

YOU ARE SPECIAL

Some Thoughts For The Soul



*"It is in the humanity that we find God,
in the world of sense that we find the Spirit
if we have a heart of a child."*

These short miscellaneous reflections - poems - stories - meditations - prayers, some also in Italian with a translation, are for you - helping perhaps to spend some quality time in meditation as we are on this journey of life and to stay friendly connected with God whose presence and love is always available.



Fr. Luigi Filippini

\$ 20.00 BILL STORY

A well-known speaker started his seminar by holding up a \$20.00 bill. In the room of 200, he asked, "Who would like this \$20 bill?" Hands started going up. He said, "I will give this \$20 to one of you, but let me do this first.

He proceeded to crumple up the 20 dollar bill. He then asked, "Who still wants it?" Still, the hands were up in the air. Well, he replied, "What if I do this?" And he dropped it on the ground and started to grind it into the floor with his shoe. He picked it up, now crumpled and dirty. "Now, who still wants it?" Still, the hands went into the air.

My friends, we have all learned a very valuable lesson. No matter what I did to the money, you still wanted it because it did not decrease value. It was still worth \$20. So often in our lives, we are dropped, crumpled, and ground into the dirt by the decisions we make and the circumstances that come our way. As a result, we feel as though we are worthless. But no matter what has happened or what will happen, we never lose our value.

Dirty or clean, crumpled or finely creased, we are still priceless to those who do love us. The worth of our lives comes not in what we do or who we know but by **who we are**. We are always special."



THE TWO SONS (Mt. 21.23-32)

On the one hand, Jesus compares the first son with “tax collectors and prostitutes,”



shameless people who publicly didn't follow Israel's customs and laws but who hear Jesus' call to repentance and change their lives. On the other hand, the chief priests and religious elite Jesus compare with the second son: they made a grand presentation of religion, but something lacks performance. Their glorious temple and elaborate worship rituals appear honourable and holy, but they fail on

the most important issue: seeking and doing the will of their heavenly Father. In another place, Jesus criticizes the elite for “neglecting the weightier matters of the law, justice, mercy, compassion and faith” (23:23). Hypocrisy comes to mind, although the term is not used here.

What, then, are we to make of the parable? As always, Jesus continues to remind us that God's inclusive mercy extends to all, to tax collectors and prostitutes, as well as the religious elite. **All are called to holiness; all are invited to the Lord's vineyard; the Master makes no distinction among persons.** Keeping this image of an impartial heavenly Father, Jesus reminds us that two responses are possible to the invitation to life in the kingdom of God - the vineyard. More importantly, we are invited not to judge by appearances. For, we surely do not know what is going on beneath the surface. Yet, to appearances, many of Jesus' audience and we make sharp judgments that “**certain people**” cannot be doing God's will and have no place in the heavenly kingdom, for they are sinners.

Only God can read hearts. Only God can know what happens after failure and refusal. Only God knows who repents and seeks to labour in the vineyard. Therefore, as the parable tells, all of us from the religious elite and down need to examine our total performance regarding listening to God. Because it may be only an easy “yes!” with no follow-through: it may be all for show. In short, we are invited to see how total and sincere our response is.

Imagine, now, that some people in Jesus' audience might be “tax collectors and prostitutes,” with whom he often seems to have taken meals. They, of course, would hear the parable as a grand affirmation of what the psalm proclaims: “Remember your mercy, Lord ... do not remember the sins of my youth.” How welcome they must feel in his presence.

The parable was written for us too. So today, let's pay attention when we say the Prayer of Our Father again: “your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

There are only two days in the year that nothing can be done. One is called yesterday and the other is called tomorrow, so today is the right day to love, believe, do and mostly live.

- Dalai Lama -

Many of the spiritual lessons that loss teaches us are not recognized while we are in the midst of them. Only later do we see the profound teachings these experiences offered to us. These lessons can help immensely when future loss enters our lives. They will not eliminate the pain, but they can give us greater strength and deeper hope. They can provide us with the courage to stay in turmoil, to trust that we will survive our struggles and not be destroyed by them. There are numerous lessons learned through loss. The following five are central ones.

WE HAVE AN INNER RESILIENCY

When we are caught in the devastating grips of significant loss such as the death of a loved one, divorce, critical illness or job termination, it is difficult to believe that we have enough inner strength to cope with what is asked of us. However, we can draw on the power and strength planted in our Spirit by the Creator at this precise time. We do have an immense inner reservoir of goodness and strength to get us through what seems impossible at the time. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed. (2 Cor4). We must need to believe and trust our ability to bounce back when the horrific blows of loss beat us down.



WE NEED THE GIFTS OF OTHERS

No matter how independent we might be, the painful loss can push us off balance. When we find ourselves losing control and discovering that it is impossible to cope by ourselves, it is then that we learn how to receive. We slowly realize and acknowledge that we need others not to go it alone and be healed without help. The gift of others in the form of wise, listening friends, skilled medical persons, providers of child care and prepared meals, professionals who help with needed information and guidance into the future, all these can be essential for us to lean on in our time of desolation.

It is not always easy to open our empty lives and accept help from others. Yet, often through these very human sources that the Holy One gives us what we secretly long for in our loss: someone to lean on, someone to entrust our confusion and doubt, someone to hold us up when the limbs of our daily existence are shaky and weak, someone to nourish our hungry Spirit until we can feed ourselves again.

OUR FAITH CAN SUSTAIN US

It is not unusual for our emotions of grief to extend into our relationship with God. In the pain and loneliness inherent in our loss, it may seem that God is far away. Past comforting and faith-filled feelings give way to the empty emotions of emptiness, anxiety, and sadness. We have to go into the void with bare faith, simply hanging on and trusting that the promises of God are true and enduring. *“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through the fire, you shall not burn because you are precious in my sight, and I love you.”* (Is43:2-5)

Faith does not take the pain of loss away or diminish our grief, but it does help us to live with the difficult emotional process as we move slowly toward healing. Faith encourages us to trust that we are held in divine care during our time of loss. Faith kindles our waning hope and assures us that God will never abandon us. Faith continually invites us to trust that God is close, surrounding us with immense compassion even though our human emotions of grief are such that we cannot sense this abiding presence embracing us with love.

FORGIVENESS IS ESSENTIAL FOR HEALING

Unwanted loss often brings with it the need for forgiveness. We may blame ourselves for things we did or did not do. We might harbour and continually hash over old wounds from hostile relationships or be angry at life or God because things did not turn out as we had hoped.

Jesus cried out in his pain from the cross, looked at those who caused his excruciating demise, and forgave them. Unfortunately, our forgiveness is rarely this quick and complete. It usually takes a long time to extend this kind of forgiveness to others and ourselves, but eventually, we must move beyond our non-forgiveness and leave the old causes of our pain behind. The energy we have put into the difficult emotions of our loss must be redirected into life-giving sources of new beginnings and continued healing. We cannot move on if the leaden chains of guilt, blame, hatred, anger, and resentment keep us bound to the past.

PAINFUL LOSS HOLDS THE SEEDS OF TRANSFORMATION

As we look back, we will see, perhaps with many surprises, that the days (possibly years) of turmoil and heartache were holding the seeds of new growth.



Spiritual transformation is always a process of birth-death-rebirth, life through struggle to new life. Loss is a part of this journey. We cannot avoid it. What we can do is open ourselves to this unfolding process. We can trust that something new will follow our time of death and destruction. This truth is at the heart of spiritual growth and development. Rumi described it well when he wrote: "From a worm's cocoon, silk is coming out." Be patient if you can, and

from sour grapes will come something sweet.

Joyce Rupp, O.S.M. has authored numerous books related to loss and spiritual growth. Among these are *Praying Our Goodbyes* - *May I Walk You Home* - *Your Sorrow Is My Sorrow* - *Dear Heart, Come Home*.



EPHPHATHA (MARK 7:31-37)

Jesus heals a deaf man who had a speech impediment. Mark tells us that he took him



“off by himself away from the crowd.” Jesus then “put his finger into the man’s ears and, spitting, touched his tongue; then he looked up to heaven and groaned, and said to him, ‘Ephphatha!’ (that is, ‘Be opened!’).” Looking up to his Father and inserting his fingers into the man’s ears, Jesus establishes, as it were, an electrical current, literally plugging him into the divine energy, compelling him to hear the word. Now, let’s look at this healing

in terms of its spiritual significance. The crowd is a large part of the problem. The raucous voices of so many, the insistent bray of the advertising culture, the confusing Babel of competing spiritualities—all of it makes us deaf to God’s word. And therefore, we have to be moved to a place of silence and communion. Jesus draws us into his space, the space of the church. There, away from the crowd, we can immerse ourselves in the rhythm of the liturgy, listen avidly to Scripture, study the theological tradition, watch the moves of holy people, take in the beauty of sacred art and architecture. There we can hear.

MEANING AND HAPPINESS

We tend to equate happiness with two things, pleasure and lack of tension.- Ron Rolheiser, OMI

We fantasize that for us to be happy, we would need to be in a situation within which we would be free of all the tensions that normally flood into our lives from pressure, tiredness, interpersonal friction, physical pain, financial worry, disappointment in our jobs, frustration with our churches, and every other headache and heartache that can appear.



However, looking back on our lives, we see that sometimes certain periods of our lives fraught with all kinds of struggles were indeed very happy times. Conversely, we can also look back on certain periods of our lives when there may have been a pleasure in our lives, but that phase of our lives now appears clearly as an unhappy time.

C.S. Lewis taught that happiness and unhappiness colour backwards: If our lives end up happy, we realize that we have always been happy even through the trying times, just as if our lives end up unhappy, we recognize that we have always been disappointed, even during the pleasurable periods of our lives. We ultimately end up in

terms of meaning to determine whether our lives have been happy or unhappy. Many people, including Jesus, suffered great pain but lived happy lives. Sadly, the reverse is also true. Happiness has a lot more to do with meaning than with pleasure.

In his autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*, C. S. Lewis tells his readers that his journey to Christianity was not easy. By his admission, he was “the most reluctant convert in the history of Christendom.” But one of the things that ultimately brought him around to Christianity was precisely realizing that meaning trumps our normal conception of happiness. He came to understand, he writes, *that God’s harshness is kinder than the softness of man, and God’s compulsion is our liberation.*

Money can’t buy happiness. It can buy pleasure, but pleasure is not necessarily happiness as life itself eventually teaches us.

FAITH = TRUST IN RELATIONSHIP (MARK 8:11-13)

The Pharisees ask Jesus for a sign from heaven. They are testing him because they have no faith nor trust in him. Faith is an attitude of confidence in the presence of God. Faith is an openness to what God will reveal, do, and invite. It should be obvious that in dealing with the infinite and all-powerful, personal God, we are never in control.



This is why we say that faith goes beyond reason. If we can figure it out, calculate precisely, predict with complete accuracy, we’re in charge—and by definition, we are not dealing with a person. Would you use any of those descriptors in talking about your relationship with your husband, wife, or best

friend? Instead, you enter into an ever-increasing rapport of trust with such people.

One of the most fundamental statements of faith is this: your life is not about you. You’re not in control. This is not your project. Rather, you are part of God’s great design. To believe this in your bones and to act accordingly is to have faith.

ETERNITA' E TEMPO

Quando tu rivolgi l'intera forza della tua passione al destino terrestre di Dio, se tu compi ciò che hai da compiere in quell'attimo, qualunque cosa sia, con tutta la tua forza e contale santa intenzione o cavvanà, tu congiungi Dio e la Shechinà, eternità e tempo. Per questo non hai bisogno d'essere né un dotto né un saggio: basta solo un'anima indivisa, indirizzata interamente verso la sua meta divina. Il mondo in cui vivi, così com'è e non altrimenti, ti permette quel rapporto con Dio che redimeallo stesso tempo te e quella parte del divino nel mondo che ti è stata affidata. E la tua propria natura,quello appunto che sei, rappresenta il tuo particolare adito a Dio, la tua particolare possibilità. Non averpaura del piacere che ti danno gli esseri e le cose, vedi solo di non

incapsularlo dentro agli esseri e alle cose, **ma avanza attraverso essi verso Dio. Non insorgere contro i tuoi desideri, ma tienili in mano e legali a Dio; non mortificare la tua passione, ma fa che essa santamente operi e santamente riposi in Dio.** Ognicontra senso con cui il mondo ti offende viene a te perché tu vi scopra il senso, e ogni contraddizione che dentro di te ti tormenta attende la tua parola che la sciolga. Ogni dolore primordiale vuole accesso alla tua fervida gioia. **Ma non è questa tua gioia che tu cerchi. Essa ti viene data quando tu cerchi di «rallegrare Dio». La tua gioia sorge quanto tu non vuoi altro che la gioia divina: niente altro che la gioia in se stessa.**



L'anima non deve gloriarsi di essere più santa del corpo; essa può raggiungere la sua perfezione soltanto perché è discesa in esso e opera con le sue membra. D'altra parte anche il corpo non deve gloriarsi di mantenere l'anima; se l'anima l'abbandona, esso si decompone.

«Come avviene che uno, che è legato a Dio e sa di essergli vicino, provi talvolta un'interruzione e una lontananza?» Il Baalshem spiegò: «Quando un padre vuole insegnare a camminare al suo figlioletto, lo pone prima davanti a sé e gli tiene le mani vicine da ambedue i lati, perché non cada, e così il bambino avanza verso il padre tra le mani del padre. Ma quando è arrivato al padre, questi si allontana un poco e tiene le mani più discoste, e così via, perché il bambino impari a camminare»

TRANSLATION - Eternity and time

When you turn the whole force of your passion to the earthly destiny of God, if you do



what you have to accomplish at that moment, whatever it is, with all your strength and counting that holy intention or will get by, you join God and Shechinà, eternity and time. For this, you do not need to be either a learned or a sage: only an undivided soul is enough, directed entirely towards its divine goal. As it is and not otherwise, the world you live in allows you that relationship with God that redeems

you and that part of the divine in the world that has been entrusted to you at the same time. And your nature, what you are, represents your special access to God, your distinct possibility. Therefore, do not be afraid of the pleasure that beings and things

give you, see that you do not encapsulate it within beings and things but advance through them towards God. Do not rise against your desires, but hold them in your hand and give them to God; do not mortify your passion, but let it work in a holy way and rest in God.

Every contradiction with which the world offends you comes to you so that you discover the meaning, and every paradox that torments you inside awaits your word to dissolve it. Every primal pain wants access to your emotional joy. But it is not this joy of yours that you seek. It is given to you when you try to "make God happy." Your joy arises when you want nothing but divine happiness: nothing but pleasure in itself.

The soul must not boast of being holier than the body; it can reach its perfection only because it has descended into it and works with its members. But, on the other hand, the body must not boast of maintaining the soul; if the soul abandons it, it decomposes.

"How does it happen that someone who is tied to God and knows he is close to him sometimes feels an interruption and a distance?" The Baal Shem explained: "When a father wants to teach his little son to walk, he first places him in front of him and holds his hands close to him on both sides, so that he does not fall, and so the child advances towards the father in the hands of the father. But when he gets to his father, he moves away from a little and keeps his hands further apart, and so on so that the child learns to walk."

BEING BORN FROM ABOVE

To be born again involves a gestation process that is being hooked up to a new umbilical cord. The one connection that begins to nurture us in such a way that our old support systems (the meaning and security we draw from our achievements, successes, material possessions, recognition, good name, good health, good looks, and sexual attractiveness) are no longer what ultimately gives us life. We still want these things, but we no longer build our lives around the fear of losing them. They always provide some energy and nourishment, but we begin, bit by bit, to draw life from something beyond them. Finally, we sense ourselves as hooked to something deeper, a spirit and a person who offers us a meaning that dwarfs what we now have.



This doesn't happen all at once, although there can be some dramatic, breakthrough moments along the way. Being born again is about seeds growing silently when nobody is watching, about unseen yeast leavening a batch of dough, and about an umbilical cord inside a dark womb supplying nutrients for an unknowing child to grow and be born. Gestation takes time. Growth works slowly.

Life, whether in the body or the Spirit, has the same dynamics.

THE POWER OF POWERLESSNESS

There are different kinds of power and other types of authority.



There is military power, muscle power, political power, economic power, moral power, charismatic power, and psychological power, among other things. There are different kinds of authority, too: We can be bitterly forced into acquiescing to certain demands or being gently persuaded to accept them.

Imagine four persons in a room: a powerful dictator who rules a country, a gifted athlete at the peak of his physical prowess, a rock star whose music and charisma can electrify an audience and a newborn, a baby, lying in its crib. Which of these is ultimately the most powerful?

The irony is that the baby ultimately wields the greatest power. A baby can touch hearts in a way that a dictator, an athlete, or a rock star cannot. Its innocent, wordless presence, without physical strength, can transform a room and a heart in a way that guns, muscle, and charisma cannot.

As most every parent has learned around a baby, we not only watch our language and try not to have bitter arguments; we also try to be better, more loving persons. Metaphorically, a baby has the power to do an exorcism. It can cast out the demons of self-absorption and selfishness in us.

This is the way we find and experience God's power here on earth, sometimes to our great frustration, and this is the way that Jesus was deemed powerful during his lifetime. The entire Gospels make this clear from beginning to end. He was born as a baby, powerless, and died hanging helplessly on a cross with bystanders mocking his powerlessness. Yet both his birth and his death manifest the kind of power upon which we can ultimately build our lives.

God's power forever lies within our world and our lives, asking for our patience. As Annie Dillard says, Christ is always found in our lives just as he was originally found, a helpless baby in the straw who must be picked up and nurtured into maturity. But we are forever wanting something else, namely, a God who would come and clean up the world and satisfy our thirst for justice by showing some raw muscle power and banging some heads here and now.

But that's not the way intimacy, peace, and God are found.

THIRD WEEK OF LENT (MARK 12:28–34)

Friends, in today's Gospel, the Lord says that the second greatest commandment is to love your neighbour as yourself. **Love is not primarily a feeling or an instinct; rather, it is the act of willing the good of the other as other. It is radical self-gift, living for the sake of the other.** To be kind to someone so that he might be kind to you, or treat a fellow human being justly so that he, in turn, might treat you with justice, is not to love, for such moves are tantamount to indirect self-interest. Truly to love is to move outside of the black hole of one's egotism, to resist the centripetal force that compels one to assume the attitude of self-protection. But this means that love is rightly described as a "theological virtue," for it represents a participation in the love that God is.



Since God has no needs, only God can utterly exist for the sake of the other. Thus, all of the great masters of the Christian spiritual tradition saw that we could love because we have received, as a grace, a share in the very life, energy, and nature of God. Reflect: Examine how you love others, searching out any move to indirect self-interest that may exist. **For example, how can you make sure your love “wills the good of the other”?**

ELETTRONE IN LIBERTA'

Un giorno partirò, sì lo so, partirò. Attraverserò il plasma, elettrone in libertà.



Nell'abbraccio di un fotone, vorrò fondermi con un raggio di sole e poi ripartire alla velocità della luce: me ne andrò nel campo delle stelle cadenti, per ritornare alla Terra, io pulviscolo svanito nel Nulla, che ha saputo di aver avuto una grande fortuna: l'aver conosciuto il dolore l'unico dono che mi avrà reso umana creatura. “Noi riteniamo di vedere meglio con la luce del sole” pensavo, ancora un po' assonnato. “Ma se il giorno durasse ventiquattr'ore su ventiquattro noi

saremmo indotti a credere, al primo impatto sensoriale, che l'universo sia circoscritto a questo pianeta terracqueo sul quale poggiamo i piedi. È solo quando la luce del sole si spegne che il cielo stellato ci dà una qualche percezione dell'immensità dell'universo. In

questo momento io credo di stare fermo, con i piedi ben saldi su una superficie immobile. In realtà stiamo viaggiando a 108mila chilometri all'ora, ch'è la velocità alla quale la terra gira intorno al sole; e a tale velocità devono aggiungersi 720 mila Km all'ora, ch'è la velocità di traslazione del sistema solare, nonché, in più, la velocità di fuga della nostra galassia. Crediamo che l'orbita terrestre sia immutabile, ma sbalzi gravitazionali potrebbero farla deragliare e lo scontro con un planetesimo (secondo l'ipotesi più accreditata) strappò in passato alla Terra una porzione ch'è diventata la Luna". La quale si sta allontanando piano piano da noi, risentendo dell'energia spesa per le maree e attratta dalla prevalente forza gravitazionale del sole.

TRANSLATION - Plasma electron-free

One day I'll leave, yes I know, I'll leave. First, I will go through the plasma electron-free. Then, in the embrace of a photon, I will want to merge with a ray of sunshine and then leave again at the speed of light: I will go into the field of shooting stars, to return to the Earth, I am dust vanished into Nothingness, which knew that it had great luck: having known pain is the only gift that will have made me a human creature. "We think we see better in the sunlight," I thought, still a little sleepy.



"But if the day lasted twenty-four hours a day, we would be led to believe, at the first sensory impact, that the universe is limited to this terrestrial planet on which we rest our feet. Only when the sunlight goes out that the starry sky gives us some perception of the universe's immensity. At this moment, I believe I am standing still, with my feet firmly on an immobile surface. In reality, we are travelling at 108 thousand kilometres per hour, which is the speed at which the earth revolves around the sun; and 720,000 km per hour must be added to this speed, which is the translation speed of the solar system, as well as the escape speed of our galaxy. We believe that the Earth's orbit is immutable. Still, gravitational changes could derail it, and the collision with a planet (according to the most accredited hypothesis) in the past tore a portion from the Earth that has become the Moon ", which is slowly moving away from us, feeling the effects of the energy spent on the tides and attracted by the dominant gravitational force of the sun.

THE 10 COMMANDMENTS - REFLECTIONS

The Ten Commandments are divided into two sets. The first three deal with our relationship to God and how to worship him, and then, following from these commandments, comes a whole series of commandments concerning our relationship with other people.

As we celebrate this Reconciliation, reflecting on how we keep these commands can become the impetus to deepen our commitment to the Lord.

"Honor your father and your mother." What is the quality of your relationship with those who are nearest and dearest to you? If things are off there, they are probably off everywhere else.



"You shall not kill." Very few of us have killed another person, but what is the role of violence in your life? What is the quality of your temper? Have you *effectively* killed people, that is to say, rendered them lifeless? Do you enhance the lives of those around you, or are people less

alive after they've been with you?

"You shall not commit adultery." The Bible is not obsessed with sex, but it does recognize the importance of our sexuality in the moral sphere. Unfortunately, much of our popular culture wants to teach us that sex is amoral, a matter, finally, of indifference. As long as you're not hurting anyone, so says the culture, anything goes. But sex, like every other part of us, is meant to serve love, to become a gift. Is your sex life self-indulgent, simply for the sake of your pleasure? Do you lust after others, using them for your sexual satisfaction? Do you practice forms of sex that are simply perverse?

"You shall not steal." Do you steal other's property, even very small things like little amounts of money? Do you steal someone's good name and reputation through gossip?

"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour." What is the quality of your speech? How much time do you spend inveighing against your neighbour, even making things up to make him look bad?

"You shall not covet your neighbour's house or wife." The philosopher René Girard suggests that we imitate other people's desires, wanting things simply because they want them. This can easily lead to conflict and dysfunction. So what is it that you are coveting in your life, especially that others have or desire?

In this Confession, suppose that Jesus has made a whip of cords, knotted with the Ten Commandments. What would he clear out of you?

A MATTER OF PRIORITIES - by *Michael, Tom and Luigi*

"Life is what you make it" because life is fundamentally the result of choices we make. True, there are many circumstances in life over which we have no control, but how we allow events to affect us is also a matter of our choosing; we make or break ourselves by the attitudes and actions we choose to maintain. Most of our choices are good ones because we are good people. Not that we don't have our failings now and then; generally, however, we will choose good over evil. Where the real difficulty lies, however, is in choosing among many good things available to us. We receive an unexpected bonus, for example, and wonder if we should spend it on new clothes, home repairs, new landscaping, a vacation, or charity. Should we buy an expensive

plasma TV that will last or a less expensive one that will permit us to buy other things? We may not make wrong choices; it's just that we might have chosen something better.



How to decide what is "better" often leads us in a dilemma.

This is what we observe in the gospel reading today. Martha would fit in easily with the agenda of the modern world. She is practical, efficient, and businesslike. Her claims on Mary for help are legitimate. There is always work to be done running a household or dinner party. Have we never experienced cooking, setting up tables, serving food and drinks, and cleaning up afterwards

while someone who is supposed to be helping us is having fun with the guests? Naturally, we are resentful. When Martha complains that Mary isn't doing her share of preparations, we note that Jesus does not condemn Martha. He merely affirms that **"Mary has chosen the good portion."** There is more to life than what is practical, efficient, and businesslike.

Making choices among many good options is always easier if we are clear about our priorities. What counts in life? What matters? In the long run, what better serves our development and happiness? On our deathbed, what will we repent not having done? It's good to maintain a showcase home, for example, but it may be better to have a well-used one where children can play at will and friends feel completely at ease. It's good to save for a rainy day, but it may be better to spend money on the present sunny one. It may be good to quit school early and go to work, but it may be better to go for education to find a good career. It is good to be highly protective of children, but it may be better for their sense of autonomy to encourage them to take some risks. It's good to find comfort in religion, but it may be better to have our faith shaken now and then, so it might be stronger. If we hope to live more effectively, choices have to be made. Priorities help us determine what the **"good portion"** is.

What is it to work hard and make a lot of money if we can't enjoy ourselves? What does it mean to be successful if we aren't happy? What good is it to build a huge home if no one shares it with you or comes to visit?

What good is a gourmet meal to a hungry soul or an impressive portfolio of investments to an empty spirit? Set up your priorities in favour of a better living and your spiritual development. Follow Mary's example and make choices that expand your life and help you grow physically and spiritually.

In closing our reflection, we may say: *Who Will Care?*

The milder weather makes life easier in some respects for the homeless, the housebound, the sick and the elderly. On the other hand, it can be a very lonely and anxious time for the dependent, as the people who normally care for them take off on holidays. 'Who will care for me while they are gone?' is the unspoken fear in many hearts. Martha and Mary inviting one homeless man into their home for the evening

meal. Even though it gave rise to some trebles, it was probably easy enough for them to do so as the man in question was respected and a good friend of them. He was Jesus of Nazareth. Many of us would be happy enough to do the same and have him to dinner.

This we can do because he assures us that what we do to the least of our brothers and sisters, we do to him.

Guess who is coming for supper? Will we care for him in any of our brothers and sisters this weekend? Guess who is here today at this very celebration of the liturgy of the Mass?

A STONE'S THROW - *Silvester O'Flynn* - (Jn 8:1-11)

That was the day when stones threatened death. In the beginning, it was the dust of creation. Then the water came from the skies and mixed with the dust to form the clay. Fire in the bowels of the earth baked the mud and raised mighty mountains. Finally, ice came and split the mountains, and rocks were formed. Water was so soft that it could play with the stones, and the rough edges were smoothed, and the stones were polished.

Then a man came and used the hardness of stone for tools and the durability of rocks for building. But in his pride, he thought that he could build a tower to the heavens. God punished his pride and scattered the stones, and divided the people. A prophet came who dreamed the hope that God would take out the hearts of stone from the people and let living hearts of flesh grow instead. But people still lived by the laws written on stone and worshipped in a great temple of rock, a symbol of their hearts.

One day, into this area of sacred stones, the people of stony hearts dragged a sinner to her cruel fate. They did not yet know that the foundations were crumbling and that a living body replaced this temple of stone. He was treated like a stone rejected by the builders. But all would change when the Spirit would roll back the stone of death, and the tomb of stone would become the womb of life.

Under the breath of the Spirit, hearts of cold stone would become warm flesh. And the living stones would creep together to become the new temple of God. The stone rejected by the builders would become the chief cornerstone, binding all together.



The time was close now. And a shadow of the future fell back across the courtyard that day as he wrote in the dust. The dust was older than the stones. And its primitive authority was recognized as people let down the rocks of death and went away, beginning with the most senior. '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.' (Ez 36:25)

ADULT CHRISTIANITY - *(Michael R. Kent)*

One of the most enduring symbols in the Christian tradition is Christ the Good Shepherd. The gospel reading recalls this moving image and assures us that Jesus will never abandon his followers. We, the sheep of his flock, are eternally under his guidance and protection. This pledge of care, of course, can be of great comfort to us, especially when we feel like "lost sheep." At the same time, however, we shouldn't let this symbol mislead us. A problem arises when we misconstrue the image of the Good Shepherd and believe it encourages us to remain sheep-like all our lives, especially in terms of our discipleship as Christians. It is one thing to feel confident that we are supported in doing what we are called to do in life, and quite another to go through life dependent on others to take care of us, do our work for us, solve our problems, and make us feel good.

A human being never attains true adulthood until he or she stops being a sheep. All of



us desire self-esteem, self-confidence, and respect. But we must realize that these qualities only come at a price. We never develop self-esteem until we own our lives. We can't have self-confidence unless we are in the habit of actually taking care of ourselves. We don't deserve respect unless we take full responsibility for what we do and for what happens to us. Real maturity and freedom are never enjoyed until we stop being dependent.

The same applies to our Christian faith. Faith cannot empower us as long as it remains only part of a hand-me-down religion; faith has little substance as long as it remains borrowed rather than owned. Being an adult Christian means, we take

independent responsibility for what we believe and hold ourselves personally accountable for the way we live out our calling as Christians. It is a good thing, therefore, that our faith is often put to the test. Only when faith is tested does it grow in meaning. Faith becomes a "living faith" when challenged and put on the line to answer what we believe.

Furthermore, we need to remember that Jesus charged his followers with a mission that would entail commitment, hardship, even sacrifice. This isn't sheep talk. Of course, we surrender to the will of the Good Shepherd, but he intends that we do our part to help

him build the kingdom of God. We are not Christians only to have our religious needs taken care of but so that we can become engaged in serving the needs of others. The Good Shepherd does not make us dependent but supports our independence in working for the kingdom's good wherever we find ourselves.

Do you “own” your faith, or is faith simply something that was passed down to you without much reflection on your part? Do you feel the power of your Christian faith to give you a better quality of life? Never fear to have your faith shaken—it will make your faith come alive. Allow your faith to serve you and others. What activities might you get involved in to build the kingdom of God? Are there any parish ministries in which you could become active? Are there ways you can make your home, workplace, or community more enjoyable for everyone? Stop asking, “what am I getting out of this?” and ask rather, “how may I serve?” Fulfill your destiny as a follower of Christ and offer your services in gratitude for all the good things God has done for you.

AT THE BEGINNING

Dear Jesus, at the beginning of this Advent Season, I want to make this a reflective and calm season, preparing for your birth and pondering how you came into this world in such a stunningly humble way. But it's so busy, and I'm distracted and sometimes even short-tempered with those I love the most. So I will cut back on the craziness of Christmas preparations. Here are just a few suggestions: send cards only to close friends and family; drop one present per person from my list; and go only to the essential holiday gatherings. Does that sound selfish? It's just the opposite! It will give me time to spend with those I love and more time to spend in prayer.

PREPARING FOR VISITORS

They are coming! Oh, dear Lord, like the Wise men wandering toward the stable,



visitors are heading to my house. I am so excited about this visit. But I can get so side-tracked about how my house looks or the food I serve and when they are coming. Help me to stay humble this Advent and Christmas season. You invite us into the humility of the stable where you were born.

Please help me to remember that humbleness and the simple joy of your birth are all I

need. Let me stay focused on my guests, not on myself and my worries about my house and how it looks.

Guide me in rejoicing in who these people are and in loving them freely as you did when you came among us.

ASCENSION 1.2.3.4.5

1. Accept Affirmation: What great things still await you in life? Don't give up on your dreams. Never put yourself down, or allow others to do so. Respond to compliments with **"thank you"** rather than a disclaimer. Learn to affirm yourself more. Pat yourself on the back when you've achieved a goal you set for yourself. Take pride in your achievements. God does not make mistakes. You were born for stardom.

2. Now I am sending you: Not only is Christ going to be the light of the world; Christ is going to be the salt of the earth; not only is Christ going to be the yeast of human life. We are invited to be that light, that salt and yeast we are in business we are living witnesses.

3. "I am sending upon you what my Father promised the Holy Spirit."

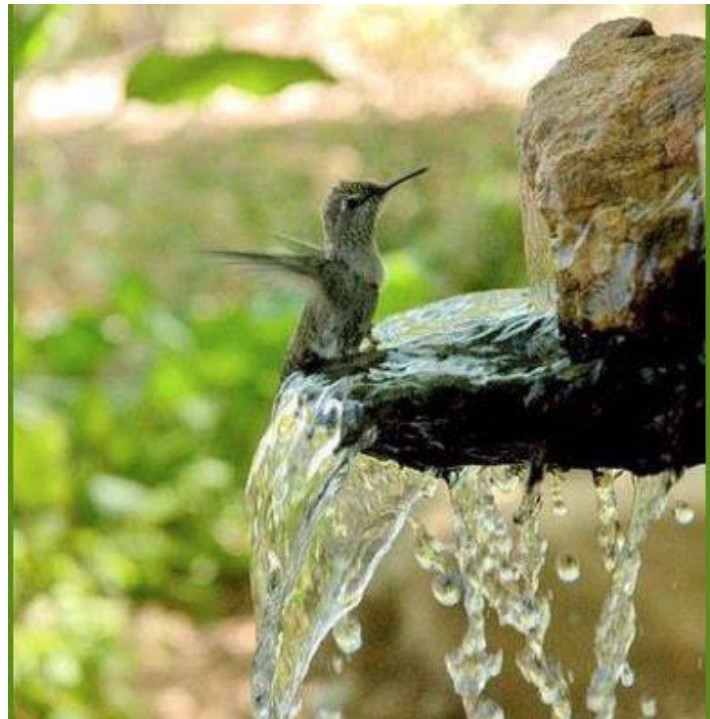
Nothing is impossible to God. Nothing is impossible with God. The Holy Spirit is always with us. So we may feel positive all the time.

Comfort and trust in the power of that presence. In good or bad situations of our life, we are always in good hands.

4. Are we ready to welcome that Power in our journey of life? God has ordered for you and me a new suit being clothed with power. Like wind and fire, we are on the wheels of a new car powerful Ferrari.

5. As the journey is still ahead of us, we keep up in good spiritual shape. Actions speak louder than words. We carry on his mission more by what we are than by what we say. If the love of God burns in our hearts, people will see from our joy that life is good, has a purpose and is worth living. Our journey is the way to glory here, and now We go to heaven altogether, or nobody goes up there.

You have to take up all of your family don't live behind anybody. And I have to take all of you, my community, with me. Mamma Mia!



STARTING FROM ASHES

Lent is traditionally a special time of the church year in which we are encouraged to perform an in-depth evaluation of where we are going with our lives, especially in terms



of our Christian values. Time is set aside for contemplation of our mortality and repentance of our sins, but also an assessment of our potential as spiritual beings, made in the image and likeness of God. We examine where we're falling behind in our spiritual growth and make fresh resolves to carry on in our Christian calling with renewed vigour and enthusiasm. The mood is sombre yet full of promise. It is a journey from ashes to Easter.

Lent should begin with ashes. Ashes have a way of putting things in perspective. When we receive ashes, we are encouraged to see ourselves in the light of our mortality. Ashes demonstrate the folly of human vanity and the implausibility of possessions to give us what we need to be happy in life. Ashes also confront any smugness or excessive self-assurance we might have in our material well-being and remind us of our need to develop spiritually. Finally, we are assured that we have much yet to do to fulfill our true purpose in life and that the journey must continue.

There is no better time than the present to consider that journey and how we are making it. In today's reading from Corinthians, Paul states: "now is the acceptable time; behold now is the day of salvation." NOW is the acceptable time to challenge our apathy, evaluate our current lifestyle, and reorganize our priorities. God has special graces for us this Lenten season and beckons us to clarify our vision of what we are about as followers of the Lord Jesus. It is up to us to take advantage of the moment and accept these graces. We don't have to wait for salvation, and it is available for us right now.

