

DAY 5: THE ONE THINGS THAT MATTERS MOST (BECAUSE EVERYTHING ELSE MATTERS TOO)



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.

IN DAYS 3 and 4 we looked at two approaches to respond to future worries, past wounds and present trials – by (1) taking custody of our emotional responses and (2) bringing these experiences to Christ through meditation.

These are not the only ways to prevail over worries, wounds and trials.

Nor should we only be reactionary. Even better is to prepare for life's trials and tribulations.

Building on Day 4, the single most important preparation for trials is ... to sit.

To sit in silence. Sacred Silence.

Christian meditation, as we looked at in Day 4 is not only how we tame our unruly emotions, but also how we transform our entire interior life through relationship with Christ.

What necessarily proceeds from this, is that Christian meditation perfects everything else that we do, including everything we have looked at to overcome worries, wounds and trials.

There are many other responses to worries, wounds and trials of tremendous value. For example, availing ourselves of the Sacraments and giving selflessly to provide for the physical and spiritual needs others. All other forms of prayer and devotions (scripture study, rosary, consecrations, novenas) should be in our spiritual armory.

But none of those are as vital as Christian meditation. And the reason, paradoxically, is because all of those are extremely vital.

In fact, they're so important that they shouldn't be the first thing you do - first comes Christian meditation.

You may recall an advertising campaign by German industrial manufacturing giant BASF: "We don't make the lotion; we make it smoother. We don't make the dress; we make it brighter..." And then, "we don't make a lot of the products you buy, we make a lot of the products you buy better."

In the same way, Christian meditation elevates and perfects everything else that we do. And thus surpasses everything else that we do.

HOW CHRISTIAN MEDITATION PERFECTS EVERYTHING ELSE THAT WE DO

Christian meditation perfects everything else we do because it is the essential element for how we sanctify ourselves. Christian meditation takes us down the path of turning our entire life, every bit of it, into a loving offering to God.

Yes, the Sacraments are indispensable as well (for the non-Catholics,

your denomination certainly recognizes some form of sacraments and “markers” of the faith). But the spiritual masters are consistent in teaching that even the grace of the Sacraments will be dormant and sterile if we don’t have a personal relationship with God in Christian meditation, through which we act on God’s grace so that it transforms into glory in our life and in the world around us.

This is all covered in much greater depth in the 30 Days to Christian Meditation retreat. If you haven’t, you should consider going on that retreat to help get the most out of this one. For today, trust that through Christian meditation all the other things we do are turned into “a loving conversation with God” (to jointly paraphrase St. Teresa of Avila and St. Jose Maria Escriva). This is why our first response and defense should be Christian meditation.

With that, let’s look at other powerful approaches to manage and mitigate worries, wounds and trials and how Christian meditation elevates them.

SACRAMENTS

The Sacraments are indispensable for spiritual growth (for the non-Catholics, your denomination certainly recognizes some form of sacraments and “markers” of the faith).

The Catholic Sacraments of the Eucharist (receiving Christ fully into ourselves under the appearance of bread and wine) and Reconciliation (as discussed in Day 3) – are particularly powerful sources of grace. God knows the rhythms of our human nature and that we need to be refreshed and renewed on a regular basis (as a rule, weekly for the Eucharist and at least monthly for Reconciliation).

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COUNT OUR BLESSINGS

Humility is the Queen of Virtues because it vanquishes the most insidious of vices – pride.

That is the powerful spiritual fruit of counting our blessing - gratitude and humility go hand in hand.

The humble person recognizes that there is nothing they have that is not a gift from God. The very fact that we exist at all, the gift of faith and having the possibility of spending eternity in Heaven, these are gifts beyond price.

And then there are all the other blessings in life. Our relationships. Our health. Whatever material comforts we enjoy. All is gift.

Even our sufferings are transformed into gifts when we unite them to Christ and become partakers in His work of salvation.

We all have many gifts in our life that we don't recognize. God often reveals, in meditation, how much we miss, and how even things we look upon as curses are blessings in disguise.

