



## RETREAT OPENING

**T**HIS RETREAT ORIGINATED as a series of Interior Life podcast episodes to help people grapple with the effects of the coronavirus pandemonium and cultural upheaval. But the principles of that original series apply to all of life's challenges. And so, we have created for you this completely new virtual retreat to inoculate you against fear, anger, resentment, and discouragement.

But first we need to cover some basics so that you are able to make this most of this five-day journey with Christ.

### **You ARE ON RETREAT**

You are entering into a five-day retreat to grow in faith, to grow in knowledge of God and to grow in self-knowledge so that, like St. Peter, you can focus on Christ and rise above the churning and chaotic events of life.

For the next five days you are on a retreat. This means you are separating yourself from the world. I know you have all your worldly responsibilities and activities and concerns, but amidst all of that you have decided to set apart this daily time for God, which is a wonderful thing. You will get the most out of this retreat if you endeavor to separate from the noise of the world (internet, TV, social media, etc)

and spend daily time in silent meditation. If you're not certain how to do that, we have a simple starting point for you in the postscript to today's session.

## **LANDSCAPE OF THIS RETREAT**

This retreat is eminently practical. Each day will provide specific, actionable, and effective steps you can take to grow your interior life and become immune to worries, wounds and trials.

If need be, you can spread out the days of the retreat, for example over five weeks (one day of retreat per week); but you want to make sure you are able to maintain the continuity of the retreat – each day is meant to build on the day prior.

Today we look at why we should have complete trust in God. Tomorrow we look at our fallen nature and how it leads us astray and thwarts our trust in God. On Days 3 and 4 we look at specific ways that, by God's grace, we can transform our fallen nature so that we are no longer fighting with ourselves. On Day 5 we will look at additional approaches to immunize ourselves against worries, wounds and trials and the importance of Christian meditation to remain immunized and continue a lifelong journey with Christ.

## **YOU, AT THE END OF THIS RETREAT**

The intended outcome of this retreat is for you to be spiritually prepared to respond to whatever trials and hardships may come your way. You will be able to brush aside baseless worries and fears and put aside regrets and resentment. When legitimate trials come your way you will be inoculated, so to speak, against despair and armed with spiritual resources to find your strength in God; to find meaning in the midst of hardship and to hold on to hope for the future.

## You, **RIGHT** Now

If you are currently in a time of relative ease and tranquility, then this is the perfect time to prepare and store up for the unknown future. Trials are an inevitable part of life.

If, on the other hand, you are in the midst of navigating hardship, first and foremost our hearts go out to you – we perpetually hold participants of this retreat in our prayers for you to prevail through God’s strength. If you feel like you are barely hanging on, then please trust that Jesus brought you to this retreat – to ease your burden. The principles in this retreat will help you hold fast to God, to experience His consolation, and to trust and follow Him along your path forward.

However, if you feel as if you are at the end of your rope, you should also seek support from a wise spiritual guide (pray for guidance from the Holy Spirit and perhaps start by seeking someone through your Church) and also consider seeking a professional, faith-based counselor.

With those opening comments, the one thing that is certain is that God has specific and personal grace that He desires just for you from this retreat. So, let us now turn to Day 1 ...

## DAY 1: “WHO’S IN CHARGE HERE?” LEARNING TO TRUST GOD’S PERFECT PLAN FOR YOUR LIFE



Let’s open with prayer:

*In the name of the Father, of the Son  
and of the Holy Spirit.*

*Lord Jesus Christ, only say the word  
and my soul shall be healed.*

*Amen.*

**W**ELCOME TO DAY 1 of our Spiritual Super Vaccination retreat! Our opening prayer, derived from Matthew 8:8, reminds us of two important realities - true healing comes from Christ, and the most important healing is the healing of our soul.

This retreat is a Spiritual Super Vaccination™ against the ill effects of worries, wounds and trials. These are, first and foremost, spiritual illnesses – which is why we seek a spiritual vaccination. If they take hold of us, they will quickly metastasize and attack our emotional and physical health, which is why we need to heal them at the source.

This retreat originated as a series of Interior Life podcast episodes to help people grapple with the effects of the coronavirus pandemonium and cultural upheaval. But the principles of that original series apply to all of life’s challenges. And so, we have created for you this completely new virtual retreat to inoculate you against fear, anger, resentment, and discouragement.

