



Day 8 (Week 1, Day 7): Week 1 – Putting It All Together.

This brings us to the end of Week 1. Today we return to our motivation – why are we doing this – and by “this” we mean *everything*.

Let's begin with opening prayer:

Come Holy Spirit, make of me a fitting dwelling place for the Lord.

Congratulations for coming through Week 1 and thank you for your commitment to this retreat. Once again, your time on this retreat is a gift to God. Whatever else transpires, however good or bad any given session is, you're offering your time, your mind and your heart to God through your dedication to this retreat and that's love. My first spiritual director would ask the rhetorical question - “What do people do when they are falling in love?” And then answer it – “they *waste* time together.” So even if some days have felt wasted, be assured that it's a productive waste of time.

But this brings us to today's question, why are we making this retreat? Or any retreat? And why, particularly, do we want to grow in mental prayer? Yes, we received an answer to the Why? of mental prayer in Day 2 – because it is the example and teaching of Jesus and it's how we grow in relationship with God. And that is true. Today we want to dig deeper and more personally into Why, including our own personal why. And, now that we're a week in, what is on your heart that you desire from this retreat?

First up - Why does it have to be this complicated and hard?

Why is this painted as difficult and dangerous. Why is our spiritual journey being equated with a jungle? Didn't Jesus make salvation easier than that?

It's true that in theory we could just get baptized, strictly live out the 10 C's and slide into Heaven.

But Jesus wants more for us. He invites us into the fullness of life, not life for non-concentrators. He wants us to rise above our fallen nature and live out beatitude, as envisioned for us in the Sermon on the Mount.

But why does it have to be hard? Don't we just have to accept Jesus as our savior, and we're done? Yes. And no.

Jesus does say salvation is simple. He says His burden is easy and His yoke is light. Jesus' way is simple. But He also says whoever would be His disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross. That instruction is also simple. But it isn't easy. It's actually very hard, at first. It's hard because the fall substituted our love for God and greatness with a lust for comfort and ease. And the world and satan continuously assault us with temptations that play to that lust. Venerable Fulton Sheen, writing in the 1960's and 1970's, commented even then how hard it was to be a Christian. It used to be easy, because all of society was Christian. But it had become hard because all of society was now pushing against Christianity. That was 50 years ago, and we know which direction society has slid since.

So, our way to Heaven is simple - model ourselves after Jesus. Doing it is very hard. It requires grace. And for grace to work, we must cooperate with it. As you know, God doesn't magically change us. If we pray for patience God doesn't whack us with a patience stick, instead he sends us opportunities to grow in patience – if we accept those opportunities we are cooperating with God's grace and we will grow in patience.

And so it is with the mystic path and mental prayer. It's a coin with two sides, one side is simple and rewarding, the other side is not easy. Point yourself to the mountain top and start walking in that direction. Simple. Watch out for that python! Hey, is that quicksand? Not easy.

Motivation #1: Think of Heaven

Heaven is a fine motivator. We're doing this so that we'll all be in Heaven someday. When it comes to Heaven, what we know best is that we know very little. Eye has not seen. Few theologians take a stab at Heaven, and when they do it is much more a poke than a stab. Because Heaven is too wonderful. The moment we try to put it into human words and images we so diminish it that we can take no more of it. Here's C.S. Lewis on the matter (*Collected Letters*):

No, I don't wish I knew Heaven was like the picture in my Great Divorce, because, if we knew that, we should know it was no better. The good things even of this world are far too good ever to be reached by imagination. Even the common orange, you know: no one could have imagined it before he tasted it. How much less Heaven

Be that as it may, Venerable Fulton Sheen gives a glimpse of Heaven by contrasting it with our earthly constraints of time and space. How many times have you experienced something wonderful and thought, "I wish so-and-so were here to share this"? Heaven is eternal. It exists outside of time and space. In Heaven all things simply *are*. In Heaven there will be no more wanting for that missing person; we will be able to celebrate Christmas and Easter at the same time with all our loved ones. Or something like that. Or nothing like that. Eye has not seen.