Promise to keep Lent special and take advantage of its special graces. Dedicate this Lent to your personal growth. Are you willing to devote these forty days to review where

you are in life and where God wants to lead you? Receive ashes with humility, and be ready to learn.

I look forward to Easter when you feel raised from the dead with new awareness and vigour for your spiritual journey. The Word of the Lord is ready to show you the way. Begin now!

BEATITUDES

In the old cowboy films set in the Wild West, it was the sheriff's job to catch the outlaw. Posters were printed depicting the wanted man and hung in saloons, usually with the caption: 'Wanted dead or alive' and offering a reward. Modern police departments have developed a more sophisticated version of this. Where the criminal is unknown, they create an identikit picture from descriptions they get from interviewing eye-witnesses. A likeness is built up from the size and shape of the mouth, nose and chin, the height of the forehead, the spacing between the eyes etc. The resulting portrait, surprisingly often, leads to the apprehension of the criminal.

It would be interesting to produce an identikit, not of the physical traits but certain personality makeup (or moral characteristics). Let's pick the obvious one, the one we are most familiar with, the American or Canadian-idol, media-star, star-athlete, leading politician, TV personality, the one everybody is talking about. Mr. Success himself. The one we all yearn to be, model ourselves on and encourage our children to be—the new secular saint.



He/she must be highly motivated. Money is the great driving force. Money means power, as Cardinal Newman put it: **'All bow down before wealth. Wealth is that to which the multitude of men pays an instinctive homage.'** To get it and the 'good life' that comes

with it, he/she must be aggressive, rough-riding others, trampling on underlings, ruthless with incompetents, unscrupulous with competitors. For sure, He/she have to be ambivalent towards the law and indifferent to morality. The rash of corruption scandals is presently making the headlines, not only in Italy but also worldwide. Worldly success is rarely achieved with 'clean hands. Our portrait is complete if I throw in a few other features, such as pride, avarice, and anger.

No modern image-maker or star creator would look twice at someone whose outstanding qualities were humility, compassion, poverty, self-denial and selfless

dedication to the service of others. Yet, as the Sermon on the Mount outlines for us today, these form the identikit of a Christian's life. Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

"Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. That person shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. (Jeremiah 17:7)

CHRISTIAN PUMPKIN

Being a Christian is like being a pumpkin.

God lifts you, takes you in, and washes all the dirt off of you. Then, he opens you up, touches you deep inside and scoops out all the yucky stuff, including the seeds of doubt, hate, greed. Then He carves you a new smiling face and puts His light inside you to shine for all the world to see. This was passed on to me from another pumpkin. Now, it is your turn to pass it to another pumpkin. I like this enough to tell all the pumpkins in my patch.

BEST POEM



I was shocked, confused and surprised
As I entered Heaven's door,
Not by the beauty of it all,
Nor the lights or its decor.

But it was the folks in Heaven
Who made me sputter and gasp.
The thieves, the liars, the sinners,
The alcoholics and the trash.

There stood the kid from seventh grade
Who swiped my lunch money twice.
Next to him was my old neighbour
Who never said anything nice.

Bob, who I always thought
Was rotting away in hell,
I was sitting pretty on cloud nine,
I was looking incredibly well.

I asked Jesus, 'What's the deal?
I would love to hear.
How would all these sinners get up here?
God must have made a mistake.

'And why is everyone so quiet,

So sombre - give me a clue.'

'Ok, child,' He said,
'they're all in shock.
No one thought they'd be seeing you.'

Every saint has a PAST - Every sinner has a FUTURE!

HAPPY ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT

Many people were disappointed with the teaching of Jesus. After all, he did not push for a political uprising, nor did he outline a social utopia. There would still be poverty, oppression, injustices and reasons to lament. What Jesus did offer was a new way of seeing how God can be present and operative in those situations. And if God is there, it is always a blessing. How do we translate the beatitudes? Do we say 'happy' or 'blessed'? 'Happy' suggests a feeling of well-being, satisfaction and contentment: receiving something or a favourable opportunity. 'Blessed' is a word that



reaches deeper than feelings or chance happening. It expresses the belief that God is at work in this particular situation of my life. On the level of emotion, there may be a very little experience of well-being or satisfaction. But if God is involved in the happening, then the believer has an eye for good, even though the superficial expertise may be of darkness and emptiness, mourning and misunderstanding. On the one hand, things may appear to be all suffering and pain, defeat and mistakes. But on the other hand, the inner eye sees that God is there and all shall be well, and all is well.

Deep trust in God is the most profound basis for peace of soul.

There is and can be happiness at a deep level in the soul of a believer, even while storms of adversity are raging on the surface of life. St Paul always opens his letters with a greeting, first of grace and then of peace. Peace and happiness would follow as a result of knowing that one is the recipient of God's grace. Blessed first, then happy because God is there.

People may have been disappointed that Jesus did not set up a system of ending poverty and pain. As a result, people still have to live and deal with difficulties and troubles.

He did present that interior disposition of mind and heart which could discern the working of God even in those bad and painful conditions, perhaps calling us to cooperate to do something about it.

And where God is at work, it is always a blessed situation. Those who know that God is there are happy people.

Suggestion: take one of the beatitudes you like and try to practice it for a week or a month and see what may happen to you!

BLESSING AS SPEAKING WELL OF SOMEONE

When we delight in them when we speak well, we bless others when we feel their



presence and energy as gifts rather than a competition to be afraid.

If we can look at another person – man or woman or child – and in full sincerity say: “I am glad you are here! Your presence here brings me life! Your energy doesn’t threaten me but adds to the joy of my own life!” then, like God pronouncing the original creation good and telling Jesus at his baptism “In you, I take delight,” you have blessed someone.

If you are a parent and sincerely say to a son or daughter: “I am proud of you!” you have blessed your child.

If you are a teacher and say to a student: “Well done!” you have blessed your student.

If you are a coach and say to a player: “Great play!” you have blessed your player.

If you are head of a company and say to an employee: “Great job!” you have blessed that employee.

If you tell a coworker at work: “It is great to be working with you!” you have blessed that coworker. ...

Blessings not all the time are in need to be articulated in words even though they should be. There are ways beyond words to tell others that we delight in them, just as there are many ways to communicate to others that we find them irritating in our lives.

We bless more with our body language and our attitude than we do with our words.

BROKEN DREAMS

As children bring their broken toys
With tears for us to mend,
I brought my broken dreams to God
Because He was my Friend.
But instead of leaving Him
In peace to work alone,
I hung around and tried to help
With ways that were my own.
At last, I snatched them back and cried,
“How can You be so slow?”
“My child,”
He said,
“what could I do?
You never let them go.”



BIOGRAPHY of LIFE

CHAPTER 1. OF LIFE:

I walked down the street, and there is a big hole in the sidewalk I fall in; I am lost and helpless. It is my fault. It will take forever to find the way out.

CHAPTER 2.

I walked down the same street with the same big hole in the sidewalk; I pretend I don't see it; I fall in again. I can't believe I am in the same place! It is my fault, and it takes a long time to get out.

CHAPTER 3.

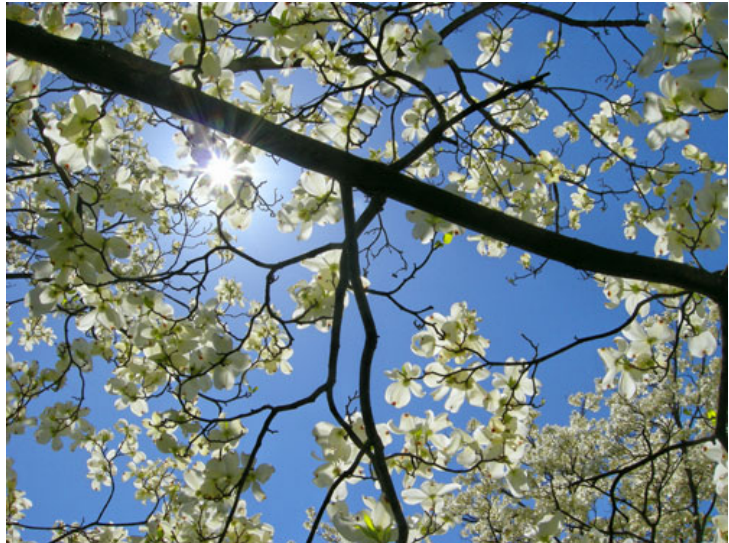
I walked down the same street; there is a big hole in the sidewalk; I see it there; I am still falling; it is a habit; my eyes are open; I know who I am; it is my fault; I get out immediately.

CHAPTER 4.

I walked down the same street there is a big hole in the sidewalk; I walked around it;

CHAPTER 5.

I walked down another street, another street and another street; there are streets that you know there is your purpose of setting in your heart, and you show up here today. See, everybody has this choice: “to wake up in the morning; to open up the curtains; we lookout, and we can even say: GOOD MORNING-GOD! Or: GOOD GOD – MORNING!



CATERPILLAR - BUTTERFLY



In this world, I am a caterpillar
Bumbling and slowly crawling along
I wander to and fro, seeking a better place
Sometimes despairing of where I land
Deep inside, I know there is a beauty
My mind's eye cannot see
But it seems so distant and difficult to attain
Outside this shell in which I dwell
There is someone who sees within
He sees not the ugliness I perceive
He sees not the things that keep me earthbound
For you see how long ago
Before time was counted
And tales were told
Saw in me a creature of beauty
He saw me not as a bumbling soul
Nor did He see me bound to the earth
Upon me, He looked before I was conceived
And with a smile on His face
And a tender thought
He saw a butterfly beautiful and free
He saw me soaring to the heights
Round His throne He saw me swiftly fly
He knows what I can become
When in His hands, I leave my life
Trusting Him, surrendering to Him
So while I wander this world below
A slow and stumbling caterpillar
He wraps me in a cocoon of love
And moulds me into a butterfly
Beautiful, light and free.

By: Ann Martin

CEASAR AND GOD

(Mt. 22:15-21)

History tells of many odd marriages of convenience between the families of opposing ideologies to confront a common enemy. The Pharisees had reached such a state of desperation that they allied with their political adversaries, the Herodians. Pharisees were, by definition, the Separate Ones who were totally against Roman influence or domination. The friends of Herod, by contrast, operated totally under Roman patronage. But the two parties were prepared to bury their differences in an attempt to discredit Jesus.

If he is against paying taxes to the Romans, they will make a political case against him in the civil court. But if he favours payment, then he will lose all popular support. Either way, it seems that Jesus is in a no-win situation.

Jesus, however, was a step ahead of their clever conspiracy. He did not directly answer the specific question. Rather, he sprung the trap back on the trappers by making them find the answers. And they found their answer in a most surprising place in their own pockets.

Jesus knew that where your coins are, that's where your heart is too. Each currency was like a mirror of their lives. If they chose to accept the advantages of the Empire in better roads, commercial opportunities and international protection, they should be prepared to pay for them.



Give your rightful return to the secular power, yes! But absolute worship is to be given to God alone: not to Caesar, as the Romans demanded when they raised their emperors to the level of gods. Jesus eluded the trap but used the occasion to re-affirm the absolute dominion of God in all areas of life.

'Show me a coin,' he said. **'Whose image is this? Whose name?'** We can take these words as a continuing challenge to our lives. Reach into the

pockets of how we live and reflect on the coins we find there. The coins represent the talents we are gifted with: and the payment we have received for our work. The cash in our hands is the means for paying our way and acquiring what we need. They represent our security.

The best advertisement for God and true religion is the face of a person living a full life in secular and sacred areas. Somebody is prayerful, emotionally integrated, intellectually stimulated, physically fit, socially sensitive, environmentally alert and politically responsible. Finally, there is somebody whose life is a coin that bears God's image: somebody who uses all the talents or coins of life to make a profit unto the glory of God. As St Irenaeus put it: 'The glory of God is best seen in a person who is fully alive.'

CARAMELLE

"Ho contato i miei anni ed ho scoperto che ho meno tempo da vivere da ora in avanti, rispetto a quanto ho vissuto finora. Mi sento come quel bimbo cui regalano un sacchetto di caramelle: le prime le mangia felice e in fretta, ma, quando si accorge che gliene rimangono poche, comincia a gustarle profondamente. Perché solo l'essenziale é ciò che fa sì che la vita valga la pena viverla. Voglio circondarmi di gente che sappia arrivare al cuore delle altre persone.



Gente a cui i duri colpi della vita, abbiano insegnato a crescere con dolci carezze nell'anima. Con gente che desideri solo vivere con onestà e rettitudine. Gente che sappia amare. Gente che non si consideri eletta anzitempo. Gente che non sfugga alle sue responsabilità. Gente sincera che difenda la dignità umana. Si ho fretta per vivere con l'intensità che niente più che la maturità ci può dare. Non intendo sprecare neanche una sola caramella di quelle che ora mi restano nel sacchetto.

Sono sicuro che queste caramelle saranno più squisite di quelle che ho mangiato finora. Il mio obiettivo, alla fine, é andar via soddisfatto e in pace con i miei cari e con la mia coscienza.

Ti auguro che anche il tuo obiettivo sia lo stesso, perché, in qualche modo, anche tu te ne andrai." - Mario Andrade (Poeta, novellista, saggista brasiliano)

TRANSLATION - Candies

"I counted my years and found that I have less time to live from now on than I have lived up to now. I feel like that child to whom they give a bag of sweets: the first he eats them happily and quickly, but, when he realizes that he has few left, he begins to enjoy them deeply.



Because only the essential is what makes life worth living.

I want to surround myself with people who know how to reach other people's hearts.

People to whom the hard blows of life have taught to grow with sweet

caresses in the soul. People who want to live with honesty and righteousness.

People who know how to love.

People who do not consider themselves elected prematurely. People who do not escape their responsibilities.

Sincere people who defend human dignity. Yes, I'm in a hurry to live with the intensity that nothing more than maturity can give us. I do not intend to waste even a single candy of those that now remain in the bag. I'm sure these candies will be more delicious than the ones I've eaten so far.

My goal, in the end, is to leave satisfied and at peace with my loved ones and with my conscience. I hope that your goal is the same too, because, in some way, you too will leave." (Mario Andrade (Brazilian poet, novelist, essayist))

CHARLES BORROMEIO

"My brothers, you must realize that for us churchmen, nothing is more necessary than meditation. We must meditate before, during, and after everything we do. The prophet says: 'I will pray, and then I will understand.' When you administer the sacraments, meditate on what you are doing. When you celebrate Mass, reflect on the sacrifice you are offering. When you pray the office, think about the words you are saying and the Lord to whom you speak. When you take care of your people, meditate on the Lord's blood that has washed them clean. In this way, all that you do becomes a work of love."

Charles Borromeo was the Archbishop of Milan and a Papal Secretary of State in the 16th century. He was born in 1538 to one of the most wealthy and notable families in Lombardy. He studied civil and canon law at the University of Pavia, where he graduated with high honours. When Borromeo was 22 years old, his uncle Pius IV made him a cardinal. Borromeo attended the Council of Trent. When he became Bishop of Milan in 1564, he undertook to reform his vast archdiocese. Charles focused on the morals of the clergy and laity, diocesan effectiveness, and educational programs. He founded seminaries and a Confraternity of Christian Doctrine to educate children. He supported the Counter-Reformation. In 1576, during the bubonic plague, Borromeo worked tirelessly for the poor and dying. He established hospitals, buried the dead, and was a constant source of spiritual support. He died in 1584 and was canonized in 1610. St. Charles Borromeo is the patron saint of seminarians, spiritual directors and religious leaders.



CHILDREN OF THE DESERT

It is not surprising that the three great world religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, were born in the desert. It was through the desert that Moses led the Israelites from slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land.

From that desert, John the Baptist came to herald the Messiah and soon after, Jesus followed to proclaim himself Messiah. The wilderness has a magic power of transformation on human beings. The desert is a purgatory man must pass through to reach paradise. What is impressive about the desert is its wild wilderness.

There is no vegetation, birdlife, and odd tiny lizard, almost no animals. The silence is almost total. In that dry landscape, nothing comes between a man and his God. One either discovers God or crashes to despair. It is no wonder that those people who work at the salt trade following their caravans

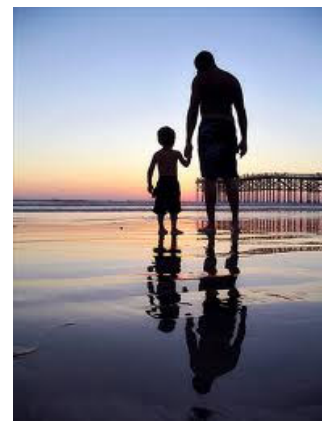


across the desert are deeply religious. No life survives there except the inner life. So it is not surprising that the Desert Fathers created that great institution dedicated to fostering the inner life, Western monasticism. It has so profoundly marked Christianity that we are all now, in a sense, children of the desert. Living as many of us do, in built-up areas, piled high on top of each other in high-rise apartments, bombarded day and night with the roar of city traffic and the blare of electronic music, we are in danger of losing our desert roots and with that our inner life.

We need to create a time and a space to nurture our spiritual lives. Lent is such a time. The Spirit drove Jesus out into the wilderness, and he remained there for forty days. Like Jesus, we should let the Holy Spirit lead us out into the desert this Lent where we can face the negative evil power of our lives, and like him too, triumph over them. Lent is time to ponder about how real is the kingdom of God among us to repent, that is, to change and to believe in the Good News of reconciliation and peace.

CHILDREN LEARN WHAT THEY LIVE - Dorothy Law Nolte

If a child lives with criticism, he learns to condemn.
If a child lives with hostility, he learns to fight.
If a child lives with ridicule, he learns to be shy.
If a child lives with shame, he learns to feel guilty.
If a child lives with tolerance, he learns to be patient.
If a child lives with encouragement, he learns confidence.
If a child lives with praise, he learns to appreciate.
If a child lives with fairness, he learns justice. If a child lives with security, he learns to have faith. If a child lives with approval, he learns to like himself. If a child lives with acceptance and friendship, he learns to find love in the world.



THE WHISPER OF CHRISTMAS

"There is no evidence of any kind regarding the date of Jesus' birth. His nativity began



to be celebrated on Dec. 25 in Rome during the early part of the fourth century (AD 336) as a Christian counterpart to the pagan festival, popular among the worshipers of Mithras, called *Sol Invictus*, the *Unconquerable Sun*. At the very moment when the days are the shortest, and darkness seems to have conquered light, the sun passes its nadir. Days grow longer, and although the cold will only increase for quite a long time, the ultimate conquest of winter is sure. This astronomical process is a parable of

the meaning of the Incarnate One. At the moment when history is blackest, and in the least expected and obvious place, the Son of God is born the darkness of nights give away to the new light of the longest days."

A REAL CHRISTIAN

The Spirit in a person is the candle of the Lord, lighted by God, and lighting people to God.

- Benjamin Whichcote

John Ruskin once sat with a friend in the dusk of an evening and watched a lamplighter, torch in hand, lighting the streetlights on a distant hill. Very soon, the man's form was no longer distinguishable in the distance, but everywhere he went, he left a light burning brightly. "There," said Ruskin, "that is what I mean by a real Christian. You can trace his course by the light that he leaves burning."

- Carl Knudsen

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

CHRIST THE KING

One great Christian mark is a conversion experience that leads one to confess that **“Jesus is the Lord.”** This confession not only acknowledges Jesus’ prominence in all



creation but accepts Jesus into a new position in our lives. We are aware that our lives are “run” by all manner of desires, fears, worries, threats, beliefs, and experiences from our past. All put together; these pressures are what constitute our self-consciousness, our self, our ego. The ego tries to rule us with great power. The primary agenda of the ego is to convince us to make us believe that we cannot exist without it and that there is no happiness in our lives if we do not satisfy the ego will: “my will be done.”

In confessing Jesus as “Lord,” however, we remove ego from the throne of our hearts and give this position over to Jesus Christ. In making this confession,

we become a new creation, a new person, “born again.” This doesn’t mean we become sinless, or perfect, or without problems, only that something substantial has shifted within us. Christ has become our center. With Christ as our center, we surrender to a higher power, a new controlling force, to “run” our lives.

This shift is big and wonderful. This change is rightly called “salvation,” which does not destroy the ego but saves us from egocentricity. The ego is displaced; its central position at the controls of our life is converted to the Lord; we now have a new self-consciousness from Christ. This conversion is reflected in an attitude of “Thy will be done,” an intention to live from the mind of Christ, and a willingness to take our actions for effective living from the teachings of Jesus. Christ lives then, not only as King of the universe but as ruler of our hearts.

Here is the question of the day: What “runs” your life? – What is in your wallet?

REMEMBER ME

‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’

This prayer of the good thief is fascinating. Judging by appearances, the three being crucified were all going to suffer the same fate. Certainly, the other thief did not doubt that it was all over for the three of them. So what stirred the other criminal dying on a cross to believe that the man on the next cross could have any power to help?

Somehow, in some strange way, there was a spark of faith, a small glimpse that Jesus was more than he seemed, that he could and would help. So we hear the plea, 'remember me.' Two simple words in many hearts over and over again in many centuries of our history.

To be remembered is the cornerstone of relationships. It is how friendship is nurtured and grows. Remembrance makes present again the reality of the bond between faraway friends. Without it, there is no hope. To experience being remembered is a blessing to be treasured and cherished in the darker moments. Just as this is true of human love and friendship, our relationship with Jesus is particularly true. Indeed, as the good thief's prayer brought an instant guaranteed promise of everlasting friendship, *"Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."*



'Jesus, remember me' is a prayer for sinners rather than for the saints.

So we can feel at home with it, especially today and at any time where we say and do this prayer in remembrance of Him.

CHRISTMAS PRAYER

"Meister Eckhart once said: 'What good is it that Christ was born 2,000 years ago if he is not born now in your heart?' "Lord, we do far too much celebrating your actual coming in our hearts. I believe in God, but do I believe in God-in-me? I believe in God in heaven, but do I believe in God-on-earth? I believe in God out there, but do I believe in God-with-us? Lord, be born in my heart. Come alive in me this Christmas! Amen."

A SAVIOR - CHRIST THE LORD

The angel announced three significant names: three names that constituted news of great joy and a joy to be shared by the whole world. Savior, Christ and Lord.

The first name is Savior. It means the same as the name Jesus given by the angel at the annunciation. Jesus' name means the one who would save his people from their sins. It is a name that is empty unless there are sinful people who need to be saved. As a doctor's presence is best appreciated where someone is sick or injured, the Savior's coming is good news for those who know they are sinners.

It was to shepherds that the heavenly message was given. So forget all your religiously



romantic ideas about shepherds. Shepherds were too dishonest and too smelly to be allowed into synagogue or temple services. They were among the outcasts. But this Savior would make a point of being with sinners. And he would scandalize the church-goers by eating and drinking (oh my!) with the outcasts.

The Savior came down to the poor and the homeless. Mary and Joseph were glad to use a borrowed shelter. And

not even that part of the house reserved for the humans (for there was no room for them), but the animals' shelter. The Savior's maternity unit was smelly, dirty and unhygienic: just like the world he was entering: just like the souls, he was coming for.

The second name told to the shepherds was Christ. The word Christ expressed his function. The Christ means the chrismed one, the anointed one. In the Old Testament, people were anointed for three great services as prophets, priests and kings.

The prophet was called to be a teacher of God's will. The priest was a mediator who offered sacrifice to God for the people; as a mediator, he brought the people to God and God to the people. The king was anointed to serve the people with good government and leadership. For the first time, all three anointings were fulfilled in the one person, the anointed one, the Christ. As a prophet, he would be the bringer of God's light to a darkened world.

As a priest, he would shepherd the straying souls back to God and lay down his life for them. Finally, as king, he would set up the reign of God in souls.

The third name announced by the angel was Lord. Luke took a special delight in that name, for he was writing for the Roman world where they claimed that the Emperor was divine. So Luke's message to them is that there is only one Lord, Jesus Christ.

Three names are rich in significance. First, Savior is coming down to us into sinfulness and poverty. Second, Christ is ministering to us as the prophet of light, as the shepherd of souls and as the bringer of God's kingdom. Third, the Lord raised, returning to the divine glory and raising our human nature, which he had assumed. He humbled himself to accept our human nature to share in the divine nature through him.

Christmas is far more than a sentimental playing out of history. It is the living celebration of God's gift of Savior, Christ and Lord. Luke tells us that those who first heard this news were astonished. Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds went back to glorifying and praising God. So let us make time for astonishment and for cherishing the memory. And let us return to God in glory and praise.

STABLE OF OUR HEARTS

At Christmas, our attention is focused on the birth of Jesus in a humble Bethlehem cave. It was all so completely unexpected. The wise men followed the star did not stop at a regal palace but stable for sheltering animals. We are amazed and surprised that God should come to us as a helpless and dependent child of poor parents who were far from home and soon became refugees in Egypt. By choosing to be born in such a lonely place, away from the world's palaces and riches, God's Son turns upside-down worldly notions of fame and success. He gave us a clear



message about the need to see grace and goodness in the very poorest of people and places. The first to share the joy of Mary and Joseph in their humble surroundings were the rough country folk, social outcasts, shepherds guarding their flocks by night. Their presence was an assurance that Christ was available to ordinary people carrying out their normal work. What's more, he was going to be on the side of the weak and disadvantaged.

Our celebration of the birth of our Lord is more than a remembrance of the happenings in Bethlehem on a starry night 2,000 years ago. It is a reminder that God loves us so much that he sent his only Son among us to save us, to forgive our sins and to show us a way to our heavenly home. In compassion, he broke the sacred barrier between creature and Creator by reaching down and presenting himself to us as a child, inspiring love rather than fear. Since that night, the newborn child is our living link with God, who is always near those who welcome him with an open heart. As heaven comes down to earth, it carries timeless blessings that soften the hardest of hearts. Bitterness and grudges are dissolved by the affection of the newborn child who has raised us to a life far beyond any human expectation.

Christmas focuses not only on what Jesus did by making his home with us but on what we must do, as it reveals that we are part of God's family. This means that we need to respect each human life, which raises some tough questions about our treatment of other people.

The consequences of our daily living are truly enormous. To neglect the old, be contemptuous of the poor, and have no thought for the unemployed and the lonely is to ignore those individuals with whom Christ has so closely identified. We all need to examine ourselves on the doors we close to Jesus. There is no point in being sentimental about the doors slammed by the folk in Bethlehem when there is no room in our hearts for the needy. The happiness and peace of Christmas come from within when God is born in the stable of our hearts.

CLAY BALLS

A man was exploring caves by the Seashore. In one of the caves, he found a canvas



bag with a bunch of hardened clay balls. It was like someone had rolled clay balls and left them out in the sun to bake. They didn't look like much, but they intrigued the man, so he took the bag out of the cave with him. As he strolled along the beach, he would throw the clay balls one at a time out into the ocean as far as he could. He thought little about it until he dropped one of the clay balls, and it cracked open on a rock. Inside

was a beautiful, precious stone! Excited, the man started breaking open the remaining clay balls. Each contained a similar treasure. He found thousands of dollars worth of jewels in the 20 or so clay balls he had left. Then it struck him. He had been on the beach a long time. He had thrown maybe 50 or 60 of the clay balls with their hidden treasure into the ocean waves. Instead of thousands of dollars in glory, he could have taken home tens of thousands, but he had just thrown it away! It's like that with people. We look at someone, maybe even ourselves, and we see the external clay vessel. It doesn't look like much from the outside. It isn't always beautiful or sparkling, so we discount it. We see that person as less important than someone more beautiful or stylish or well known or wealthy. But we have not taken the time to find the treasure hidden inside that person. There is a treasure in each one of us. If we take the time to get to know that person, the clay begins to peel away, and the brilliant gem begins to shine. May we not come to the end of our lives and find out that we have thrown away a fortune in friendships because the treasures were hidden in bits of clay.

CLIMBING THE MOUNTAIN

When you work with cameras, the best faces are the very young and the very old. This is because the young are incapable of counterfeiting their emotions while the seniors care about the world and its opinions. But there are moments when everybody is capable of registering pure emotion without just pretending.

These are those too rare occasions when the 'camera never lies.

What makes a televised football match truly exciting is not the expert camerawork following the intricate moves of the ball through the field to the back of the net but the absolute joy on the face of a fan in the crowd. The viewer at home feels that he is there, too, in the middle of that roaring crowd. There is always a camera that shows the audience in every live broadcast, searching for a face that best expresses the moment's

emotion. The smiling face of the young girl watching her friend performing with grace and impossible triple rotation at a figure skate contest captures the magic of the action.

When Jesus was transfigured on the mountain some two thousand years ago, I wish that cameras would have been available to see the rapture and exultation on the faces of Peter and James and John of that sublime moment and capture that special light for us to see. In any case, it is most unlikely that such a vision would be accessible to electronic eyes. It would be reserved only to the eyes of faith, as we well know. Beauty, they say, is in the eyes of the beholder. Beauty is best expressed in the faces of those who witness it. Peter and his companions were transfigured by the vision that day, an image so special that changed their life forever.



Since then, only the great mystics or saints have had similar experiences. And they have reached such heights through meditative prayer. Prayer begins with an invitation from Christ to find a place to be alone. But, unfortunately, it is not easy to find a place for meditation in our modern world, which is why we find it so hard to pray. 'Climbing a mountain' signifies raising our vision above the turmoil, ups and downs of our daily chores that press us down. Remember Martin Luther King and his moving speech 'I have a dream to civil rights activists in the Sixties. 'I have climbed the mountain, and I've seen the promised land.'

Only up there on the mountain will we be able to share all our burdens and concerns as we encounter Jesus. And like Peter, we will feel good, very good: 'Lord, it is good for us to be here!' So let's build a place here and stay up here forever. Only by prayer, in the presence of the Lord, will our lives be transfigured. One day our life will be bright like what Peter, John, and James saw that day we would be transformed, but for now, we have to climb the mountain – the mountain of our daily concerns, troubles, and relationships. For now, we have to follow the path and try not to lose the way.

Prayer, meditation participation to the sacraments we all know very well like: Baptism, Reconciliation, the Eucharist, loving and respecting our neighbor will help not to lose the way.

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"Listen to him! He is my beloved Son with him I am well pleased!"

ENJOY THE COFFEE - *Author Unknown*

A group of alumni, highly established in their careers, visited their old university professor. Conversation soon turned into complaints about stress in work and life. Offering his guests coffee, the professor went to the kitchen and returned with a large pot of coffee and an assortment of cups - porcelain, plastic, glass, crystal, some plain

looking, some expensive, some exquisite - telling them to help themselves coffee.



Finally, when all his former students had a cup of coffee in hand, the professor said:

"If you noticed, all the nice looking expensive cups were taken up, leaving behind the plain and cheap ones. While it is normal for you to want only the best for yourselves, that is the source of your problems and stress. What all of you wanted was coffee, not the cup, but you consciously went for the best cups and were eyeing each other's cups. Now consider this: Life

is the coffee, and the jobs, money, and position in society are the cups. They are just tools to hold and contain Life and do not change the quality of Life. Sometimes, by concentrating only on the cup, we fail to enjoy the coffee God has provided." So, don't let the cups drive you to enjoy the coffee instead.

THE HEART OF COMPASSION

Compassionate God, your generous presence is always tuned to hurting ones. Your listening ear is bent toward the cries of the wounded. Your heart of love fills with tears for the suffering. Turn my inward eye to see that I am not alone. I am a part of all of life. Each one's joy and sorrow is my joy and sorrow, and mine is theirs. May I draw strength from this inner communion. May it daily recommit me to be a compassionate presence for all who struggle with life's pain. Joyce Rupp

COSMIC DANCE - Seeing the Sacred in All of Life

Joyce Rupp invites us to deepen our relationship with all of creation. She encourages us to develop our compassion by deepening our communion with all that lives, including rocks! Through poetry, story, Scripture, and even dance, she skillfully draws us to listen inwardly and acquire a deeper appreciation of these sacred dimensions. Rupp compares the beauty of the dance of life within our complex cells to the world around us and beyond, including all imaginable galaxies



stretching to infinity. As we realize how deeply we participate in the stream of life, she confirms: "We are truly made of stardust. We breathe the air that circles the globe and can never be isolated. Each of us is part of the dancing energy that dwells in every living thing." As we reach out, we can befriend the stranger, examine an extraordinary created thing more closely, or appreciate the beauty and spender in the world around us or within us. All are related and interdependent.

CRACKPOT



An elderly Chinese woman had two large pots, and each hung on the ends of a pole which she carried across her neck. One pot had a crack in it, while the other pot was perfect and always delivered a full portion of water. At the end of the long walk from the stream to the house, the cracked pot arrived only half full. For a full two years, this went on daily, with the woman bringing home only one and a half jar of water. Of course, the perfect pot was proud of its accomplishments. But the poor cracked pot was ashamed of its imperfection and miserable that it could only do half of what it had been made to do. Finally, after two years of what it perceived to be bitter failure, it spoke to the woman one day by the stream. "I am ashamed of myself because this crack in my side causes water to leak out back to your house." The old woman smiled, "Did you notice that there are flowers on your side of the path, but not on the other pot's side?" "That's because I have always known about your flaw, so I planted flower seeds on your side of the path, and every day while we walk back, you water them." "For two years, I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate the table. Without you being just the way you are, there would not be this beauty to grace the house." Each of us has our unique flaws. But it's the cracks and defects we each have that make our lives together so very interesting and rewarding. You've just got to take each person for what they are and look for the good in them. Have a great day to all of my crackpot friends, and remember to smell the flowers on your side of the path.

DEATH WAS NOT THERE

Catherine de Hueck Doherty tells this story:

Death was very lonely.

She was hungry for a smile or a kind word from those she touched, but when she felt them, they became lifeless and cold. They were all afraid of her. Her loneliness was overpowering. One day, tired and weary, she sat beneath three crosses on which three men were being executed. Suddenly above her head, she heard a voice say,

"I thirst." She looked up. Her gaze met two fathomless eyes. From their depths flowed a brilliant, warm, blue light, the likes of which she had never experienced before. He spoke a few more short sentences. He relished them. Then he was silent, but his eyes called to her in a wordless message. Gently, she touched his cheek. He seemed for an instant to smile for her alone. Then, like everyone else she felt, he closed his eyes and became lifeless and cold. Death could not believe it. She followed him into his tomb.

No one knows what happened between him and Death. But two days later, when women came to the tomb, Death was not there. And since then, all who look on Death with the eyes of faith see it differently.



DEATH WAS WALKING - Unknown



Death was walking toward a city one morning, and a man asked, "What are you going to do?" "I'm going to take 100 people," Death replied. "That's horrible!" the man said. "That's the way it is," Death said. "That's what I do." The man hurried to warn everyone he could about Death's plan. As evening fell, he met Death again. "You told me you were going to take 100 people," the man said. "Why did 1,000 die?"

"I kept my word," Death responded. "I only took 100 people. Worry took the others."

This interesting tale portrays so well what the US National Mental Health Committee reported a few years ago - half of all the people in America's hospital beds are constant worriers. Mental distress can lead to migraine headaches, arthritis, heart trouble, cystitis, colitis, backaches, ulcers, depression, digestive disorders, and yes, even death. The mental fatigue of nights without sleep and

days without peace, then we get a glimpse of the havoc worry plays in destroying the quality and quantity of life. Anxiety is, and always will be, a fatal disease of the heart, for its beginning signals the end of faith.

Release the regrets of yesterday, refuse the fears of tomorrow and receive instead of today's peace. Free your mind; you will be glad you did.

DISCIPLES ON THE GO

Let him renounce himself. What is meant here is something deeper than various acts of self-denial. There are many different reasons people may deny themselves chocolate, tobacco, or some entertainment, and these motives have nothing to do with following Christ. The real meaning of what must be renounced is the narrow human or earthbound way of thinking and to take on God's way in the values of the Gospel.