DO SMALL THINGS FOR OTHERS

We were created for community. It is deep in our human nature. "It's not good for man to be alone." And then there's this: "love your neighbor as yourself." And finally, when Jesus had finished washing the grime from the feet of His apostles, he told them (and all of us) "as I have done for you, you should also do."

There is little in life that better takes our focus off our own hardships than helping someone else.

It is very empowering. At those times when we feel (and probably are) powerless to alter our path around our trials, we do indeed have the power to help the people God has placed in our life.

Who is God calling you to help today? How is He calling you to

help them? In Christian meditation God make us aware of who we are called to serve and how. Even more, He may show you, after the fact, surprising ways you have served people around you, perhaps with something as simple as a smile and a kind word.

OFFER IT UP

Offer your pain and suffering.

“Offer it up” has become something of a catch phrase, but it reveals a great truth. Christ tells us “some things can only be accomplished through prayer and fasting.” The merit of fasting is founded in the willing acceptance of some manner of suffering (even the small “suffering” of skipping dessert).

It is the same principle when we courageously accept the sufferings that life brings us, rather than reacting with bitterness and anger. When we offer our suffering to God it becomes meritorious, a source of grace. The world literally becomes a little brighter because we are interconnected as the Body of Christ. The closer you are to Christ in Christian meditation, the more mindful you will be to unite your sufferings to His.

Try offering your pain and suffering for loved ones, or for the Church and be consoled in knowing that you are, by God’s grace, transforming your pain and suffering into miracles in someone else’s life.

HEAVENLY PERSPECTIVE

We are strangers in a strange land. We were not created for this fallen world. That is why every single person yearns for Heaven. Yes, some people lose their faith in God and do not believe in Heaven, but that yearning remains as they search for “utopia” on earth.

The bottom line – we were created to spend eternity with God in Heaven and nothing else on earth will ever fulfill that desire.

We must keep fixed in our vision the end goal – Heaven. When we do that, everything else becomes small in comparison.

Let's say you were going through a difficult trial but were told that at the end of it you would be given a check for one billion dollars. Suddenly the trial would seem like nothing. All you would think is "each day I'm closer to that billion dollars." And, instead of focusing on the pain of the trial, you'd be thinking about what you were going to do when you had that check in hand.

That is how it is with a Heavenly perspective. When we do that our trials are nothing more than the path that leads us to that destination.

Christian meditation is a powerful way to renew that Heavenly vision on a daily basis.

ROOT SIN (PREDOMINANT FAULT)

An important teaching in Catholic spiritual tradition which has been lost in modern times is the understanding that each of us suffers from a root sin, sometimes called a predominant fault. Just as we all have human characteristics that are unique to us, such as our fingerprints and unique mix of gifts and talents, we also must grapple with our own unique tendencies to sin. Each of us has one or two areas where we are most inclined to fall into sin.

Our root sin may be any one of the capital sins. Some spiritual masters simplify the list to three potential root sins (which incorporate several of the capital sins) - pride (pride and sloth), vanity (envy, anger and avarice), and sensuality (lust and gluttony). This is based in part on St. John, "For all that is in the world – the lust of the flesh (sensuality) and the lust of the eyes (vanity) and the pride of life (pride) – is not of the Father but is of the world." (1 John 2:16)

Often our root sin is a perversion of a particular strength. Someone who is naturally empathetic and gifted at hospitality and providing comfort to others may fall into sensuality. A person who is

particularly capable at accomplishing great things in the world, instead of doing them for God can be turned to do them for their own glory (vanity or vainglory).

The methods in this retreat of growing in self-knowledge and taking custody of our thoughts and actions, all through Christian meditation, are very effective at identifying and overcoming our root sin.

ASCETICISM

Ascetism comes from the Greek word for “exercise” or “effort.” Asceticism is how we willingly perfect ourselves. An athlete training for a competition is practicing asceticism. A student studying for an exam is practicing ascetism.

When we deny ourselves by refusing ourselves some source of pleasure, we are practicing asceticism. This is because our fallen nature naturally craves indulgences and comfort – and left unchecked we crave them more than we crave God. By denying ourselves these cravings (even something as simple as cream in our coffee) we are strengthening our spirit and disciplining our fallen nature (“the flesh”).

