a song

We, as human beings, are multi-dimensional beings. We need to be nurtured from different experiences to relate and learn from reality and help each other because, as humans. Similarly, our culture's expression is also multi-dimensional, and we need to offer holistic responses to the big challenges of today's life. I like the quote of Steve Jobs: *"It is the marriage between technology and the liberal arts, science and the humanities that give us a song in our hearts."*



As long we can enjoy and keep this 'song' in our hearts, all will be just fine, all will be OK. And in this way, our families, churches, and gatherings will sing the same 'song' of life and freedom. I hope to enjoy our humanity's melody even with all *challenges and paradigm* shifts that sometimes are difficult to solve today by individual communities. Perhaps not only in the family's Church but with other actors and organizations outside the Church, the music has to be played. Maybe we have to get into the square where the effective symphony is performed. Do we love to hear this song wherever we are? No music - no life!

335. The hat

If we use a larger hat than our head, what will happen to us? It will cover our eyes. I believe that our vision of things, which is also a good example of our faith and



spirituality, has limitations. When we pretend to know everything and have an answer to everything, we risk blinding at what we truly know or see. Perhaps we need more patience with our limitations and be humble enough to take out the big hat of our presumption to start to see properly. What size of hat is on your head?

336. Wise man story



The story goes that the wise man found himself standing in front of God, who appeared to him. Through God's words, he realized what He had in the hands as a gift to him to choose. The wise man said: 'O Lord, in your right hand you have all truth, and in your left, you have the patience, tiring and continuous instinct for truth. Well, all Truth is yours. I ask you to be able to walk carrying the search for truth.' If this is our choice too, are we not curious to look also sometimes, in the right hand of the Lord?

337. Ugliness

Father Turollo said: *'The ugly, the category of the ugly, cannot belong to the divine. Today I have many suspicions and fears that we are not on the right path because the ugly is predetermined nowadays. We are in bad times, and we live in bad cities. And this must frighten us: ugliness is usually the beginning of ugliness. Whoever cares about the Kingdom of God cannot help but love beauty. Who has lost the taste for beauty moves in an opaque world where grace is absent, even if he continues to proclaim it with his mouth.'* We know that humanity can do without the Chinese, it can do without America, and nothing is easier for it than to do without the Russians. Our humanity needs neither science nor bread to live, but only beauty is available and satisfies because, without beauty, there will be nothing more to do in this world. Here is all the secret; the whole history of humanity is here. How can we restore the presence of beauty in ourselves, our world, society, and our families?



338. Food

"The LORD God then took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it. The LORD God gave the man this order: You are free to eat from any garden trees except the tree of good and evil knowledge. From that tree, you shall not eat; when you eat from it, you shall die." (Gen. 2:15-17)

As a society, we are obsessed with food. Our supermarkets are overfilled, recipe books crowd



the aisles of bookstores, and more cooking shows one can count. But we are also addicted to food, burden our bodies with toxic food, and are the most obese nation on earth with a growing segment of people who have little access to healthy food or enough food at all. What is the meaning of bread, wine, and water hold for our material and spiritual lives? How can we who have more food than appetite learn to respect and cherish the food we have, share it in joyful fellowship, and not forget those who have more appetite than food? Understanding our contemporary culture, we can't

forget about our spiritual and biblical origin that is the core of our Christian wisdom. To say all in moderation is not enough. We are called to respect, enjoy, and share the blessing of the food with others. The food of 'the tree of knowledge of good and evil' was from the beginning and is even for us today too much to eat. I believe that the food of the tree of knowledge of good and evil is poisoning and killing us because it is 'gluttony' of all kinds, the worst poison in our lives.

339. The desert story

This story also has roots in the eastern Arab world that tells of a man lost and walking in the desert, this infinite plain of sand and sun. While walking on the long desert tracks, he sees from very far away like a strange figure. He is immediately thinking of an animal or ferocious beast or a bandit that is coming toward him. As he walks in the same direction, he sees that this figure is getting closer and closer. He can't escape or hide because there is only sand, so he keeps walking. As he gets closer and closer, he bows his head thinking that it is finished at the end of his journey and life. He hears the sound of the footsteps of that figure that gets closer and closer. When he almost feels the breath of that mysterious presence on his face, he raises his head and sees that it is his brother whom he has not seen for about twenty-five years.