## **WORRIES, WOUNDS AND TRIALS**

In this retreat we'll use the terms "worries", "wounds" and "trials" to capture three distinct experiences, tied to three specific time frames, that work against the life God desires for us:

**Worries:** set in the future and fueled by our imagination – these are anxieties and other distress caused by fear of imagined and potential future events.

**Wounds:** set in our past and fueled by our memories – these are anger, resentment and regret caused by memories of our own failings, setbacks and injuries inflicted by others.

**Trials:** set in the present, these are actual tribulations, challenges, crises and other sources of suffering that, if we're not careful, can lead to doubt in God's goodness.

There will be overlap between these. For example, if we are going in for a serious medical procedure, that is a very real trial. But our imagination will seize on it and create all manner of worries about negative outcomes that may never come to pass. Or, our imagination may exaggerate the memory of a past health problem. Nevertheless, worries, wounds and trials are distinct experiences causing unique interior responses. It is powerful to name and understand them, and in doing so we can overcome them by God's grace.

Note that this retreat does not directly address conditions such as clinical depression and anxiety disorders that may require psychiatric treatment or other professional intervention.

## **FEAR, ANGER, AND DOUBT - THE ENEMIES OF YOUR PEACE AND HAPPINESS IN THE PRESENT**

Our worries for the future cripple us with fear. Our wounds from the past cripple us with anger and resentment. And present trials can cause us to despair – to doubt God's power and goodness.

Now, there are constructive forms of fear and anger. Healthy fear protects us from danger, for example by making us careful when working near a stove top for fear of getting burned. And righteous anger is the only valid response to sin and evil (“hate the sin, love the sinner”).

But there is a great deal of fear in our life that is poisonous, paralyzing, and destructive to our peace and ability to flourish. This is the groundless fear that robs us of our future by binding us with despair and hopelessness.

The archetype of this fear is the great example of Peter the Apostle walking on water. When he looks ahead to Jesus, he walks over the waves. When he looks down at the churning water, he becomes fearful and begins to sink.

In a similar way, anger binds us and distracts us from God. In fact, the first time anger is explicitly mentioned in the bible is when the Lord rejects Cain’s sacrifice and we are told “So Cain was very angry, and his face fell.” (Gen 4:5) Cain looks away from God in anger, just as Peter looked away from Christ in fear.

And the archetype of doubt is demonstrated in Christ’s return to his home village of Nazareth. His family and neighbors did not believe in Him; because of their familiarity with Him they were closed to recognizing the truth that He was the Messiah and “He did not work many mighty deeds there because of their lack of faith.” Everywhere else Jesus performed many, many healings. Certainly there were many in Nazareth that had great need of healing at that very moment, but their doubt closed them off to Jesus’ power. So too, when we doubt in God, we close ourselves from receiving His grace.

A key ingredient in our vaccination is Trust. And that is the focus of this first day of the retreat.

## OUR OPENING QUESTION

“Who’s in charge here?”

Such a common phrase. We hear it on TV, in movies, in our everyday lives. So, Who really is in charge here? You can guess where this is going, but it merits reflection because some aspects of the answer aren’t so obvious.

The basic answer, of course - “God is.” God is always in charge. God is in charge and has a plan for good for you.

*For I know well the plans I have in mind for you declares the Lord. Plans for your welfare and not for woe, so as to give you a future of hope. (Jer 29:11)*

But for many people, and at one time or another for each of us, it can ring hollow to simply acknowledge that “God is in control.” We find that even if we acknowledge “God is in charge,” it’s at the surface level - it doesn’t penetrate deep into our heart. We don’t have any real peace or confidence in the thought that God is calling the shots. It seems there is a giant gorilla on our back and nothing on heaven or earth can keep it from tormenting us.

We are going to look at three ways we can cultivate trust in God – because trust in God is exactly what we need so His sovereignty is not some vague philosophical observation but part of the bedrock of our life no matter what our circumstances may be in the present moment.

## TRUST IN GOD – FROM THEOLOGY

For starters, it will help to remind ourselves how God controls things. There are two aspects of God’s will – that which He permits, and that which He perfectly ordains. In a childish analogy (literally) we can think of the parent-child relationship. I can remember wanting another piece of candy, and another, and another. On occasion (a very rare occasion) I was allowed to indulge that sweet tooth, at the

expense of a sour stomach. That was mom’s permissive will in action. She permitted me to follow my desire for candy hyper-consumption (and face the consequences). Other times it was mom’s “perfect will” in action, orchestrating events so that there would be no unfettered access to candy.