We are all undergoing forced suffering in one form or another when we struggle with worries, wounds and trials – and we should strive to “offer it up,” as discussed above.

In addition to that, we can take on a small act of self-denial of our choosing (just as we do each Lent). Any small act will do. And it should be small – so that it is achievable. We want to set ourselves up for success and not attempt a sacrifice so grand that we’re bound to fail (which is very damaging to our spirit).

Small acts of sacrifice done with great love are heroic (blending the teachings of St. Terese of Lisieux with St. Josemaria Escriva).

If you've done this before, you know it's power. If new to you, you will be amazed. Similar to the spiritual empowerment that comes from "offering it up" and from helping others – when we take it upon ourselves to willingly deny ourselves (rather than having it forced upon us by exterior circumstances) and offer that self-denial to God – it increases our self-command and engenders optimism and courage. And, it releases grace into the world.

What sacrifice should you take up? Where will you find the motivation and strength to sustain that spirit of willing self-sacrifice? You know the answer.

STOP FEEDING THE BEAST

Our worries, wounds and trials are exacerbated by our aggressively immoral culture. Almost all secular social media, news media and entertainment are toxic to our spiritual health. One of the best things you can do is get rid of all of it.

This again is covered in depth in the 30 Days to Christian Meditation retreat.

For the purposes of this retreat, any small steps you take to start removing secular influences from your life will pay great dividends in overcoming worries, wounds and trials.

It is also impossible to overstate the powerful grip of secular culture. It is absolutely imperative to stay close to the Lord through daily meditation so that you have the spiritual strength to recognize error when you encounter it and separate yourself from secular poison.

MORNING OFFERING AND EVENING EXAMEN

Our first waking thoughts should be offered directly to God (not our cell phone...). This is our first opportunity to let go of our thirst for control and turn it over to God. With this comes an opportunity to enter into His peace throughout the day. Notice the subtle (or not so

subtle) shift this brings in perspective. Let's say you have a challenging meeting later in the day - with a coworker, or a sensitive conversation with a friend, or a doctor's visit about a serious condition. You set yourself up for failure if you go into that meeting with a mindset of how you want to control the situation (e.g. "how am I going to handle this," or "here's what I want to get out of this") – now it's all on you. You set yourself up for success if you first turn it over to God at the start of the day (e.g. "Lord, you will be with me at the meeting; I trust You will stand by me and whatever comes of the meeting you will turn it to the greatest good for me"). Now you've given control to God. All that is left for you to do is show up to the meeting, prepare and participate in it as best as you can, and the rest you turn over to God.

And before turning in at the end of the day we should review our day with God. The Examen prayer from St. Ignatius of Loyola, involves reviewing our day in the company of God, so that the Holy Spirit can show us the spiritual movements of the day. When did we lose sight of God and march down the path of self? When was God trying to get our attention? When were we in danger of succumbing to desolation? When were we a blessing to others?

Examples of morning offerings and a brief summary of the Examen are included in the postscript.

MORNING OFFERING AND EVENING EXAMEN

Building on the practice of being present with God throughout each day, we should begin and end each day with Him.

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PRACTICING THE PRESENCE OF GOD

Offering our day to God is the perfect way to greet the morning. What we need to do next is carry that disposition of mind and heart throughout the day. Often what happens is that we start the day with that beautiful Godly vision and soon after the demands and distractions of the day rush in and before we know it the day is done and we've not again turned our mind and heart to our Lord.

Brother Lawrence, a simple and holy man in the 17th century, lived and shared the Practice of the Presence of God and captured the essence of it in a few brief letters and notes. To practice the Presence of God is to cultivate a loving awareness that God is with us every moment of the day. As we mature in this practice, we arrive at a very dynamic place in which we are attuned to God in the present moment – both receiving from and responding to Him. This awareness of the presence with God in no way distracts us or diminishes our availability to the people and tasks at hand, in fact it heightens and perfects all that we do.