340. Mirror

'You must do what the word tells you and not just listen to it and deceive yourselves. But the man who looks steadily at the perfect law of freedom and makes that his habit – not listening and then forgetting, but actively putting it into practice – will be happy in all that he does.' (James 1:22,25)

It was common in the ancient world for people to hear a teacher. If you followed the teacher and

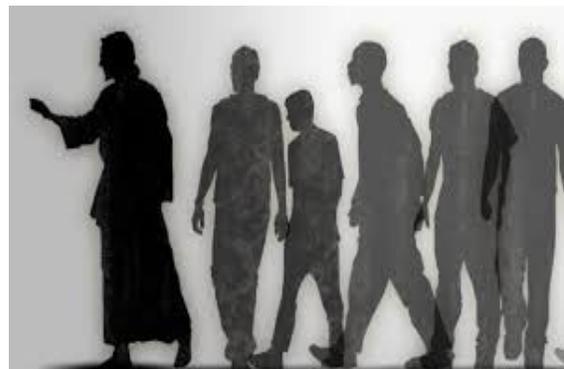


tried to *live* what he said, you were called a *disciple* of that teacher. We may say that Jesus is looking for disciples: doers, not mere hearers. We know that 'the word' is always one of the manifestations of God's presence to us. Jesus used this same point to conclude His great Sermon on the Mount. He said that the one who heard the word without doing it was like a man who built his house on the sand, but the one who heard God's word and did it was like a man whose house was built on a rock (Matthew 7:24-27). The example of the mirror is clear. The person who only

hears God's word without doing it has the same sense and stability as a man who looks into a mirror and immediately forgets what he saw. The information he received did not do any good in his life. As somebody said: 'God's presence is hidden in all the mirrors of the world' - (Gianfranco Cardinal Ravasi), so we reflect the presence of God also through our words and actions. Everyone sees in it 'the face of his birth'; that is, the face of his nature. He who looks into and hears the Word may also see his actions of the day there, his motivations, desires, and inward future aspirations. The Word of the Lord is a revealer of secrets: it shows to a man his life, his thoughts, his heart, his innermost self. The mirror metaphor is perhaps an invitation to all of us not just to look and spend much time at our glass so that we may decorate ourselves but to transform our hearts by the Word-Presence of God who is calling us to action bringing His presence everywhere we go. True happiness is found in our activities. Our image in charity action is also another way people perceive God's presence.

341. Immediately

'And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. Then He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." They immediately left their nets and followed Him. Going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James, the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. He called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him.' (Matthew 4:18-22)



God usually calls people as they are busy doing something. Jesus called the apostles as they were casting a net into the sea or mending their nets. Here are other examples: - Saul was looking for his father's donkeys. - David was keeping his father's sheep. - The shepherds were guarding their flocks. - Amos was farming in Tekoa. - Matthew was working at the tax collector's table. - Moses was tending his father-in-law's flock. - Gideon was threshing wheat. The call of Jesus suggests a need for a Rabbi's disciples, but the rabbi called disciples who followed him around to absorb his teaching. Interestingly, the action in time the word 'immediately.' The *immediate* response of these disciples is not only a great example to

us but is telling us the speed of the reaction of the disciples. Then the first disciples did what all disciples of Jesus should do: they followed Him right away. I love this response speed that tells us and invite all Christians who are called to follow and to be with the Rabbi, to postpone or delay the call for any other reason is not acceptable. I like this professional Christian life speed that also changes the flavour of our busy lives completely but are we always in shape and ready to do so?

342. Dollar competition



There is a story of a man who would give a dollar to some charitable institution. The devil said, 'No, you cannot afford it.' 'Then,' said the man, 'I will give two dollars; I will not be dictated to in this way.' Satan exclaimed, 'You are a fanatic.' The man replied, 'I will give four dollars.' 'Ah!' said Satan, 'what will your wife say when you go home and tell her that you have given away four dollars?' 'Well,' said the man, 'I will give eight dollars now, and if you do not mind what you are at, you will tempt me to give sixteen.' So the devil was obliged to stop because the more he tempted him, the more he went the other

way. So let it be with us. If the devil would drive us to curse God, let us bless him all the more, and Satan will be wise enough to leave off tempting when he finds that the more he attempts to drive us, the more we go in the opposite direction. The devil cannot stand the competition of true generosity.