It involves a total self-surrender to the vision of faith. It means giving up the worldly image of life that disregards God's reality and fails to transcend death. Sophisticated thinking generates energy for material possessions, security, power, pleasure, and the gratification of our appetites. On the other hand, the Christian vision of life generates energy for values related to the love of God and our neighbor. The follower of Jesus must renounce this kind of earthbound values to grow in the mind of Christ.

Let him take up his cross. We read this condition with a picture in our minds of Jesus struggling under the burden of the cross on his way to Calvary. But what would the word cross have meant to people before the crucifixion of Jesus? The cross was like a brand mark indicating the ownership of animals: a pattern in the shape of the capital X, or the plus sign +, or even the capital T, called Tau in the Hebrew and Greek alphabets.

Ezechiel wrote of his vision of a time of repentance when the brand mark of Tau, the cross, would be a sign or seal of repentance on the forehead of the people: (Ez 9:4) At the opening of the Fourth Lateran Council; Pope Innocent III used this text as a symbol of the spiritual renewal of the church. Francis of Assisi heard the Pope's use of the image and adopted the Tau sign as his signature. To take on the cross-sign indicated a repudiation of sinful ways and a commitment to the standards of Jesus Christ.

Let him follow me. The Christian life is not static, but one is ready to move. It calls for energy in the Christian way and courage in persevering when the journey is hard.

The way of the Master is to be the way of the disciple too. The Christian life is action. We are made like crosses and called to follow the Lord.

No cross, no resurrection. No pain, no gain!

DO NOT ASK

Do not ask the Lord

To guide your footsteps

If you are not willing

To move your feet

I PIU' BEI PENSIERI DI DON BOSCO

- Fa che tutti quelli con cui parli,diventino tuoi amici.
- Sarà sempre per voi una bella giornata quando vi riesce di vincere coi benefici un nemico e farvi un amico.
- Studia di farti amare piuttosto che di farti temere.
- Ricordati che hai un Angelo per compagno,custode e amico.
- L'amore fa sopportare le fatiche, le noie,le ingratitudini,le mancanze,le negligenze.
- Per fare del bene bisogna avere un poco di coraggio.
- La carità sopporta tutto,quindi non avrà mai vera carità chi non vuole sopportare i difetti degli altri.
- Se il denaro fa molto, la preghiera ottiene tutto.
- Niente ti turbi: chi ha Dio ha tutto.
- Pensate sempre a quello che di voi dirà il Signore, non a quello che di voi, in bene o in male,diranno gli uomini.
- La dolcezza nel parlare, nell'operare, nell'avvisare guadagna tutto e tutti.
- Si otterrà più con uno sguardo di carità, con una parola di incoraggiamento che dia fiducia al cuore,che con molti rimproveri i quali non fanno che inquietare.
- Perché si vuole sostituire all'amore la freddezza di un regolamento?
- Gesù sarà sempre nostro maestro, nostra guida,nostro modello.
- Fate quello che potete. Dio farà quello che non possiamo fare noi.
- Chi confida nella Madonna non sarà mai deluso.
- I tre nemici dell'uomo sono: la morte (che lo sorprende), il tempo (che gli sfugge), il demonio (che gli tende i suoi lacci).
- Se non avete un amico che vi corregga i difetti, pagate un nemico che vi renda questo servizio.
- Fa molto chi fa poco ma fa quello che deve fare; fa nulla chi fa molto ma non fa quello che deve fare.
- Non impegnatevi in troppi lavori. Chi troppo vuole nulla stringe, e guasta tutto.
- Chi non ha pace con Dio,non ha pace con se stesso, non ha pace con gli altri.



- Di Dio pensa secondo la fede, del prossimo secondo la carità, di te stesso secondo l'umiltà.
- La preghiera è per l'anima come il calore per il corpo.
- Facciamo del bene quando possiamo, e poi non aspettiamoci la ricompensa dal mondo, ma da Dio solo.
- Non chiamiamo divertimento una giornata che lascia rimorsi nel cuore.
- Il miele della carità temperi l'amarezza dei rimproveri.
- Le spine della vita saranno i fiori dell'eternità.
- Colui il quale è umile e amorevole sarà sempre amato da tutti, da Dio e dagli uomini.
- La vendetta del vero cattolico è il perdono e la preghiera per la persona che ci offende.
- Bisogna operare come se non si dovesse morire mai, e vivere come se si dovesse morire ogni giorno.

TRANSLATION - Don Bosco's most beautiful thoughts

- Make everyone you talk to become your friends.
- It will always be a beautiful day for you when you manage to win an enemy with benefits and make yourself a friend.
- Study to be loved rather than feared.
- Remember that you have an Angel for companion, keeper, and friend.
- Love makes us endure fatigue, boredom, ingratitude, shortcomings, negligence.
- To do good, you need to have a little courage.
- Charity endures everything; therefore, whoever does not want to tolerate the faults of others will never have true charity.
- If money makes a lot, prayer gets everything.
- Nothing disturbs you: whoever has God has everything.
- Always think about what the Lord will say about you, not about what men will say about you, for better or for worse.
- The sweetness in speaking, in working, in advising gains everything and everyone.
- It will be obtained more with a look of charity, with a word of encouragement that gives confidence to the heart, than with many reproaches which only cause concern.
- Why do you want to replace love with the coldness of a regulation?
- Jesus will always be our teacher, our guide, our model.
- Do what you can. God will do what we cannot do.
- Whoever trusts in Our Lady will never be disappointed.
- The three enemies of man are death (which surprises him), time (which escapes him), the devil (who draws his snares to him).
- If you do not have a friend correct your defects, pay an enemy to do this service.
- Those who do little do a lot but do what they have to do; whoever does a lot but does not do what he must do does nothing.



- Do not engage in too many jobs. Those who want nothing too tightly and spoil everything.
- Whoever has no peace with God, has no peace with himself, has no peace with others.
- Think of God according to faith, of your neighbor according to charity, of yourself according to humility.
- Prayer is for the soul as warmth is for the body.
- We do good when we can, and then do not expect the reward from the world, but from God alone.
- We do not call fun a day that leaves remorse in the heart.
- The honey of charity temper the bitterness of reproaches.
- The thorns of life will be the flowers of eternity.
- He who is humble and loving will always be loved by everyone, by God and men.
- The revenge of the true Catholic is forgiveness and prayer for the person who offends us.
- We must operate as if we were never to die and live as if we were to die every day.

EASTER

“Easter lacks all balance; it is happiness gone wild. Yet, with all the evil in our world, with all the confusion in our churches, with all the shortness of spirit in our hearts — in the midst of all that we are called upon to sing of Christ’s victory today and dance forever the way of life.”

ENDURANCE - FAITHFULNESS



In rapidly changing times, like we are in, faithfulness is not easy to come by, much less to find and practice. Moreover, our “throwaway” culture doesn’t encourage permanence of any kind. Friends and relations, for example, come and go, even spouses.

According to forecasts, young people currently entering the job market will change jobs four or five times over a lifetime. The political climate and issues alternate and change almost with every new situation and trebles.

Even our beliefs about what is important in life tend to keep shifting. Yet, through all this, Jesus encourages faithfulness - endurance.

“By your endurance, you will gain your soul.”

But what kind of faithfulness is possible? And endurance to what?

The answer in Jesus' exhortation is implicit: faithfulness remains true to our life's purpose: Times will always be difficult; society will always have its problems. People will continue to come and go in our lives; tastes and appetites will vary; interests and opinions will change. We may pursue new careers and explore different lifestyles.

Whatever the shifting events and moods of life, Jesus teaches us that our true purpose for living is to love and that faithfulness to love is the one permanent foundation for secure, fulfilled, and happy living.

As long as we love, we have nothing to fear, no matter what turmoil we experience. Even for finding success in life, faithfulness to love is all we need to pursue. As Mother Teresa said, "God calls us not to success, but faithfulness." Concerning success, faithfulness proves to be its reward.

In all of life's changes and turmoil, to be able to maintain our stability and a firm sense of identity by anchoring our life to something unshakeable is the answer. Landing our lives in fidelity to the Lord and his way of life is the right choice.

Faithfulness to being a loving person gives our lives all the meaning and purpose we need. Don't permit "trying times," bad news, shifting public opinion, economic uncertainties, or personal hardships to destroy our equilibrium, peace of mind, and even to lose our faith.

In moments of despair or confusion, always remember for what reason we are here.

We do not need to be frightened, no matter how crazy or chaotic the times may be, as long as we remain true to our purpose. Trust that in God's care, we are always in good hands: *"not a hair of your head will perish,"* and continue to live by love.

EPIPHANY - WORSHIP

Epiphany is a feast at the beginning of the New Year that may help us ponder how we worship or pray or give thanks to God during this year and in our lifetime.

Worship is an integral part of our life; we do this every Sunday when we come to church and pray together. So what is worship doing to us, or what do we mean by worshipping or praising the Lord?

A nice question, isn't it?

Worship is, let me say, in the language, we all have been using, and I have this image that God has

been saying from all eternity, *"You are my beloved."*

From all eternity, before we were born, we existed in the mind of God.

God loved us before our fathers, and mothers loved us. And He still does!



This issue is quite important because, in the world we are, my father, my mother, my brother, my sister, my teacher, my friends all love me, but they also some time, they hurt me.

No human being can only love us; they always give us pain, hurt us.

We are often in pain, mostly by those who love us. In the same way, we are also wounded by the suffering of people in many different parts of the world, but I am hurt by my mother who didn't love me well enough, or by my father, who was so authoritarian, or by my teacher, or by my church.

The people who love me are always the ones who hurt me because they also have needs.

God's love is a love that isn't hurting because it is eternal. So God loves me from eternity and will love me for all eternity.

Our life, this little bit of energy – thirty, fifty, seventy, ninety years, is not very long.

Our life is just one little chance for us to say "Yes" to Him, "We love you too."

That is what life is about, and that chance to say "Yes" is what time offers us.

We call this *Kairos*, not *Chronos*;

Kairos, the other Greek word for time, means opportunity for us to change our hearts. There are as many opportunities to change our hearts as there are many events that are connected.

Everything is an opportunity to change your heart – a friend visit, a phone call, at home, or shopping whatever we do or wherever we are, that is where our life goes!

Looking upon our life horizontally, *Chronos*: I have to survive, and I have to fight my way through it.

Looking at my life vertically or above; is the opportunity to change my heart in everything I do; it is *Kairos*.

In the beautiful gospel's story of the Galileans, Jesus asks about the Galileans whose blood Pilate mixed with the sacrifices: "Were they any worse sinners than you are?" No, they were not, but unless you convert yourself, you will undergo the same fate. There was another news item that day of twelve people who were killed by the tower of Siloam. Again, Jesus says, "Were they any worse than you?"

No, they weren't worse than us, but we need to change.

In other words, all historical events are opportunities to change our hearts; that is why they are here, and this is what the meaning of our life's journey is all about.

All news items are meant for our hearts to change. Why is there cancer? There is cancer so that you are converted; that is a spiritual answer.

Why are there children dying every day for starvation or victims of war?

So that other people in free countries can be converted.

Why are the poor of Africa or Latin America poor? So that the rich can be converted.

You know, this language is the language from above.

Worship, as this feast of Epiphany, is inviting us to think, for me, is constantly being able to say, "Yes to God's love ... to say, Lord, I love you too, because you are beautiful, you are great, you are my redeemer, you are my Saviour. I love you too".

All our life should be worship. Every occasion in our time should be an occasion to say, "Yes, I love you too."

That will be a sign of a change of heart.

Like this Eucharist or rosary or whatever, the moment we call worship is nothing else but moments in which we remind ourselves what our lives are, moments in which we look for the real direction, the real meaning of our existence.

ETERNAL FATHER



You are always present from end to end of the universe and ordering all things with your mighty power; for you, time is the unfolding of truth that already is, the unveiling of beauty that is yet to be.

Your Son has saved us in history by dying and rising from the dead so that transcending time, and he might free us from death. May his presence among us and the power of your Spirit lead us to the vision of eternal life and unfold the beauty of your love. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, your Son who is our Lord forever and ever. Amen.

EXPLANATION OF GOD

Written by Danny Dutton, age 8, from Chula Vista, California, for his third-grade homework assignment to "Explain God – why you believe in God."

"One of God's main jobs is making people. He makes them replace the ones that die so there will be enough people to take care of things on earth. He doesn't make grown-ups, just babies. I think because they are smaller and easier to make. That way, He doesn't have to spend so much time teaching them to talk and walk. He can just leave that to mothers and fathers.

God's second most important job is listening to prayers. An awful lot of this goes on, since some people, like preachers and things, pray at times beside bedtime. God doesn't have time to listen to the radio or TV because of this. Because He hears everything, there must be a terrible lot of noise in His ears. God sees everything and hears everything and is everywhere, which keeps Him pretty busy. So you shouldn't go wasting His time when you do ask things you couldn't have.

For People who don't believe in God, I suggest going to the doctor for a tune-up. I don't think there are any in Chula Vista. At least there aren't any who come to our church. Jesus is God's Son. He used to do all the hard work like walking on water, performing miracles, and teaching people who didn't want to learn about God. They finally got tired of Him preaching to them, and they crucified Him. But He was good and kind like His Father, and He told His Father that they didn't know what they were doing and forgiving them, and God said OK.

His Dad (God) appreciated everything that He had done and His hard work on earth, so He told Him He didn't have to go out on the road anymore. He could stay in Heaven. So He did. And now He helps His Dad out by listening to prayers and seeing things that are important for God to take care of Himself without bothering God. Like a secretary only more important. You

can pray anytime you want, and they are sure to hear you because they got it worked out, so one of them is on duty all the time.

You should always go to church on Sunday because it makes God happy, and if there is anybody you want to make happy, it is God. However, don't skip church to do something you think will be more fun, like going to the beach. This is wrong! And, besides, the sun doesn't come out at the beach until noon anyway.

If you don't believe in God, you will be very lonely, because your parents can't go everywhere with you, like camp, but God can. It is good to know He's around you when you're scared in the dark or when you can't swim very well, and you get thrown into real deep water by big kids. But you shouldn't just always think of what God can do for you. I figure God put me here and loves me. He can take me back anytime He pleases.

And that's why I believe in God."



FAITH - LOVE

"Faith," like "Love," has a hundred definitions. It means different things for different people. Some look at faith as a form of trust, taking people at their word. We have faith, for example, that our physician makes an accurate diagnosis of an illness. Some see faith as an act of self-confidence.

An Olympic runner, for instance, envisions himself perfectly executing a complex step of movements. Others understand faith as an acceptance of certain religious beliefs or a code of moral practices. Christians, for example, may say they believe in the Ten Commandments and the teachings of the church. However, by far, a majority view faith as a tentative suspension of judgment, an attitude of "wait and see." This kind of faith is highly conditional; it is based on demands for evidence. It is the faith of Thomas in the gospel reading of John - "Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my



finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe.” Thomas is not a man of faith; he is a detective seeking proof like we are sometimes.

Faith is more than a code of beliefs, a “leap in the dark,” or a suspension of judgment “till all the facts are in.” Real faith is the attitude of a loving heart; it’s what makes someone known as a “faith person.” Faith people do not start with something specific to believe in, but with a soul viewpoint. A loving heart perceives the whole world as full of grace and wondrous mystery, the creation of a loving God who loves each of us unconditionally. Love-filled people see other people as basically good and united

with them in the same Spirit's life. If Thomas lived from a perspective of love, of real faith, when he learned that Jesus had been present in the upper room, he would have said, “I’m sorry I missed him.”

Faith in Jesus as the risen Lord is more than knowing “about” Jesus: how he looked, what “form” he was in after rising from the dead, how the nail marks could identify him in his hands, and so on. Real faith is surrender to God’s loving actions manifest in the life and teachings of Jesus. Our challenge as Christians is not to develop more theories “about” Jesus or to refine theological arguments and proofs of his resurrection but to develop ourselves as people of faith. In the gospel of John, Jesus calls faith people “blessed.” They are blessed because they don’t have to “see” and believe it is loving faith that allows them to see. As we grow in spiritual life, we become faith people. As we become more loving, belief becomes second nature to us. Faith, therefore, is a way of being.

Let us consider what it means to be a faith person rather than a person with a certain set of beliefs. Beliefs come and go; they shift in intensity as we get older and wiser. Real faith is the state of the soul, a way of life. So let us pledge ourselves to continue our spiritual development.

TROVA IL TEMPO - Grazie a Suor Cecilia

Trova il tempo di lavorare, è il prezzo del successo.

Trova il tempo di riflettere, è la fonte della forza.

Trova il tempo di giocare, è il segreto della giovinezza.

Trova il tempo di leggere, è la base del sapere.

Trova il tempo di essere gentile, è la strada della felicità.

Trova il tempo di sognare, è il sentiero che porta alle stelle.

Trova il tempo di amare, è la vera gioia di vivere.

Trova il tempo d' essere contento, è la musica dell'anima.

Trova il tempo di pregare, è il respiro della tua vita.

TRANSLATION - Find the time

Find time to work: it is the price of success.

Find time to think: it is the fountain of strength.

Find time to play: it is the secret of youth.

Find time to read: it is the base of knowledge.

Find time to be gentle: it is the road to happiness.

Find time to dream: it is the path that leads you to the stars.

Find time to love: it is the true joy of life.

Find time to be happy: it is the music of the soul.

Find time to pray: It is the breath of your life.



FRESH BREAD - Joyce Rupp



Can it be? Have I for so long forgotten to feed myself?

Yes. I was slowly starving and getting lost in busy days tossing aside the hunger that chewed away inside for just a year.

Yet, I did not die. Instead, by some quiet miracle, I made it to this moment of truth: I nearly starved to death.

It was not my body that I failed to feed. It was my spirit left alone for days without nourishment or care.

And then, one day, I paused to look within, shocked at what I found: so thin of faith, so weak in understanding, so needy of encouragement.

My starving spirit cried the truth: I can! I will! I must be fed!

THE FROG PRINCIPLE

There is an often-quoted story of a frog and a bucket of water. It illustrates the law of deterioration.

If you take an intelligent, happy frog and drop him into a bucket of boiling water, what will the frog do? Jump out! Instantly, the frog decides: "This is no fun – I'm gone!"

If you take the same frog or a relative, drop him into a bucket of cold water, put the bucket on the stove, and gradually heat the bucket, what then? The frog's relaxing a few minutes later, he says to himself: "It seems warm in here." Soon enough, you have a cooked frog.

The moral of the story? Life happens gradually. Like the frog, we can be fooled, and suddenly it's too late. We need to be aware of what is happening in our life. Lent could be a time to help

us to refocus our spiritual life and to know where we are going and what we are doing. Here is the scary thing – there is no standing still. We are either gaining or losing, getting better or worst, being alive or dead! Have a nice trip!

QUESTION – If you woke up tomorrow forty pounds heavier, would you be worried? Sure you would! You'd be calling the hospital: "Emergency! I'm fat!"

But when things happen gradually, a pound this month, a pound next month, we tend to let it go. When you overspend on your budget by ten dollars in one day, it's no big deal. But you do it again tomorrow, and the next day, and the next, you end up broke. For people who go broke, put on weight, get divorced, it usually isn't one big disaster – it's a bit today and a bit tomorrow – and then one-day "Kaboom!" – and they say: "What happened?"

Life is accumulative. One thing ADDS to another – like the drop of water that wears away the rock. The frog principle is telling us to watch the trends. Each day, we ask ourselves: "Where am I heading? Am I fitter, healthier, happier, more prosperous than I was last year?" If not, we need to change what we are doing.

Here's the scary thing – there's no standing still. You're either gaining or slipping, getting better or worst, being alive or dead!



GOD'S GENEROSITY

That lesson was expressed in his imagery by a certain farmer when his parish priest



complimented him for his generous support to any charitable cause. 'The way it is,' he said, 'whenever I give God a shovelful of anything, he shovels more back in my direction. So you see, Father, that God has the bigger shovel.'

Please help us to be generous with the gift of time which you have given us.

May we show on our faces that we do have time for others time to listen, time to share the burden, time to celebrate their joy.

Help us to leave behind the self-centred routine which has taken us

away from family and neighbors.

Help us to be generous in our emotions. May all our feelings and reactions be warmed by love. Then, when we feel like reacting in self-importance, show us how to be humble. When we are stung and seek revenge, help us to reach out in forgiveness.

When we are fired to anger, help us to be patient and gentle. When we are full of prejudice and intolerance, show us how we might allow the other person to be different.

O God of all giving, overwhelm us with a sense of your love so that all we have is for you, all we do is with you, and all we are is in you.

MANDACI DEI MATTI

O Dio, mandaci dei matti, di quelli che siano capaci di esporsi, di quelli che siano capaci di scordarsi di loro stessi, di quelli che sappiano amare con opere e non con parole, di quelli che siano totalmente a disposizione del prossimo.

A noi mancano matti, o Signore, mancano temerari, appassionati, persone capaci di saltare nel vuoto insicuro, sconosciuto e ogni giorno più profondo della povertà; di quelli che sono capaci di guidare la gente senza il desiderio di utilizzarla come sgabello per salire loro; di quelli che non utilizzano il prossimo per i loro fini.

Ci mancano questi matti, o mio Dio !



Matti nel presente, innamorati di una vita semplice, liberatori del povero, amanti della pace, liberi da compromessi, decisi a non tradire mai, disprezzando le proprie comodità o la propria vita, totalmente decisi per l'abnegazione, capaci di accettare tutti i tipi di incarichi, di andare in qualsiasi luogo per ubbidienza, e nel medesimo tempo liberi, obbedienti, spontanei e tenaci, allegri, dolci e forti.

TRANSLATION - Send us madmen

O God, send us crazy, those who are capable of exposing themselves, those who are qualified to forget about themselves, of those who know how to love with works and not with words, of those who are available to others.

We lack madmen, oh Lord, and we lack daredevils, passionate people, people capable of jumping into the insecure void, unknown and every day deeper than poverty; of those who can lead people without the desire to use them as a stool to get on them; of those who do not use their neighbor for their ends.

We miss these madmen, oh my God! Crazy in the present, fall in love with a simple life, liberators of the poor, lovers of peace, free from compromise, determined never to betray, despising their comforts or their own life, totally determined for self-denial, capable of accepting all kinds of assignments, of going to any place for obedience, and at the same time free, obedient, spontaneous and tenacious, cheerful, sweet and strong.

GOD IN OUR MIDST - By Richard Rohr, O.F.M.

According to psychologist Carl Jung, all human beings need to confront the same critical question: Are we related to something infinite or not? Are we part of an enchanted universe or just traveling in our little desperate search for personal meaning? Biblical revelation offers us the answer to this essential human question: Yes, we are a part of something infinite—and wonderfully so! Not only that, but we cannot know the meaning of our own lives until we see that each life is but a small strand, a little thread in a much larger tapestry. Only within this context can each of us find our meaning. Throughout most history, religions have held that we come to God by seeing him in spiritual places, following precise rituals, and engaging incorrect behavior. In effect, we have been



told: Do all those things right, and you will 'get' God. Typically, religion has started—with the notion that if we answer correctly, then God will like us, and we will meet God. Biblical revelation, however, takes us to a new level by telling us that we come to the real through the actual, through what is. So it's not a matter of finding God just in sacred places. The Bible transforms the holy place into holy time. Time is transformed. It is experienced altogether differently because, suddenly, God is available all of the time. That is why Jesus says the temple has to fall: He wants to lessen the importance of sacred places. We understand that God manifests in the ordinary, the actual, the daily rather than only in the pure, the spiritual, the special. This represents such a contrast from what so many of us learned! There is no need to go off somewhere set apart to 'be spiritual.' God is in the actual, real world. Isn't that amazing?

Meeting God Daily

We are already spiritual beings. We don't know it! And the task of biblical revelation is to teach us how to be human, be present, and see the extraordinary. That is the whole miracle of a biblical revelation: Think of the wars and adulteries, the marriages and celebrations and festivals that make up so much of the Bible—the ordinary events of human life. Perhaps that is why so many of us, Catholics in particular, didn't like to read the Bible for such a long time. It wasn't spiritual enough for us; it wasn't special enough. In truth, it was just like our life, but we didn't realize the good news in that. But it is indeed good news that we meet God in the eventful world. This history, this life matters. It matters to God, and it is in this history that we find God.

Lesson From Life

This lesson is most clearly evident in the lives of the Jewish people, who were always situated in the bloody middle of history. We see it in their 40-year journey in the desert; we see it again in the Exile. The Jewish people let God come into their reality. They possessed an uncommon power to stand their ground before negative facts with God alone, nothing else. They stood naked before their enemies, always trusting in God. We've got to appreciate how daring that was! Our challenge today is to take this new awareness to heart. It will mean letting go of our certainty that God is to be found only in certain designated places and moments and, instead, surrendering to the scary and terrifying mystery of God. It means allowing ourselves to be transformed. If we approach the Bible correctly, it leaves us humble and vulnerable. We need to let go of our answers and explanations and, instead, to become blank slates before God, eager to listen to what God has to say to us. Our reward will be a God who continually unfolds before us in the minutes and hours of our lives, the God who is ever with us.

GOD THE CREATOR IS OUR SOURCE OF HOPE AND LOVE

We are called again to reflect upon the story of our creation and on the love that our creator has for each one of us. The moral order based on God has its beginnings in this unique story of creation. This is explained in Genesis 2, where God comes to earth as a potter. God fashions man from the dust of the ground and personally creates him in his image. God the creator then breathes into man's nostrils, and life starts in us. The story of Genesis reveals God as a loving Father who likes to be involved in our life. God places us in the center of creation and with the moral order to protect us.

Our creator knows about our needs. God creates a garden with food to eat, and He wants his children with the free will to choose good or evil. Adam and Eve live in



harmony as good partners and stewards of the garden. Each sees the other as a gift, they love each other, and they know they are part of creation and are different from it. They have self-awareness and can reflect on who they are.

The existence of evil is very real to the couple. The devil approaches them. Good always seems to attract evil. The devil tempts them into disobeying God, and they give in to the temptation. They now see themselves differently. Naked and ashamed, they blame someone or something else for their new condition.

The mutual love and respect shared between the two are lost. They no longer see each other in the same way.

In Mt. 4:1-11, Jesus, in his ministry, taught us how to return to the moral order, which places the good of the human person at the center of creation. He did this by choosing to ignore the temptation of the devil. The devil made many promises that would have brought Jesus fame and wealth, promises that would have to enable Jesus to avoid suffering. The devil was not concerned about the well-being of Jesus but only wanted Jesus to turn away from God like in the original story of Adam and Eve. The devil knew that, in turning from God, Jesus would have turned away from us. The devil continues to tempt us to turn from God. Evil is clever. It recreates itself in all kinds of promises and beliefs to turn us away from what is good. Jesus lived a life of having to make decisions based on choosing between good and evil. He knew that choices toward the good were choices in favour of the human person. God gave the moral order for the good of the human person. Was God's heart as a father at work to love and protect us? When people turn from God, they place their love and hope in ideologies far from God. These other values and belief systems cause people to turn away from the good of a human person, leaving them empty and with no hope. Where can we go far away from God? Like St. Augustine, we may consider that far away from God, there is no life. Only in God, our Father, we find love and hope.

DO NOT WORRY

To set your heart first upon God is to thirst for God beyond all lesser striving, contentment, or satisfaction. It is God or nothing. There is no room for compromising or for half-hearted faith. From the days of Egyptian monasticism comes the young initiate asking the Spiritual Father to teach him how to pray. The Father led the young man to a riverbank and asked him to plunge his head underwater. He pressed his hand on the head to keep it under a while. Then he let the young man surface for air. The process was repeated, the charge being held under for a longer time. Then the third time, the Master had the student's head under longer still. Then he let him surface and asked him how he felt.



'Bursting for air,' he gasped. 'When you begin to thirst for God the way you were bursting for air, you will be ready to learn about prayer.'

Whatever we set our hearts on, whatever we value most, will receive our attention, time, and energy. But, if our values are of a low order, if we settle for inconsequential things like passing fashions and material things, the chances are that we will never recognize the eternal thirst of our hearts.

When our values are low, our attempts at prayer will resemble the pagans who sought to twist the arm of the deity to their favour and advantage. The prayer that comes out of half-hearted faith is invariably an attempt to use God for self. It tries to make God's will come around to what we want.

The psalms are the greatest school of faith-filled prayer to instruct us.

In God alone is my soul at rest; my help comes from him.

He alone is my rock, my stronghold, my fortress: I stand firm." (Ps 61)

O God, you are my God, for you I long; for you my soul is thirsting.

My body pines for you like a dry, weary land without water. (Ps 62)

Like the deer that yearns for running streams, so my soul is yearning for you, my God.

My soul is thirsting for God, the God of my life. (Ps 41)

THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY



Remember the movie, *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, starring Clint Eastwood? He put so much character into the role that, no matter how bad he was, the audience always sympathized with him! The movie seemed to have the right amount of humour and humanity. As members of the church, we could take a lesson from this scenario.

As we communicate, it's important to be aware of "the good, the bad, and the ugly" that can happen in our Christian life or community!

The good members discuss, mentor, support each other, accept new ideas, welcome new members to the meetings, offer compassion, affirm, sustain and include others, reach out to other

parishioners, have fun, smile, and pray together.

The bad members always criticize, gossip, complain, spread rumours, make negative remarks, are with no interest, ignore new members, don't contact other members who do not go to church, and do anything!

The ugly members don't feel a part of the community, do not practice their faith, become dissatisfied with the organization, and choose not to accept any involvement in activities. You see them maybe at Christmas and Easter and of course sometimes at funerals. They don't believe in the life of the community.

Which group do you belong to? THE GOOD, THE BAD, or THE UGLY?

GOOD SAMARITAN (Luke 10.25-37)

The use of a story enabled Jesus to open up an entirely new way of thinking for the lawyer. To use the terminology of modern research, he invited the lawyer to move from a mode of thinking restricted to the left brain into the right-brain way.

Left brain thinking seeks control of things by analysis and definition, by dividing and conquering. The lawyer, trained in casuistry, was an expert in this field. Hence his initial reaction was to seek an explanation of neighbour. But a definition is always restrictive as it sets out the limits beyond which the term does not apply. The left brain is happy with this restricted area which can be controlled. Right brain thinking seeks the possibilities of the subject and its connections with the larger reality. When we move into the right-brain mode, we are exposed to losing control, and we are open to risk.

Jesus invited the lawyer to leave the safe, controlled world of casuistry and discover the realm of love where exciting possibilities live side by side with demands, risks, and vulnerability. At the end of the exchange, the lawyer has reached the position where he can be invited by Jesus: "Go and do the same yourself." The stories of Jesus are never only stories. Each story is an invitation to enter into it, find our place there, and discover our life afresh. Sometimes the discovery is shocking: but always, the word offers hope of growth. One of life's great excuses is waiting around for the ideal opportunity. The cartoonist Charles Schultz, creator of the Charlie Brown family, drew a pictured story with this punch line: *"I love humanity, it's people I can't stand!"*



Love begins at home, with the people we meet every day. "The law that I enjoin on you today is not beyond your strength or your reach. The Word is very near to you, and it is in your mouth and your heart for your observance." Now is the right time. Today is the day to see, feel, and share.

GOOD BOY – GOOD DADDY

Once, a little boy of five was left alone with his father at bedtime. It had never happened before. After some maneuvering and a lot of fun, the father finally got the little fellow into his nightclothes and was about to lift him into bed when the child said, "But Daddy, I have to say my prayers." He knelt beside his bed, joined his hands, raised his eyes to heaven, and prayed: "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep; if I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take." That was his usual prayer, but that night he looked up at his daddy, then raised his eyes to heaven and prayed, "Dear God, make me a great big good man like my daddy. Amen." In a moment, he was in bed and five minutes asleep. And then the father knelt by his son's bedside and prayed, "Dear Lord, make me a great big good man like my boy thinks I am."

GOOD SWIMMER



Once upon a time, a man was walking by a river when he saw somebody carried downstream in grave danger of drowning. Bravely the man dove in and pulled the person to the bank. He had just revived the victim when a second person was carried downstream. Again he dove in and performed the rescue. There were onlookers now who admired the man's courage. A third victim came downstream, and once again, the hero dove in and rescued. Then he gathered his jacket and asked the onlookers to save any other victim who might appear. 'But you are such a good swimmer,' they said, 'why are you going away?' 'I am going upstream to see where they

are falling in.' It is not sufficient for a Christian life merely to say my prayers and mind my own business. The salvation of others is also my business. And sometimes, this demands that I move upstream to confront the social situations of individuals' wrongdoing. A chain is only as strong as the weakest link. The weakness of any member of the community affects the whole community just as pain in any part of the body affects the entire body.

GRATITUDE



Thankfulness is not a once-in-a-while response for having received a favour, and it is an attitude of soul, a readiness always to give thanks. Gratitude is an attitude that springs from a heart that senses everything in life as a gift. This attitude needs a shift from self-centeredness to looking beyond self. When we can acknowledge that we are part of a great web of life and are touched by grace from countless sources, our life can change dramatically. We see this in the readings today. Once we transcend self-preoccupation, we begin to see that our minds, bodies, talents, and very existence are all gifts we have received. If we can expand our vision of life and creation, we become people

permanently grateful. Consider the great number of people without whom we could not sustain ourselves, even the life we are in. What would our life be like without the love and support you receive from family and friends? Do we take too much for granted?

Think of all the people who have impacted our development, who have taught us, inspired us, given us opportunities, forgiveness, healing. Consider even the valuable lessons we have learned from difficult people and the hardships we have faced. We have “everything in the world” to be thankful for and should never hesitate to go back to say “thank you.”

HAVE EYES AND SEE NOT

The gospel for today is a complaint. It is a serious complaint, directed to us: God’s word often falls dead on its soil. It is trampled, and it is drying up; it is drowned. It does not grow. The signs God gives in our lives remain unseen, unheard, unfelt, untouched, and powerless. I am sure in the same way that some indication you wanted to give to another person has been lost along the way. For example, a young man had a misunderstanding with his girlfriend, a very serious misunderstanding. He was upset about it because it spoiled their relationship entirely, and he liked her very much.



He tried to talk to her, but that did not work. Then, he wanted to phone her, but he did not know what to say when he heard her voice, and he had to hang up. Then, he tried to write a letter, but he tore his letter up when he finished because he thought it sounded silly.

Then he remembered that she liked roses, dark red roses. So he bought her a rose--only one because roses were very expensive that time of the year. The man in the flower shop put some ferns with the rose and wrapped it in nice, thin paper.

The young man went to her apartment and put the rose down in front of her door when he knew she would come home. He then hid around the corner behind some trash cans. Then she came, as lovely as ever. His heart bounced in his throat, and his mouth suddenly got dry, very dry. She opened her purse and took out her key. She opened the door and stepped inside without having noticed his beautiful, expensive rose at all. What a disappointment, what a horror, what a tragedy, what a missed chance.

It is in those terms that God speaks to us. God gives us signs day after day, trying to get our attention: a flower, a thought, a dream, a child, a person, a good feeling, sometimes even pain. How often do we notice? How often do we stop and say: “Hello, thank you, my God”? We live as those who have eyes and see not; as those who have ears and hear not; not only as far as God is concerned, but even as far as the people around us

are concerned. Isn't God trying to speak to us through others? Isn't that what God tried to do through Jesus?

I JUST HELPED HIM CRY

Author and lecturer Leo Buscaglia once talked about a contest he was asked to judge. The purpose of the competition was to find the most caring child. The winner was a four-year-old child whose next-door neighbor was an elderly gentleman who had recently lost his wife. Upon seeing the man cry, the little boy went into the old gentleman's yard, climbed onto his lap, and just sat there. When his mother asked him what he had said to the neighbor, the little boy said, *"Nothing, I just helped him cry."*

HIS BURDEN IS LIGHT



Jesus speaks about a yoke in today's text. A yoke is a kind of wooden harness that you put over your shoulders to carry two burdens, one on each side. Since hardly anyone uses a collar anymore, it might be easier and more practical to stick to the second expression Jesus uses: burden.