Our time of meditation is our most intimate time with God. But when we set about the rest of our daily activities, we find that they can quickly distract our mind from the reality that we are still in His presence. Practicing the presence of God is a simple way to train our mind to the marvelous reality of His ever-presence – it is how we carry the fruits of our meditation into everything else we encounter that day. The more we do this, the more we are strengthened against fatigue and temptation, and enlivened to do the good work God has planned for our day.

DAILY ROSARY

In the Rosary we meditate on the great mysteries of the life of Christ. The Rosary is both vocal prayer and meditative prayer. We recite one Our Father and ten Hail Mary's as we meditate on a specific mystery from the Gospel. The recitation of repeated prayers (ten Hail Mary's) is a natural way to focus our mind and avoid distraction. In the East this might be considered a mantra, but in Christian spirituality it serves not to empty ourselves, but rather to create a closeness to Christ and our Blessed Mother.

The Rosary has been a source of spiritual growth for countless saints and people of good will. Our Blessed Mother always guides souls to her Son.

DELIVERANCE AND RENUNCIATION

The enemy of humanity, the devil and his minions, is quite real and constantly working against us. Our faith gives us many ways to dispel bad spirits and one of the simplest and most effective is to call on the Holy Name of Jesus (at the sound of which "every knee must bend").

There is much to be said about demonic activity, but a simple starting point is if you find yourself repeatedly faced with the same setback – such as giving in to the same old temptation, or trapped in a pattern of negative thought – a prayer of renunciation can be a powerful spiritual weapon to drive off demonic influences that are fanning the flames. An example of such prayer is provided in today's postscript.

PLAN OF LIFE

Having a Plan of Life helps us to stay focused on what matters from moment to moment – this focus helps us to not be deterred by worries and wounds, and to find meaning in trials. A Plan of Life

clarifies our purpose and motivation at the highest level (getting to Heaven) and drilling down to small details (should I say yes or no to a request for volunteers at my child's school?).

The overarching theme of your plan of life is this: what is your vocation - what are you called to sacrifice for? Christ tells us that the purpose of our life is to lay it down for God and neighbor. It is that sacrificial aspect of your life that powerfully connects you with Christ and gives your life meaning, purpose and fulfillment. It is what makes you most alive. Your Plan of Life will help you take command of how you spend your time so you can give the best of yourself to God and the people He places in your life.

As an example, if you are a wife and mother of young children your plan of life will guide you in how to best give your time and gifts to God (receiving the sacraments, daily meditation, ministry work), family (ordering your home life around liturgical seasons, caring for your marriage and children), neighbor (building meaningful relationships with extended family and friends) and yourself (caring for your health and personal development).

Christian meditation relates to your Plan of Life in two ways – your plan should flow from your time in meditation, and once your plan is developed, you can apply it to discern major decisions in the setting of meditation. Once again, 30 Days to Christian Meditation provides a detailed approach to developing your Plan of Life (see Day 21).

DISCERNMENT OF THE WILL OF GOD

Discernment is a far-ranging activity in the spiritual life. The discernment of spirits is the act of discerning which spirit (good or bad) is influencing you at any given moment. This is not as obvious as it seems; St. Paul warns us that satan “masquerades as an angel of light.” (2Cor 11:14)

And then there is discernment on a grand scale – discerning the

will of God for our life. Life's big decisions can be a source of anxiety (what if I don't make the right decision?), regret (I fear I made the wrong decision?) and doubt (God, is this really part of your plan?).

Catholicism provides rich teaching and tradition on discernment – all of it relying on the practice of Christian meditation.

CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

“It is not good for man to be alone.” As said before, we are created for community. But not all communities are equal.

“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

There are two key points in this message. First, “For where two or three are gathered...” This does not mean that God isn't with us when we're alone (in fact He directs us to go “into our room” to pray in silence with Him). God is instructing us that we need community – in fact, it is so important for our spiritual health He promises to always join us when we're in community.

But not just any community, and this brings us to the next point – it's only in those communities “gathered together in my name.” As we go out into the world all the forces of secularism and division work against us and chip away at our faith and resolve to trust in God. It's very important that we come together with like-minded Christians, gathered in His name, to be built-up.