343. What are we looking for?

'Then Jesus turned, and seeing them following, said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to Him, "Rabbi" (which is to say, when translated, Teacher), "where are You staying?" He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where He was staying and remained with Him that day.' (John 1:37-38)

Jesus asked these disciples who were following him an important and logical question – and the same question He continues to ask to all humanity today and to each one of us. One of the most valuable qualities to look for today is to find somebody or a group, even a community (family), where we feel at home and protected and respected. When



we see someone who encourages us to be ourselves, we can feel secure in our relationship yet independently. It's easy to feel loved when someone enables us to do what lights us up and makes us happy. I believe that for this reason, Jesus directed them to *Himself*, to live, and to be with him. It is also the best way for direct learning on the way to become his disciples. To be Jesus' disciple, we must deal with Jesus directly. So Jesus invited John and Andrew to be a part of His life 'Come and see' to be family with Him. This is also true for our Christian life and faith experience. The best way to learn is to be with the teacher, to see his actions, to hear his words, program, and aspiration to become one with his message. Even today, our faith will be

genuine if we walk not just behind Him but 'through Him, and with Him, and in Him.' The speed of the master's way of life is the best for each one of us.

344. New wineskin



'No one puts new wine into old wineskins, or else the new wine bursts the wineskins, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins.' (Mark 2:22)

A wineskin expanded under the pressure of fermentation. So if new and unfermented wine was put in an old and brittle wineskin, it was sure to burst and lose in this way, the wine destroying the wineskins. At the time of Jesus, the wineskins were the regular container for wine as they were easy to make and practical for serving and transporting wine. Jesus' point was made clear by this helpful example of daily useful life. 'New wine must be put into new wineskins.' He was

telling the people of his time and again to us today that we can't fit His new message and Christian life into the old forms. Jesus traded fasting for feasting, sackcloth, and ashes for a robe of righteousness; a spirit of heaviness for a garment of praise; mourning for joy; and law for grace. His message and His presence were the beginning of the new era. The Kingdom of God at work through the centuries is the new wine, and it is strong and always alive or under fermentation, because it contains the Holy Spirit's work. God often looks for new wineskins through the generations because the old ones won't stretch any further.

Jesus came to introduce something new, not to patch up something old. This is what the 'Kingdom of God' and salvation is all about. In doing this, Jesus doesn't destroy the old (the law), but He fulfills it, and it is for all of us the way, the truth, and the life. Let's get a new skin, new heart, new mind to contain the power of the love of God we are receiving every day.

345. Same thing

We can say with Ron Rolhiser that: *'God is family and whoever abides in family abides in God, and God abides in that person.'* The theology of family roots itself here. Among other things, this means that a family is a community, a domestic church, the place where we participate in God's own life.' God is a community, a trinity, a flow of giving and receiving between three persons. God is a family, and when we participate in a family, we experience the same flow of God's life. Family life then is church life. What makes



for a church is gathering around the person of Christ and a common sharing of one Spirit – the spirit of charity, joy, peace, patience, goodness, long-suffering, fidelity, gentleness, faith, and

love. As we all know, family and home generally have more of a familiar face to them. Home and family life is the everyday experience we are participating in. Such is home and family life functions being together and sharing all we have and all we are. Such too is the process of a church community.

We may understand that family life and church life are part of the same thing; we participate in God's life in both ways. We know that family life is not like church life but is part of it. To participate healthily in a family is to be part also of a church. The family is not secular, while the church is divine, mundane while the church is holy, and the place of ordinary life while the church is worship. By abiding in the family – by sitting down with each other around a kitchen table, by sharing the frustration of balancing an ordinary chequebook, by celebrating each other's joys and sorrows and everyday life, by offering each other consolation and correction, and by putting up with each other's troubles, phobias, and sins – we experience church's life.

In both family life and church, our lives are open beyond ourselves, and God can enter and be at 'home' with us. The family unity car's speed goes according to the presence we allow to the One who likes to abide in a personal and mysterious way.

346. The Older I Get

*The older I get
The more I think
You only get a minute; better live while you're in it
Because it's gone in a blink
And the older I get
The truer it is
It's the people you love, not the money and stuff
That makes you rich*

*And if they found a fountain of youth
I wouldn't drink a drop, and that's the truth
Funny how it feels I'm just getting to my best years yet*

*The older I get
The fewer friends I have
But you don't need a lot when the ones that you got
Have always got your back
And the older I get
The better I am
At knowing when to give
And when to just not give a damn*

*And if they found a fountain of youth
I wouldn't drink a drop, and that's the truth*



Funny how it feels I'm just getting to my best years yet
- Alan Jackson -

With all respect, we are supposed to get more Wisdom as we all get older. Do we?

347. God & Everything

I agree with Fr. Ron Rolheiser that everything is happening in our lives we suppose to search or understand for some clues of faith meaning. Even in every incident within our life is the finger of God telling us something. For example, if something tragic happened to us, would we always ask ourselves: "What is God saying to me in this?" Conversely, if something good happened to us, would we ask ourselves the same question: "What is God saying to us in this?" The idea is that in every event of life, God speaks, says something to us, and meant this event to have spiritual significance for our life. That might sound simplistic, but that's real biblical faith. In Scripture, there was no such a thing as a purely secular event for both Israel and Jesus, a pure accident. The idea was rather: "God has blessed us! God has done this!"