Of course there are much more grave and severe examples of how this plays out in life. Little more so than the betrayal of Judas. God permitted Judas’ exercise of free will, but God ordained the resurrection of His only Son that would be the ultimate resolution of that betrayal.

Thus is the understanding of how a loving and merciful God permits bad things to happen – He allows the realities of our fallen nature, and the fallen world around us, to play out. We suffer natural disasters, physical ailments and broken relationships. That is God’s permissive will in action.

Other times God ordains events in our life. Sometimes we’re aware of this – those “coincidences” that aren’t, or the times we have a strong interior prompting from the Holy Spirit. Most times we’re not even aware of the events that God is orchestrating.

The lynch pin in the whole operation is that God is always in control, and always bringing good from the trials that He permits.

That said, in the midst of trials it can be very hard for us to see where the “good” comes in. God tells us three important things:

1. “In the world you will face troubles.” This goes hand-in-hand with “take up your cross.” In other words, no one gets through this life unscathed.
2. “God works all things to the good for those who love him.” Whatever trials we face, even the most crushing hardships, God turns them all to good - so long as we love Him; so long as we give ourselves over to Him as best as we are able.
3. “My ways are not your ways.” Much of what we encounter in

this life will remain a mystery to us – the balancing of God’s permissive and perfect will with our free will – but our understanding isn’t necessary, only our trust.

And so we are challenged to trust that God is in control in the middle of a crisis – He’s right there keeping everything in balance. He is constantly and perfectly making whatever adjustments and calibrations are necessary to work each new event, flare-up, or out-right conflagration, work for our ultimate good.

In fact, the same scripture passage that tells us God works all things to the good for those who love him, continues with, “What will separate us from the love of Christ?” (Romans 8:34) St. Paul is asking a rhetorical question, because no external thing can separate us from the love of Christ. The only thing that can separate us from Christ’s love is ourselves, through our lack of faith. If we place all our trust in Christ, we are invincible, through Him.

This type of complete trust is difficult for us. That is why God has given us many examples to shore up our doubts.

## **TRUST IN GOD – FROM SCRIPTURE**

“Trust in God alone” is a prevailing theme of Sacred Scripture. We are given nearly endless examples, both positive and negative. Here are some notable ones, starting with the Old Testament.

Adam and Eve: they failed to trust in God and were banished from the Garden. Even then, God remained faithful and provided for them.

Abraham: trusted in God to the point of being willing to sacrifice his precious son, Isaac. For this he became the father of many nations.

Joshua: trusted in the Lord and guided his army to take up horns instead of weapons and march around Jericho seven times in as many

days and the walls came down. And he then went on to conquer all the Holy Land in the name of God.

Rahab: trusted in the Lord by assisting Joshua's men and saved the lives of her family.

Ruth: in an interesting twist, Ruth was a gentile woman of great virtue. In response to her virtuousness, she was blessed by God with the gift of great faith, marriage into Jewish royalty and became part of the royal line of David and Christ.

Hannah: trusted in the Lord and was blessed with a son, Samuel, who would become a great, and final, Judge of Israel.

David: a complex figure – he trusted in the Lord, conquered Goliath, survived Saul's jealousy, and became a great king. He also succumbed to lust and pride and fell from grace. But he again trusted and threw himself upon God's mercy and established a monarchy from which would come the Messiah.

Solomon: his trust in the Lord led him to become the wisest and more prosperous of all of Israel's kings. But in pride his trust turned inward, to his own wealth and power, and when that failed to satisfy he declared "all is vanity!"

Ezra and Nehemiah: trusted in the Lord and rebuilt Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile.

Tobit and Sarah: each suffered great misfortune, but maintained their trust in God. Through God's goodness, and many amazing events, they were brought to good fortune and a happy end.

Job: the quintessential story of trust amidst hardship. Through Job, God demonstrates that He is God. His ways are not our ways. He will always bring good from evil if we trust in Him.

Israelites: as a nation they lived out the ebb and flow of doubting in God (for which they are left wandering in the desert, led by corrupt kings and exiled by enemies) and trusting in God (leading to times of

great prosperity and being favored to be God's chosen people to go out and redeem the world)

Let's turn to the New Testament. Jesus' message of salvation is to "repent and believe." This type of belief in God is more than just a feeble belief that God exists. It is deep and vibrant belief in Him, in His goodness and His plan for our life.

Mary: Mary's "fiat," saying yes to God's plan for her, is the great act of trust that undoes Eve's act of pride in the Garden.