But here's another Heavenly motivator – our degree of blessedness in Heaven depends on what we do here on earth.

From theologian Frank Sheed (*Map of Life*): "Not all souls will be equal in heaven. The soul grows naturally by development of the intellect and will. Supernaturally – which is what matters here – it grows by the possession of the Supernatural Life. But this it must receive upon earth, for after death it cannot merit. Therefore, souls united with God have not all reach the same degree of development when they come to die. But, greater or smaller, all souls are functioning in heaven with intellect and will at their highest intensity upon their highest object: therefore, every soul will know perfect happiness."

St. Therese of Lisieux (actually her sister speaking to her) explains this with a thimble analogy. If we fill both a large tumbler and a small thimble with water, they're both completely full. Just so, whether our soul is the size of a tumbler or a thimble when we get to Heaven, our soul will be completely filled with God. But the tumbler-sized soul will be able to receive more of God – more of God's truth, beauty and goodness. Fortunately for us, all sin – particularly envy, in this case – is vanquished in Heaven. So even if we have but a thimble we won't be jealous of the tumblers; we'll all be rejoicing in the glory of God and that our cup is full. But, why not aspire to a tumbler? Mental prayer and growth of our interior life, by which we sanctify our active life, is the path to a tumbler-sized soul.

Still, Heaven can seem far off – far off in time, far off in space, far off emotionally and at times far off spiritually. Let's look even closer to home.

Motivation #2: Why We Believe in God in This Life

Our life of mental prayer isn't simply for entry into Heaven, it's for happiness in this life. It is extremely helpful, therefore, to have spiritual pearls that remind us of why we're doing this in the here and now. Why do we believe in God at all? And why do we believe that God specifically loves us?

Here are some of my pearls. I go back to these routinely to renew in my soul the reality of God. Your pearls, of course, are probably much different. And if you haven't had the opportunity to search for the pearls that you will carry in your pocket, then that is the purpose of today.

The Martyrdom of the Apostles. This is the classic argument for Jesus divinity and Pentecost. What else would drive 12 men to pour out every ounce of their life for a single cause – the spread of the Gospel. And 11 of them to give their lives in brutal martyrdom. Here's Chuck Colson on this point –

I know the resurrection is a fact, and Watergate proved it to me. How? Because 12 men testified they had seen Jesus raised from the dead, then they proclaimed that truth for 40 years, never once denying it. Every one was beaten, tortured, stoned and put in prison. They would not have endured that if it weren't true. Watergate embroiled 12 of the most powerful men in the world – and they couldn't keep a lie for three weeks. You're telling me 12 apostles could keep a lie for 40 years? Absolutely impossible.

Historical Coincidences. We noted the significance of mountains at the outset of this retreat. Abraham is called to sacrifice Isaac on Mount Moriah and it's generally understood that would be the same location where Christ was crucified approximately 2,000 years later.

Jesus' Brilliance. He always has the perfect response. Many fine authors create many fine characters who can outwit their opponents. But none can hold a candle to Christ. If Christ had not live and the Gospels not been written down, no author would have ever invented anything remotely close.

Science. Time and again science confirms the greatness of creation and the supernatural realm. No sooner do scientists thing they're about to get to the big answer then they find there's a deeper underlying mystery. This happened with the creation of the universe. This happened with the discovery of dark matter. This is happening with the study of human consciousness.

Personal Revelation. My wife and I come from the same small town (population less than 4,000 souls when we lived there). But we didn't meet there. We had to move to a large city a 1,000 miles away and move into the same highrise at the same time so that we were both at the welcome Christmas party. Top that.

Personal Revelation #2. Here's a picture where our Heavenly Father made himself more real to me than I am to myself. Below that is a picture where I had a similar experience of Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

Many Other Personal Miracles. Too many to list here, but many small miracles of providence – divine appointments, events so statistically unlikely that they had to have been divinely orchestrated.

I return to these pearls of “personal revelation” time and again. When I’m feeling dry and need to stir up my spirit and conviction, these are my aids. First and foremost, there is calling to Jesus, as well as our blessed mother and my guardian angel. And then I turn to these pearls.