Everybody knows what a burden is. Yet, all over the roads of Kenya, people are carrying loads: food, wood, water, and their belongings.

Jesus says: "Take my burden, take the burden I want you to carry, because that burden is light and easy." Jesus speaks about "my yoke" and "my burden," suggesting that there are other yokes

and burdens we should (according to him) not carry. He explained what those burdens are in the gospel.

Jesus accused the priests and the Pharisees, the scribes, and the "church" of his time of having burdens on the people that should not be there--burdens that oppressed.

Did you know that according to their regulations, a Jew was not allowed to whisk away a fly that landed on his nose or his bald head during a Sabbath day? He had to wait until that fly finished its affairs--whatever those affairs were--and flew off. Those regulations even forbade Jesus to take the lameness away from a man on the Sabbath. Jesus said: "Throw that burden away, and it is no good. Take my burden: love!"

Jesus accused the political powers of his time of having put the burden of submissiveness on the people. "You know"--and they all knew, since they all suffered

under the same colonial power--“that your political leaders rule over you, calling themselves your masters. Throw that burden away; that is not how it should be with you. Nobody should be a master among you, weighing on the shoulders of others.”

Jesus spoke not only about the yokes and burdens others put on our shoulders. He also said about the duties and yokes we put on our shoulders, on the shoulders of our terrorized and tired bodies.

When that rich young man comes to him, stepping out of his brand-new chariot or down from his beautifully groomed horse to ask: “What should I do?” Jesus likes him at first sight. He answers: “Take that burden off your wealth from your shoulders, sell everything you have, start another life, a new life; my burden is easy.” We carry so many unnecessary burdens. We think we should drive a big, inconvenient, gas-guzzling car. When we are small, we should have a beautiful watch, even if we don't know how to tell time yet.



HO IMPARATO CHE

HO IMPARATO CHE IGNORARE I FATTI NON CAMBIA I FATTI
HO IMPARATO CHE QUANDO VUOI VENDICARTI DI QUALCUNO LASCI SOLO CHE
QUEL QUALCUNO CONTINUI A FARTI DEL MALE
HO IMPARATO CHE L'AMORE, NON IL TEMPO GUARISCE LE FERITE
HO IMPARATO CHE IL MODO PIU' FACILE PER CRESCERE COME PERSONA, E'
CIRCONDARMI DI PERSONE PIU' INTELLIGENTI DI ME.
HO IMPARATO CHE OGNI PERSONA CHE CONOSCI MERITA DI ESSERE
SALUTATA CON UN SORRISO.
HO IMPARATO CHE NESSUNO E' PERFETTO FINCHE' NON TI INNAMORI
HO IMPARATO CHE LA VITA E' DURA MA FORSE IO DI PIU'
HO IMPARATO CHE LE OPPORTUNITA' NON VANNO MAI PERSE QUELLE CHE
LASCI ANDARE TU LE PRENDE QUALCUN ALTRO
HO IMPARATO CHE QUANDO CONSERVI RANCORE E AMAREZZA LA FELICITA'

VA DA UN'ALTRA PARTE
HO IMPARATO CHE BISOGNEREBBE SEMPRE USARE PAROLE BUONE PERCHE'
DOMANI FORSE SI DOVRANNO RIMANGIARE
HO IMPARATO CHE UN SORRISO E' UN MODO ECONOMICO PER MIGLIORARE IL
TUO ASPETTO
HO IMPARATO CHE NON POSSO SCEGLIERE COME MI SENTO MA POSSO
SEMPRE FARCI QUALCOSA
HO IMPARATO CHE QUANDO TUO FIGLIO APPENA NATO, TIENE IL TUO DITO
NEL SUO PICCOLO PUGNO TI HA AGGANCIATO PER LA VITA
HO IMPARATO CHE TUTTI VOGLIONO VIVERE IN CIMA ALLA MONTAGNA MA
TUTTA LA FELICITA' E LA CRESCITA AVVENGONO MENTRE LA SCALI.
HO IMPARATO CHE E' MEGLIO DARE CONSIGLI SOLO IN DUE CIRCOSTANZE
QUANDO SONO RICHIESTI E QUANDO NE DIPENDE LA VITA
HO IMPARATO CHE MENO TEMPO SPRECO PIU' COSE FACCIO

TRANSLATION - I LEARNED THAT



I LEARNED THAT IGNORING THE
FACTS DOES NOT CHANGE THE
FACTS

I LEARNED THAT WHEN YOU WANT
TO REVENGE YOURSELF ON
SOMEONE, YOU ONLY LET THAT
SOMEONE CONTINUE HURTING YOU
I LEARNED THAT LOVE, NOT TIME,
HEALS WOUNDS

I HAVE LEARNED THAT THE EASIEST
WAY TO GROW AS A PERSON IS TO
SURROUND MYSELF WITH PEOPLE
MORE INTELLIGENT THAN ME.

I LEARNED THAT EVERY PERSON
YOU KNOW DESERVES TO BE
GREETED WITH A SMILE.

I LEARNED THAT NO ONE IS
PERFECT UNTIL YOU FALL IN LOVE

I LEARNED THAT LIFE IS HARD BUT MAYBE ME MORE

I LEARNED THAT OPPORTUNITIES NEVER GO TO LOSE THOSE YOU LET TAKE
SOMEONE ELSE

I LEARNED THAT WHEN YOU HOLD A GRUDGE AND BITTERNESS, HAPPINESS
GOES SOMEWHERE ELSE

I LEARNED THAT YOU SHOULD ALWAYS USE GOOD WORDS BECAUSE
TOMORROW MAYBE THEY HAVE TO STAY

I LEARNED THAT A SMILE IS A CHEAP WAY TO IMPROVE YOUR APPEARANCE

I LEARNED THAT I CANNOT CHOOSE HOW I FEEL, BUT I CAN ALWAYS DO
SOMETHING WITH IT

I LEARNED THAT WHEN YOUR NEWBORN SON IS HOLDING YOUR FINGER IN HIS LITTLE FIST, IT HAS HOOKED YOU FOR LIFE
I HAVE LEARNED THAT EVERYONE WANTS TO LIVE ON TOP OF THE MOUNTAIN, BUT ALL THE HAPPINESS AND GROWTH HAPPENS WHILE YOU CLIMB.
I HAVE LEARNED THAT IT IS BETTER TO GIVE ADVICE ONLY IN TWO CIRCUMSTANCES WHEN THEY ARE REQUIRED AND WHEN LIFE DEPENDS ON IT. I LEARNED THAT THE LESS TIME I WASTE, THE MORE THINGS I DO

HO PAURA A DIRE DI SI' - Michel Quoist

"Ho paura di dire di sì, o Signore. Dove mi condurrà?

Ho paura di avventurarmi, di firmare in bianco, ho paura del sì che reclama altri sì.

Eppure non sono in pace: mi insegui, o Signore, sei in agguato da ogni parte. Cerco il rumore perché temo di sentirti, ma ti infiltri in un silenzio.

Signore, mi hai afferrato e non ho potuto resisterti.

Sono corso a lungo, ma tu mi inseguivi. Mi hai raggiunto.

Mi sono dibattuto, hai vinto. I miei dubbi sono spazzati, i miei timori svaniscono.

Perché Ti ho riconosciuto senza vederti, ti ho sentito senza toccarti, ti ho compreso senza udirti."



TRANSLATION - I'm afraid to say yes - Michel Quoist

"I'm afraid to say yes, oh Lord. Where will you take me?

I'm afraid to venture out, sign blank; I'm scared of the yes that others claim yes.

Yet I am not at peace: you follow me, O Lord, you are lurking on all sides.

I look for the noise because I'm afraid to hear you, but you slip into silence.

Lord, you grabbed me, and I couldn't resist you.

I ran for a long time, but you were chasing me. Then, finally, you caught up with me.

I struggled; you won. My doubts are swept away, my fears vanish.

Because I recognized you without seeing you, I felt you without touching you, I understood you without hearing you."

JOURNEY TO HOLINESS



which is Holiness.

Imagine a circle drawn on the ground, a perfect process, and a center. We call the center the point that is in the center of the ring. Imagine that that circle is the world, the center is God, and the rays of our beings' various ways or lives, the ways we spend our lives. When the Saints want to go close to God, they walk toward the center of the circle, and in the way, they get closer to the center, get close to one another, and the more they get closer, the more they close themselves to the center God.

Now we understand that the same happens oppositely: when we get far away from God, it is clear that we get far away from one another from the center toward the outside. The more we are close together, the more we are close to God,

RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT

He breathed on them and said: '*Receive the Holy Spirit* - be filled with the breath of divine life be born anew into a life above this world.'

Long, long ago, in the early days of human development, our primitive fathers sought to understand that secret force that caused life and governed the cycles of nature. It must be something very like our breath, they thought. Breath is invisible but so necessary. When we stop breathing, we die. So maybe a great breath or spirit is the power behind life.

And so, the oldest name for God was the Great Breath or Spirit.

You don't see the wind itself but its effects. You see the clouds flying, the rain slanting, the smoke trailing, and you know how the wind is blowing. Old stories in the Bible about creation picture God breathing life into the bodies of clay that he had fashioned.



The thought is carried on in the words of psalms:

'You send forth your breath, and things are created, and you renew the face of the earth. Then you take back your breath, and they die, returning to the dust from which they came.'

We may consider the breath of life as something we have on loan from God. Thus, when we die, we are returning the breath to its divine owner.

HONEY OR VINEGAR - Augustine

"Suppose God

wanted to fill you with honey;

if you are full of vinegar,

where will you put the honey?"

INSIDE HUMAN MATURITY - Ron Rolheiser, OMI



In his autobiography, Morris West suggests that at a certain age, our lives simplify, and we need to have only three phrases left in our spiritual vocabulary: Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! He is right if we understand fully what is implied in living out gratitude. Gratitude is the ultimate virtue, undergirding everything else, even love. It is synonymous with holiness. Gratitude not only defines sanctity but also defines maturity. We are mature to the degree that we are grateful. But what brings us there? What makes for a deeper human maturity? I want to suggest some major demands that reside inside both human and Christian maturity:

1. Be willing to carry more and more of life's complexities with empathy: few things in life, including our hearts and motives, are black or white, either-or, simply good or simply bad. Maturity invites us to see, understand and accept this complexity with empathy so that, like Jesus, we cry tears of understanding over our troubled cities and our complex hearts.

2. Transform jealousy, anger, bitterness, and hatred rather than give them back in kind: any pain or tension that we do not transform will retransmit. In the face of jealousy, anger, bitterness, and hatred, we must be like water purifiers, holding the poisons and toxins inside us and giving back just the pure water, rather than being like electrical cords that simply pass on the energy that flows through them.

3. Let suffering soften rather than harden our souls: suffering and humiliation find us all, in full measure, but how we respond to them, with forgiveness or bitterness, will determine the level of our maturity and the colour of our person. This is perhaps our ultimate moral test: Will my humiliations soften or harden my soul?

4. Forgive: in the end, there is only one condition for entering heaven (and living inside the human community), namely, forgiveness. Perhaps the greatest struggle we have in the second half of our lives is to forgive: forgive those who have hurt us, forgive ourselves for our shortcomings, and forgive God for seemingly hanging us out unfairly to dry in this world. The greatest moral imperative of all is not to die with a bitter, unforgiving heart.



5. Live in gratitude: to be a saint is fuelled by appreciation, nothing more and nothing less. Let no one deceive you with the notion that a passion for truth, for church, or even for God can trump or bracket the non-negotiable imperative to be gracious always. Holiness is gratitude. Outside of gratitude, we find ourselves doing many of the right things for the wrong reasons.

6. Bless more and curse less: we are mature when we define ourselves by what we are for rather than by what we are against and especially when, like Jesus, we are looking out at others and seeing them as blessed (“Blessed are you!”) rather than as cursed (“Who do you think you are!”). The capacity to praise more than to criticize defines maturity.

7. Live in ever-greater transparency and honesty: we are as sick as our sickest secret, but we are also as healthy as we are honest. We need, as Martin Luther once put it, “to sin bravely and honestly.” Maturity does not mean that we are perfect or faultless, but that we are honest.

8. Pray both affectively and liturgically: the fuel we need to resource ourselves for gratitude and forgiveness does not lie in the strength of our willpower but grace and community. We access that through prayer. We are mature to the degree that we open our helplessness and invite in God's strength and to the degree that we pray with others that the whole world will do the same thing.

9. Become ever-wider in your embrace: we grow in maturity to the degree that we define family (Who is my brother or sister?) in a way that is ever more ecumenical, interfaith, post-ideological, and non-discriminatory. We are mature only when we are compassionate as God is compassionate, namely when our sun shines on those we like and those we do not. There comes a time when it is time to turn in our cherished moral placards for a basin and a towel.

10. Stand where you stand and let God protect you: in the end, we are all vulnerable, contingent, and helpless both to protect our loved ones and ourselves. We cannot guarantee life, safety, salvation, or forgiveness for ourselves or those we love. Maturity depends upon accepting this with trust rather than anxiety. We can only do our best, whatever our place in life, wherever we stand, whatever our limits, whatever our shortcoming, and trust that this is enough, that if we die at our post, honest, doing our duty, God will do the rest. God is a prodigiously loving, fully understanding, completely empathic parent. We are mature and free of false anxiety to the degree that we grasp that and trust that truth.

I AM THE GATE



Sheep, like other domestic animals, come to know their master and especially his voice. They depend on him to find 'fresh and green pastures. Far from threatening them, the shepherd's staff is used to pull them out when occasionally they fall into creeks. The worst fate that can happen to sheep is to stray from the right path. Even then, the shepherd will go in search, clambering over

rocks and crags, calling out and searching for them.

We live in a media age, very far removed from that ideal pastoral scene in the Italian hills. The only noise we hear is far more likely to be pop music from the earplugs of an I-pod or the bleeping of the cellular phone in our pockets. All sorts of voices are competing for our attention. They scream at us from plasma TV and stereos in our sitting rooms. 'Please, turn down the volume!' is the almost constant parent's plea to its wired-up offspring. And things are getting worse rather than better. We are now going to be deluged with information from personal Ipad. The cyberspace age has arrived with

the Internet and e-mail and the sky net. Unfortunately, data is not synonymous with knowledge, and technique is no substitute for wisdom. A friend of mine once joked, "I am going to change my name to 'Exit.' That way, I'll see my name in neon lights wherever I go." Being an Exit would certainly guarantee that folks will be rushing in your direction regularly. But what about being an Entrance? And which is it, exactly, that Jesus intends to be in his teaching?

Gates swing both ways, keeping some safely within and allowing others passage out. Jesus proposes to do both: to be the one who leads us safely out and guides us with his familiar voice on the way to a more abundant life. And to be in a place of a more safe life, the pasture nourishes and sustains us.

Jesus is there, and of course, others come and go, vagabonds who pretend the authority and property of the shepherd. But there is only one way to pass through, one gate to the fullness of life. So Jesus reminds us: *"Very truly, I tell you I am the gate for the sheep."*

I WISH YOU ENOUGH

A mother and daughter were overheard in their last moments together at a regional airport. Her departure had been announced, and they were standing near the security gate; they hugged, and she said, "I love you. I wish you enough". She, in turn, said, "Mom, our life together has been more than enough. Your love is all I ever needed. I wish you enough too, Mom". They kissed, and she left.



She walked over toward the window where I was seated. Standing there, I could see she wanted and needed to cry. I tried not to intrude on her privacy, but she welcomed me in by asking, "Did you ever say goodbye to someone, knowing it would be forever?" "Yes, I have," I replied. "Forgive me for the asking, but why is this a forever goodbye?" I asked.

"I am old, and she lives much too far away. I have challenges ahead, and the reality is, the next trip back will be for my funeral," she said. "When you were saying goodbye, I heard you say, 'I wish you enough. May I ask what that means?'"

She began to smile. "That's a wish that has been handed down from other generations. My parents used to say it to everyone." She paused for a moment and looked up as if trying to remember it in detail, and she smiled even more. "When we said, 'I wish you enough,' we wanted the person to have a life filled with just enough

good things to sustain them," she continued. Then turning to me, she shared the following as if she were reciting from memory.

I wish you enough sun to keep your attitude bright.

I wish you enough rain to appreciate the sun more.

I wish you enough happiness to keep your spirit alive.

I wish you enough pain so that the smallest joys in life appear much bigger.

I wish you enough gain to satisfy your wanting.

I wish you enough loss to appreciate all that you possess.

I wish you enough hellos to get you through the final goodbye.

She then began to sob and walked away. My reader, I wish you enough. They say, "It takes a minute to find a special person, an hour to appreciate them, a day to love them, but an entire life to forget them. Take time to live!"

ICE CREAM PRAYER

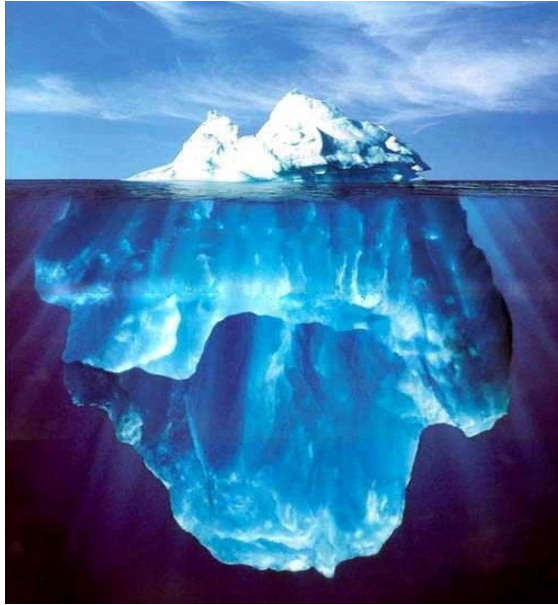


Last week, I took my grandchildren to a restaurant. My six-year-old grandson asked if he could say grace. As we bowed our heads, he said, "God is good, God is great. Thank you for the food, and I would even thank you more if Nana gets us ice cream for dessert. And liberty and justice for all! Amen!"

Along with the laughter from the other customers nearby, I heard a woman remark, "That's what's wrong with this country. Kids today don't even know how to pray. Asking God for ice cream! Why I never!" Hearing this, my grand-son burst into tears and asked me, "Did I do it wrong? Is God mad at me?" As I held him and assured him that he had done a terrific job, and God was certainly not mad at him, an elderly gentleman approached the table. He winked at my grand-son and said, "I happen to know that God thought that was a great prayer." "Really?" my grand-son asked. "Cross my heart," the man replied. Then, in a theatrical whisper, he added (indicating the woman whose remark had started this whole thing), "Too bad she never asks God for ice cream a little ice cream is good for the soul sometimes." So, naturally, I bought my grandchildren ice cream at the end of the meal. My grand-son stared at his for a moment and then did something I will remember for the rest of my life. He picked up his sundae and, without a word, walked over and placed it in front of the woman. Then, with a big smile, he told her, "Here, this is for you. Ice cream is good for the soul sometimes, and my soul is good already."

ICEBERG

This iceberg came from a Rig Manager for Global Marine Drilling in St Johns,



Newfoundland. They have to divert the path of these things away from the rig by towing them with ships! Anyway, in this particular case, the water was calm & the sun was almost directly overhead so that the diver could get into the water and click this picture. Clear water, huh! They estimated the weight at 300,000,000 tons. And now we also know why they say one picture is worth 1000 words. Now we also know why the Titanic sank.

To “explore the iceberg” is to look beneath the surface of our lives, identifying the hidden but powerful forces that shape the way we navigate choices and relationships. By acknowledging and naming these realities, we raise our emotional awareness, enabling us to process our emotions healthily and integrate

them into our discernment of God’s will. *'Lord, help me slow down enough to feel and acknowledge what is going on inside me. Grant me the courage to enter into an honest and authentic relationship — with You, with others, and with myself — trusting that You will carry me. Help me rest and relax in You as I risk being more transparent and vulnerable with my emotions. In Jesus’ Name, amen.'*

IL PICCOLO CERCHIO

Il piccolo stagno sonnecchiava perfettamente immobile nella calura estiva. Pigramente seduto su una foglia di ninfea, un ranocchietto teneva d'occhio un insetto dalle lunghe zampe che stava spensieratamente pattinando sull'acqua: presto sarebbe stato a tiro e il ranocchietto ne avrebbe fatto un solo boccone, senza tanta fatica.

Poco più in là, un altro minuscolo insetto acquatico, un ditisco, guardava in modo struggente una graziosa ditisca: non aveva il coraggio di dichiararle il suo amore e si accontentava di ammirarla da lontano. Sulla



riva a pochi millimetri dall'acqua un fiore piccolissimo, quasi invisibile, stava morendo di sete. Proprio non riusciva a raggiungere l'acqua, che pure era così vicina. Le sue radici si erano esaurite nello sforzo. Un moscerino invece stava annegando. Era finito in

acqua per distrazione. Ora le sue piccole ali erano appesantite e non riusciva a risollevarsi. E l'acqua lo stava inghiottendo. Un pruno selvatico allungava i suoi rami sullo stagno. Sulla estremità del ramo più lungo, che si spingeva quasi al centro dello stagno, una bacca scura e grinzosa, giunta a piena maturazione, si staccò e piombò nello stagno. Si udì un "pluf!" sordo, quasi indistinto, nel gran ronzio degli insetti. Ma dal punto in cui la bacca era caduta in acqua, solenne e imperioso, come un fiore che sboccia, si allargò il primo cerchio nell'acqua. Lo seguì il secondo, il terzo, il quarto ... L'insetto dalle lunghe zampe fu carpito dalla piccola onda e messo fuori portata dalla lingua del ranocchietto. Il ditisco fu spinto verso la ditisca e la urtò: si chiesero scusa e si innamorarono. Il primo cerchio sciabordò sulla riva e un fiotto d'acqua scura raggiunse il piccolo fiore che riprese a vivere. Il secondo cerchio sollevò il moscerino e lo depositò su un filo d'erba della riva, dove le sue ali poterono asciugare. *Quante vite cambiate per qualche insignificante cerchio nell'acqua.*

TRANSLATION - THE SMALL CIRCLE



The little pond slumbered perfectly still in the summer heat.

Sitting idly on a water lily leaf, a frog was keeping an eye on a long-legged insect that was carelessly skating on the water: it would soon be within range, and the frog would take a single bite without much effort.

A little farther on, another tiny aquatic insect, a discus, was looking at a pretty discus poignantly: he did not dare to declare his love for her and was content to admire her from afar. Then, finally, a few millimetres from the water on the shore, a very small, almost invisible flower was dying of thirst. He couldn't reach the water, which was still so close. Its roots had run out of effort. A gnat, on the other

hand, was drowning. He had ended up in the water for distraction. Now his little wings were weighted down, and he couldn't lift himself. And the water was swallowing him.

A wild plum stretched its branches over the pond. At the end of the longest unit, which pulled almost into the center of the pond, a dark, wrinkled berry, fully ripe, broke off and plunged into the pond. There was a "pluf!" deaf, almost indistinct, in the great hum of insects. But from the point where the berry had fallen into the water, solemn and imperious, like a blooming flower, the first circle in the water widened. The second, third, fourth followed. The long-legged insect was snatched by the little wave and put out of reach by the frog's tongue. The finger was pushed towards the finger and hit it: they apologized and fell in love. The first circle lapped on the shore, and a gush of dark water reached the little flower that began to live again. The second circle lifted the gnat and deposited it on a blade of grass on the shore, where its wings could dry. How many lives changed for some little circle in the water.

IN ALL MY LIFE

There's an old native story about a twelve-year-old boy who died of a snake bite. The poison took away his life, and his grieving parents carried his body to the holy man and laid it before him. And the three of them sat around the body sadly for a long, long time.

Then the father finally rose from his grieving, went over to his child,

stretched out his hands over the feet of the child, and said, "In all my life, I have not worked for my family as I should have." And the poison left the feet of the child.

Then the mother rose and stretched her hands over the heart of the child, and she said, "In all my life, I have not loved my family as I should." And the poison left the heart of the child.

And the holy man stretched out his hands over the head of the dead boy, and he said, "In all my life, I have not believed the words I have spoken." And the poison left the head of the child.

The child rose, and the parents and the holy man rose, and all village rejoiced.



INNER FREEDOM



With both words and music, Joyce Rupp invites us to become spiritually free. She defines inner freedom as a process of personal transformation in which we find the true self -- no easy process. Discover both theory and practical suggestions in a talk that dares to ask, "Are we weak enough to enter heaven?" Rupp draws on many spiritual masters and her own life experience. She quotes Thomas Merton: "When we find the true self, we find God. When we find God, we find

the true self." She encourages us to face each day by yielding, surrendering, accepting, and discerning so that we do not strive for perfection but rather embrace the true self within us. As we discover the beauty of our strengths and our weaknesses with greater compassion for others, we become more liberated. By becoming aware of what is happening within us, we develop the courage to face life.

IN SEARCH OF INNER PEACE

Everybody is searching for inner peace, joy, and harmony, whether they realize it or not. When we seek outside ourselves for these qualities, we eventually become exhausted and learn that we would discover our True Nature if we would only stop for a moment and look within ourselves. Although it may have been veiled by false concepts or beliefs that we hold about ourselves and the world around us, this has always existed. The psychological benefits of gratitude have been championed repeatedly in happiness research. Practicing gratitude is another way to access that state of inner peace quickly. She suggests two simple ways to get into the habit: Keeping a gratitude journal and smiling as soon as you sit up in bed in the morning. "When you smile, it signals to your brain that things are good and that you're happy." Research has suggested that in the long term, the inner peace that people feel from doing something like volunteering or making someone else feel good is more rewarding, and longer-lasting, than the more commonly pursued well-being, which prioritizes seeking pleasure and minimizing pain. Thus, building up a reserve of daily happiness through acts of service could potentially up your general inner-peace baseline.



ITALIAN PEASANT



There is a contemporary story told about an Italian Peasant.

He was a man who deeply loved his life and his work. He enjoyed tilling the soil. Feeling the warm sun on his naked back, he worked in the fields and felt the dirt under his feet. He loved the planting, the harvesting, the very smell of nature.

He loved his wife and his children and his friends, and he enjoyed being with them, eating together, drinking wine, talking, making love, and being united in a shared life. And he loved Italy, his tiny country. The

earth, the sky, the sea, it was his! This was his home. One day he sensed that death was near. However, what frightened him was not fear of the beyond, for he had lived a good life. No. He feared leaving Italy, leaving his wife, children, friends, home, and land. So as he prepared to die, he grasped in his hand a few grams of soil from his beloved Italy and told his loved ones to bury him with it.

He died, awoke, and found himself at heaven's gate, the soil still in his hand, and heaven's gate firmly barred against him. Eventually, St Peter emerged through the heavy gates and blessed him: "You have lived a good life, and we have a place for you inside, but you cannot enter unless you drop that handful of soil. You cannot enter as you are now." The man, however, was not willing to drop the soil and protested: "Why? Why must I let go of this soil? Indeed, I will not! What is inside those gates, I do not know. But this soil is what I know – it is my life, my wife, my work, my family, all I know and love, Italy! I will not let it go!" Peter left him in silence and with no choices and closed the large gates behind him. There was no little point in arguing with the peasant. Several minutes later, the gates opened a second time, and this time, from them, a very young child emerged. She did not try to reason with the man, nor did he try to get him into letting go of the soil in his hand. Instead, she took his hand, and, as she did, it opened, and the dirt of Italy spilled on the ground. He then let him through the gates of heaven. A shock awaited the man as he entered heaven; there lay all of Italy before him.

JESUS HAD A DREAM

Jesus had a dream. He called it the Kingdom of God. In his dream, Jesus saw the world as a great mirror that reflected The Father's beauty and love. He came to tell his dream to people whose small minds had never really paid attention to the great power of love. They could not see beyond hurts and injustices. They kept shouting for their rights. Their passion was limited because every pain or wrong was a human obstacle that blocked the flow. The greatest of their wise men had formulated their noblest ideal in the Golden Rule. Never do to another what you would not wish to be done to yourself. This rule did not go far enough for Jesus. A negative statement that set out what one should not do was too limiting for his vision. He knew the Father's love in all its details and depth and tenderness. He knew that love is a power, not a limitation. So he spoke of love as a dynamic flow, not to be stopped by the obstacles of hostility and hatred, nor by the discomfort of abuse in word and deed. We know that Christian love confounds the worldly law of retaliation by turning the other cheek. It is generosity that gives more rather than less. It makes you stand in the shoes of your brother or sister to look out at the world through their eyes. Then you will understand their pain, and you will be slow to condemn or pass sentences.



Love is as much greater than injury as goodness is greater than evil. Therefore love will always find the power to forgive. Christian love is a reflection of the Father's care for all. It does not wait for conditions to be perfect. It does not say: 'I will begin to love when ... or if ...' Love is too important an attitude to be made to wait upon another's the answer.

As the Father's love is creative, Christian love must take the initiative in reaching out to the other.

The dream of Jesus saw a world where the Father's unconditional love was reflected. He saw the barriers of distrust removed and the legacies of hatred dissolved. He saw the hurts of life healed by compassion and the wounds of misunderstanding healed by forgiveness. The power to transform the world into his dream would be love. Jesus lived according to that vision and passion. And his rule of life was a new commandment.

"Love one another as I have loved you."

Remember that no one can hurt me if I am determined to do what is right. Love one another, have compassion and keep me in the background. Never pay back one wrong with another or an angry word with another one; instead, pay back with a blessing. The experts say that it is being proved: I will find that the benefit will come back on myself, generously multiplied. And we know that The Father is never outdone in generosity.

JOHN THE BAPTIZER



The reason John sent those disciples of his to Jesus remains a much-discussed issue among those who study the Bible. Some say John sent them because he was fed up with them. He had told them explicitly that he had only come to announce the coming of the Messiah. He had told them very clearly that he, John, was not humanity's destination, that he was only a signboard along the road. Still, they remained like babies that do not know what to do or where to go hanging around him. So he sent them to Jesus with that question hoping that he would convince them to stay with himself.

There is also another possible explanation. There might even be an indication of where we have to look for what happened in the text. At

the end of his answer to John's messengers, Jesus asked them to tell John not to lose faith in him! So that it is what John must have been doing in his prison cell. He was losing faith in Jesus. But why? Was it because John had announced God's wrath, selecting and uprooting all sinners, destroying them with power and fire?

Was it because John heard, while he was suffering in prison, how Jesus was eating and drinking with those very same sinners, sitting with them at the table, conversing with prostitutes who washed his feet? After all, the Messiah's mission supposes to be for everyone as a Savior. I don't know, but there is another clue in the gospel about John's difficulty and his difference with Jesus. Do you remember how one day, some people came to Jesus, blaming him? They told him: "We don't understand you. You don't seem to do the right thing! John the Baptizer and the Pharisees teach their people how to pray, and they tell them to mortify themselves; they introduce them to all kinds of spiritual exercises. But you don't do any of those things. Why?" We should not forget

that John had been a monk all his life, living in the desert, dressing in skins, eating insects, drinking dirty swamp water. John was accustomed to being far from the world, praying day and night. I think that John expected something to change drastically with the arrival of the Messiah. He expected Jesus to stress prayer, going to the temple and the synagogue, a charismatic leader followed by enthusiastic people and things like that. Instead, Jesus listened to John's messengers, then told them: "*Tell John that the blind see again, that the lame walk, that the lepers are cleansed, that the deaf hears, that the dead come to life, and that this good news is proclaimed among the poor.*" The wilderness is changing, the wasteland is blooming, and the glory of God is on its way. The disciples went back to tell John the message. I believe John understood. I hope we understand too. As Christians, we are willing to pray, and we are eager to go to church, ready to have everything in order, prayers, decorations, gifts, etc. But, sometimes, we forget to enter into the Spirit that celebrates the birth of our Lord and Savior in our hearts, and John did it.

MY JOURNEY TO WISDOM - *Joyce Rupp*

Once upon a time, a child of happiness danced upon the land, knew friendship with the earth, and celebrated life with her love of solitude and simple things. She grew into a young woman whose vision of self was clouded, clothed with the complexities of insecurity and the necessity of leaving the sacred womb of the quiet earth. She walked into cities of strangers, straining her inner eye to catch the slightest hint of the beauty that had energized her younger days when



she played upon the earth. Days stretched into months, and then years went by. She slowly changed by going deeper, deeper into her Center. Never understanding why the desire to go deeper was there but always knowing there was no other choice than to follow at all costs. Darkness often loomed up large against her searching journey. Risk and Truth became her companions. She met Compassion, and then Wisdom came to greet her. So close, at times, were these companions that she wept for their intensity and her unworthiness. Still, they walked with her, and everywhere she went, her companions reached out and blessed the people of her life. She could only kneel in gratitude, offering her heart of praise to the Divine Companion who had faithfully kept the kindling of love burning in her heart.

JUDGMENT AND THE LAWS - Rev. Patrick J. McHugh



What happens after death--the Judgment--is in a certain sense previewed and acted out in an obscure symbolic way in things that happen now. To put this in another way: every day, we experience "judgments," only we do not call them that; nor do we realize that that is what they are: judgments on the way we act and think and like. Consider this analogy. Suppose a man was waiting for his turn to come down in an elevator. In a burst of intellectual freedom, he says, "This is ridiculous! I refuse to accept the indignity of subjecting myself to a law

of gravitation that that fool, Isaac Newton, thought up and imposed on the rest of us. I am going to be free." He proceeds to jump out the window. He seems to have proved his point for a few seconds or a few moments, depending on the height. He is getting down faster. He has an exhilarating experience, free fall, and all the rest of it until he hits the ground. A smashed body is the "judgment" that the law of gravitation passes on all who try to defy it. This is the first way to try to understand the judgment. The Lord has made the world in such a way that we always get what we choose ultimately. If I decide to jump from the top of a high building, I will get injured or die. That is the judgment the universe God has made passes on me. If I refuse to learn, I will get ignorant and painful things that go with ignorance. That is judgment. If I choose to hurt and humiliate others out of envy, I will get the darkness of soul and all that accompanies that, the impulse to tear down what is good. That is my judgment. The Judgment is not so much something the Lord confronts us with in the world to come as it is the law of the universe that operates now and in everything. How Judgment appears, the smashed body, ignorance, failure, darkness of the mind are previews of the final confrontation with the reality of what we have chosen to become. There is one difference between God's judgment through the physical universe and the judgment that He exacts through the spiritual. There is no appeal and no mercy in the judgment of the material order, but there is no judgment of the spiritual hierarchy. Suppose that this man we spoke of jumped from the 80th floor, but as he hurled past Floor Number 35, he had a change of heart. He cried out, "Oh, great and mysterious Law of Gravitation, I was foolish to think that I would defy you and get away with it. Forgive me!" If he were to receive an answer, the Law of Gravitation would say, "I do not forgive. This is what you chose, and this is what you are going to get your judgment." What is impossible in the physical order (apart from a miracle) happens all the time in the spiritual. The Lord reaches out and snatches us from what we are falling into.

Moral laws are laws. That is to say, and they are statements of the reality of things. Here, for example, are statements of the real universe in which we live: "Thou shalt not take arsenic with thy coffee. Thou shalt not use gun powder as tobacco. Thou shalt study for thy exams or else." These are laws. We cannot break them--we can only break ourselves against them.



In the same way, the following statements are statements of the real universe too. "Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour." These are laws too. We cannot break these either. We can only break ourselves against them. If I try to defy the law of gravitation, I begin to fall to my ruin. If I try to fight the rule of morals, I also start to fall to my doom--unless, and until, the Lord reaches out, snatches me out of mid-air in my fall, sets me down gently, and says, "Your sins are forgiven you. Go and sin no more."