Sometimes, of course, like them, we overdo it. Rather than seeing God as speaking through an event, we saw God as actually causing the event. Thus, God is seen to be sending sickness, death, drought, and pestilence upon the earth; or conversely, deliberately privileging some people over others. Perhaps we need a better theology or more deep faith. When Scripture tells us to "pray always," it doesn't just mean that we should always be saying prayers. Among other things, though, it does mean that we should be looking at every event in our lives and asking ourselves: "*What is God saying to me in this way?*"

348. Under the sun

'It is good and fitting for one to eat and drink and to enjoy the good of all his labour in which he toils



under the sun all the days of his life which God gives him; for it is his heritage. As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him the power to eat of it, to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labour – this is the gift of God.' (Ecclesiastes 5:18-19)

The Preacher in this book of Ecclesiastes knows that riches do not bring true meaning to life; he is no fool. He understood that it was better to have wealth than not to have it, and *under the sun*, one should enjoy both wealth and the capacity to enjoy it as the gift of God. We sense that Solomon, who is probably the Preacher – still very much with

the premise of the expression '*under the sun*' that means the time, the day of our life when we are willing to be hoped to make the best of what we say and do.

When, through faith, we see every moment and every creature as an ingredient in the divine plan, we live in a joyful time and with a sense of wonder. What is God doing for me now? What path is opening up to me today? Why did God send that person, that trial, that pleasure to me just now?

349. La Fede

'Quella vecchietta ceca che incontrai la notte che mi sono perduto in mezzo al bosco mi disse: *"Se la strada non la sai ti accompagno io che la conosco; se hai la forza di seguirmi e di tanto in tanto ti daro' una voce fino la' in fondo dove c'e' un cipresso, fino la' in cime dove c'e' la croce."* Io risposi: *'Sara', ma trovo strano che mi possa guidare chi non ci vede."* La ceca allora mi prese la mano e sospiro': *"Cammina."* Era la Fede. - Trilussa - Carlo Alberto Salustri (1871 – 1950)

The Faith (Translation)

'That old blind woman I met the night I got lost in the woods told me: *"If you don't know the way, I'll go with you, I know the way; if you have the strength to follow me, and from time to time I'll give you a voice up there at the bottom where there is cypress and up there at the top where there is the cross."* I replied: *'It could be, but I find it strange that someone who cannot see can guide me."* The blind woman then took my hand and sighed: *"Walk."* It was the Faith. - Trilussa



350. Why are you afraid?

'And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat so that it was already filling. But Jesus was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" Then He arose and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace, be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.' Mark 4:36-39

In this wonderful story of the calming of the windstorm at sea, we witness the spiritual dynamics of fear and trust in our lives. Making their way across the lake, the disciples stand symbolically for all of us journeying through life. The Sea of Galilee is well known for its sudden, violent storms. The reaction of the disciples shows the severity of this storm. Several of the disciples were experienced fishermen on this very lake, and they were frightened and feared



perishing in this storm. When we confront the mighty waves, we, too, are immediately filled with terror.

Similarly, when the trials and anxieties of life face us, the first reaction is fear. It is interesting to notice that Jesus was sleeping in a rocking boat. Was he resting because he was tired, or was it the rest of faith? There is a resting of faith as well as a watch of faith. Jesus is "asleep on a cushion." He probably stands for the divine power that is "asleep" within all of us. It was not the wind or the waves' splash, but the disciples' voice that awoke Jesus.

The disciples were afraid, but at the same time, there were several experienced fishermen among them. Probably they did not request to Him to do anything but a protest against His apparent indifference. Jesus is like the mother who sleeps through all kinds of rackets, but she instantly awakes at the slightest noise from her baby. At a spiritual level, we see that this divine power present in our faith successfully calms the waves: "He woke up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Quiet! Be still!'" There may be both a sleeping Christ and an asleep church, but neither Christ nor his church can perish.

This beautiful narrative story suggests that if we but awaken to the presence of Christ within us, then we can withstand even the most frightening storms. When we also know that he asked the still shaking disciples at the close of the story, "Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?" He wonders why they have no faith. Like the disciples, we sometimes have not yet experienced the change of heart necessary for living our lives with confidence in the lord. Do we?