What are your pearls?

A Note About Flowery Talk

We often speak in absolutes in this retreat, statements like “We do this out of love for God”. This is a stylistic necessity, if we’re qualifying every statement it will be clumsy in the extreme, “We do this out of love for God, even though it may be imperfect love and maybe we don’t even feel love at all, but we don’t trust our emotions, so just trust that your desire to love God is love because love is a decision....”

So we speak in absolutes. Certainly you have doubts. I have doubts. Everyone has doubts. “Lord I believe, help me in my unbelief!”

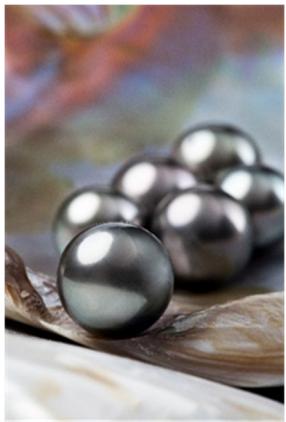
Maybe you’re carrying a cross of *great* doubt, great dryness. Maybe no “pearls” come to mind for you, or it doesn’t seem like they’re overly convincing. Then please hear this – something moved you to take this retreat. Even if it was pure curiosity – *something, or someone, moved your curiosity* to attend a retreat focused on God. Receive this as God’s message that He loves you so very deeply. Receive this moment, right here and now, as one of your pearls. Hear the words of Hosea speaking to you: “Long have I waited for this moment.”

Motivation #3: Pure Love of God

Ultimately our highest motivation is to do everything for love of God. Everything else is an imperfect motivation, because it’s based on seeking our own satisfaction – “I’ll be so happy in Heaven”. But that’s OK – we’re still desiring the right things, even if for imperfect motives. Over time our love will be purified and what we will desire most is God for His sake, and in that all other desires will be satisfied.

Think of a point in time in your life when you were with someone in true agony – a child, a parent, perhaps a complete stranger – but someone in true agony or distress. In that moment your heart went out to them and you acted. You did all you could for them in that moment, even if simply to comfort them. In that moment there was no thought of self – “oh, I hope people are watching, seeing how kind and helpful I am!” – there was none of that. In that brief moment all of your will, all of your energy was focused on that one person. That is what we’re growing into with God. You may well be on your way to that point. In time, maybe not until we’re in Heaven, we’ll all reach a point where we’re consumed with the things of God; loving God and neighbor. That type of love is our destiny.

It’s worth traveling through a jungle.



Pearls from Day 8: Week 1 – Putting It All Together

Why does it have to be complicated and Hard?

Jesus' plan for salvation is simple. Follow Him. But doing it is not easy. It is very difficult to be a Christian and grow in holiness. We can only do so with God's grace. But we have to cooperate with that grace for it to be active in our life, and that takes a well-developed interior life.

Motivation #1: Think of Heaven

When it comes to Heaven, what we know best is that we know very little. Eye has not seen. Few theologians take a stab at Heaven, and when they do it is much more a poke than a stab. Because Heaven is too wonderful. The moment we try to put it into human words and images we so diminish it that we can take no more of it. But, Heaven is an extremely worthy subject of our meditation.

Another aspect of Heaven that should motivate us is that our degree of blessedness in Heaven depends on what we do here on earth. St. Terese of Lisieux employs the comparison of two souls – one is a thimble the other a large tumbler. In Heaven both will be filled, but the tumbler will be able to receive more of God's truth, goodness and beauty. We should aspire to the tumbler. Our interior life is how we get there.

Motivation #2: Think of Why You Believe

What are your *pearls*? What are the great truths that you come back to, as a way to stir up your faith? If you don't have any, now's a time to reflect on them.

Motivation #3: Pure Love of God

Ultimately our highest motivation is to do everything for love of God. Everything else is an imperfect motivation, because it's based on seeking our own satisfaction – "I'll be so happy in Heaven". But that's OK – we're still desiring the right things, even if for imperfect motives. Over time our love will be purified and what we will desire most is God for His sake, and in that all other desires will be satisfied.