OTHER BENEFICIAL METHODS

The ways that we live out a holy life and sanctify ourselves and the world around us are endless. All aspects of our vocation, relationships, hobbies, devotions, you-name-it, all are available to God and should be brought into loving relationship with Him. The more we do this, the more we will naturally diminish disordered effects of worries, wounds, and trials.

Specific to worries, wounds and trials, there are many other approaches that can allied to this vaccination, including everything from conventional wisdom like positive “self-talk” to emerging psychiatric methods like Cognitive Therapy.

Through Christian meditation God will lead you to the ways that He desires for you to be liberated from the bondage of worries and wounds, and how to thrive amidst trials.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

We will close with a point that we touched on yesterday. The real reason Christian meditation works is because of Christ. Everything comes down to one thing, one person - Christ. I can't give you peace in a blog, a podcast, or a video. I couldn't give you peace even if I could write you a check for a billion dollars. No human being on earth can give you everlasting peace, meaning, fortitude, hope or joy. Only Christ can, and He dearly wants to. So dearly He gave His life for you. That is the true power of Christian meditation – drawing you closer to Christ so he can speak to you the words of life that only He can. Are those words that you can “hear?” Most times probably not. But if you commit to daily meditation there is absolutely no doubt that, in time, God will make known His presence and how He is speaking to you and doing His good work in your soul.

This brings us to the close of our Spiritual Super Vaccination Retreat. But this is just the beginning for you and this new aspect of your relationship with God. Continue to deepen the spiritual practices in this retreat and be assured that there are very specific graces God will bring to bear in your life to liberate you from worries, wounds and trials so that you can be fully alive with Him in the present moment.

DAY 5 POSTSCRIPT: MORNING OFFERINGS AND EXAMEN

SIMPLE MORNING OFFERING

Dear Jesus, I offer you all that I am this day. I pray that you possess me and guide my thoughts, words, actions and feelings so that I serve you in all that I do. Please show me your will for me and I beg your forgiveness for anything I do this day that is not as loving as it should be. Amen.

TRADITIONAL CATHOLIC MORNING OFFERING

O Jesus, through the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I offer you my prayers, works, joys, and sufferings of this day for all the intentions of your Sacred Heart, in union with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass throughout the world, for the salvation of souls, the reparation of sins, the reunion of all Christians, and in particular for the intentions of the Holy Father this month. Amen.

OUTLINE OF THE EXAMEN (FROM FR. TIMOTHY GALLAGHER, "THE EXAMEN PRAYER")

Transition: I become aware of the love with which God looks upon me as I begin this examen.

Step One: Gratitude. I note the gifts that God's love has given me this day, and I give thanks to God for them.

Step Two: Petition. I ask God for an insight and a strength that will make this examen a work of grace, fruitful beyond my human capacity alone.

Step Three: Review. With my God, I review the day. I look for the stirrings in my heart and the thoughts that God has given me this day. I look also for those that have not been of God. I review my choices in response to both, and throughout the day in general.

Step Four: Forgiveness. I ask for the healing touch of the forgiving God who, with love and respect for me, removes my heart's burdens.

Step Five: Renewal. I look to the following day and, with God, plan concretely how to live it in accord with God's loving desire for my life.

Transition: Aware of God's presence with me, I prayerfully conclude the examen.

PRAYER OF BINDING (FROM FR. CHAD RIPPERGER)

(insert the name of the obstacle you face, e.g. "Spirit of anger")

Spirit of N., I bind you in the Name of Jesus, by the power of the most Precious Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ and by the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Michael the Archangel, the blessed Apostles, Peter and Paul and all of the saints, and I command you to leave N. (Name of person or object) and go to the foot of the Holy Cross to receive your sentence, in the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

DAILY SUMMARIES

For convenience, here's a final summary of key points from each day of the retreat.

Day 5

Christian meditation is not only how we tame unruly emotions, but also how we transform our entire interior life through relationship with Christ. Because of this, Christian meditation elevates and perfects all the other good practices we may undertake to sanctify our life and inoculate ourselves against fear, anger and doubt.