In the judgment of the physical order, there is no mercy, no appeal. In the decision of the spiritual order, there is. That is the difference. But in both cases, there is Judgment. Suppose a man was invited to a party and acted very rudely; he was critical and abusive towards his host and fellow guests. If he were to complain afterward, "they avoid me," you would say to him, would you not, "What do you expect?" If you were in a philosophical mood, you might go on: "We live in a cosmos, not in chaos. If we choose disorder, disorder we shall have. If we choose to hurt others and tear at them, we enter into spiritual darkness in which we no longer see good as good but as evil. In that darkness we have chosen to enter, we are poisoned with aversion from good. We are filled with bitterness, frustration, and hate. If we encounter Honesty in our workplace, we do not admire it; we fear it. If we meet Integrity, we feel threatened by it. That is our Judgment." The Lord takes us seriously. He lets us have our way. We get what we choose. We go to our place. But, as Judas did, if we betray the Lord, we get up and leave His company; we go out into the night. The Judgment is not so much something that God decrees as it is the Lord Who allows our free will to run its course--unless He intervenes to save us from ourselves. This is what He does, again and again. If we begin to fall to our ruin, the Lord sees us; He takes pity on us and reaches out and grasps us in mid-air (so to speak) and changes the course we have chosen by our folly and our sin. The mercy of God is His endless miracle of saving sinners who are bent on destroying themselves.

LAST WILL



Every so often, I think of making a will, and I did it. Most of us accumulate at least a modest amount of possessions in the course of a lifetime. Most of us need a house and all that goes with it, a car, a couple of luxuries, and maybe a little nest egg in the bank as insurance against the 'rainy day.' There is no great harm in that. It is not the things we possess that hurt

us, and it is the things that keep us. These are the sort of things that poison our relationships; that can come between our friends and us and, tragically, sometimes between our families and us. They are to be found more often among the poor than the rich. These are the things that occasionally people are willing to kill for. There is a powerful play by the Irish dramatist John B. Keane, which has since been made into a film. It is called 'The Field.' A poor farmer is pushed to murder to acquire a miserable piece of land. The success of the play and the film is due to the universality of the theme. We all have a 'field' for which we are capable of committing murder. These are the possessions that separate us from God.

There is a story told about an early hermit who gave up everything to find God. Living alone in his hermitage deep in the forest, he befriended a fly, a mouse and a rooster. The rooster would wake him up every morning at dawn, to say Matins. The fly would move along each line of his Breviary as he read. And the mouse would nibble his ear to wake him up every time he dozed off. Then, one day the fly stopped and moved no more. It was dead. Soon death claimed the mouse and the rooster also. The hermit was devastated by his loss. In his grief, he wrote to his Abbot, but the abbot showed no sympathy. 'What else can you expect but grief,' he replied, 'when you put your trust in possessions?'

It is good to make a will. Everyone should do so. But the best choice of all is goodwill. Mothers and fathers who leave children behind them who love them and love each other have made the best wills. The possessions they had in life they converted into goodwill. So we should pray like the Psalmist today: *"Make us know the shortness of our life that we may gain wisdom of the heart."*

LOVE AND LAW

Where would civilization be without laws? How could society function without law and order? Most of us believe we need more laws and stricter enforcement of rules if we ever hope to resolve the chronic ills afflicting society. Many of us are convinced that family life prospers when all family members adhere to established house rules. Without question, the law is important for the well-being of society. But we need to understand

something important about the law. The law concerns itself with restrictions; it tells us what we shouldn't do. The purpose of the law is to protect rather than empower; it doesn't make good things happen as it prevents something bad from happening. In other words, the law safeguards life but does not itself nurture it. Therefore, when we depend on the law to raise the moral tone of society or enrich our life, we are asking for something it simply cannot provide.

Without love, life is empty, no matter how carefully we obey every rule and regulation.

In the gospel reading from Luke, Jesus carries this concept even



further. He is anointed with perfumed oil by a woman we presume to be a prostitute. She is considered a public sinner, and Jesus' host at dinner is annoyed that Jesus doesn't rightfully recognize her as an object of scorn. Jesus pronounces, however, that this woman's many sins (breaking of the law) are easily forgiven because "she loved much." What Jesus is saying is that love covers a multitude of sins. This reality should give us a great sense of relief. We are not given a license to sin, but as long as we try to be loving persons, we can be assured that God considers our sins pardoned. Therefore, there is no need to burden ourselves with guilt trips and no reason to look down on ourselves for past mistakes. Instead, love sets us free from our failings to continue our spiritual journey with a lighter spirit.

Are you more concerned about being a law-abiding citizen than a loving person? Have you ever witnessed the miracles of change brought about by loving people? Give love a chance to show you its miraculous powers. In place of multiplying house rules, what can you do to increase love in your home? Try doing some favours for members of your family rather than giving orders. Instead of criticizing people, tell them how much they mean to you. Don't empty your life with rules; fill it with love.

L'ECO

Un ragazzino e suo padre passeggiavano tra le montagne. All'improvviso il ragazzino inciampò, cadde e, facendosi male, urlò: "AAAhhh!". Con suo gran stupore il bimbo sentì una voce venire dalle montagne che ripeteva: "AAAhhh!" Con curiosità, egli chiese: "Chi sei tu?", e ricevette la risposta: "Chi sei tu?". Dopo il ragazzino urlò: "Io ti sento! Chi sei?", e la voce rispose: "Io ti sento! Chi sei?". Infuriato da quella risposta egli urlò: "Imbroglione". E ricevette la risposta: "Imbroglione!". Allora il bimbo guardò suo padre e gli chiese: "Papà, che succede?". Il padre gli sorrise e rispose: "Figlio mio, ora stai attento". Il padre gridò: "Tu sei un campione!", e la voce rispose: "Tu sei un campione!" Il figlio era sorpreso ma non capiva. Allora il padre gli spiegò:

"La gente chiama questo fenomeno ECO ma in realtà è VITA. La Vita, come un'eco, ti restituisce quello che tu dici o fai.



La vita non è altro che il riflesso delle nostre azioni. Se tu desideri più amore nel mondo, devi creare più amore nel tuo cuore; se vuoi che la gente ti rispetti, devi tu rispettare gli altri per primo. Questo principio va applicato in ogni cosa, in ogni aspetto della vita; la Vita ti restituisce ciò che tu hai dato ad essa. La nostra Vita non è un insieme di coincidenze: è lo specchio di noi stessi."

In senso cristiano noi siamo qui su questa terra per imparare ad amare e l'amore e' l'eco della vita che Dio ci ha dato.

TRANSLATION - The Echo

A little boy and his father were walking on the mountain. Suddenly, the boy tripped and felt hurting himself and shouted: " AAAhhh!". The boy was very surprised when he heard a voice coming from the mountain repeating "AAAhhh!" So the boy asked: "Who are you?" and he received the answer: "Who are you?" Then the boy shouted: "I can hear you! Who are you?" And the voice answered: "I can hear you! Who are you?"

The boy got very upset and shouted: "You are a trickster!" He receives the answer: "You are a trickster!" Then the boy looking at his father, asked: " Papa' what is going on?'. The father smiled and answered: "My son listens to me." The father showed: "You are a Champion!" The voice answered: "You are a Champion!" The son was very surprised, but he wasn't able to understand. So the father explained:

"The people call this phenomenon ECHO, but in reality, it is our life. Life, like an eco, gives you back what you say or do. Life is nothing else than a reflection of our actions. If you desire to see more love in the world, you have to produce more love in your heart. If you want other people to respect you, first you have to respect them. This idea may be applied to every aspect of life. Life gives you back what you are giving to it. Our life is not a mere coincidence of situations but a mirror of ourselves.

In a Christian way, we are on earth to learn how to love, and love is the echo of life we receive from God himself.

LENT FIRE UNDER ASHES - poem

Sometimes our Faith is like ashes, not too hot to be true in daylight!

Our Hope is like ashes: very light and with no voice!

Our Love is like ashes: only words and no action!



Our hands are like ashes: always holding and no sharing!
Our family is like ashes: too busy in dreaming good and shiny!
Our world is like ashes: yes, like dust hiding peace and justice!
I wish that this healing time of Lent will keep
Faith, Hope, Love, our hands, our family, and this world
awake and start again the fire hidden under the ashes of our life. (Fr. Luigi)

WHAT SHALL I DO - poem

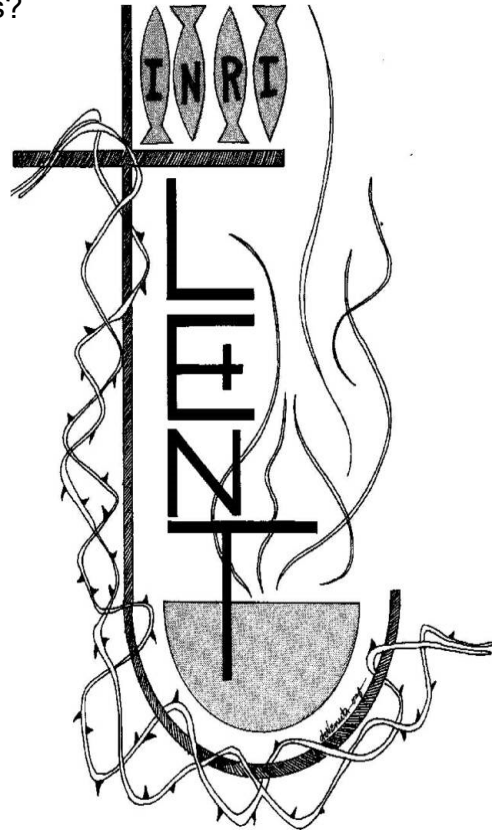
What shall I do this, Lent? Shall I forgo dainty foods?
Or will it be the television set? Yes, says the Lord,
these are good, but neither of these is enough.

What then shall I do this, Lent? Shall I attend
an extra Mass? Or maybe a bible study class?
Yes, says the Lord, these are also good but
these, too, are not enough.

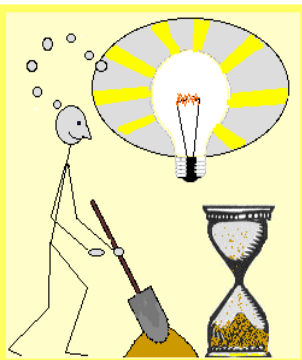
What then shall I do this, Lent? Shall I look forward
to praying more? Or visit the sick or poor?
Yes, says the Lord, these are good indeed, but
these are still not enough.

Oh Lord, what then shall I do? I surrender!
Ah, dear child, that is the word I have been
waiting to hear, very much longing to share
from your little heart.

Surrender your fear, pain, trouble, my beloved
child, surrender your will and life to me.
Learn how to stay in My love, that complete and
strong love that took Me to Calvary. (Fr. Luigi)



LET ME LIVE UNTIL



Today, dear Lord, I'm 80, and there's much I haven't done; I hope, dear Lord, you'll let me live until I'm 85. But then, if I haven't finished all I want to do. Would you let me stay awhile until I'm 87? So many places I want to go to, So very much to see. Do you think that you could manage to make it 89? The world is changing very fast, and there's just so much in store. I'd like it very much to live until I'm 93. And if by then I'm still alive, I'd like to stay till 95. More planes will be up in the air, so I'd like to stick and see what happens to the world when I am 97. I know, dear Lord, it's much to ask, and it must be nice in

heaven, but I certainly would like to stay until I'm 98. I know by then I won't be fast and sometimes will be late, but it truly would be pleasant to be around at 99. I will have seen so many things and had a wonderful time. So, I'm sure that I'll be willing to leave at 100 maybe!

LET US FLY

Soren Kierkegaard explained what he meant in his sermon about the geese. He



compared his fellow Christians to domesticated geese. Those geese are always talking about flying: "We have wings, we never use our wings, we should use them, let us fly!" But nobody ever flies.

On Sundays, a big goose stands a bit higher than other ones on a pulpit, and he, too, every Sunday, encourages the others to fly in the most beautiful words.

But nobody does fly, and if one started to fly, the preacher would be the first to shout: "Come down immediately!"

Pentecost is our feast. It is the feast of our takeoff with the Spirit. With that Spirit, we can fly in all directions.

Let us belong to those who fly on the wind of that Spirit, and let us fly together into the dawn of the kingdom to come.

LIBERAL OR CONSERVATIVE

No, neither a liberal nor a conservative bible is the solution to imagine a more effective way to be missionaries to our children. The answer is ultimately found in Jesus. Yet, we struggle to wake up to it. Jesus offers us a model; he tries to move us from one state to another: We are asleep, and he tries to wake us; We are deaf, and he tries to open our ears; We are dumb, and he tries to open our mouths to speech and praise; We are narrow, and he tries to widen our perspective; We are blind, and he tries to open our eyes; We are lost, and he tries to find us; we are dead, and he tries to resurrect us. This invitation must be strong always present for our model of being today - our good way to be in this world - the journey of our life.



LIFE AFTER DEATH - life for diamonds!



The dark November days of our northern latitudes lend a sympathetic setting for contemplating the end of life. The journey's end for Jesus, too, has reached Jerusalem at last for his long pilgrimage. A bitter reception awaited him there as the various factions of power, one after another, confronted him with hostile questions.

It was the turn of the Sadducees, a small but very wealthy faction in the city. In matters of theology, they were the arch-conservatives who would not accept any change or development from the five books attributed to Moses, the Torah. Thus, they did not get the later doctrines about angels and life after death.

They set a trap for Jesus with their familiar ploy about the seven brothers married to one wife. Jesus answers in two ways. First, he returns the challenge and clarifies the naive understanding his opponents have of the resurrection.

The life to come is not a repeat of this life: life is transformed and elevated above our human needs and wants. In part, Jesus' answer depends on an ancient understanding of "immortality" as coming from many children, a tradition that goes back to Abraham. Ancestors live on in descendants' lives, which is why the patriarch is eternal as long as his offspring inhabit the earth.

More important, Jesus shames the Sadducees who deny God the power and the will to raise the dead. Our God is the God of the living, not the dead. And as God is life, so those in God's family share the divine life.

There is a life after death: God has the power and the purpose to raise us.

That life is the life of a heavenly creature, "equal to angels and children of God." Let no one ridicule our hope, rooted in God and proved by Jesus' resurrection. But, if this is so, what sort of godly lives should we live as people destined and called to share God's holiness?

St. John expands upon this call to be children of God, saying: *'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 Jn 3:2)

Death, which is the end of one journey, is the beginning of another, just as Jerusalem marked the end of the walked journey of Jesus but would be the place for his return to the Father. Death is the only doorway into the higher form of life. It is the great step toward that imperishable, glorious, and powerful fullness of life in the Spirit.

Life is changed, not ended. And the change is to a new life in which we are to become 'the same as the angel, children of the resurrection, sons of God.' Now our God is the God, not of the dead, but the living; for to him all men are alive'.

Listen what we say in our profession of faith any time we come to mass: We believe in the Holy Spirit - The Holy Catholic Church - The communion of the saints - The forgiveness of sins - The resurrection of the body - And the life everlasting - Amen
Thoughts about the resurrection of the body are sometimes best expressed by poets. A priest-poet, Gerald Manley Hopkins, put it like this: *"In a flash, as a trumpet crash, I am all at once What Christ is. Since he is what I am. And this jack, joke, poor pothered, patch, match-wood, immortal diamond, it is, after all, an eternal diamond."*

LA PORTA SENZA MANIGLIA

C'è un quadro famoso che rappresenta Gesù in un giardino buio. Con la mano sinistra alza una lampada che illumina la scena, con la destra bussa ad una porta pesante e robusta. Quando il quadro fu presentato per la prima volta ad una mostra, un visitatore fece notare al pittore William Hunt un particolare curioso. "Nel suo quadro c'è un errore. La porta è senza maniglia!" "Non è un errore!", rispose il pittore. "Quella è la porta del cuore umano. Si apre solo dall'interno!". Dio non entra nella tua vita senza il tuo permesso. *"Ecco, sto alla porta e busso. Se qualcuno ascolta la mia voce a mi apre la porta, io verro' da lui, cenero' con lui ed egli con me."* (Ap 3,20)

TRANSLATION - The door without a handle



There is a famous picture that represents Jesus in a quiet, dark garden. He has in his left hand a lamp that gives light to the entire image, and with the right hand, he is knocking on a big and heavy door. When the picture was presented for the first time at an exhibition, a visitor underlined to the painter William Hunt an interesting point in the image. He said, "Must be a mistake in your picture. The door doesn't have the handle!"

The painter answers, "It is not a mistake. That is the door of our human heart. It can only be open from inside!" God will never enter into our lives without our permission.

"Listen! I stand at the door and knock; if any hear my voice and open the door, I will come into their house and eat with them, and they will eat with me." (Rev. 3,20)

THE JOY OF CHRISTMAS

"The joy of Christmas is contagious—but not primarily because of our gifts of dolls and trucks, bikes and pretty dresses, sweaters and ties...The joy of Christmas is contagious because of the spirit behind the gifts. The glory of Christmas is that a gracious God became one of us to tell us that He loves us. In our Christmas giving, the genuine believer symbolizes his or her inner desire to spread this Good News. At Christmas, we celebrate the Incarnation! Today we rejoice! The eternal God comes into flesh and blood of humanity. Christmas cards portray the little Babe, the Manger, the Magi, the shepherds. Little children learn that today is Jesus' birthday. But these pieces of the story only touch the edge of the mysterious event which brings us together. The Good News is that the God of Mercy has come into the history of humanity to bring us perfect peace. The peace of mind and heart and soul that the world cannot give. The joy of Christmas is to welcome Jesus. And when you follow Jesus, do not be surprised to see others following you. After all, the spirit of Christmas is contagious."



LITTLE FISH IN SEARCH OF GOD



There is a story about our search for God that runs something like this. There was a little fish who swam up to his mother one day and asked: "Mummy, where is this water that I hear so much about?" The mother replied: "You stupid little fish! It's all about you and in you. Just swim up near the beach and enjoy the ride for a while, and you will find out." And so there is the person who is searching for God and his presence and love always asking: "Where is this God that I hear so much about?" God is to us like the ocean is to the fish, all around us, and in us. In God, we live and move and have our being. So if we are swimming in God, but that reality does not seem as real to us as the reality of our situations and headaches of our daily lives, how can we make ourselves more aware of God?

WHAT HAPPENED

Four men woke up one morning as fishermen and went to bed that night as disciples of a great prophet. Zebedee was short the help of two sons, and Peter's wife would not see much of her husband for a while. What had happened? Mark's Gospel provides a simple account of the call of the disciples. Just as John the Baptist disappears from the scene, Jesus shows up and takes up John's message about the coming of God's reign. As Jesus walks along the shore of the sea, he invites people to join him in the work he is about to do. There is no job description, no salary, and only one promise: you will catch bigger fish. Maybe to a fisherman, that is all you have to say. Perhaps they were all young and bored; maybe they saw Jesus as a way out of their dead-end lives in Galilee. There is also a sense that these folks were not trapped in their routines and the everyday need for security. They were free to move, and they could travel lightly in any direction. Are we free to do the same? Are we ready to follow the Lord when He is calling me?



LET'S DANCE - (Acts 2.1-11)

The reading from Acts speaks of rushing wind, fire, and Spirit that brought a group of frightened disciples out of hiding and energized them to go out and conquer the world for Christ. They were filled with enthusiasm, and all who witnessed it were amazed.

The events in this reading probably stand out in sharp contrast to how we normally experience life, especially our mission to witness Christ and his message. It is easy for life to become boring, if not discouraging. The never-ending responsibilities and ordeals we routinely face every day have a way of draining our ambition. Yes, we do what we have to do, but our heart isn't in it very often. We work at our job and tend to our obligations but do so with less and less enthusiasm. Even prayer and worship become dry. Sometimes it strikes us that we should be doing more with our lives, but the feeling doesn't last. Over time we become more resigned to life than excited about prospects.



In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul says, “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit.” We need to understand that we share the Spirit that flooded the apostles with energy and enthusiasm. The Spirit is the same and is always with us. Our personal development is never complete. We have work to do to build ourselves and the kingdom of God, and the Spirit continually urges us onto new heights.

However, the work of the Spirit can be significantly reduced by our inclination toward laziness, apathy, and resignation. As we get older, we tend to stop setting goals; we back down from commitments and run away from challenges; we’re reluctant to try something new. If we wish for a better quality of life, however, we need to fight these tendencies. The Spirit is always present to us as energy, but it is up to us to tap into that energy by struggling against the forces of gravity that would pull us down. This means that we make a conscious choice for growth rather than comfort, for risk rather than safety, for more life rather than a slow death. Christians are Pentecost people, people with “spirit.” We stay “alive” and feel most alive when we determine to live with passion. We all know what a potent force enthusiasm can be. As a good coach might revive his dispirited team at half-time, it is up to us to rally ourselves to new zest in our marriage, better performance in our job, new friends, new interests, new activities, and new heights in our spiritual growth. We raise our spirits by living with enthusiasm in everything we do. As you think, so you are.

What kind of thoughts occupy your mind most of the day? Dark, depressing thoughts, or positive, energizing thoughts? How you feel is up to you, by the kind of thoughts you allow. Wake up seeing every new day as full of possibilities for your happiness. Remember, it’s our attitude that sets the tone for what we will experience. Take responsibility for your energy levels. Read books that inspire you. Avoid people who make you feel down and associate more with people who build you up. Make sure you eat properly and make regular exercise part of your daily routine. Commit yourself to live with passion, and your spirits will rise.

PSALM 17

“O Praise the LORD, all you nations! Give glory to him, all you peoples! So strong is his love for us; He is faithful forever.” Sometimes we may hear or read that “Christianity is a religion for losers!” We may laugh at this unsuspecting presentation. “Yes, it is,” We may agree. “But the difference between us is that what seems to be an insult, I believe, is good news.” Losers, like the prodigal son, are grateful for the invention and presence of Christianity. But he is not the only one. The sick, the blind, the lame, the crazy all have a lot to thank. So do the dead. So do the poor, those who mourn, those who are persecuted. Outsiders, children, the despised when you begin to count them up, many people fall into the category of those who have lost something and long for forgiveness, comfort,



justice, or love. The prodigal son was not the only loser in the story. The father had lost his son, which was a troublemaker. And what the elder son suffered from was perhaps the most devastating loss of all: the ability to feel compassion for his brother or family. The Christian story promises to redress all these losses, whether from sin, suffering, or spiritual sickness. All we have to do is to come to the feast.

LOVE MYSELF - Mt 22:34-40

There are three reasons why I should love myself the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.



First, God the Father has loved me into being. I was first a thought in the beautiful mind of God before ever I was spoken into life. God, who loved me before I arrived, still loves me and always will. This loving God has gifted me with my unique composition of talents. God wants to see me grow and develop these talents to reflect his glory in my life. The second reason why I should love myself is that God the Son loves me. 'I came down from heaven to save you,' he says. 'I have spent my life for you, suffered and died for you. I rose again for you. Look at my cross and

know how much I love you.'

The third reason is the Holy Spirit. In the gift of God's Spirit, the spark of God's love has been lit in my heart. If I let the wind of the Spirit move this spark, it will become a passionate fire of love that will burn away all spots of hatred and negativity. If I love myself for these three special reasons, it will follow that I will love others for the same reasons. I will share in the love of the Father for all his children.

I will share in the love of Jesus Christ whose pity was immense, whose compassion was wide, and whose understanding was divine. When I know how much Jesus loves me, I will want others to see that love in their lives too. The Spirit's love in me will tear down any barriers or misunderstandings which are preventing growth. Whenever my evil eyes focus on how unlovable the other person is, then I must beg the Holy Spirit to overcome my sin and poor vision to grant me divine eyes to see with understanding, to see better.

AT THE END

At the end of our lives, we will not be judged by how many diplomas we have received, how much money we have made or how many great things we have done.

We will be judged by: *I was hungry and you gave me to eat. I was naked, and you clothed me. I was homeless, and you took me in.*

Hungry not only for bread but hungry for love. Naked not only for clothing but naked of human dignity and respect. Homeless not only for want of a room of bricks but homeless because of rejection. This is Christ in a distressing disguise.



MAKE LOVE TO THE SONG

Make love to the song! Forget about yourself and how others react to you! A bad singer on stage makes love to himself; A more mature singer makes love to his audience; A mature singer makes love to the song. Service is the same. You must forget about yourself, your image, your need to prove yourself, and eventually forget about your audience too so that you and your song are not about yourself or your people, but about God.

BEAUTY IS IN THE EYES - Margaret Wolfe Hungerford



"It was her way of saying that we see what we wish to see in others. Every living human being is a complex combination of feelings, emotions, and thoughts — some good, some bad. Your impression of another depends far more upon you and your expectations of that person. If you believe someone is good, you will find good qualities. If you don't, you won't. When you are a positive person, you tend to find positive qualities in others. As you work to develop good, constructive habits to improve yourself continually, make it a practice to look for those same qualities in others. When you identify the good in others and congratulate them upon their positive achievements, you will make friends on whom you can always depend — both in good times and bad times."

MARY IMAGE

The American sociologist Andrew Greeley, addressing the question 'Why do Catholics stay in the Church?' Among the many reasons, he said the most powerful image of all is Mary, the Mother of God. It all begins when a mother brings her little child to see the Christmas crib. The child gazes in wonder at this exotic scene of angels, animals, shepherds, kings, mothers, and fathers, all gathered around a baby in the manger.



'Who is the baby?' the little child asks. 'That is Jesus'. 'And who is Jesus?' 'Jesus is God.' 'Oh!' the little child says. 'And who is the lady?' 'That is Mary, God's mammy.'

It is a hard story to beat. It is many children's first introduction to theology and a most effective one at that. Nothing in later life shakes their attachment. They may disagree and sometimes violently with the Church's pronouncements on certain issues, but that image of Mary is always present: 'God's mammy.' Greeley also tells a story heard from nuns who taught him as a young boy in Chicago. One day God made a tour of heaven to check out the recent arrivals. He was taken aback at the quality of many of those allowed in, and he went out to confront Peter about it. 'You've let me down again,' he told Peter. 'What's wrong now?' Peter asked. 'You let a lot of people in that shouldn't be there.' 'I didn't let them in.' 'Well, who did?' 'When I turned them away at the front gate, they went around the back, and your mother let them in.'

MYSTERY OF FORGIVENESS

Our response to being wrong, to having a precious trust betrayed, to our



failures, is often a mixture of resentment, disappointment, anger, despair mixed in with a craving for justice and a seedling of forgiveness struggling for survival someplace in our emotionally turbulent hearts. It is important for our well-being that this seedling not only survives but triumphs. Justice is essential, reasonable, arguable, and human.

Forgiveness is mysterious, exciting, energizing, life-giving, painful, and divine. It is a response to love.

Punishment concentrates on the evil to be redressed, while forgiveness focuses on the love potential of the one who had failed. The difference is in the attitude of mind and heart of the one who is offended. Punishment always has an element of righting the balance. Forgiveness is allowing love to absorb the agony without bitterness. True forgiveness is never conditional or demanding. Rather it risks its security to give an offender's goodness another chance. There are two aspects to forgiveness that are so strongly connected, the willingness to forgive others and the openness for accepting forgiveness oneself. Both parts grow or decline together within each heart. As long as we refuse to forgive another, we become incapable of forgiving ourselves or allowing another to forgive us.

On the other hand, every time we forgive, we open ourselves to be filled with peace. Forgiveness, like love, is a mystery. I believe that everything goes beyond justice, apology and retribution. It is appreciated through being experienced. It cannot be measured or counted. Therefore, in this weekend's gospel, the command of Jesus is to forgive unconditionally again and again so that our hearts may be enriched beyond all our understanding.

DOVE DIO SI PUO' NASCONDERE

Un giorno Dio si stancò degli uomini che in continuazione, chiedevano sempre tante cose. Allora decise di nascondersi per un po' di tempo. Radunò tutti i suoi consiglieri e chiese loro: "Dove mi devo nascondere? Quale è il luogo migliore?". Alcuni risposero: "Sulla cima della montagna più alta della terra". Altri: "No, nasconditi nel fondo del mare, nessuno ti troverà". Altri: "Nasconditi sul lato oscuro della luna; questo è il posto migliore. Come riusciranno a trovarti là?" Allora Dio si rivolse ad un piccolo angelo "Tu dove mi consigli di nascondermi?".



L'angelo, sorridendo, rispose: "Nasconditi nel cuore di ogni persona! È l'unico posto dove essi non vanno mai a cercarti!".

TRANSLATION - Where God may hide

Once upon a time, God was feeling tired. So many people were asking continuously so many things. So He decided to hide for some time. So he called for all his consultants and asked them: "Where should hide? Where should be the best place?"

Some suggested – On the tallest mountain in the world. Some others offered in the deep of the ocean where nobody can reach you. Others said to hide on the dark side of the moon; nobody will find you there. Then God asks a little angel: "Where do you

suggest me to hide?" The Angel smiling answered: " Hide Yourself in the heart of Mankind that is the only place where they never go to look at."

THE - BIT- IN YOUR BOTTLE



An ancient story tells of a Triumphant Feast scheduled in a certain village. Each villager agreed to pour one bottle of his best wine into a giant cask to ensure adequate refreshments. But one reasoned to himself, "If I fill my bottle with water, the dilution will be so slight, who will ever notice it?" When the feast commenced, and the great cask was tapped, the townspeople were shocked that there was nothing but the water that poured forth! Everybody in the village had figured alike, reasoning, "The bit in my bottle will never be missed!" At your church, too, the sacrifice of everyone able counts. Your gift will be missed as we struggle to carry on our church programs with

the budget demands upon us because the need is great. Therefore, we ask each member who can place Good Wine in his bottle represented by a Good Gift to his church.

DON'T WORRY - C.L. Lewis

There was a meeting of the board of directors going on in Hell. The chief devil was concerned over the fact that business was not increasing. He wanted to reach as many people as possible and draw them into Hell. One devil jumped up and said: *"I'll go back to earth and convince the people that there is no Heaven."* "That won't do," he said. "We have tried it before, and it doesn't work." "I'll convince them that there is no Hell," offered a second devil. "No – that doesn't work, either," said the chief. Finally, a wise old veteran in the back of the room said, *"If you let me go back to earth, I can fill this place easy. I'll convince them that there is no hurry: to be happy and don't worry about it."*



NONNO E NIPOTINO

Passan sul prato, nonno e nipotino. Il nonno e' vecchio, il bimbo e' piccolino; il bimbo e' biondo, il nonno e' tutto bianco; il bimbo e' diritto, il nonno curvo e stanco.



Passan sul prato, dandosi la mano. Il nonno dice: "Presto andro' lontano, molto lontano, e piu' non tornero!" E il bimbo rispose: "Nonno mio, ti scrivero."

TRANSLATION - GRANDFATHER AND GRANDCHILD

Pass on the lawn, grandfather, and grandson. The grandfather is old; the child is small; the child is blond; the grandfather is all white; the child is straight; the grandfather bent over and tired. They walk across the lawn, shaking hands. The grandfather says: "Soon I will go far, very far, and I will never return!" And the child replied: "My grandfather, I'll write to you."

IN THE SAND

Two friends were walking through the desert. They argued at some point of the journey, and one friend slapped the other in the face. The one who got hit was hurt without saying anything wrote in the sand: Today, my best friend slapped me in the face. They kept on walking until they found an oasis with a lot of water, and they decide to take a bath. The one who had been slapped got stuck in the mud, which was quicksand, and he started to sink, but his friend saved him. After the friend recovered from the quicksand, he wrote on a stone:



Today, my best friend saved my life. The friend who hurt and saved his friend's life asked him, "After I hurt you, you wrote in the sand, and now, you write on a stone; why?" The other friend replied: "When someone hurts us, we should write it down in sand where winds of forgiveness can erase it away, but when someone does something good for us, we must engrave it in stone where no wind will ever erase it."

ONE IS IMPORTANT TO GOD - Lk 15:1-32



The love of God is intensely personal and individual. A man with a hundred sheep is concerned when one is lost. A woman with ten coins searches diligently when one is lost. A man with two sons loses one to his youthful wildness. He shields his ageing eyes daily, scanning the horizon for that one face: his young son. There is one for whom

his heart is waiting every day. One is important to God: 'I have carved you on the palm of my hand.' One name is precious to God: 'I have called you by your name; you are mine.'

So different is the jungle law built into society today. Governments plan for the millions, but it will be too difficult for the one. Multinational corporations manipulate thousands with little sympathy for the individual. In the cruel world of competition, compassion is a weakness: its only function is to cover up a mistake. The law of Jesus draws attention to the one, to the little one. 'In so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me.' The judgment itself is based on our attitude to the one, the least one. The kingdom won by Jesus on Calvary is promised that day to one crucified with him – and he a thief. In the one-to-one dialogue there, that repentant thief is the first person in the gospel to address the Lord by his name, Jesus.

This is telling us how important in God's eyes is each one of us. Jesus is concerned about one sinner: so much so that the return of one is an occasion for rejoicing in heaven! If I were the only sinner in the world, Jesus would have done all he did for me. I am that important to God. Many people fight shy of intimacy with God, but they keep him at a respectful distance! Yes – God loves you and me, and you – he wants to hear the sound of my prayer, the beat of my heart. Imagine God in search of me, enjoying me! What a blessing! At the same time, what follows naturally is this: what I receive from God I must pass on to others. Charity begins at home. It can be very safe and undemanding when the price about the problems of lands and peoples is miles away. But what of the one to whom I owe an apology, the one about whom my words are always critical, the one I have frozen out of my affections? That one person is precious in God's eyes. If I claim to be serious about God, then I must strive to partake in God's special love for each individual. If not, I will be like the other son in the parable with a special shining halo of rights but never happy!

My dear friends, one is important to God: every single one.

ONE SMALL BOY



The report on the miracle of the bread and the fish is about what happened to somebody who gave all he had. It is, of course, a story about Jesus multiplying all that bread and fish. But whose bread did he multiply? Whose fish did he divide? It all started with the real hero of that story--a small boy. Let's have a look at the eyewitness report.

There were all those people: five thousand men and, most probably, at least double that number of women and children. It is Jesus who says: "What are we going to do? How are we going to feed them?"

Philip knows what to do to feed them. First, he says: "You just buy the food." Then he added: "One piece of bread for each one in this crowd would most probably cost you thousands of dollars. So how are you going to manage that?"

Andrew gets another bright idea. He asks the crowd: "Has anybody any food?" There is a big hush and a great silence. People look at one another. There must have been quite a few in that crowd with some food, but they kept their mouths shut. Nobody admitted to having a crumb of bread or a bit of fish. They were afraid they were going to lose it.

And then there is that small boy. He had been looking at Jesus with an open mouth and a wet nose. He patted his pockets, he felt under his shirt, and he shouted: "Yes, Sir, over here!" So out he came with five slices of bread and two fish, small ones, very small ones, a small boy catch. The whole crowd laughed. Jesus did not. He took those bread slices, took those two fish, and told the people to sit down.

There was a great deal of noise, and everyone sat down. Only that small boy was still standing there, looking with eyes full of wonder at his fish and bread. Jesus gave his fish and bread to those big apostles of his and said: "Divide it among them!" They said: "Divide what?" He said again: "Just start, will you?" So they started to break and break and break until everybody had enough, even more than enough. So much so that they still had pieces in their hands when their stomachs were full.

Jesus said: "Can you please collect the leftovers." They collected twelve basketfuls, and Jesus must have given them to that small boy: after all, it was his bread, his fish. The people praised Jesus. They even wanted to make him king. I think Jesus praised the small boy who had given all he had. It is that attitude that should be king and, in Jesus, was. Those who give will receive and will receive in abundance.

When we are asked for something we think we cannot give, think of that small boy, of his story, and think of the twelve basketfuls of food given to him because he gave all he had. We may see the picture again, like in a movie that evening, the boy would recount the story all breathlessly to his mother when he went home.

"Imagine, Mom," he would say, "with the fish I caught and the buns you baked, Jesus fed five thousand people, and there were baskets of leftover."

Mother might, as a mother does, have shaken her head in disbelief and packed him off to bed. But he would never forget as long as he lived that he had contributed to a miracle. So we should not forget either.