351. La Matita - The Pencil

Un bambino guardava la nonna che stava scrivendo una lettera. Ad un certo punto, le domandò: "Stai scrivendo una storia che è capitata a noi?" La nonna interruppe la scrittura, sorrise e disse al nipote: "E' vero, sto scrivendo qualcosa per te. Tuttavia, più importante di tante parole è la matita con la quale scrivo. Vorrei che la usassi tu, quando sarai cresciuto". Incuriosito il bimbo guardò la matita senza trovarvi alcunché di speciale. "Ma è uguale a tutte le altre matite!". Rispose la nonna: "Dipende tutto dal modo in cui guardi e usi le cose. Questa matita possiede cinque qualità: se riuscirai a metterle in pratica nella tua vita, sarai sempre una persona in pace con tutti e con il mondo. Prima qualità: puoi fare grandi cose, ma non devi mai dimenticare che esiste una mano che guida i tuoi passi. Questa mano si chiama 'Dio.'! Tu Devi fare la sua volontà. Seconda qualità: di tanto in tanto, io devo interrompere la scrittura e usare il temperino. E' un'azione che provoca una certa sofferenza alla matita ma, alla fine, essa risulta più appuntita. Ecco perché devi imparare a sopportare alcuni dolori nella vita: ti faranno diventare un uomo migliore. Terza qualità: la gomma della matita ci permette di cancellare ciò che è sbagliato. Correggere è un'azione e non è necessariamente qualcosa di negativo: anzi, è importante per riuscire a mantenere la retta via e migliorare se stessi di riconoscere i propri sbagli. Quarta qualità: ciò che è realmente importante nella matita non è il legno o la sua forma esteriore, bensì la grafite racchiusa in essa. Dunque, presta sempre attenzione a quello che accade dentro il tuo cuore, dentro di te. Ecco la quinta qualità della matita: essa lascia sempre un segno. Allo stesso modo, tutto ciò che farai nella vita lascerà una traccia: di conseguenza, impegnati per avere piena coscienza di ogni tua azione e lasciare una buona traccia anche per altri se vorranno leggere la storia della tua vita".



The Pencil (Translation)

A child looked at his grandmother, who was writing a letter. At one point, he asked her: "Are you writing a story that happened to us?" The grandmother stopped writing, smiled and said to her grandson: "It's true, I'm writing something for you. However, more important than many words is the pencil with which I write. I wish you would use it when you grow up." Intrigued, the child looked at the pencil without finding anything special. "But it is the same as all other pencils!". The grandmother replied: "It all depends on the way you look at and use things. This pencil has five qualities: if you can put them into practice in your life, you will always be a person at peace with everyone and with the world."

Prime quality: you can do great things, but you must never forget that there is a hand that guides your steps. This hand is called 'God.'! You must do his will. Second quality: from time to time, I have to stop writing and use the sharpener. It is an action that causes a certain pain to the pencil but, in the end, it is more pointed. That's why you have to learn to endure some pains in life - they will make you a better man. Third quality: the pencil eraser allows us to erase what is wrong. Correcting is an action and is not necessarily something negative: indeed, it is important to keep the right path and improve oneself to recognize mistakes. Fourth quality: what is important in pencil is not the wood or its external shape, but the graphite enclosed. So, always pay attention to what happens inside your heart, inside you. Here is the fifth quality of the pencil: it still leaves a mark. Likewise, everything you do in life will leave a trace: consequently, strive to be fully aware of your every action and leave a good path for others too if they want to read the story of your life. "

352. Prayer with eyes



"My Lord, the stars shine in the sky, the eyes of lovers close, every woman in love is alone with her beloved, and I, Lord, am alone with you." This prayer with the love language is a song of a Muslim woman of the eighth century. The music of love is, in fact, often the fundamental language of prayer. We find the same way of music in the prayer of mystics and contemplation. The liturgy's "Glory to God in heaven above" is a characteristic example of this prayer of praise in which God and his greatness are celebrated. Regarding the prayer with the eyes, there is a very

suggestive Psalm, 123, which seems to refer to the famous Scribe's image in the Cairo Museum. He is on the ground and holding an unfolded papyrus, has the pen in his hand, and is ready to write what his master dictates to him. But he doesn't look at what he writes. His coloured quartzite eyes are ideally fixed on his master, who dictates the words of a message to him. Here is the beginning of Psalm 123: "To You, I raise my eyes, to You who sit in heaven. As the eyes of servants to the hand of their master, so our eyes are turned to the Lord."

When we pray, we turn our eyes to the Lord, and this attitude is fundamental in prayer because in this way, prayer is linked to the eyes and face of God, to joy, to rigorous but serene fidelity, to

dance and to love for God. In this way, prayer becomes like the fuel for our spiritual journey towards God. A trip based on the love of those who look at each other in the eyes.