Among the many other practices are counting our blessings; serving others; offering up our sufferings; maintaining a heavenly perspective; practicing asceticism; detaching from secular media; practicing the presence of God; making a morning offering and evening Examen; praying a daily Rosary; following a Plan of Life; and, practicing discernment.

All of these endeavors, and many others besides, will strengthen us against worries, wounds and trials – but only to the extent that we mold our life to Christ through meditation.

Day 4

Our disordered emotions can also be reharmonized with our other interior faculties (especially intellect and will) by uniting them with Christ through meditation.

The silver lining of worries, wounds and trials is that they reveal our vulnerabilities. Through them, God brings into the light the hidden places of our interior life that need attention.

When we become aware of vulnerabilities, we should meditate with a related scripture passage. Through that meditation the Holy Spirit works with us at both our conscious and subconscious levels, to reorder our interior.

Day 3

Because of the fall, our intellect is darkened, our will weakened, and our emotions disordered.

Our disordered emotions (passions and feelings) are instrumental in how we are derailed by worries, wounds and trials. Our emotions are disordered because they attract us to wrong things and they work with our memories and imagination to overwhelm our intellect and our will. We can tame and reorder our emotions by taking custody of them – this is a healthy application of our free will and self control.

We must rely on the Holy Spirit and practice being aware to our emotional responses, so that we can assess them, and then we act - if they are appropriate, we sanction them, if not we disavow them.

Day 2

Looking to the future, we crave control over not only what we do, but the outcomes of our actions and the happiness that we think we'll derive from those outcomes.

Seek examples that remind you that nothing good comes when we try to control our life and plan for our vision of happiness, without relying on God. And practice detachment in small ways.

In our past we seek ways to control the pain of wounds; both self-inflicted and caused by others. Forgiveness is our key response.

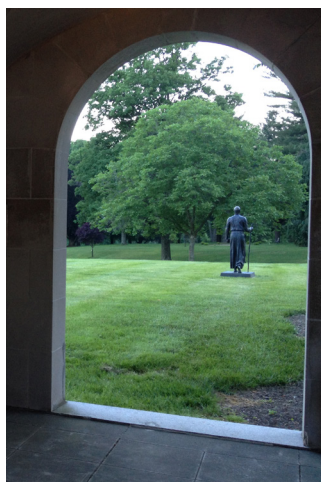
And we seek to control present trials, to avoid them or suppress them. Acceptance and relying on God's strength is our best response. Our response to the present moment is our one healthy exercise of control (self-control).

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.

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.



RETREAT CLOSING

THIS BRINGS US to the close of our Spiritual Super Vaccination Retreat. But this is just the beginning for you and this new aspect of your relationship with God.

Hold tight to the specific graces you received while on this retreat. These are the personal insights and inspirations that came to you; these are very specific gifts the Holy Spirit desires just for you at this time and place in your life.

Be aware that over time the enemy of our human nature will work to rob you of those gifts by making them seem distant and no longer potent – as if they were some mirage that never really had the power to change the reality of your life.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Simply focus on the one or two aspects of this retreat that stood out to you and find practical ways to deepen and interiorize those graces. As with all things, allow Christ and His Spirit to lead you in this through Christian meditation.

Be encouraged that this is the work of a lifetime. Encouraged because it means you will always keep growing in self-knowledge, in self-control, in freedom, in peace – because you will keep growing in relationship with God. In some areas of life you may experience very rapid transformation, in other areas the progress may not be so obvious – but only because we can't always see the good work God is doing deep in our interior.

Stay the course with the tried-and-true spiritual principles in this vaccination and turn the rest over to God.

As you continue down this path with Christ be assured of His power liberate you from worries, wounds and trials so that you can be fully alive with Him in the present moment.

Let's close in prayer-

Heavenly Father, thank you for your love for me and your plan for my life. Please help me to grow in the graces You desire for me from this retreat and to grow ever closer to Your Son, through the Holy Spirit. Amen