Overwhelmed as we may be with the might of technological progress, we should always remember that it is with our little efforts that God chooses to make his greatest miracles.

God and little boys together make an amazing combination for God, and each one of us together makes a wonderful combination.

NON TRATTENERTI MAI - Madre Teresa di Calcutta

"Tieni sempre presente che la pelle fa le rughe, i capelli diventano bianchi, i giorni si trasformano in anni. Però ciò che é importante non cambia; la tua forza e la tua convinzione non hanno età. Il tuo spirito e` la colla di qualsiasi tela di ragno. Dietro ogni linea di arrivo c`e` una linea di partenza. Dietro ogni successo c`e` un`altra delusione. Fino a quando sei viva, sentiti viva. Se ti manca cio` che facevi, torna a farlo. Non vivere di foto ingiallite insisti anche se tutti si aspettano che abbandoni. Non lasciare che si arrugginisca il ferro che c`e` in te. Fai in modo che invece che compassione, ti portino rispetto. Quando a causa degli anni non potrai correre,



cammina veloce. Quando non potrai camminare veloce, cammina. Quando non potrai camminare, usa il bastone. **Pero` non trattenerti mai!**"

TRANSLATION - Never Hold Back

"Always keep in mind that the skin wrinkles, the hair turns white, the days turn into years. But what is important does not change; your strength and your conviction have no age. Your spirit is the glue of any

spider web. Behind each finish line, there is a starting line. Behind every success, there is another disappointment. As long as you are alive, feel alive. If you miss what you did, go back to doing it. Do not live on yellowed photos; insist even if everyone expects you to abandon. Don't let the iron in you rust. Make sure that instead of compassion, everybody brings you respect. When you can't run because of the years, walk fast; you can not walk faster than pace. When you can't walk, use a cane. But never hold back! "

PLAYING DEAD

A large, green grasshopper, jumping like he's in the circus, moves before me on the path. I step nearer and touch him with my long stem of grass. He's suddenly silent. Not a breath of movement from him, like a little bump of green. "Clever," I say to myself, "neat way of protection, this playing-dead thing." I smile and move on, nearly squishing a slow-moving form of yellow and brown stripes, a miniature porcupine, elongated, of

course. I stoop to touch this roly form, anxious to feel the little brushes of colour around the body. As I do so, the caterpillar quickly forms itself into one soft, curvy ball. No amount of teasing with my finger will cause it to unfold. I move it gently in all directions, and still no sign of life. "Clever," I say to myself, "neat way of protection, this playing-dead thing." Then, I wander to the inside of myself, to the journey of my heart. I look at places where fears and old wounds keep me from being alive and



fully a part of life. I see how maybe it's not so clever to keep on playing dead. Parts of me need to wake up, to be tickled in the ribs of my vulnerability by life's blade of grass. Parts of me need to jump high with delight, to leap along life's path instead of hiding out in the concrete havens of my overly protected self. *Too much of me is still "playing dead."* - Anonymous

**Mercy is stronger than anger,
Forgiveness is more powerful than rejection,
Reconciliation is more transformative of spiritual
devastation into a new life of many possibilities.**

SHAY'S STORY

What would you do? You make a choice. Don't look for a punch line; there isn't one.



Read it anyway. My question is: Would you have made the same choice? At a fundraising dinner for a school that serves children with learning disabilities, the father of one of the students delivered a speech that would never be forgotten by all who attended. After extolling the school and its dedicated staff, he asked: 'When not interfered with by outside influences, everything nature does, is done with perfection. Yet my son, Shay, cannot learn things as other children

do. He cannot understand things as other children do. Where is the natural order of things in my son?' The query stilled the audience. The father continued. 'I believe that

when a child like Shay, who was mentally and physically disabled, comes into the world, an opportunity to realize true human nature presents itself, and it comes in the way other people treat that child.' Then he told the following story: Shay and I had walked past a park where some boys Shay knew were playing baseball. Shay asked, 'Do you think they'll let me play?' I knew that most of the boys would not want Shay on their team, but as a father, I also understood that if my son were allowed to play, it would give him a much-needed sense of belonging and confidence to be accepted by others despite his handicaps. I approached one of the boys on the field and asked (not expecting much) if Shay could play. The boy looked around for guidance and said, 'We're losing by six runs, and the game is in the eighth inning. I guess he can be on our team, and we'll try to put him in to bat in the ninth inning.' Shay struggled over to the team's bench and, with a broad smile, put on a team shirt. I watched with a small tear in my eye and warmth in my heart. The boys saw my joy at my son being accepted. At the bottom of the eighth inning, Shay's team scored a few runs but was still behind three. Shay put on a glove in the top of the ninth inning and played in the right field. Even though no hits came his way, he was ecstatic just to be in the game and on the field, grinning from ear to ear as I waved to him from the stands. In the bottom of the ninth inning, Shay's team scored again. With two outs and the bases loaded, the potential winning run was on base, and Shay was scheduled to be next at-bat. At this juncture, do they let Shay bat and give away their chance to win the game? Surprisingly, Shay was given the bat. Everyone knew that a hit was all but impossible because Shay didn't even know how to hold the bat properly, much less connect with the ball. However, as Shay stepped up to the plate, the pitcher, recognizing that the other team was putting winning aside for this moment in Shay's life, moved in a few steps to lob the ball in softly so Shay could at least make contact. The first pitch came, and Shay swung clumsily and missed. The pitcher again took a few steps forward to toss the ball softly towards Shay. Shay swung at the ball as the pitch came in and hit a slow ground ball right back to the pitcher. The game would now be over. The pitcher picked up the soft grounder and could have easily thrown the ball to the first baseman. Shay would have been out, and that would have been the end of the game. Instead, the pitcher threw the ball right over the first baseman's head, out of reach of all teammates. Everyone from the stands and both teams started yelling, 'Shay, run to first! Run to first!' 'Never in his life had Shay ever run that far, but he made it to first base. He scampered down the baseline, wide-eyed and startled. Everyone yelled, 'Run to second, run to second!' 'Catching his breath, Shay awkwardly ran towards second, gleaming and struggling to make it to the base. By the time Shay rounded towards second base, the right fielder had the ball. The smallest guy on their team now had his first chance to be the hero for his team. He could have thrown the ball to the second-baseman for the tag, but he understood the pitcher's intentions, so he, too, intentionally threw the ball high and far over the third-baseman's head. Shay ran toward the third base deliriously as the runners ahead of him circled the bases toward home. All were screaming, 'Shay, Shay, Shay, all the Way Shay.' Shay reached third base because the opposing shortstop ran to help him by turning him in the direction of third base and shouted, 'Run to third! Shay, run to third!' As Shay rounded third, the boys from both teams, and the spectators, were on their feet screaming, 'Shay, run home! Run home!' Shay ran to home, stepped on the plate, and was cheered as the hero who hit the grand slam and

won the game for his team' That day,' said the father softly with tears now rolling down his face, 'the boys from both teams helped bring a piece of true love and humanity into this world.' Shay didn't make it to another summer. He died that winter, having never forgotten being the hero and making me so happy and coming home and seeing his Mother tearfully embrace her little hero of the day!

LORD THAT I MAY SEE - Mark 10:46-52

There are so many ways to lack spiritual vision; hatred, pride, and jealousy can prevent us from seeing our neighbours' goodness. Refusal to pay our debts or to do an honest week's work for the wages we are collecting means we are blinded to a sense of justice. Never being satisfied with what we have and always wanting more material goods is an indication that we are blinded by greed. We are all victims of some sort of blindness, but to become aware of it and have the scales removed from our eyes, we must continually search and pray for more light. Only prayer and trust in Jesus, who is the light of the world, can dispel such darkness and restore our true spiritual vision. The closer we are to Jesus, the more light there is in our lives. The cry of the blind man, 'Lord that I may see,' is a prayer that should constantly be on our lips.



IN THE FLESH OF GOD - JOHN 6:52-59

Friends, today's Gospel declares that the Word became flesh. Why has the Incarnation been resisted from the very beginning? Why is the extension of the Incarnation, the Eucharist, still such a source of division? I think it has to do with the flesh. God became one of us, as close to us as blood and muscle and bone. It is no longer correct to say that God is in his heaven and we are on the earth. It is not right to say simply that God is spirit and we are matter. The matter has been invaded by spirit. In Jesus, God became flesh, and, more to the point, he



invites us to eat his Body and drink his Blood. But that means that he wants us to take him into ourselves. "Now, wait a minute!" many people think. "That's a little too close for comfort, for it means that he wants to be Lord of my flesh and my bones, that he wants to move into every nook and cranny of my life. My work, my recreation, my sexual life, my life of play—all those fleshy things that I do—he wants to be Lord of all of that!" That's precisely right. - Robert Barron

SIGNORE DELLE CIME - (Bepi de Marzi)

Dio del cielo, Signore delle cime un nostro amico hai chiesto alla montagna ma ti preghiamo, su nel paradiso, lascialo andare per le tue montagne. Santa Maria Signora della neve, copri col bianco soffice tuo mantello, il nostro amico, il nostro fratello, su nel paradiso, lascialo andare per le tue montagne.

TRANSLATION - LORD OF THE PEAKS

God of heaven, Lord of the peaks, a friend of ours asked the mountain but please, up in paradise, let him go to your mountains.

Holy Mary Lady of the snow, cover your cloak with soft white, our friend, brother, up in paradise, let him go to your mountains.



SIMPLE THINGS IN LIFE

A philosophy professor stood before his class and had some items in front of him.



When the class began wordlessly, he picked up a large empty mayonnaise jar and proceeded to fill it with cookies right to the top, cookies about 2 inches in diameter.

He then asked the students if the jar was full. They agreed that it was.

So, the professor then picked up a box of peanuts and poured them into the jar. He shook the jar lightly. The peanuts, of course, rolled into the open areas between the rocks. The students laughed. He then again

asked his students if the jar was full? Once again, they agreed that it was. The professor then picked up a box of sugar and poured it into the jar. But, of course, the sugar-filled up everything else.

"Now," said the professor, "I want you to recognize that this is your life. The cookies are the important things – your family, partner, health, children – anything that is so important to you that you would be nearly finished if it were lost.

The peanuts are the other things in life that matter but on a smaller scale. The peanuts represent things like your job, your house, your car. The sugar is everything else—the small stuff. If you put the sugar or the peanuts into the jar first, there is no room for the cookies. The same goes for our life. If you spend all your energy and time on the small stuff, material things, you will never have room for the things that are truly most important.

Pay attention to the things that are critical in your life. Play with your children. Take time for your partner. There will always be time to go to work, clean the house, have a dinner party and fix the disposal. Remember to say "I love you"; it can never be said too many times. Take care of the cookies first – the things that matter. Set your priorities. The rest is just peanuts and sugar.

THE BRICK

A young and successful executive was travelling down a neighbourhood street, going a bit too fast in his new Jaguar. He was watching for kids darting out from between parked cars and slowed down when he thought he saw something. As his car passed, no children appeared. Instead, a brick smashed into the Jag's side door! He slammed on the brakes and backed the Jag back to the spot where the brick had been thrown. The angry driver then jumped out of the car, grabbed the nearest kid and pushed him up against a parked car,



shouting, "What was that all about and who are you? Just what the heck are you doing? That's a new car, and that brick you threw will cost a lot of money. Why did you do it?" The young boy was apologetic. "Please, mister, please, I'm sorry, but I didn't know what else to do," He pleaded. "I threw the brick because no one else would stop..." With tears dripping down his face and off his chin, the youth pointed to a spot just around a parked car. "It's my brother," he said. "He rolled off the curb and fell out of his wheelchair, and I can't lift him." Now sobbing, the boy asked the stunned executive, "Would you please help me get him back into his wheelchair? He's hurt, and he's too heavy for me." Moved beyond words, the driver tried to swallow the rapidly swelling lump in his throat. He hurriedly lifted the disabled boy back into the wheelchair, then took out a linen handkerchief and dabbed at the fresh scrapes and cuts. A quick look told him everything was going to be okay. "Thank you, and may God bless you," the grateful

child told the stranger. Too shook up for words, the man watched the boy push his brother, who uses a wheelchair, down the sidewalk toward their home. It was a long, slow walk back to the Jaguar. The damage was very noticeable, but the driver never bothered to repair the dented side door. Instead, he kept the dent there to remind him of this message. "Don't go through life so fast that someone has to throw a brick at you to get your attention!" God whispers in our souls and speaks to our hearts. Sometimes when we don't have time to listen, He has to throw a brick at us. It's our choice to listen or not.

IL SANTO E IL TOPOLINO

Un grande asceta, noto in tutto il mondo per la sua grande santità, abitava in una profonda caverna. Sedeva tutto il giorno immerso in profonda meditazione e il suo pensiero era sempre rivolto al Signore. Ma un giorno, mentre il santo asceta stava meditando, un topolino sbucò dall'ombra e cominciò a rosicchiargli un sandalo. L'eremita aprì gli occhi arrabbiatissimo. «Perché mi disturbi durante la meditazione?». «Ma io ho fame!», piagnucolò il topolino. «Vattene via, topastro della malora! -sbraitò l'asceta -come osi infastidirmi proprio mentre cerco l'unione con Dio?» «Come fai a trovare l'unione con Dio», chiese il topolino, «se non riesci neppure ad andare d'accordo con me?». Non si può presumere di essere amici di Dio senza essere amici



delle creature. Gli uomini sono stati affidati gli uni agli altri. Chi non é capace di amare i propri fratelli non é capace neppure di amare Dio.

TRANSLATION - THE SAINT AND THE MICKEY MOUSE

A great ascetic, known throughout the world for his great holiness, lived in a deep cave. He sat all day immersed in deep meditation,

and his thoughts were always turned to the Lord. But one day, while the holy ascetic was meditating, a mouse came out of the shadows and began to gnaw on his sandal. The hermit opened his eyes in anger. "Why do you disturb me during meditation?" "But I'm hungry!" Whined the little mouse. "Go away, bad mouse of the damn!" - the ascetic barked - how dare you annoy me just as I seek union with God? " "How do you find union with God," asked the mouse, "if you can't even get along with me?" One cannot presume to be friends of God without being friends of creatures. Men were entrusted to each other. Those who are not capable of loving their brothers are not even capable of loving God.

TO JOSHUA - POEM - Ann Martin

Little one so tiny
A flicker of light in time
A creation of beauty
Sent from the Father's hand
How I long to hold you
To touch your small hand
And count your tiny toes
Close to my heart, I want to cuddle you
Rocking you gently to sleep
But timing and distance will not allow
So I send many a whispered prayer
Asking Up to the Father's throne
Him to send angels
To surround and enfold you
Protecting you from all harm
And filling you with our Father's love
From my heart, I make a request
That someday, in this world or the next
My eyes upon you I may lay
To see for me, this extension
Of my family tree
My hopes for you are high
My thoughts of you are precious
May you always have love surrounding you
May your needs always be met
And may your desires be good ones
Bent toward helping your fellow man.



GOD IN OUR MIDST - *By Richard Rohr, O.F.M.*

How many times have we heard or read the words over the years: "God created man in



his image, in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27). We are created in the image of God. In other words, our family of origin is divine. Perhaps we've heard it so often that we don't get the existential shock anymore of what those words tell us. Beginning with the opening lines of the Old Testament, God tells us that we are fundamentally good and that we have a

foundational identity with God. This is nothing less than extraordinary!

To put it another way, God is extending an invitation to us: God seeks to give away God, but it is with great difficulty! You would think the invitation would be readily accepted, but not so. One of the most common responses to God's offering of self is "O, Lord, I am not worthy." It may sound humble, even respectful. But it can also be the way we humans avoid God's call.

Not so the young virgin from Nazareth. When the angel Gabriel announces to Mary that she is to be the Mother of God, this humble teenager from the backwater town of Galilee does not run away from God by protesting unworthiness. No, Mary wants to understand how she can bear a son under such unlikely circumstances. Once she realizes how God plans to work through her, her openness to the invitation is extraordinary. She becomes, for all time, the archetype of receptivity. Mary is the one perfect vessel who knows how to say an unquestioning "yes" to God's invitation and God's gift. Most of us, however, do not accept God's invitations so readily.

Unlike Mary, we question our worthiness, refusing to believe that God is speaking to us. Meanwhile, God is trying to tell us that there is nothing we need to earn, there is nothing we can attain or accomplish, there is nothing to work up to. We've already "got it" by being part of the family of God. Our relationship with God is about awakening rather than accomplishing, realizing rather than performing. Trust is the issue, and that becomes the biblical concept of faith. It's all about the confidence that God could love us enough. It's all about belief in the goodness of God. This sense of being inadequate, of not being enough, is what I prefer to call Original Shame rather than the more familiar Original Sin. As God's creatures, we are a mixed blessing. We are filled with contradictions and mystery, darkness and light. But God, who has taken the risk of creating freedom inside us, is always gracious. God persists in loving us—mixed blessings that we are—in all our unworthiness. Just what is God seeking from us? God isn't looking for servants, for slaves, for workers, for contestants to play the game or jump through the right hoops. God is simply looking for images that can bear the mystery of the glory and the darkness of life. God invites us, his creatures, to a relationship of love. What God wants are icons who will communicate who God is, what God is about.

Once we accept and believe that we are made in God's image, we have found our identity. We don't have to be so preoccupied with roles and titles, with clothing and cars and all the things the world holds up as ideals. We do not need material things to assure us that we are special. We know we are radically significant because of being a son or a daughter of the Lord. We have less need to be visible or showy, make a name for ourselves, and take our place in history. We no longer need our 15 minutes of fame—because we know we're famous! Our family of origin is divine. You don't get much better than that!

IL PETTIROSSO

Nella stalla dove stavano dormendo Giuseppe, Maria e il piccolo Gesù, il fuoco si stava spegnendo. Presto ci furono soltanto alcune braci e alcuni tizzoni ormai spenti. Maria e Giuseppe sentivano freddo, ma erano così stanchi che si limitavano ad agitarsi inquieti nel sonno. Nella stalla c'era un altro ospite: un uccellino marrone; era entrato nella stalla quando la fiamma era ancora viva; aveva visto il piccolo Gesù e i suoi genitori, ed era rimasto tanto contento che non si sarebbe allontanato da lì neppure per tutto l'oro del mondo. Quando anche le ultime braci stavano per spegnersi, pensò al freddo che avrebbe patito il bambino messo a dormire sulla paglia della mangiatoia. Spiccò il volo e si posò su un coccio accanto all'ultima brace. Cominciò a battere le ali facendo aria sui tizzoni perché riprendessero ad ardere. Il piccolo petto bruno dell'uccellino diventò rosso per il calore che proveniva dal fuoco, ma il pettirosso non abbandonò il suo posto. Scintille roventi volarono via dalla brace e gli bruciarono le piume del petto ma egli continuò a battere le ali finché alla fine tutti i tizzoni arsero in una bella fiammata.



Il piccolo cuore del pettirosso si gonfiò di orgoglio e di felicità quando il bambino Gesù sorrise sentendosi avvolto dal calore. Da allora il petto del pettirosso è rimasto rosso, come segno della sua devozione al bambino di Betlemme.

TRANSLATION - The Robin

In the stable where Joseph, Mary and little Jesus were sleeping, the fire was going out. Soon there were only a few embers and a few extinguished embers. Mary and Joseph felt cold, but they were so tired that they merely fidgeted restlessly in their sleep.

There was another guest in the stable: a brown bird; he had entered the stable when the flame was still alive; he had seen little Jesus and his parents, and he had been so happy that he would not have strayed from there even for all the gold in the world. When even the last of the embers were about to go out, he thought of the cold that the child would suffer if he had put to sleep on the straw in the manger. It took off and landed on a shard next to the last ember. It began to flap its wings, blowing air on the embers so that they resumed burning. The little brown breast of the bird turned red with the heat from the fire, but the robin did not leave his place.

Hot sparks flew from the embers and burned the feathers on his chest, but he continued to flap his wings until finally, all the embers burned in a beautiful flame.

The robin's little heart swelled with pride and happiness as the baby Jesus smiled and felt enveloped in warmth. The robin's chest has remained red ever since, as a sign of his devotion to the baby of Bethlehem.

PIECE OF CAKE

Sometimes we wonder, “What did I do to deserve this?” “Why did God allow this to



happen to me?” Here is a little story. A small boy tells his grandmother how everything is going wrong: school, family problems, severe health problems; meanwhile, Grandma is baking a cake. She asks her grandson if he would like a snack, which, of course, he does. “Here, have some cooking oil!” - “Yuck!” says the boy. “How about a couple of raw eggs?” - “Gross, Grandma!” “Would you like some flour, then? Or maybe baking soda?” “Grandma, those are all yucky!”

To which Grandma replies, “Yes, all those things seem bad by themselves, but when they are put together in the right way, they make a delicious cake!”

God may work the same way. Many times we wonder why He would let us go through such bad and difficult times. God knows that when He puts these things all in His order, They always work for good! We have to trust Him, and eventually, they will all make something wonderful. I know that God is crazy about you and me.

He sends us sunrise every morning and friends and people every day.

Whenever we want to talk, He'll listen. He can live anywhere in the universe, and He chooses our hearts. So I hope and wish your days will be peaceful days like a “piece of cake!”

RECALL NOTICE - IMPORTANT

The maker of all human beings recalls all units manufactured, regardless of make or year, due to the serious defect in the primary and central component or heart. This is due to a malfunction in the original prototype units, resulting in reproducing the same defect in all subsequent units. This defect has been technically termed 'Sub sequential Internal S-I-N or L-A-C-K of T-R-U-S-T,' or more commonly known as POOR FAITH, as it is primarily symptom zed by loss of moral judgment. Some other symptoms are:



- (a) Loss of direction
- (b) Dirty vocal emissions
- (c) Amnesia of origin
- (d) Lack of peace and joy

- (e) Selfish or violent behaviour
- (f) Stubbornness of heart
- (g) Depression or confusion in the mental component

However, the manufacturer, who is neither liable nor at fault for this defect, provides factory-authorized repair and service, free of charge, to correct this S-I-N or Lack of Faith defect at numerous locations worldwide. The number to call for the recall station in your area is: 771937 that stands for P-R-A-Y-E-R

WARNING: Continuing to operate the human unit without correction voids the manufacturer's warranty, exposing the owner to dangers and problems too numerous to list. For free emergency service, call 53787 that stands for J-E-S-U-S, for prompt assistance at any worldwide local stations.

RECOGNIZE HIM



The encounter of the risen Lord with the two disciples of Emmaus on the road is told in three stages. He is first a fellow traveller on the road with them: then he explains the scriptures to them: and finally, he goes in with them to sit at their table. These three stages of the story correspond to the vital parts of the Christian life. By reflecting on them, we can highlight a programme for Christian life. Spiritual writers have traditionally pictured the tripod,

which requires the balance of action, study and prayer.

In the first stage of the story, the risen Lord was their fellow traveller on the road. But they did not recognize him. Nor do we, without the light of grace, acknowledge the presence of God in those who travel the road of life with us spouse, children, co-worker, friend or neighbor.

Faith reveals how the other person is a creature of the Father's love, is loved unto the cross by Christ the Son, and is a sanctified temple of the Holy Spirit. When we begin to glimpse the divine worth in other people, we will act in love towards them. Christianity has always been a religion of loving action and always will be.

In the second stage of the journey, he set their hearts on fire and explained the scriptures to them. This corresponds to the second leg of the tripod: study. Adult study of religion has been a serious weakness in our tradition. The Emmaus disciples were downcast and without hope in God or trust in others until the explanation of the scriptures warmed their hearts. Is it any wonder that there is so much sadness today, depression, and inability to cope with life pressures; listening to the news today is always to hear about bad news!

The third leg of the tripod is prayer. The Emmaus story proceeds to a table. And for Luke, tables are his favorite symbolic setting to express the experience of worship. So he went in to stay with them. This particular table depicts the prayer of the Eucharist. 'Stay with us, Lord.' The risen Lord is with us on the road to our Jerusalem. We reach out to him through the people who journey with us. We listen to him through the study of the scriptures. We celebrate his living memory at the Eucharistic table.

THE WEIGHT OF A SNOWFLAKE

Not too long ago, in a place not too far away, a field mouse asked a wise old owl the weight of a snowflake. "Why nothing more than nothing," answered the owl. The mouse went on to tell the owl about the time he was resting on a branch in a fir tree, counting each snowflake until the number was exactly 3 million, 471 thousand, 952. Then with the settling of the very next flake—crack. The branch suddenly snapped, tumbling mouse and snow to the ground. "Wow, such as the weight of nothing," said the mouse. So the next time you think your contributions, your acts of charity, your works for justice, your gifts of love, and your talents are nothing, or that they are small in comparison to those of others, remember that when one is added to another, and then to another and so forth, great things can happen from nothing. Similarly, what seems ordinary can be transformed into something extraordinary with just a little extra nothing. So your mission and mine are to create great things once again out of nothingness and transform the ordinary into the extraordinary.



STARLIGHT OF GOD



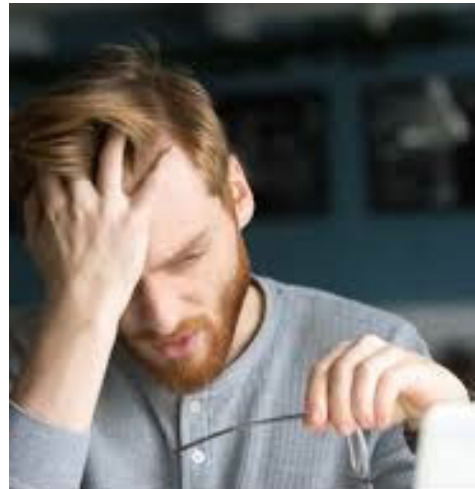
'O Light of God, rising for us at the birth of Jesus, shine powerfully through the darkness of this age and guide us in the ways of wisdom.

O Light of God, shining in the teaching of Jesus, may we grow in faith and experience the delight of walking in divine paths.

O Light of God, implanted in our hearts by the Spirit of Jesus, may we experience what it is to fall on our knees in adoration.'
Amen

THE BURDEN

Samson Mwangi, a little boy who asked for a watch? He asked in the morning, in the afternoon, in the evening, and even in his dreams. Finally, he got one, a beautiful one. He put it on his wrist and thought that he was very happy, and he showed his watch to everybody. But then he walked through the street with his very fancy watch, and a big boy came up to him and tried to steal the watch. Mwangi had to run, and he didn't dare walk through the streets anymore, so he stayed home. Mwangi liked to play football, but now he couldn't because he was afraid his watch might fall on the ground. What a burden that watch became!



Things can become burdens in other ways, too. Advertisements burden us to eat a certain cereal at breakfast, even though it tastes like overcooked old newspapers. Advertisements load us to buy very high, dangerous, and expensive platform toys and other useless things like that. Some of us have a day full of appointments. Others work late at night. Others labor so much that they are never at home. Their children do not recognize them anymore, and they may ask during breakfast, "Who is that man over there?" We may be smarter in listening to the Lord saying: "Throw it off. Do not be burdened like that way, religiously, politically, consumer-wise and economically. Get a free walk with me. Find rest for your soul, trust me."

SPECIAL ALPHABET

Although things are not perfect **B**ecause of trial or pain, **C**ontinue in thanksgiving. **D**o not begin to blame **E**ven when the times are hard, **F**ierce winds are bound to blow, but **G**od is forever able to **H**old on to what you know. **I**magine life without His love **J**oy would cease to **K**eep thanking Him for all the things **L**ove imparts to thee. **M**ove out of 'Camp Complaining.' **N**o weapon that is known **O**n earth can yield the power **P**raise can do more **Q**uit looking at the future with anxiety **R**edeem the time at hand **S**tart every day with worship **T**o "thank" is a good habit

Until we see Him coming **V**ictorious in the sky **W**e'll run the race with
gratitude **X**alting God most high **Y**es, there'll be good times, and yes some
will be bad, but **Z**ion waits in glory where none are ever sad!
"I am too blessed to be stressed!" *The shortest distance between a problem and a
solution is the distance between your knees and the floor.*

THE LIFE TREE - Anonymous

There once was a shining Christmas tree
Standing out where all could see.
Its brilliance captured every eye
And seemed to cheer each passerby.
"The lights are so bright," they would say
And hesitate to walk away.
The tree stood proud ablaze with light
For every light was burning bright.
Then one bulb was heard to say
"I'm tired of burning night and day;
I think I'll just go out and take a rest
For I'm too tired to do my best;
Besides, I am so very small
I doubt if I'd be missed at all."
Then a child lovingly touched the light,
"Look, mother, this one shines so very bright.
I think of all the lights upon the tree
This one looks the best to me."
"Oh my goodness," said the light
"I almost dimmed right out of sight.
I thought perhaps no one would care
If I failed to shine my share."
With that, a glorious brilliance came
For every light had felt the same.
Our life, like this Christmas tree,
With little lights which are you and me,
We each have a space that we must fill
With love, and share and goodwill.
Let's keep our journey ablaze with light,
With testimonies burning bright.
For our life is a living tree
That lights the way to eternity.



THE MAN AND THE FORK



A young man had been diagnosed with a terminal illness and had been given three months to live. So as he was getting his things 'in order,' he contacted his Priest and had him come to his house to discuss certain aspects of his final wishes. He told him which songs he wanted to be sung at the service, what scriptures he would like to read, and what outfit he wanted to be buried in. Everything was in order, and

the Priest was preparing to leave when the young man suddenly remembered something very important to him. 'There's one more thing,' he said excitedly. 'What's that?' came the Priest's reply. 'This is very important,' the young man continued. 'I want to be buried with a fork in my right hand.' The Priest stood looking at the young man, not knowing quite what to say. That surprises you, doesn't it?' the young man asked. 'Well, to be honest, I'm puzzled by request,' said the Priest. The young man explained. 'My grandmother once told me this story, and from that time on, I have always tried to pass along its message to those I love and those who need encouragement. In all my years of attending socials and dinners, I always remember that when the main course dishes were being cleared, someone would inevitably lean over and say, 'Keep your fork. ' It was my favorite part because I knew that something better was coming like chocolate cake or deep-dish apple pie. Something wonderful and special!' So, I want people to see me there in that casket with a fork in my hand, and I want them to wonder, 'What's with the fork?' Then I want you to tell them: 'Keep your fork; the best is yet to come.' The Priest's eyes welled up with tears of joy as he hugged the young man goodbye. He knew this would be one of the last times he would see him before his death. But he also knew that the young man had a better grasp of what heaven would be like. He knew that something better was coming. At the funeral, people were walking by the young man's casket, and they saw the suit he was wearing, and the fork placed in his right hand. Over and over, the Priest heard the question, 'What's with the fork?' And over and over, he smiled. During his message, the Priest told the people of the conversation he had with the young man shortly before he died. He also told them about the fork and about what it symbolized to him. He told the people how he could not stop thinking about the fork and told them that they probably would not stop thinking about it. He was right. So the next time you reach down for your fork, let it remind you, ever so gently, that the best is yet to come.

THE QUESTION

If God is the question, every human been is the answer

If every human been has a question, only God is the answer.

THE SMART CHRISTIAN

There are some people 'who know the price of everything and the value of nothing. A Christian should be the reverse. One who has no interest in the price of anything but knows the importance of everything. The gospel always shocks us: a criminal is praised! The thief does the right thing! The man obsessed with wealth gives it away! The person most deserving of punishment acts in the nick of time to escape disaster!

This parable is then another invitation by Jesus to assess the most important things in our lives - "God" and "Money" - and look beyond today toward the mysterious future. It touches the core of our lives in that it asks us to examine what we do with our wealth and to see that our choices and decisions have a direct relationship to our future: "Make friends with mammon, so that when it is gone, you may be received into eternal homes."

The early Christian community understood that those who shared the bread were obliged to share with the needy members by distributing their wealth. What does one possess that did not come originally from the Creator, who is Father of all? Every gift of the Creator comes with the responsibility of using it and sharing it.

Another point of our Christian life is the proper use of wealth by followers of Jesus. The dishonest steward "made friends with his money"; that is, he used his wealth for others: to relieve hunger, debt, and injustice. This reminds us of Jesus' frequent exhortation to "give alms" and to invite to table those who cannot ask you in return. Luke echoes in various ways the appeal in Mt 25:36 to feed the hungry and clothe the naked. God called the rich man "Fool!" back because he spent his wealth on himself, building bigger barns and making himself richer and "storing up treasure for himself," instead of sharing his extra harvest with the poor local needy. Our life here on earth is like an experience we are here to practice, grow up for real life, eternal life.

Everything we do out of love is important, and also to consider the many possibilities we have every day to bring some love into the lives of others is to be smart in a Christian way and get ready for an eternal home.



NO GAS IN THE TANK

Its extraordinary pace of life characterizes our culture. Many of us feel we are riding in a



blowing wind. It's astonishing how quickly one season passes before we find ourselves in another. If we are like most people, we are always busy, busy, busy. There never seems to be enough time to do what we need to do or what we want to do. As a result of this rapid pace of life, we often feel worn out and

dried up. Millions today complain of "burnout." A good night's sleep, even a couple of weeks of vacation, doesn't seem enough to restore us. A fast-paced life, however, appears here to stay. It's unlikely that demands on our time from career, family, maintenance chores, and the like will be part of our life. Most of us don't have the option to retire early, get away from family responsibilities, pursue a less demanding job, or go off to a retreat. Which leads to a consideration of resources: so what keeps us going? Only a few people are actively engaged in pursuing resources for personal and spiritual renewal. And this will bring nasty consequences in our life. We can own the most luxurious car globally, loaded with maximum horsepower and every premium option that a manufacturer can provide, but if there is no gas in the tank, the car is not going anywhere. **Without "fuel" for an accelerated pace of life, we soon run ourselves into the ground.**

The readings today are telling us about the importance of the Spirit as an amazing resource. Isaiah outlines the work to be done by God's special servant and is assured that the work will be accomplished because "I have put my Spirit upon him." The reading from Acts notes that the mission of Jesus is being performed because "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power." Luke quotes John the Baptist welcoming the coming of Christ and remarking that his followers would receive from him a special baptism "with the Holy Spirit and with fire." If we inquire about the nature of this "Spirit," we are led to conclude from the readings that it is energy. It is energy that keeps us going, and we owe it to ourselves to find plentiful resources for renewing that energy. The gospel suggests that Jesus found an enormous resource for his ministry in the love he felt from God: "Thou art my beloved Son; with thee, I am well pleased." Setting aside a few moments every day to communicate with God can do wonders to uplift our spirits. And there are other resources. Scheduling time to read, meditate, go on retreat, relax with family, have fun with friends can go a long way toward renewing us. Making time for unrushed meals, good nutrition, and regular exercise can significantly restore our energy levels.

Having a full and busy life is not bad as long as we find resources for renewing our energy. Are we aware of our resources? When we feel "on empty," what fills us up?

Make time every day to refuel yourself. Replenish your spirit with worship, prayer, inspiring reading, healthy eating habits, humor, regular exercise, rest, and creative hobbies. Contemplate God's unconditional love for you and cherish the love you receive from a spouse, your family, and friends. Never run out of gas!

THE FARMER DONKEY

One day, a farmer's donkey fell into a well. The animal cried piteously for hours as the farmer tried to figure out a way to get him out. Finally, he decided it was probably impossible, and the animal was old, and the well was dry anyway, so it just wasn't worth it to try and retrieve the donkey. So the farmer asked his neighbours to come over and help him cover up the well. They all grabbed shovels and began to shovel dirt into the well. At first, when the donkey realized what was happening, he



cried horribly. Then, to everyone's amazement, he quieted down and let out some happy brays. A few shovel loads later, the farmer looked down the well to see what was happening and was astonished at what he saw. With every shovel of dirt that hit his back, the donkey was shaking it off and taking a step up. As the farmer's neighbours continued to shovel dirt on top of the animal, he continued to shake it off and take action up. Pretty soon, to everyone's amazement, the donkey stepped up over the edge of the well and trotted off. Will and wisdom consider that the moral of this tale is: Life is going to shovel dirt on you. The trick to getting out of the well is to shake it off and take a step up. Through applying wisdom, every adversity can be turned into a stepping stone. The way to get out of the deepest well is by never giving up but shaking yourself off and taking a step up. The moral of this donkey story is what happens to you isn't nearly as important as how you react to it.