353. The 'You' prayer

I love this prayer that reflects the repetitive-mnemonic style: The Song Tu is attributed to the Hasidic rabbi of Berdičev in Poland. The texts and traditions of these Central European Jews were collected by the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber, especially in *The Hasidim's Tales* (1950). This song is precisely an invitation to the contemplation of creation. In the creation, we find the divine presence, just as a man walks among the wonderful creatures of God:



'Wherever I go, you! Wherever I stop, you! Only you, still you, always you! If that's okay with me, you! If I'm in pain, you! Only you, still you, ever you! Heaven, you, earth, you, above, you, below, you, Wherever I turn, wherever I go, only you, still you, always you! You, you, you!'

The God of creation is not seen in the Bible and the Judaic and Christian tradition as an infinite Being or as a mysterious principle that pervades nature, but always as a "You," a personal and loving presence with which to dialogue. His works are a trace of the light of the mystery of him. As a biblical sage of the second century BC, Jesus Ben Sira, called Sirach or the Ecclesiastical, says: *'He is the Great, above all his works. We could say many things, and we would never finish except to conclude: He is everything.'* (*Ecclesiastes 43, 27-28*). Perhaps our prayers will be more easy and loving when we will talk or listen to the Lord in a more personal and confidential relationship of a friendly 'You.'

354. The Silent Prayer



Like two people in love, when they run out of words, their silence and looking at each other in the eyes become the best way to communicate their passion.

The prayer as a thanksgiving song is always the best way for our dialogue-prayer with the Lord when we get short of words, but there is another simple way, perhaps better and common in many other cultures when we run out of words: 'The silent prayer.' The silence can also be the mysterious and sometimes disconcerting one of God himself speaking to us. A silence that calms our minds, mouth and spirit, brings us peace. Perhaps after launching our supplication with a flowering of ardent and even screaming invocations, we find more dialogue with the Lord if we go into a quieted and contemplative silence. We may hear His voice. It is an experience

that is clearly described by Fr. David M. Turollo in these essential verses: 'You, God, more and more silent; a silence that thickens, the more it explodes: and I speak to you, I speak to you, and I repent, and I stammer and whisper syllables to myself unknown: but I know that you hear and listen, and you move with pity; then I too calm down and keep silence.'

355. Life after death

Two Woody Allen characters argue heatedly. Finally, one asks: *"Do you think there is a life after death?"* The other allows himself a pause for reflection and then replies: *"And in your opinion, is there a life before death?"* What is certain is that if a veil of indifference spreads over the present, a heavy blanket of clouds obscures the future beyond that extreme frontier. Many people are not even interested in life after death. In the past, we used to hear more of hell, heaven, purgatory, entrusted to bright colours, now terrifying, now attractive, but now it looks like we do not have time to think about it. Time and space may become one in the definition of a state in which the human being and the entire creation will find themselves in the future. Many words are also said that death is passing away. Of course: from life to dust, we all will go. Even in this pandemic, where we face death continuously, even on the step at the door of our homes, we feel that it is almost impossible to live healthy in a sick world, impossible to live healthy in sick families. Perhaps we may use the psalmist prayer like an invitation for everyone to 'Roll up our thoughts' taking up the invocation: *'Teach us, O Lord, to count our days, and we will lead our hearts to wisdom.'*



356. She served

'Now, as soon as they had come out of the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. But Simon's wife's mother lay sick with a fever, and they told Him about her at once. So He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and immediately the fever left her, and she served them.' (Mark 1:29-31)



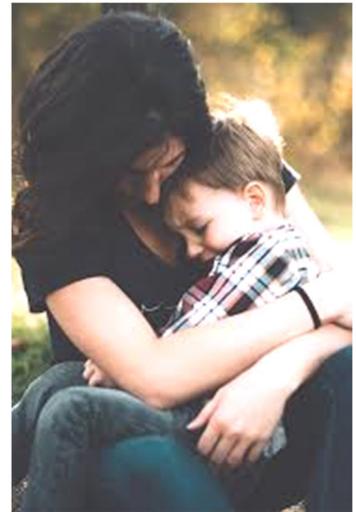
Jesus came into this humble house in Capernaum and met a sick woman, the mother-in-law of Simon. Jesus didn't only perform for the crowds.' Here, He ministered to one person in a private home. Jesus' interest was in meeting the needs also of individuals and not in promoting Himself. He didn't need the power of crowd dynamics to help His ministry. We may see that in this healing, Jesus showed both *simplicity* and *power*. Jesus healed with the same authority that He used to cast out demons. Peter's mother-in-law was suffering from what the Talmud called 'a burning fever.' It was and still is very prevalent in that particular part of Galilee. The Talmud lays down the methods of dealing with it.