Woman with a hemorrhage: in trust she reaches out and touches Jesus cloak, is healed, and told by Jesus that her faith has saved her (Mt 9:22)

Ten Lepers: Jesus heals 10 lepers, but to the one who returns to give thanks He responds, "your faith has saved you." (Lk 17:19)

Centurion: Jesus is "amazed" at the faith the Centurion has in Jesus's ability to save his servant - "only say the word and my servant will be healed." Mt 8:13

Canaanite Woman: she is determined that Jesus can heal her daughter (possessed by demons) even when Jesus at first appears resistant. When she persists in her pleading, Jesus commends her great faith. (Mt 15:28)

Blind Bartimaeus: aware that Jesus is passing by persists in begging for a miracle. Jesus restores his sight telling him that his faith has saved him. (Mk 10:52)

In these examples we see people in desperate situations, without hope, until Jesus comes into their life. They place complete trust in Him, and miracles follow. Note that the greater miracle is their salvation.

The opposite also holds true. We see Jesus unable to perform miracles where faith is absent:

Family at Nazareth: when Jesus returns home to Nazareth, He is unable to work many miracles because of their lack of faith. (Mt 13:58)

The Apostles and the Storm at Sea: the apostles, in the boat with Jesus, are being tossed by the storm at sea. They are certain that they are about to perish (that was their exact word). They even had Jesus right there – in the boat with them – but in abject terror they gave no thought to that, only to what seemed like certain doom. And then, as is always the case, Jesus demonstrates that He is in complete control. He calms the storm raging at sea. He calms the storm raging in their hearts.

We saved the two greatest (and closely related) biblical stories of trust for last.

Moses and the Exodus: The Israelites were seemingly trapped between the devil and the deep blue sea (or Pharaoh's army and the Red Sea, as it were). They were certain they would perish. Here's a particularly pithy passage illustrating the Israelites hysteria and fury at Moses as Pharaoh is bearing down: "Were there no burial places in Egypt that you brought us to die in the wilderness?" Who can blame them? By human standards, the odds were stunningly good that they would be mowed down by Pharaoh. But God was in charge. He had already given them His signs again and again (e.g. the 10 plagues). They had only to trust. Moses trusted on their behalf and the Red Sea was parted.

Jesus and His Passion: For all eternity the greatest example of God's trustworthiness is Christ's passion and resurrection. The greatest suffering and defeat transformed into the greatest triumph.

Person upon person upon person, and even Christ himself, persevered and were saved from seemingly hopeless situations. Why so many stories, why so many life examples? Because God knows us and knows that we need this reassurance to carry us through our own trials.

These biblical examples teach us not only that we must trust in

God, but that the greater the trial, the greater the deliverance. If you are suffering a great trial, trust that God will bring even greater good from it.

## **TRUST IN GOD – PERSONAL EXPERIENCE**

The God that we know from theology, the God we encounter in Scripture is the same God we encounter in our own lives and through the lives of others.

Most people have had the experience of being in fear of a dreadful outcome. Perhaps it was related to a serious medical diagnosis, or a financial catastrophe, or a crisis in a relationship. In time, and through faith in God, the actual outcome was not at all what was feared. That's not to say the trial wasn't challenging, but it also was not the end of the story.

Have you experienced that? If so, go back to that, in prayer, and experience it anew. Remind yourself of that reality.

If not, look to examples from other people you know. Or look into the lives of these modern day people who met tremendous challenges with faith and joy: Chiara Corbella Petrillo, Carlo Acutis, or Nick Vujicic. Chiara and Carlo both suffered from fatal illnesses but lived life thoroughly and joyfully. Nick, a man born without arms and legs, continues to live a life of joy and meaning. Similarly, all of the Saints overcame great trials – that's how they became Saints.

## **SPIRITUAL TAKE-AWAYS FOR DAY 1**

God alone has the perfect plan for your happiness. As part of His plan He permits us to experience hardships, but He will always draw good from it if you trust in Him.

Fear, anger and doubt are great enemies of faith. Fear of the future, anger and regret from the past, and doubt in present trials paralyze us, so that we are not receptive to God's work in our life.

## Day 1

Search out those examples from your life, or from scripture, or from the lives of Saints or other inspirational figures, that remind you of God's goodness and that He will deliver you from any trial you face.

Let's close in prayer:

*Heavenly Father, thank you for your love for me and your plan for my life. Please raise up in my mind and heart what you desire for me from this day of the retreat. Amen.*