WHAT WOULD YOU DO

What would you like to say to God? Oh Lord, thank you for making me your work of art. Thank you for being a light to me and letting me wake up, knowing I am safe and strong. Good morning Lord, the beginning of this new day is a wonderful one.

What would you do if just for one day you are God?

I would change the world. I would find a cure for all diseases.

I would make everybody wanted, needed and cared for, and I would turn the bad people into good people.

WE ARE ONE - poem



'We Are one little dancing feet full of energy enlivening every particle of the universe, tiny feet skipping, hopping, jumping, strong feet stomping, jiggling, prancing, leaping to a rhythm defies regulation. Airy, bright feet of sailing stars, wrinkled, callused feet of day cliffs, waxy, webbed feet of succulent leaves, fast-flowing feet of winding rivers. Endless feet of unobserved tree roots, soft feet of every form of a

fetus. With an eye as fresh and delicate as birth, sneak a peck as each pulsing part of life comes dancing, whirling, weaving, secret neurons, veiled photons, hidden electrons, whirling, skipping, pirouetting, forming a circle of oneness with each other. If your ear is keen enough, you will hear their insistent, silent symphony, moving freely in chasubles of beauty. Receive the music of their secret unity as they glide within each other's lives, unaware of barriers built by static minds.' - Anonymous

HIS MASTER'S VOICE

One of the earliest phonographs was marketed at the beginning of this century with a picture showing a turntable with its winding handle and large trumpet-like earphone. Sitting in front of the earphone was a little dog, ears pointed, listening intently. The caption underneath reading: His Master's Voice. In this noise-filled world of ours, our greatest concern should be to listen to and follow the voice of our Master. Lazarus did it!



WE HAVE A CHOICE

We have two basic orientations in our lives: we can choose either to walk in the flesh or walk in the spirit. To determine the former way—to walk in the flesh—is to put our trust exclusively in our human power, ignoring the divine source of our being.

To choose the other way—to walk in the spirit—is to put our real hope and trust in the Lord. The first option may provide us with wealth, power, and prestige -A life of wow-s, but it will almost certainly lead to a quite dry and empty life. However, the second

orientation, one that trusts completely in the Lord, will prepare us for God's ultimate blessings. Each day of our lives provides occasions that require us to make choices between these two opposite ways. Like Jesus said to his disciples in the Gospel: "You cannot serve God and wealth."

WHY GO TO CHURCH

A Church goer wrote a letter to the editor of a newspaper and complained that it made no sense to go to church every Sunday. "I've gone for 30 years now," he wrote, "and in that time, I have heard something like 3,000 sermons. But for the life of me, I can't remember a single one of them. So, I think I'm wasting my time, and the pastors are wasting theirs by giving sermons at all." This started a real controversy in the "Letters to the Editor" column, much to the delight of the editor. It went on for weeks until someone wrote this clincher: "I've been married for 30 years now. In that time, my wife has cooked some 32,000 meals. But, I cannot recall the entire menu for a single one of those meals for the life of me. But I know this: they all nourished me and gave me the strength I needed to do my work. If my wife had not given me these meals, I would be physically dead today. Likewise, if I had not gone to church for nourishment, I would be spiritually dead today!" When you are down to nothing, God is up to something! Faith sees the invisible, believes the incredible and receives the impossible! Thank God for our physical and our spiritual nourishment!



THE SEVEN UPs

1. Wake Up - This day is good. "This is the day the Lord hath made; let us rejoice and be glad in it." Psalms 118:24



2. Dress Up - The best way to dress up is to put on a smile. A smile is an inexpensive way to improve your looks. "The Lord does not look the same way at the things man looks. Man looks at outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." 1 Samuel 16:7

3. Shut Up - Say nice things and learn to listen. God gave us two ears and one mouth, so He must have meant for us to do twice as much listening as talking. "He who

guards his lips guards his soul." Proverbs 13:3

4. Stand Up - We all stand up for what we believe. Stand for something, or you will fall for anything. "Let us not be weary in doing good, for at the proper time, we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have an opportunity, let us do good." Galatians 6:9-10

5. Look Up - To the Lord. "I can do everything through Christ who strengthens me." Philippians 4:13

6. Reach Up - For something higher. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not unto your understanding. In all your ways, acknowledge Him, and He will direct your path." Proverbs 3:5-6

7. Lift Up - Your Prayers. "Do not worry about anything; instead, pray about everything." Philippians 4:6

If God had a refrigerator, your picture would be on it. If He had a wallet, your photo would be in it. But, instead, he sends you flowers every spring and a sunrise every morning. Whenever you want to talk, He'll listen. He could live anywhere in the universe, and He chose your heart. He's crazy about you.

PREGHIERA DEL PAGLIACCIO - poesia

"Signore, sono un fallito, però Ti amo, Ti amo, terribilmente, pazzamente, che è l'unica



maniera che ho di amare perché io sono solo un pagliaccio. Sono vari anni che sto nelle Tue mani, presto verrà il giorno in cui volerò da Te. La mia bisaccia è vuota, i miei fiori appassiti e scoloriti, solo il mio cuore è intatto. Mi spaventa la mia povertà però mi consola la Tua tenerezza. Sono davanti a Te come una brocca rotta, però con la mia stessa creta, puoi farne un'altra come Ti piace. Signore, cosa Ti dirò quando mi chiederai conto? Ti dirò che la mia vita, umanamente, è stata forse un fallimento, che ho volato molto basso. Signore, accetta l'offerta di questa

sera. La mia vita, come un flauto, è piena di buchi; ma prendila nelle Tue mani divine. Che la Tua musica passi attraverso di me e sollevi i miei fratelli, tutti, che sia per loro ritmo e melodia, che accompagni il loro camminare, allegria semplice dei loro passi stanchi."

TRANSLATION - poem - CLOWN PRAYER

"Lord, I am a failure, but I love You, I love you, terribly, madly, which is the only way I have to love because I am only a clown. I have been in Your hands for several years, and soon the day will come when I will fly to You. My saddlebag is empty, my flowers withered and discolored, only my heart is intact. My poverty frightens me, but Your

tenderness comforts me. I am in front of You as a broken jug, but you can make another one with my clay as you like. Lord, what will I tell you when you ask me for an account? I will tell you that my life, humanly, has perhaps been a failure, that I have flown very low. Lord, accept the offer of this evening. My life, like a flute, is full of holes; but take it into Your divine hands. May Your music pass through me and lift my brothers, all of them, may it be rhythm and melody for them, that it accompanies their walking, simple joy of their tired steps."

SOME SEED

The press of the crowd having forced Jesus to preach toward shore while standing in a boat, Jesus speaks in parables. One is presented here. A farmer went out to sow seed. Some seed fell on the road, and birds came to eat this up. Some seed fell on rocky ground, sprouting quickly but soon withered in the sun for lack of roots. Still, other seeds fell among thorns, which grew up and choked it. Finally, part of the seed fell upon good soil, where it produced grain up to a hundred-fold. In this crowded scene, the disciples manage to ask Jesus privately why he teaches in parables. He tells them that they are privileged to know mysteries not made available to others. Citing the prophet's indictment of a people who do not use their senses to hear or see (Isaiah 52:15), he assures the disciples that they see and listen to what has been kept hidden from prophets. Then Jesus explains the parable of the sower. The various soils represent different ways in which we might receive the seed that is God's word. The Word is always the same. It always bears within itself the promise of abundant life. Some people have so hardened themselves that the Word merely bounces off their surfaces. Others respond with immediate enthusiasm that wears thin before long. Still, others surround themselves with so much clutter that the Word cannot grow to maturity in them. Finally, some people do what they must to receive the Word, allowing themselves to be tilled, weeded, and watered. The receptive person understands the Word, enables it to grow roots, and organizes his or her priorities so that the Word is far more important than anything else. Where do we stand on our reception of the Word?



QUAL'E' - St. Madre Teresa di Calcutta

Il giorno più bello?
La cosa più facile?

Oggi
Sbagliare



L'Ostacolo più grande?	La paura
Lo sbaglio peggiore?	Arrendersi
La radice di tutti i mali?	L'Egoismo
La distrazione più bella?	Il lavoro
La peggiore sconfitta?	Lo scoraggiamento
I migliori insegnanti?	I bambini
La prima necessità?	Parlare con gli altri
La cosa che più fa felici?	Essere di aiuto agli altri
Il mistero più grande?	La morte
Il peggiore difetto?	Il malumore
La persona più pericolosa?	Il bugiardo
Il sentimento più dannoso?	Il rancore
Il regalo piu' bello?	Il perdono
La strada piu' rapida?	Il cammino giusto
La sensazione piu' gratificante?	La pace interiore
Il gesto piu' efficace?	Il sorriso
Il miglior rimedio?	L'ottimismo
La maggiore soddisfazione?	Il dovere compiuto
La forza piu' potente?	La fede
Le persone piu necessarie?	I genitori
La cosa piu bella di tutte?	L'Amore

TRANSLATION - What is

The most beautiful day? Today / The easiest thing? Make a mistake
 The biggest obstacle? Fear / The worst mistake? Give up
 The root of all evil? Egoism / The best distraction? The work
 The worst defeat? Discouragement / The best teachers? The children
 The first necessity? Talk to others / What makes you happy most? Be of help to others
 The biggest mystery? The death / The worst flaw? The bad mood
 The most dangerous person? The liar / The most harmful feeling? The grudge
 The best gift? Forgiveness / The quickest way? The right path
 The most rewarding feeling? Inner peace / The most effective gesture? The smile
 The best remedy? Optimism / The greatest satisfaction? Duty accomplished
 The most powerful force? Faith / The most needed people? The parents
 The most beautiful thing of all? The love

PANCAKES FOR GOD

Six-year-old Brandon decided one Saturday morning to fix his parent's pancakes. He found a big bowl and spoon, pulled a chair to the counter, opened the cupboard and pulled out the heavy flour canister, spilling it on the floor. He scooped some of the flour into the bowl with his hands, mixed in most of a cup of milk and added some sugar, leaving a floury trail on the floor, which by now had a few tracks left by his kitten. Brandon was covered with flour and getting frustrated. He wanted this to be very good for Mom and Dad, but it was getting very bad. He didn't know what to do next, whether to put it all into the oven or on the stove (and he didn't know how the stove worked)! Suddenly he saw his kitten licking from the bowl of mix and reached to push her away, knocking the egg carton to the floor. Frantically he tried to clean up this monumental mess but slipped on the eggs, getting his pyjamas dirty. And just then, he saw Dad standing at the door. Big crocodile tears welled up in Brandon's eyes. All he wanted to do was something good, but he'd made a terrible mess. He was sure a scolding was coming, maybe even a spanking. But his father just watched him. Then, walking through the chaos, he picked up his crying son, hugged him and loved him, getting his pyjamas dirty in the process. That's how God deals with us. We try to do something good in life, but it turns into a mess. Our marriage gets all sticky, or we insult a friend or can't stand our job, or our health goes sour. Sometimes we just stand there in tears because we can't think of anything else to do. That's when God picks us up and loves us, and forgives us, even though some of our mess gets all over Him. But just because we might mess up, we can't stop trying to "make pancakes" for God or others. Sooner or later, we'll get it right. "Kind words can be short and easy to speak, but their echoes are endless."



THE JOY YOU GIVE

"Somehow, not only for Christmas but all the long year through, the joy that you give to others is the joy that comes back to you. And the more you spend in blessing the poor, the sick, the lonely and sad, the more of your heart's possessing, the more returns to you abundantly shared"

SANTISSIMO PADRE NOSTRO - San Francesco d'Assisi

Che sei nei cieli negli angeli e nei santi, illuminandoli alla conoscenza, perché tu,



Signore, sei luce; infiammaci all'amore, perché tu, Signore, sei amore; ponendo la tua dimora in noi e riempiendoli di beatitudine, perché tu, Signore, sei il sommo bene eterno, dal quale proviene ogni bene e senza il quale non esiste alcun bene. Sia santificato il tuo nome: si faccia luminosa in noi la conoscenza di te, affinché possiamo conoscere l'ampiezza dei tuoi benefici, l'estensione delle tue promesse, la sublimità della tua maestà e la profondità dei tuoi giudizi. Venga il tuo regno: perché tu regni in noi per mezzo

della grazia e ci faccia giungere nel tuo regno, ove la visione di te è senza veli, l'amore di te è perfetto, la comunione di te è beata, il godimento di te senza fine. Sia fatta la tua volontà, come in cielo così in terra: affinché ti amiamo con tutto il cuore sempre pensando a te; con tutta l'anima, sempre desiderando te; con tutta la mente, orientando a te tutte le nostre intenzioni e in ogni cosa cercando il tuo onore; e con tutte le nostre forze, spendendo tutte le energie e sensibilità dell'anima e del corpo a servizio del tuo amore e non per altro; e affinché possiamo amare i nostri prossimi come noi stessi, trascinando tutti con ogni nostro potere al tuo amore, godendo dei beni altrui come dei nostri e nei mali soffrendo insieme con loro e non recando nessuna offesa a nessuno. Il nostro pane quotidiano il tuo Figlio diletto, il Signore nostro Gesù Cristo, dà a noi oggi: in memoria, comprensione e reverenza dell'amore che egli ebbe per noi e di tutto quello che per noi disse, fece e patì. E rimetti a noi i nostri debiti: per la tua ineffabile misericordia, per la potenza della passione del tuo Figlio diletto e per i meriti e l'intercessione della beatissima Vergine e di tutti i tuoi eletti. Come noi li rimettiamo ai nostri debitori: e quello che non sappiamo pienamente perdonare. Tu, Signore, fa' che pienamente perdoniamo, sì che, per amor tuo, amiamo veramente i nemici e devotamente intercediamo presso di te, non rendendo a nessuno male per male e impegnandoci in te ad essere di giovamento a tutti. E non ci indurre in tentazione: nascosta o manifesta, improvvisa o insistente. Ma liberaci dal male passato, presente e futuro.

TRANSLATION - OUR HOLY FATHER

Who art in the heavens in the angels and the saints, enlightening them to knowledge, because you, Lord, are light; inflame us with love, because you, Lord, are love; placing your abode in us and filling them with bliss, because you, Lord, are the supreme eternal good, from which all good comes and without which there is no good. Hallowed be your name: let the knowledge of you be made luminous in us so that we may know the extent of your benefits, the importance of your promises, the sublimity of your majesty and the depth of your judgments. Thy kingdom comes: so that you reign in us through grace and

make us reach your kingdom, where the vision of you is unveiled, the love of you is perfect, the communion of you is blessed, the enjoyment of you endless. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven: so that we love you with all our hearts always thinking of you; with all my soul, always wanting you; with all my mind, directing all our intentions to you and in everything seeking your honor; and with all our strength, spending all the energies and sensitivities of the soul and body in the service of your love and for nothing else; and so that we can love our neighbors as ourselves, dragging everyone with all our power to your love, enjoying the goods of others as ours and suffering together with them and not causing any offence to anyone. Your beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, gives our daily bread to us today: in memory, understanding and reverence of the love he had for us and of all that he said, did and suffered for us. And forgive us our debts: for your ineffable mercy, for the power of the passion of your beloved Son and the merits and intercession of the most blessed Virgin and all your chosen ones how we forgive our debtors: and what we do not know how to forgive fully. You, Lord, grant that we forgive fully so that, for your sake, we truly love our enemies and devoutly intercede with you, repaying no one evil for evil and committing ourselves in you to be of benefit to all. And do not lead us into temptation: hidden or manifest, sudden or insistent. But deliver us from past, present and future evil.



SWEDISH PROVERB FOR VALENTINE

***"Fearless, hope more, eat less, chew more,
cry less, breathe more, talk less, say more,
love more, and all good things will be yours."***

ABSOLUTELY WONDERFUL

As a gentleman was riding a commuter train, he kept repeating as he looked out the window: *"Wonderful, absolutely wonderful."* The commuter train was travelling through various places of various socioeconomic conditions, but the gentleman continued to repeat these words emphatically. Finally, a fellow passenger sitting beside him said,



"Sir, how do you find the view to be wonderful - such impoverishment - the buildings are run down - it all looks so bleak." The gentleman replied to the lady, "You know I was blind for thirty years. But, thanks to the skills of a gifted surgeon and a cornea organ donor, I have been blessed with sight. So I say Madame: It is wonderful absolutely wonderful to see with open eyes."

WHICH WOLF - Author Unknown



An elder Cherokee Native American was teaching his grandchildren about life. He said to them, "A fight is going on inside me; it is a terrible fight, and it is between two wolves." "One wolf represents fear, anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, stubbornness and ego." "The other stands for joy, peace, love, hope, sharing, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, friendship, empathy, generosity, forgiveness, truth, compassion, and faith." "This same fight is going on inside you and inside every other person, too." They thought about it for a minute, and then one child asked his grandfather, "*Which wolf will win?*" The old Cherokee replied, "The one you feed."

WHAT IS FAIR

The story of the workers in the vineyard follows the encounter of Jesus with the rich young man. This context is interesting because Jesus has just told the young man to give up all he has and become a disciple. But, as we know, the man turns away sadly. Then Peter pipes up, observing that the Twelve have done exactly what Jesus asked--given up everything to follow him. "What will we get for that?" Peter asks. Jesus assures him the reward of disciples is great. Then he tells this story of the vineyard workers.

The jaws of the disciples must have dropped. You mean--we can hear them saying to



with you from the start will get the same wages as those who cast their lot with you in the end? Forget sitting at Jesus' right or left--they would end up in the bleachers with everyone else! This is the problem with God. Divine justice sounds unfair by our standards. Our thoughts are not God's thoughts, and our scales weigh things out quite differently. We may never forget that in all situations, God's generosity will surpass all our expectations. We must

remember what Jesus said: "So the last will be first, and the first will be last." And for most of us, needless to say, this is our only hope.

TO KNOW THE VOICE

Writers about the Holy Land have been intrigued by the various calls and whistles that shepherds use and the unfailing response of sheep to them. Several flocks may be intermingled overnight in the same shelter. The morning will bring no problem in sorting out the herds. A shepherd makes his peculiar call, and straightaway his flock, and only his flock, will follow him out. In answer to the call, a leader sheep begins to move, and all the others will follow. Jesus said: 'The sheep that belong to me listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.'



One must periodically ask oneself: whose voice do I follow? Whose standards do I seek to imitate? Loud voices shout at us today from many sources peer pressure, pop culture, advertising, political slogans, too many voices. The way of a disciple is to follow the voice of the Lord. The life of faith is a response to a call. Indeed the whole bible is an ongoing story of call and response. Creation itself can be understood as God calling Adam out of nothingness.

At the beginning of revelation, Abraham heard the call of God to venture forth in confidence. He became the father of many nations. Moses listened to the call, overcame all obstacles and led the people on to freedom. After receiving God's call at the annunciation, Mary set out in faith to visit Elizabeth. And in the life of Jesus, he received his call when the Spirit descended upon him at the Jordan. His journey began when the Spirit led him first into the wilderness and then into the Galilean ministry. Jesus, in turn, called disciples, some of whom he called more intimately, to become shepherds of his flock. The risen Lord shared his Spirit with these disciples and called

them to carry on his mission: 'As the Father sent me, so I am sending you.' They, too, would journey forth in answer to the call.

The harvest is great, and the labourers are few. More than half the world's parishes today have no resident priest: the mission of Jesus needs many more voices. While people are hungry, while the sick need tenderness and caring, the compassion of Jesus needs many more hearts and hands. While fidelity in love is often unknown, the world needs the witness of Christian marriage as a light showing the possibility of unconditional trust. The life of a true disciple is directed by listening to the voice of the God who calls. We need to reflect on our daily involvement to discern how the Lord calls us to respond and represent him. Vocations Sunday is an occasion to reflect on our own experience of the Lord's call: and to encourage others to understand their lives as being open to the call of the risen Lord. Christ is alive and perhaps is calling you and me to be better witnesses of his love and presence in following his voice which calls us the best expression of his company and love.

PLANT A GARDEN

To plant a garden for daily living, plant three rows of peas: Peace of mind, peace of heart, and soul.



Add four rows of squash: Squash gossip, squash indifference, squash grumbling and squash selfishness.

Add four rows of lettuce: Let us be faithful, let us be kind, let us be patient and let us love one another.

And no garden is complete without turnips: Turn up for church, turn up for service and turn up to help those in need.

Finally, a garden requires thyme: Time for each other, time for family, time for

friends and time for prayer. Water freely with patience and cultivate with love; you'll have much fruit in your garden because you reap what you sow.

PRAYER TO LIVE IN THE PRESENT

"Dear Lord,

I spend so much time reliving yesterday or anticipating tomorrow

that I lose sight of the only time that is mine: the present. Remind me that the past with its successes and failures is over. I can make amends where I have hurt others or let them down, but I can not undo what has been done. The future is yet to be had; eagerness or apprehension will not hasten it or postpone it. You give me today, one minute at a time. That's all I have, all that I ever will.

*Please give me the faith that knows each moment contains exactly what is best for me.
Give me the hope that trusts you enough to forget past sins and future trials.
Give me the love that makes each minute of life anticipation of eternity with you. Amen"*



THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY - Rev. William G. Most

Death entered into this world by sin (Romans 5:12). So all will die, with the exception



that those who are alive at the return of Christ at the end, will never die (First Thessalonians 4:13-17). In verse 17: "Then at His return, and after the resurrection of the dead] we the living, will be taken together with them the risen dead in the clouds to meet the Lord" (Cf. 1 Cor 15:51). There will be a resurrection of all, as St. Paul explains in First Corinthians chapter 15. Those who have been faithful to Christ will rise glorious, their bodies transformed on the model of the risen body of Christ, who could travel instantly at will, could ignore closed doors and come through anyway, but yet had real flesh. St. Paul says the risen body is "spiritual " (15:44). It

is still flesh, but the soul completely dominates the flesh to no longer suffering or die. St. Paul insists that because Christ our Head rose, those who are His members must also rise. So, to deny the general resurrection would imply a denial of Christ's resurrection (1 Cor 15:13). After the resurrection, each person will have the same body (except for imperfections) that he had in this life. If this involves having the same matter, this is surely within God's power. No matter what happens to the body after death, He can recall and rebuild the material of the body. Because of metabolism, we now know that every cell is constantly being torn down and rebuilt--in a normal life span, a person has the material for many bodies. Nothing gets destroyed, but all is transformed into something else. We will, of course, be the same persons after the resurrection as we were before the death, but our bodies will be like the ones Jesus had after the Father resurrected him.

SATURATED PRAYER

While Moses asked God for a victory over what he considered evil in this world, his soldiers fought that victory. The widow in the gospel must have asked God that the judge would hear her prayer. Take the student who is praying for success in his examinations. Isn't he praying that he may succeed? Isn't he praying that he may spend the necessary time behind his desk? Isn't he praying that he may use the techniques needed to retain what he studied and reproduce what he knows? Think about a sick person who has to undergo a serious operation. When that



person, the surgeon, the nurses, and the family pray for a successful procedure, isn't that prayer going to be heard through their attention and care? Take that other life issue for which so many people are praying today all over the world: The end of terrorism, disarmament, peace in our world, freedom from viruses. Don't you think that if all the people in the world were to pray seriously for peace, those prayers would be heard? Don't you think that if all people in the world were to pray seriously for an end to terrorism and war, that nonsense would stop? In the gospel, Jesus speaks about persistence and consistency in prayer. He explains how prayer works. He explains how prayer is heard. The widow who wanted justice done to her repeatedly went to the judge who did not want to help her since she was poor and of no interest. She kept coming, once a day, twice a day, three times a day, for one week, a second week, a third week, a fourth week. She filled the mind of that unjust judge with the idea that justice should be done to her. Every day she added a new reason. Every day, she showed a further aspect until that judge's mind was saturated with her thoughts, up to the point that she was the only thing he had in his mind when waking up in the morning, all during the day, and late at night. So he decided to do her the justice she wanted and deserved. It works like that glass of water in which you start to dissolve sugar. You add one spoon of sugar; you stir, the sugar dissolves. You add more sugar, stir, and dissolve--right up to the point that the water gets over-saturated. It cannot hold any more sugar. At that precise point, you only have to add one more grain, the smallest crystal of sugar possible, to have the whole situation change. Suddenly all the sugar crystallizes instantly.

This probably is what will happen if we pray enough for the real issues of our times. If solved, the problems will fulfill many of our prayers for our employment, health, family, food, drink, and career. This is what will happen if we, all of us, raise our hands high enough and long enough, praying for justice, peace, unity, and love.

Praying like that is making our faith grow and be persistent. "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" – I hope so! - You and I may make a difference!

ST. NICHOLAS NOTE

"It is fitting that the feast of St. Nicholas comes at the beginning of Advent and the



beginning of the shopper's season. As the patron saint of shoppers, he proclaims, 'Keep it simple!' Please keep it simple enough to fit in a shoe or a stocking. "One gift that could fit in a shoe, or a stocking hanging on the fireplace, is a note that speaks of one of our most precious gifts, *the gift of time*. Such a St. Nicholas note might read: *'The gift I give to you is half an hour of quality conversation each night right after the*

dishes are done.' Or, *'The gift I give to you is one Saturday a month to be with you and do whatever you want to do.'* According to a recent survey, we can appreciate the value of such a gift if we keep in mind that the average married couple in America has only 30 minutes a week of communication. Outside of exchanges at the dinner table, between parent and child is only 14 minutes. So, as you can see, the possibilities are almost unlimited for these St. Nicholas shoe gifts.

"Come, St. Nicholas, patron of shoppers and gift-seekers, and make Christmas this year fun, creative and love-filled."

HEARING TEST

An elderly gentleman of 85 feared his wife was getting hard of hearing. So one day, he called her doctor to make an appointment to have his wife's hearing checked. The doctor made an appointment for a hearing test in two weeks and gave him a simple preliminary test the husband could do to determine how bad her problem might be. "Here's what you do," said the doctor. "Start about 40 feet away from her, and in a normal conversational speaking tone, see if she hears you. If not, go to 30 feet, then 20 feet, and so on until you get a response." That evening the wife is in the kitchen cooking dinner, and he's in the living room. He says to himself; I'm about 40 feet away; let's see what happens. Then in a normal tone, he asks, "Honey, what's for supper?" No response. So the husband moved to the other end of the room, about 30 feet from his wife and repeats, "Honey, what's for supper?" Still no response. Next, he moved into the dining room, where he is about 20 feet from his wife and asks, "Honey, what's for supper?" Again he gets no response. So he walks up



to the kitchen door, only 10 feet away. "Honey, what's for supper?" Again there is no response. So he walks right up behind her. "Honey, what's for supper?" She turns and says, "*Damn it, Earl, for the fifth time, we going to have chicken!*"

STARVING OF LOVE



A behaviour scientist called James Dawson experimented with a particularly voracious fish called a wall-eyed pike. In his glass aquarium, he fed the pike with some little minnows. In a few seconds, the pike had savagely devoured the lot. Then he placed a glass panel in the aquarium and threw in some minnows on the far side. The pike sprang into action but smashed into the glass panel and hurt itself. It came forward again only to be hurt again. Each time it advanced with increasing caution. Eventually, Dawson took out the board. The minnows swam around the pike, but it made no move to devour them. Going after the minnows were now associated with hurt and failure. Eventually, the pike died of starvation

while the food was there to be taken. We meet many people who are starving of love because their life story tells only of hurt and failure. The same happens in our faith life, love of God. It is there all around us, but we cannot come forward to receive its nourishment because of all the injury in our memory. It is the famine for love, starving of love.

MISSING MEMBERS - Luke 15,1-32

Churches keep no files on their missing members, but by all accounts, they are numerous, particularly in recent times. There is a steady flow of people who walk away from God's house and never come back. Their problem, it appears, is not with God but more often with the company they keep. Too many scribes and Pharisees sometimes are there who complain that Jesus 'welcomes sinners and eats with them'. Baptized but non-practicing is the new term coined to describe them. In time some of them return to the church, but probably far less than is generally claimed. Mercifully, most return to God in heaven where we are told 'there is more rejoicing over one repentant sinner than over ninety-nine virtuous men who do not need repentance. How much am I able to forgive and forget?



MY HANDS



'Hands are the heart's landscape.' As Karol Wojtyla - St John Paul II said, we use our imagination, watching the hands of the people here, revealing their inner attitudes.' Have a look at your hands for a moment. Cruel hands in one of the gospel stories roughly drag the woman and throw her into the center. Her trembling hands vainly attempt to cover up her shame and keep a shred of dignity. 'Rabbi - master,' they shouted, and their hands are gesturing like a pleading advocate, though they cannot altogether mask the hypocrisy

of their appeal to him. Then fingers of criticism stab the air like darts in the direction of the accused woman. 'This woman' as if she had no name, no right to the person.

The pointing fingers of condemnation then rise upright and wag forth and back with indignation 'adulteress!' Fingers lock savagely, and the good hand is clenched into an angry fist. 'She should be put to death by stoning!'

Stones and hands are now frantic claws that rake the ground and dig. Those hands are ready for action and waiting for the word. 'What do you say?'

How relaxed are the hands of Jesus? No pointing, not anger. Was he writing their sins? Or engaging in a little act of distraction just playing with dust? In the beginning, it was the dust of creation. Then the water came from the skies and mixed with the dust to form the clay, and He made us according to his image (Gen:1-2)

That one relaxed hand gave her a ray of unexpected hope. A hand not dealing with a death sentence. A hand of compassion, playing in the dust of creation, restoring the dead to life. 'Go away, and don't sin anymore.'

Wisely did David say: 'Let us rather fall into the hand of God, since his mercy is great, and not into the hands of men.' (2 Sam. 24:14)

'Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit,' Jesus said on the Cross.

Now, as people of the Family of God, we still live by the laws written on stone and worship in a great temple of rock, often a symbol of our hearts. Like the people in the gospel, our best choice is to go away and stop any desire for murder.

Like the people at the time of Ezekiel 6:25, we may be happy to hear again the words of the Lord: '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.'

Perhaps it is now the time to undergo this kind of surgery!

NEWBORN CHILD - Joyce Rupp

Each time a child is born, particularly after a grandparent dies, we sense that life goes on. All is not lost. There is a deep resilience stronger than the grasp of death. The babe is lifted high toward the welcoming stars, a young life with just a kernel of ripening, a new resident in the heart of existence. All those gathered proclaim: "Behold, behold, this newborn one! Let us nurture and keep alive the sacred mystery of hope hallowed in this young one's heart. We sow our dreams of a future in this freshly birthed being. We give our loving promise to guide and guard this child. Always we will remember our oneness in the dancing cosmos." The stars say not a word. Instead, they bow in reverence to this creature, whose adult hands will hold power enough to blow up a planet or seed a waiting garden. The stars smile, for they too have hope, and night turns toward the dawn.



A PEACE PRAYER

Loving Father, Creator of heaven and earth and life-giver, we pray for the power to be gentle, the strength to be forgiving, the patience to be understanding, and the endurance to accept the consequences of holding to what we believe, sustain, and give life. May we trust the power of good to overcome evil and the power of love to overcome hatred. We pray for the vision to see and the faith to believe in a world able to be free from violence, a new world where fear shall no longer lead humanity to commit injustice, nor selfishness make peoples bring suffering to others.



Please help us to devote our whole life and thoughts, and energy to the task of making peace, always hoping for the inspiration and the power to fulfill the destiny we and all humanity were created for. Let this prayer become an inspiring reality also for our children and children of our children. For yours, o Lord is the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen

PRAYER TO MARY



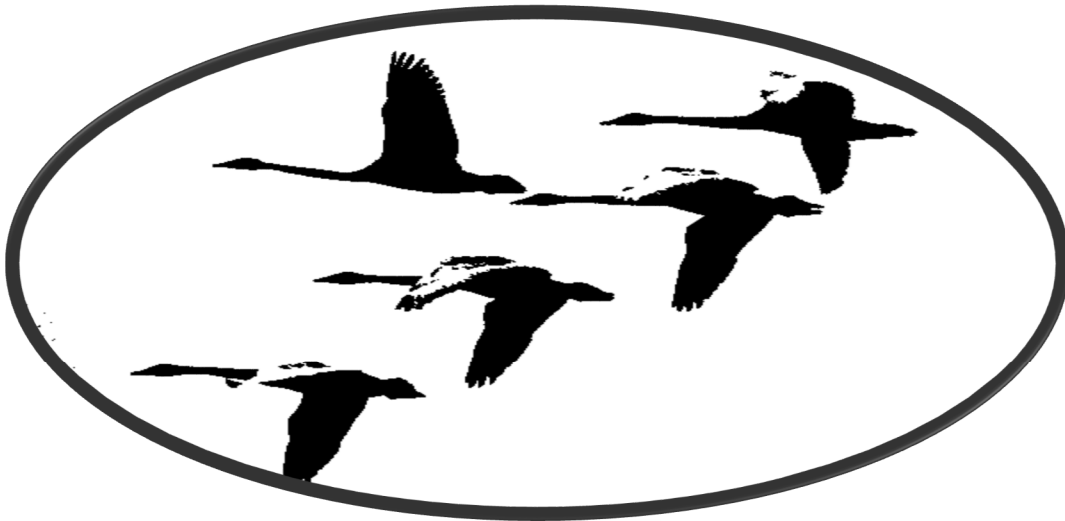
Mary, our mother,
Teach us to follow your way in responding to God.
Lead us to be sensitive to God's initiative just as you were.
Help us to accept the difficulties of life that follow on meeting with God.
Give us the courage to measure everything in the light of God's mind.
Guide us to offer our very emptiness as an invitation to God to work in us.
Prepare us to receive the word of God and give it flesh in our every thought, words and actions. Amen

ONE STRONG STAR - Joyce Rupp

I stand gazing at the cold winter sky, thirty minutes after midnight, *the first day of the new year*. What I see catches my heart and draws me into profound hope. One strong star sings a silent melody in the black winter sky, illuminating the heavily clouded heights with a powerful, assuring presence. I hear it calling to every human soul whose life yearns for something more. One strong star sends a brave song to those who doubt their courage. It shines for the soreness of the planet and for all who die daily in their coffins of discouragement. I stand gazing at that single star resonating with the shining message: none of us need to doubt our ability to survive. Hope comes in little ways - it only takes one bright star, one faithful friend, one wisp of inspiration, one touch of creation's beauty, one deep sip of love to keep the illumination alive in us. So, in the snow-laden clouds of the first day of the new year, I bow to the heavens and turn homeward, grateful for the quiet in my heart and the singing of a lone star sending strength to every corner of the cosmos.



ONE BODY



Spiritual masters of all times, writers and thinkers, have been great promoters of “unity consciousness,” that we may be aware of how connected we always are.

Science demonstrates that everything in the universe, from the tiniest of atoms to the largest galaxies, exists in a dynamic relationship. Therefore, it is important for our spiritual development and the well-being of society that we appreciate that we are never alone, working exclusively on our agendas with only ourselves in mind and that we maintain a vision of the whole of which we are apart.

We have a responsibility, not only to ourselves but to the whole body of humanity.

We are our brother’s keeper; society’s problems are our problems; global issues are our issues. If and when the whole functions better, we benefit.

As Paul notes, “If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.” We each reap the benefits only if we are all united. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul is well aware of the dangers of exaggerated individualism, especially among Christian believers. Paul is a passionate promoter of the unity of the body of Christ and knows how easily that unity can be fragmented. He fully acknowledges our individuality—“For the body does not consist of one member but many”—but reminds us that we are members of one body, sharing “one Spirit.” What Paul is encouraging here is an attitude that respects the whole as well as the parts. Individualism has its limits. We may be different, with different gifts and destinies to pursue, but we are one. Just as our body has many parts, each functioning according to its design, it is still one body. Should part of the body go off on its own, as is the case with cancer, the whole body will suffer.