A braid of hair tied a knife made wholly of iron to a thorn bush. On successive days the action was repeated, first, then a certain magical formula was pronounced, and thus the cure was supposed to be achieved. Jesus completely disregarded all the paraphernalia of popular magic, and with a gesture and a word of unique authority and power, he healed the woman. Peter's mother-in-law responded the way we should when Jesus blesses and heals us. She immediately served Jesus and the disciples out of gratitude. When we feel good, strong, full of energy or halfway, our vocation is always and remain as a mission in action to help. Serving is one of the best ways and speed of life we can't forget about if we want to be members in good standing of Jesus community.

357. The consolation medicine

'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, a gentle Father and the God of all consolation, who comforts us in all our sorrows, so that we can offer others, in their sorrows, the consolation that we have received from God ourselves.' (2Corinthians 1:3-4)

Paul considers the Father a comforter, a Paraclete. We also know that the Holy Spirit is our Paraclete, like a fountain of consolation in any situation of our life journey. In every aspect of His being, God is full of comfort, strength, and help for us because He is a Father. For this reason, we may understand why we are supposed to be an instrument of consolation for others. One great purpose of God in comforting us is to enable us to bring comfort to others. God's comfort has to be shared. Even *spiritual* comforts are not given us for our use alone; they, like all the gifts of God, are given that they may be distributed or become instruments of help to others. All Christians, including Ministers, Deacons, Priests, Bishops etc., are called to do the same. What a miserable preacher must he be who has all his divinity by study and learning and nothing by real experience! There is more joy in sharing than receiving.



358. Love story



Prayer is like the North Star that helps us to live our experience of love with God. Prayer is, then, as in the biblical Psalter, a beautiful representation of Revelation's dialogue, the dialogue between God and humanity. The prayers with the psalms are, in fact, human words, yet they bear upon them the seal of divine inspiration, therefore in them also God speaks to us.

In Psalm 136, for example, the assembly constantly responds to each statement with a fixed antiphon: *"because forever is his love."* The words: fidelity, love, grace are always present

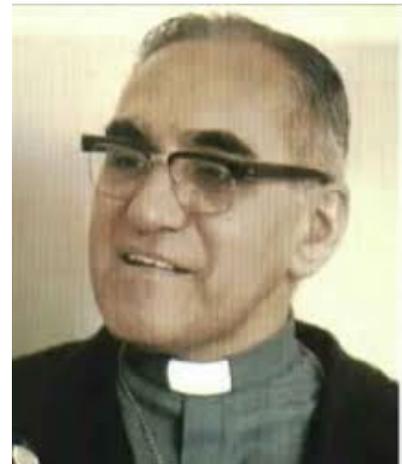
in the Psalter, which uses them one hundred and twenty-seven times. It isn't easy to make the plot alluding to this term's meanings with a single word of ours. In the Psalms, there is an inexhaustible atmosphere of intimacy between two people who love each other. Praying is also an art, an exercise in beauty, in singing, in inner liberation. It is an ascent work, and to ascent, it is a rigorous commitment and light and free flight of the soul towards God. The whole bible is a "love story" between the Lord and his people. Prayer is a great help to stay and feel that intimacy with our Lord that we need to write our 'Love Story.'

359. Violence of love

'We have never preached violence, except the violence of love, which left Christ nailed to a cross, the violence that we must each do to ourselves to overcome our selfishness and such cruel inequalities among us. The violence we preach is not the violence of the sword, the violence of hatred. It is the violence of love, brotherhood, and violence that wills to beat weapons into sickles for work. You say that you are Christian. If you are really Christian, please stop sending military aid to the military here in El Salvador because they use it only to kill my people.'

- Bishop Oscar Romero (1917 - 1980) - Saint Óscar Arnulfo Romero (Canonized 14 October 2018)

I believe that any intelligent fool can make things bigger, more complex, and more violent. It takes a touch of a genius person and a lot of courage to move in the opposite direction we may call love.



360. Colour your dreams



We should find time to look into our dreams and understand if there is some meaning for our present time, the journey we are in. We should all do it for ourselves, and it's very healthy because it's the only place where we probably never lie. At night in our dreams, we don't lie. If we think that our whole lives are built on specific goals, we should try and follow our dreams and what they teach us; shamelessly, fearlessly, and by facing what is inside our very human being: violence,

disgust, and terror, invention, poetry and love. In our dreams, we are with ourselves; we talk, cook, work etc., with a lot of enjoyment. If our dreams become a reality with our participation in it, we also become the happiest people on earth; perhaps we can reach the sky because that is the only limit. The sky is the limit as Heaven is our best dream. Watch your dreams?