SOPHIA GOT LOST - Joyce Rupp



One day as I concluded a talk on Sophia, a woman asked me: "You told us how Sophia got lost. Now tell us: How do we find her?" I suggested that she begin by reading, studying, and meditating on the Sophia passages in the Bible. She takes a metaphor or a name for Sophia in the verses, breathes it in and out, letting it permeate her whole being. "Most essential of all," I responded, "is to ask Sophia to reveal herself to you." We need to look for Sophia. By her very nature, she is relational, present in the

world, interacting among people and ordinary human lives. By desiring to know her, her radiance will permeate our lives by opening our minds and hearts.

Such happened recently with a concerned mother who was having much difficulty with her two young daughters, who were sulky and disruptive. One day after work, she sat alone in her car, feeling sad and troubled. She called on Sophia for guidance and insight, praying quietly for some time. Then she drove home, sat down with her daughters and together, they came to some much-needed household compromises that made all of them more peaceful and happy. Prayer is vital in discovering this treasure of Sophia. This helps me the most in finding her and establishing a faithful relationship. I believe it is time for Christians to recover the richness of this heritage of the divine feminine that has been lost. We need Sophia now more than ever. We need her compassionate presence and her ability to help us see clearly amid a world that cries out for wisdom and love. Sophia will not fail us. She will always draw us deeper and further, for there is no end to the mystery of her life with us. "The first person did not finish discovering about her nor has the most recent tracked her down; for her thoughts are wider than the seas, and her designs more profound than the abyss" (Sir. 24:28-29).

LET HIM - Ann Martin

When life seems it's darkest - And doom seems to oppress - When nothing looks good -
And hope is so distant - Go down on your knees - And pour out your fears - The Lord is
always listening - Ever ready to come to your aid - He knows about your suffering - He
understands your pain - He sees all your tears - He, too, has experienced pain - He has
suffered beyond measure - He has cried so many tears - But He also knows - How to
repair your broken heart - How to bind up your wounds - He can return your hope - And
bring fresh joy to your heart - Just turn to Him - Lay it all in His hands - He has the
solution - He has a plan - He will see you through - Both the thick and the thin - He

loves you so much - And has wondrous things - Stored up just for you - So let Him fight the battles - Let Him lighten your soul - Let Him do it - While you rest in His peace.

NEW SCHOOL PRAYER - Anonymous



Now I sit me down in school - Where praying is against the rule. For this great nation under God - Finds mention of Him very odd. If Scripture now the class recites - It violates the Bill of Rights. And anytime my head I bow - Becomes a Federal matter now. Our hair can be purple, orange or green - That's no offence; it's a freedom scene. The law is specific, and the law is precise - Prayers spoken aloud are a serious vice. For praying in a public hall - Might offend someone with no faith at all. In silence alone, we must meditate - the state prohibits God's name.

We're allowed to cuss and dress like freaks - And pierce our noses, tongues and cheeks - They've outlawed guns, but FIRST the Bible - To quote the Good Book makes me liable. It's 'inappropriate' to teach right from wrong - We're

taught that such judgments do not belong. We can get our condoms and birth controls - Study witchcraft, vampires and totem poles. But the Ten Commandments are not allowed; No word of God must reach this crowd. It's scary here. I must confess - When chaos reigns, the school's a mess. So, Lord, this silent plea I make: Should I be shot; My soul, please take! Amen

PRECIOUS TEN PEARLS - Someone has written these beautiful words. They are like the COMMANDMENTS to follow in life all the time.

1. Prayer is not a “**spare wheel**” that you pull out when in trouble, but it is a “**steering wheel**” that directs the right path throughout.
2. Why is a car’s **windshield** so large and the rearview mirror so small? Our past is not as important as our future. So, Look Ahead and Move On.
3. Friendship is like a book. It takes a few seconds to burn, but it takes years to write.
4. All things in life are temporary. If going well, enjoy it; it will not last forever. If going wrong, don’t worry; they can’t last long either.

5. Old Friends are Gold! New Friends are Diamond! If you get a Diamond, don't forget the Gold! Because to hold a Diamond, you always need a Base of Gold!

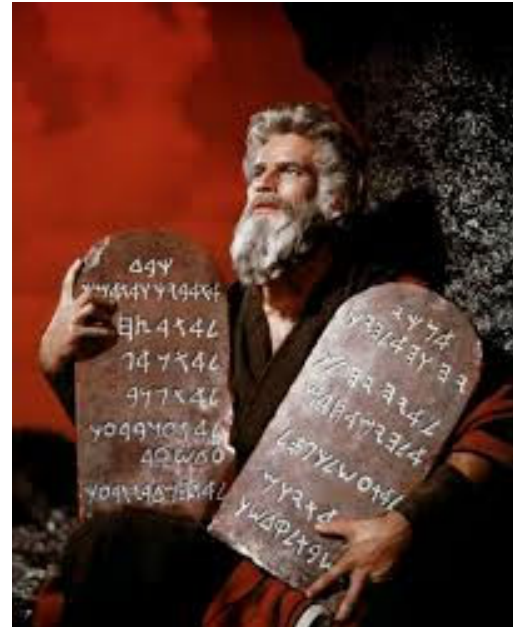
6. Often, when we lose hope and think this is the end, God smiles from above and says, "Relax, sweetheart, it's just a bend, not the end!"

7. When God solves your problems, you have faith in His abilities; when God doesn't solve your problems, He has confidence in your abilities.

8. A blind person asked St. Anthony, "**Can there be anything worse than losing eyesight?**" He replied: "**Yes, losing your vision!**"

9. When you pray for others, God listens to you and blesses them, and sometimes, when you are safe and happy, remember that someone has prayed for you.

10. Worrying does not take away tomorrow's troubles; it takes away today's peace. So, be at peace today.



PROUD TO BE YOUR FRIEND

I've learned. That life is like a roll of toilet paper. The closer it gets to the end, the faster it goes. I've learned. That we should be glad, God doesn't give us everything we ask for. I've learned that money doesn't buy class. I've learned that it's those small daily happenings that make life so spectacular. I've learned that under everyone's hard shell is someone who wants to be appreciated and loved. I've learned that the Lord didn't do it all in one day. What makes me think I can! I've learned that ignoring the facts does not change the facts. I've learned. When you plan to get even with someone, you are only letting that person continue to hurt you. I've learned. That love, not time, heals all wounds. I've learned that the easiest way for me to grow as a person is to surround myself with people smarter than I am. I've learned that everyone you meet deserves to be greeted with a smile. I've learned that no one is perfect until you fall in love with them. I've learned that life is tough, but I'm tougher. I've learned that opportunities are never lost; someone will take the ones you miss. I've learned that when you harbor bitterness, happiness will dock elsewhere. I've learned that I wish I could have told my Dad that I love him one more time before he passed away. I've learned that one should keep his words soft and tender because tomorrow, he may have to eat them. I've learned that I can't choose how I feel, but I can choose what I do about it. I've learned that when your newly born child holds your little finger in his little fist, that you're hooked for life. I've learned that everyone wants to live on top of the mountain, but all the happiness and growth occur while you're climbing it. I've learned that it is best to advise in only two circumstances; when requested and a life-threatening situation. I've learned that a smile is an inexpensive way to improve your looks.

You are my friend, and I am honored.



WILDERNESS SCHOOL OF WISDOM



In the school of wilderness, Jesus grew in understanding the experience of the human condition and limitations. The first lesson was about bread and hunger, or, on a larger scale, about our appetites and how we respond to them. Bread is the symbol of all that is needed for a healthy life. People live on bread in its many forms: but not on bread alone. The struggle is eternal to balance attending to the body's appetites and the call of the spiritual life. *“Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes*

from the mouth of God.”

The second lesson comes from the suggestion of a sensational stunt. Right in the center of religion, the temple area, to perform this amazing jump. Sensational religion! The power of showing off. We find that today's human mind struggles to come to any point of depth because of the distracting attention demanded by all that is superficial and sensational, like the newest or latest, or most fashionable, the number one best-seller and the Oscar winner. When the mind is preoccupied with such superficialities, it isn't easy to reach any depth in one's inner life. *“Again, it is written – Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”* The third temptation is to settle for a kingdom here and now. To do so, one must sell one's soul to Satan, the sinister power. Diabolical means

separation of energies - division. To acquire the demonic kingdom, one must grow hard-hearted, tough-minded, prepared to trample competitors underfoot.

Forty days of solitude and fasting brought Jesus to a clear perception of the struggles, camouflages and temptations that are part of every human heart. We need not set out for a distant Sahara to find the desert experience. The desert comes to us in any knowledge of our lives. The desert of these forty days of lent could become a school of the Spirit for the soul's education. *"Worship the Lord your God and serve only him."*

It is an invitation for all of us to grow in our relationship with God during this time of life, and in doing so, real wisdom will be ours.

THE TABLECLOTH

The new pastor and his wife, newly assigned to their first ministry to reopen a church in suburban Brooklyn, arrived in early October excited about their opportunities. When they saw their church, it was very run down and needed much work. They set a goal to have everything done in time to have their first service on Christmas Eve. They worked hard, repairing pews, plastering walls, painting, etc., and on December 18 were ahead of schedule and just about finished. On December 19, a terrible tempest - a driving rainstorm hit the area and lasted for two days. On the 21st, the pastor went over to the church. His heart sank when he saw that the roof had leaked, causing a large area of plaster about 20 feet by 8 feet to fall off the front wall of the sanctuary just behind the pulpit, beginning about head high.



The pastor cleaned up the mess on the floor, and not knowing what else to do but postpone the Christmas Eve service, and he headed home. On the way, he noticed that a local business was having a flea market-type sale for charity, so he stopped in. One item was a beautiful, handmade, ivory-colored, crocheted tablecloth with exquisite work, fine colors and a Cross embroidered right in the centre. It was just the right size to cover up the hole in the front wall. He bought it and headed back to the church. By this time, it had started to snow. An older woman running from the opposite direction was trying to catch the bus, but she missed it. The pastor invited her to wait in the warm church for the next bus 45 minutes later. She sat in a pew and paid no attention to the pastor while he got a ladder, hangers, etc., to put up the tablecloth as a wall tapestry. The pastor could hardly believe how beautiful it looked, and it covered up the entire problem area. Then he noticed the woman walking down the centre aisle. Her face was like a sheet.

"Pastor," she asked, "where did you get that tablecloth?" The pastor explained. The



woman asked him to check the lower right corner to see if the initials EBG were crocheted into it there. They were. These were the woman's initials, and she had made this tablecloth 35 years before in Austria. The woman could hardly believe it as the pastor told how he had just gotten the Tablecloth. The woman explained that before the war, she and her husband were well-to-do people in Austria. When the Nazis came, she was forced to leave. Her husband was going to

follow her the next week. She was captured, sent to prison and never saw her husband or her home again. The pastor wanted to give her the tablecloth, but she made the pastor keep it for the church. The pastor insisted on driving her home; that was the least he could do. She lived on the other side of Staten Island and was only in Brooklyn for the day for a housecleaning job. What a wonderful service they had on Christmas Eve. The church was almost full. The music and the spirit were great. At the end of the service, the pastor and his wife greeted everyone at the door, and many said they would return. One older man, whom the pastor recognized from the neighbourhood, continued to sit in one of the pews and stare, and the pastor wondered why he wasn't leaving. The man asked him where he got the tablecloth on the front wall because it was identical to what his wife had made years ago when they lived in Austria before the war and how there could be two tablecloths so much alike. He told the pastor how the Nazis came, how he forced his wife to flee for her safety and was supposed to follow her, but he was arrested and imprisoned. He never saw his wife or his home again all the 35 years in between. The pastor asked him if he would allow him to take him for a little ride. They drove to Staten Island and to the same house where the pastor had taken the woman three days earlier. He helped the man climb the three flights of stairs to the woman's apartment, knocked on the door, and he saw the greatest Christmas reunion he could ever imagine. - Pastor Rob Reid says that God does not work in mysterious ways!

WE PRAY FOR ALL - *Cyprian of Carthage, 3rd century.*

When we pray, we are not to pray for ourselves alone. We do not say, "My Father, who art in heaven" or, "Give me this day my daily bread"; We do not ask for our trespasses alone to be forgiven; And when we pray that we may be delivered from evil, we are not praying only for ourselves either. Our prayer is for the general good, for the common good. When we pray, we do not pray for ourselves alone; we pray for all God's people because they and we are one. -

FIND THE WILL

'The one who does the will of my Father in heaven will enter the kingdom of God.'

Concluding the sermon on the mount, Jesus distinguishes between mere religious observance and genuine faith. Not everyone who cries "Lord, Lord," or who says any of the other proper words will enter the kingdom of God. If all we do is follow the rules and forms of religion, we go nowhere. Real faith puts Jesus' words into practice.



Jesus paints two images to bring the difference into focus. First, putting his words into practice is

like building a house on a solid foundation. Second, such a house can withstand any storm.

But failure to enact Jesus' words is like building a house on sand. The first storm collapses the house. At the conclusion and climax of Matthew's masterful summary of Jesus' teaching, Jesus seems to echo the great ancient teacher, Moses. Take these words into your heart and soul. Make them your own, and live by them. We are blessed if we do so. We are light for the world, salt of the earth.

Don't just obey the commandments, but live them completely. Think, talk, and act with the purest of motivations. Don't worry, do not be afraid for God provides. And always do the will of the Father. All the law and the prophecy that Jesus came not to abolish but to fulfill is the one we all know already. "Love one another as I have loved you! In doing so, everybody will know that you are my disciples!"

THE LAUNDRY

A young couple moves into a new neighbourhood. The next morning, while eating breakfast, the young woman sees her neighbor hanging the wash outside. "That laundry is not very clean," she said. "She doesn't know how to wash correctly. Perhaps she needs better laundry soap." Her husband looked on but remained silent. Every time her neighbor would hang her wash to dry, the young woman would make the same comments. Finally, about one month later, the woman was surprised to see a nice clean wash on the line and said to her husband: "Look, she has learned how to wash correctly. I wonder who taught her this." The husband said, "I got up early this morning and cleaned our windows." *And so it is with life. What we see when watching others depends on the purity of the window through which we look! May this story help us to see better, to love and see better in the heart of others.*

ESSERE VENTO NEL VENTO - from Sr. Cecilia



Lo Spirito Santo non è innocuo: non lascia le cose come sono. Se si capisce chi davvero è e non gli si oppone resistenza, Egli ci investe col suo vento gagliardo (At 2,2) e ci riscalda con le sue lingue di fuoco (At 2,3). Se non gli si oppone resistenza, sottolineiamo, perché è vero che lo Spirito ci inonda a grandi scrosci con la sua grazia; è vero che sparge senza misura i suoi don, ma a tanta abbondanza noi possiamo rispondere col conta-

gocce. Per dirla in termini automobilistici, lo Spirito Santo è il pilota, però l'auto la mettiamo noi. Lo Spirito Santo è il vento, ma la vela la srotoliamo noi. A questo punto diventa chiaro che non si può parlare dello Spirito Santo limitandoci a descrivere chi è: il discorso sullo Spirito deve concludersi col farci prendere coscienza della responsabilità che abbiamo nei suoi confronti.

Camminare secondo lo Spirito vuoi dire, intanto, essere vento nel Vento. Essere vento, cioè non ristagnare, non bloccarsi, ma muovere, ma alzarsi: non si dice, forse, «si alza» il vento? La vita è moto; la stasi è morte. Dunque, essere vento significa, semplicemente, essere vivi! Il che non è poco, non è tanto: è tutto! Lo scrittore russo *Aleksandr Puskin* racconta questa favola: Una volta l'aquila domandò al corvo: «Dimmi, corvo, perché tu vivi a questo mondo trecento anni e noi ne viviamo in tutto solo trentatré?». «Perché, rispose il corvo, tu bevi il sangue vivo, e io mi nutro di carogne». L'aquila pensò: «Proviamo anche noi a nutrirci nello stesso modo!». Dunque l'aquila e il corvo si lanciarono. Videro un cavallo morto e si calarono. Il corvo si mise a beccare di gusto. L'aquila beccò una volta, beccò un'altra volta, ma poi disse al corvo: «No, fratello corvo, piuttosto che nutrirti trecento anni di carogne, meglio è bere una volta sola il sangue vivo, e poi sia quel che Dio vuole». È meglio vivere pochi anni di ardore e di slancio, che cibarsi per lunghi anni di carognate. Ecco cosa significa essere vento: sollevarsi da terra, librarsi in alto. È evidente che per essere vento occorre gettar via la ferraglia che ci appesantisce: la ferraglia delle cose, la ferraglia dell'avere, della pigrizia, della superbia. Lo Spirito Santo ama le persone libere e lievi.

Camminare nello Spirito vuoi dire, inoltre, non inscatolare Dio. Già sappiamo che lo Spirito Santo agisce in tutti. È come la pioggia di primavera che, pur essendo identica su ogni campo, fa crescere una varietà straordinaria di fiori: «A ciascuno è data una manifestazione particolare dello Spirito per l'utilità comune» (1 Cor 12,7). Lo Spirito Santo ama la libertà: «Dove c'è lo Spirito del Signore c'è libertà» (2 Cor 3,17). Una prova? Basta pensare a quanto è vario il campionario della santità. Nei più di mille santi e beati proclamati dal solo papa Giovanni Paolo II trovi ogni categoria di persone: dai medici (Giuseppe Moscati) agli schiavi (Bakita); dalle madri di famiglia (Gianna Beretta Molla) agli universitari (Pier Giorgio Frassati); dagli spiriti mistici e intraprendenti (Escrivà de Balaguer) fino agli zingari (Giménez Malia Ceferino)... È una chiara prova

della libertà dello Spirito Santo! È, di conseguenza, anche un chiaro invito a darci una mentalità aperta.

La mentalità aperta è generosa: vede il bene ovunque. La mentalità aperta è umile: confronta il proprio punto di vista con quello degli altri. La mentalità aperta è dinamica: cerca sempre vie nuove per risolvere i problemi, per dire in modo rinnovato verità antiche. La mentalità aperta è intelligente: l'intelligenza è come il paracadute: funziona bene solo se è aperta. In breve la mentalità aperta è così positiva e saggia che non può che essere la mentalità dello Spirito e di tutti coloro che vogliono camminare con lui.



Camminare con lo Spirito vuoi dire, inoltre, assolvere a tre impegni con la luce. *Primo impegno: non temerla!* — È vero che i bambini hanno paura del buio, ma gli adulti, talora, hanno paura della luce. Il che è ben peggio! Chi sta con lo Spirito accetta il fuoco che illumina, accetta la verità, sempre, anche quando è scomoda e va pagata. Un giorno uno sceicco arabo chiamò uno dei suoi consiglieri perché gli raccontasse cosa si diceva di lui nel paese. Il consigliere rispose: «Signore, cosa preferite? Una risposta che vi piaccia o la verità?». «La verità, la verità! ». «Ve la dirò, signore, se in cambio promettete di darmi il premio che vi chiederò». «Va bene, chiedi quello che vuoi, perché la verità non ha prezzo». «Mi basta un premio molto piccolo, disse allora il consigliere: datemi un cavallo per fuggire non appena avrò finito di dirvi la verità».

Secondo impegno: non tradirla! — Il bene è bene; il male è male. Il profeta Isaia ammoniva: «Guai a coloro che chiamano bene il male e male il bene, che cambiano le tenebre in luce e la luce in tenebre» (Is 5,20). Non si può «fare i furbi» con i Valori. Tra l'essere furbi e l'essere lestofanti non vi è che un millimetro di distanza. Non si può fare i furbi con la luce, con la Verità. Eppure le menzogne si sono sempre più aggiornate, raffinate e infiltrate ovunque. *Cesare Marchi* ha tentato di farne un elenco, del tutto provvisorio. Eccolo: «Bugia pietosa: quella del medico. Bugia spavalda: quella dei cacciatori. Bugia editoriale: centomila copie vendute. Bugia cimiteriale: padre esemplare, cittadino integerrimo. Teatrale: a grande richiesta. Telefonica: attenda un attimo. Turistica: tutto compreso». A queste menzogne si possono aggiungere: «La mia modesta persona». «Giornale indipendente». «Giovane, onesto, di buona famiglia, cerca». Dove è andata a finire la luce? Vieni Spirito Santo a ricordarci quello che un giorno tu stesso hai detto: «Meglio un povero che un bugiardo» (Prv 19,22). Sì, davvero «meglio», perché la menzogna guasta tutto. *Anton Cechov* diceva: «Il pidocchio divora le piante, la ruggine i metalli, la menzogna l'anima». *Gandhi* aggiungeva: «Come una goccia di veleno rovina un intero secchio di latte, anche la più piccola mancanza di verità rovina l'uomo». Pensare di poter camminare con lo Spirito Santo e mentire, è una grande illusione.

Terzo impegno: distribuirla! — Distribuire la luce che si possiede. Non importa che sia



quella del sole come era, ad esempio, quella di san Giuseppe Benedetto Cottolengo, definito in modo molto indovinato da *Giovanni Barra* «mercante di sole»; non importa che sia quella di un faro; può bastare un fiammifero, purché sia acceso. Un esempio. Centomila persone sono radunate nel Coliseum di Los Angeles, in California. All'improvviso *Padre Keller*, che parlava a quell'immensa assemblea si interruppe: «Non abbiate timore; adesso si spegneranno le luci». Piombò

l'oscurità sullo stadio; ma attraverso gli altoparlanti la voce di Padre Keller continuò: «Io accenderò un fiammifero. Tutti quelli che lo vedono brillare, dicano semplicemente "Sì"». Appena quel puntino di fuoco si accese nel buio, tutta la folla gridò: «Sì!». Padre Keller seguì a spiegare: «Ecco: una qualsiasi azione di bontà può brillare in un cuore di tenebre. Per quanto piccola, non passa mai nascosta agli occhi di Dio. Ma voi potete fare di più. Tutti quelli che hanno un fiammifero l'accendano!». Di colpo l'oscurità venne rotta da uno sconfinato tremolio di piccoli fuochi. Se molti uomini di poco conto, in luoghi di poco conto, facessero cose di poco conto, la faccia della terra potrebbe brillare! (tratto da *Il gigante invisibile* di Pino Pellegrino)

TRANSLATION - BEING THE WIND IN THE WIND - from Sr. Cecilia

The Holy Spirit is not harmless: He does not leave things as they are. If one understands who he is and does not resist resistance, he invests us with his strong wind (Acts 2,2) and warms us with his tongues of fire (Acts 2,3). If no resistance is opposed to him, let us emphasize because it is true that the Spirit floods us in great downpours with his grace; he indeed scatters his don without measure, but to such abundance, we can respond with the drop counter. To put it in automotive terms, the Holy Spirit is the driver, but we put the car on us. The Holy Spirit is the wind, but we unroll the sail. At this point, it becomes clear that we cannot speak of the Holy Spirit by limiting ourselves to describing who he is: the discourse on the Spirit must end with making us aware of the responsibility we have towards him.



In the meantime, walking according to the Spirit means being the wind in the wind. To be wind, that is, not to stagnate, not to freeze, but to move, but to rise: is it not perhaps said that the wind "rises"? Life is motion; stasis is death. So, being wind simply means being alive! Which is not a little, it is not a lot: that's all! The Russian writer Aleksandr Puskin tells this fable: Once the eagle asked the crow: "Tell me, crow, why do you live in this world for three hundred years and we only live thirty-three of it?" "Because replied the crow, you drink live blood, and I feed on carrion." The eagle thought: "Let's try to feed ourselves in the same way!" So the eagle and the crow launched themselves. They saw a dead carcass range and went down. The crow began to peck with gusto. The eagle pecked once, bit again, but then said to the crow: "No, brother crow, rather than feeding three hundred years of carrion, it is better to drink live blood only once, and then whatever God wills.» It is better to live a few years of ardor and enthusiasm than to drink for long years of idleness. This is what it means to be wind: to rise from the ground, to free oneself at the top. It is clear that to be wind; it is necessary to throw away the iron that weighs us down: the iron of things, the iron of having, laziness, and pride. The Holy Spirit loves free and light people.

Walking in the Spirit also means no boxing God. We already know that the Holy Spirit acts in everyone. It is like the spring rain, which, although identical in every field, makes an extraordinary variety of flowers grow: "Each one has given a particular manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Cor 12,7). Moreover, the Holy Spirit loves freedom: "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Cor 3:17). A test? Just think of how varied the sample of holiness is. In the more than a thousand saints and



blessed proclaimed by Pope John Paul II alone, you will find every category of people: from doctors (Giuseppe Moscati) to slaves (Bakita); from mothers (Gianna Beretta Molla) to university students (Pier Giorgio Frassati); from the mystical and enterprising spirits (Escrivà de Balaguer) to the gypsies (Giménez Malia Ceferino) It is clear proof of the freedom of the Holy Spirit! Consequently, it is also a clear invitation to give us an open mind.

The open mind is generous: it sees the good everywhere. The open mind is humble: compare your point of view with that of others. The open mind is dynamic:

it always seeks new ways to solve problems, to say ancient truths in a renewed way. Finally, the open mind is intelligent: intelligence is like a parachute: it only works well if it is genuine. In short, the open mind is so positive and wise that it can only be the Spirit's mindset and all those who want to walk with him.

Walking with the Spirit also means fulfilling three commitments with the light.

First commitment: do not fear it! - Children are indeed afraid of the dark, but adults are sometimes afraid of the light, which is far worse! Whoever is with the Spirit accepts the fire that illuminates, agrees with the truth, always, even when it is uncomfortable and must be paid for. One day an Arab sheikh called one of his advisers to tell him what was being said about him in the country. The councillor replied, "Sir, what do you prefer?" An answer that you like or the truth? ». "The truth, the truth! ". "I'll tell you, sir, if you promise to give me the prize, I'll ask of you in return." "Okay, ask what you want because the truth is priceless." "A very small prize is enough for me, then said the councillor: give me a horse to run away as soon as I finish telling you the truth."



Second commitment: do not betray the truth! - Good is good; evil is evil. The prophet Isaiah admonished: "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who change darkness into light and light into darkness" (Is 5:20). You can't "get smart" with Values. Between being smart and being swindlers, there is only a millimetre of distance. You cannot be smart with the light, with the Truth. Yet, the lies have become more and more updated, refined and infiltrated everywhere. Cesare Marchi has tried to make a list, which is entirely provisional. Here it is: «Pitiful lie: that of the doctor. Proud lie: that of hunters. Editorial lie: one hundred thousand copies sold. Cemetery lie: exemplary father, upright citizen. Theatrical: in great demand. Phonic lie: wait a moment. Tourist: all-inclusive.» To these lies, we can add: "My humble person." "Independent newspaper." «Young, honest, from a good family, look for.» Where did the light go? Come Holy Spirit to remind us of what one day you said: "Better a poor man than a liar" (Prv 19:22). Yes, really "better" because lying spoils everything. Anton Chekhov said: "The louse devours plants, rust the metals, lies the soul." Gandhi added: "As a drop of poison ruins an entire bucket of milk, even the slightest lack of truth ruins man." Thinking that you can walk with the Holy Spirit and lie is a great illusion.

Third commitment: distribute it! Distribute the light you have. It does not matter that it is that of the sun as it was, for example, that of St. Giuseppe Benedetto Cottolengo, defined in a very guessed way by Giovanni Barra "merchant of the sun"; it does not matter that it is that of a lighthouse; a match can be enough, as long as it is lit. An example. One hundred thousand people are gathered in the Coliseum in Los Angeles, California. Suddenly Father Keller, who spoke to that immense assembly, interrupted: "Do not be afraid; now the lights will go out." Darkness fell on the stadium, but through the loudspeakers, Father Keller's voice continued: «I'll light a match. All those who see it shine say "Yes." As soon as that dot of fire lit up in the dark, the whole crowd shouted: "Yes!" Father Keller went on to explain: "Here: any deed of goodness can shine in the heart of darkness. However small, it never goes hidden from God's eyes. But you can do more. All those who have a match light it! ». Suddenly the darkness was broken by a

boundless flickering of small fires. If many small men, in small places, did small things, the face of the earth could shine! - Taken from "The Invisible Giant" by Pino Pellegrino.

ST. THERESE PRAYER

*May today there be peace within you.
May you trust God that you are exactly
where you are meant to be.
May you not forget the so many
possibilities that are born of faith.
May you use the gifts that you have
received and share the love and
blessings that have been given to you.
May you be content knowing that you are
a child of God.*

*"The Eucharist": Let this presence settle
into your bones, and allow*

your soul the freedom to sing, dance, praise and love.

This gift is there for everyone because, in His love, we grow and are meant to be.



HOLINESS WHERE WE ARE - Pope Francis

Pope Francis has said: "To be holy does not require being a bishop, a priest or



*religious. We are frequently tempted to
think that holiness is only for those who
can withdraw from ordinary affairs to
spend much time in prayer. That is not
the case. We are all called to be holy
by living our lives with love and by
bearing witness in everything we do,
wherever we find ourselves. Are you
called to the consecrated life? Be holy
by living out your commitment with joy.*

*Are you married? Be holy by loving and
caring for your husband or wife as Christ does for the Church. Do you work for a living?
Be holy by laboring with integrity and skill in the service of your brothers and sisters. Are
you a parent or grandparent? Be holy by patiently teaching the little ones how to follow
Jesus. Are you in a position of authority? Be holy by working for the common good and
renouncing personal gain."*

THE COSMIC DANCE – Joyce

An invitation to Experience Our Oneness

At this moment, I lean back in memory and catch a hint of what I knew long ago when I was a small child living on a farm in rural Iowa. It is the melody of the cosmic dance playing in my soul since those early days, a song that has never stopped singing in me. As I grew older, eventually, I made some startling discoveries, three of them, and they have changed my life forever. The first of these is the amazing revelation that I am made up of stardust, that every part and



parcel of who I am materially was once a piece of a star shining in the heavens. The second discovery is that the air I breathe is the air that has circled the globe and been drawn in and out by people, creatures and vegetation in lands and seas far away. But the most astounding discovery that both awakened and affirmed my early childhood awareness is the fact that I am part of a vast and marvellous dance that goes on unceasingly at every moment in the most minute particles of the universe. This experience is about my experience of being with the cosmic dance, how I have fallen in love with Earth and how I have been enthralled with the mystery of the Moon, Sun, and the Galaxies. I have learned a lot from this great attraction to creation. My three discoveries have changed the way I look at everything and the way I relate to everyone. First, I see that I am not a separate entity, and never could be, because the tiny particles of my body are dancing, intermingling with the particles of life around me. It is not a matter of "them" and "me," whether this is people, rocks, sea anemones, clouds, or rabbits on the run. Rather, it is a matter of "us." I hope that this reflection on the cosmic dance will be a source of soul-tending and planet-tending for you. May it draw you to fuller enjoyment and appreciation of the mystery of life and its inherent goodness in yourself and all of "creation."

THE SEVEN SORROWS

The First Sorrow: The Prophecy of Simeon - The Foretelling of Sorrow.

The Second Sorrow: The Flight into Egypt - Fleeing From Destruction.



The Third Sorrow: The Loss of Christ Jesus in the Temple - Searching For Our Lost Treasures.

The Fourth Sorrow: Mary Meets Jesus Carrying His Cross - Meeting Our Pain.

The Fifth Sorrow: Mary Stands Beneath the Cross of Jesus - Standing Beneath the Cross.

The Sixth Sorrow: Mary Receives the Body of Jesus - Embracing Our Loss.

The Seventh Sorrow: Jesus Is Laid in the Tomb - Laying Our Sorrows to Rest.

THE PERFECT CUP - Joyce Rupp

It is time for me to see the flaws of myself and stop being alarmed - it is time for me to halt my drive for perfection and to accept my blemishes - it is time for me to receive slowly evolving growth, the kind that comes in God's own good time and pays no heed to my panicky pushing - it is time for me to embrace my humanness to love my incompleteness - it is time for me to cherish the unwanted to welcome the unknown to treasure - the disappointed - if I wait to be perfect before I love myself, I will always be unsatisfied and ungrateful - if I wait until all the flaws, chips, and cracks disappear, I will be the cup that stands on the shelf and is never used.

THE WAY WITH GOD

Wishing to encourage her young son's progress on the piano, a mother took the small boy to a Paderewski concert. After they were seated, the mother spotted a friend in the audience and walked down the aisle to greet her. Seizing the opportunity to explore the wonders of the concert hall, the little boy rose and eventually explored his way through a door marked "no admittance." However, when the house lights dimmed and the concert was about to begin, the mother returned to her seat and discovered that her son was missing. Suddenly, the curtains parted, and spotlights focused on the impressive Steinway on stage. In horror, the mother saw her little boy sitting at the



keyboard, innocently picking out "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star." At that moment, the great piano master made his entrance, quickly moved to the piano, and whispered in the boy's ear, "Don't quit. Keep playing." Then leaning over, Paderewski reached down with his left hand and began filling in a bass part. Soon his right arm reached around to the other side of the child, adding a running obligato. Together, the old master and the young novice transformed a frightening situation into a wonderfully creative experience. The audience was mesmerized. That's the way it is with God. What we can accomplish on our own is hardly noteworthy. We try our best, but the results aren't exactly graceful flowing music. But with the hand of the Master, our life's work truly can be beautiful. Next time you set out to accomplish great feats, listen carefully. You can hear the voice of the Master, whispering in your ear, "Don't quit." "Keep playing." Feel His loving arms around you. Know that His strong hands are playing the concerto of your life. Remember, God doesn't call the equipped. He equips the call. And He'll always be there to love and guide you on to great things.

SMILE INSIDE - Joyce Rupp

"As anyone who has read any of her...books knows, Joyce Rupp is a gifted teacher who



makes everyday spirituality dramatic, palpable, and transformative. Rupp is a connoisseur of attentiveness, imagination, and prayer. For example, she draws a link between a cup brimming over and the following practice: 'As I pour liquids of any kind into a cup, a glass or a bowl, I will smile inside as I remember how generous God is in filling my life with blessings.'" "I have found the cup to be a powerful teacher for my inner life. The ordinariness of the cup reminds me that

my transformation occurs in the common crevices of each day. The mug is an apt image for the inner process of growth. The cup has been a reminder of my spiritual thirst. As I've held it, filled it, drunk from it, emptied it and washed it, I've learned that it is through my ordinary human experiences that my thirst for God is quenched. I see life with its emptiness, fullness, brokenness, flaws, and blessings in the cup.

A cup is a container for holding something. Whatever it contains has to eventually be emptied so that something more can be put into it. I have learned that I cannot always expect my life to be always full. There has to be some emptying, some pouring out, if I am to make room for the new. The spiritual journey is like that--a constant process of emptying and filling, of giving and receiving, of accepting and letting go.

The cup has taught me many valuable lessons for my spiritual growth. First, I have learned that my life holds stale things that need to be discarded and that sometimes my life feels as wounded as a broken cup. Second, I have learned that I have flaws, chips, and stains, just as any well-used cup may have, but that these markings of a well-

travelled life need not prevent me from being a valuable gift for others. Third, I have learned that the contents of my life are meant to be constantly given and shared in a generous gesture of compassion, just as the main purpose of a cup is to have its contents given away. Finally, I have especially learned gratitude for all those moments when the unexpected has transformed my life into a great cup of blessings. "The main purpose of a cup is to have its contents given away." "The spiritual life is a journey toward becoming whole, a day-to-day movement of continually growing into the person we are meant to be."



After reading these short miscellaneous reflections, I feel happy to consider how wonderful is and could be the journey of our life if we allow the grace and the blessing of God to work wonders in our life. I wish you all the best and many special blessings.

A decorative flourish consisting of a series of elegant, sweeping curves that start from the left and extend towards the right, ending in a long, thin tail.

Fr. Luigi Filippini

with the cooperation of

Rick Skribka - Rev. Pasquale Coccimiglio - Rosa Carina

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