361. New feeling

'I would like to share an insight from Luther. In a sermon on Pentecost, he affirmed that we are born with an old heart, a heart full of carnal desires and lust. People desire prestige, power, money, their neighbour's goods, their neighbour's wife and so on, but God blocks their path with His commandments: "You must not...; you must not...!" In this situation, said Luther, they would inevitably begin to look at God with a sullen eye, as an enemy of their happiness, as the one who is the obstacle to obtaining their desires. There is a silent bitterness in sinful people against God, to the extent that, if it depended on them, they would rather that God did not even exist. When the Holy Spirit comes, here is the miracle! He presents people with a different face for God: a God who is an ally, not an adversary; a good Father who did not spare even His own Son for them; in short, a God who shows them a favour. They understand that God has given them the commandments for their good. A new feeling springs up in their hearts, that of sons or daughters, and from their lips, at last, comes the cry, "Abba, Father!" — Raniero Cantalamessa.



362. And Mary said



'And Mary said: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on, all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.'" (Luke 1:46-55)

Sandro Botticelli's (1446-1510) work portrays the Virgin Mary crowned by two angels, a sheer veil covering her flowing blonde hair and a Byzantine-style scarf around her shoulders. She is writing the opening of the *Magnificat* on the right-hand page of a book. As Mary writes in the *Magnificat*, the infant Jesus guides her hand, looking up to the clear blue sky, or perhaps to his mother, softly returning his gaze. In her left hand, she holds a pomegranate. The pomegranate is representative of an anatomically accurate human heart. The figures are placed in front of a bright and serene landscape, and the framing creates a division between Heaven and earth. To the left, three angels crowd around the *Magnificat*, seemingly in deep conversation amongst one another. Mary's faith and also ours, like love, does not only occupy a few hours of our existence, but it is its soul, its constant breath. We need it to feel and to be alive. A life without faith does not deserve to be lived.

363. Indifference

'But since you are lukewarm, that is, you are neither cold nor hot, I am about to vomit you out of my mouth '(Revelation 3, 16).

When we are neither hot for the truth, nor hot for conversions, nor hot for holiness, nor zealous enough to take care for something, nor fervent sufficient to make our family a better-living place, then we are neither cold nor hot. What a terrible thing – in either of these ways – we risk being expelled from the mouth of God himself even do we pray or speak His words. Indifference-incredulity is similar to a difficult-to-clear fog, and it knows no anxieties or asks questions. It feeds on stereotypes and banalities, contenting itself with living on the surface, not touching on the fundamental problems because it does not want to be involved in the truth. Indifference pleases nobody. With the speed of indifference, we go nowhere.

364. Piety

'The Piety' 1498–1499) sculpture by Michelangelo Buonarroti, housed in St. Peter's Basilica, Vatican City. It is the first of several works of the same theme by the artist. It is the only piece Michelangelo ever signed. The statue was commissioned for the French Cardinal Jean de Bilhères, who was a representative in Rome. In Carrara marble, was made for the cardinal's funeral monument but was moved to its current location, the first chapel on the north side of the entrance of the basilica, in the 18th century. This famous work of art depicts the body of Jesus and his mother, Mary, after the Crucifixion. The Crucifixion marks are limited to very small nail marks and indicate the wound in Jesus' side. Christ's face does not reveal signs of the Passion. Michelangelo did not want his version of the *Pietà* to represent death, but rather to show the religious vision of abandonment and a serene face of the Son as a communion between man and God siled in the Resurrection.



365. Best speed

Yes, the impression is that our life's speed depends and is a product of our ability to move as we first step on this planet. But now, in this time of our life's race, as Dante reminds us, we need and feel more and more the urgency and the necessity to become men and women willing to convert, to change the mentality. The change of attitude in relationships, with others, with the earth, and with who made us and the earth, is essential. We have before us the possibility of an unprecedented season, a world that - in any case - will be different from before. But how it will be different, whether even sicker or better, depends largely on us: it depends on what speed of life we want to choose. Have a good trip.





After reading these pages, I cannot help but raise my eyes to the Lord and be thankful. Each one of us is born with a soul in action. We cherish and nourish our body and soul until we feel full comfort and freedom on a new planet with our Creator's presence and love forever and ever.

Fr. Luigi Filippini

with the cooperation of

Ricky skribka - Rose Carina - Rev. Pasquale Coccimiglio

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