



Faith in 52

A yearlong parish retreat based on the work *I Believe in Love*
by Father Jean C. J. d'Elbee

Week 4: November 26th through December 2nd, 2012

For Individuals

(pages 18-24 of the book *I Believe in Love*, stopping at the  symbol)

STEP 1: OPENING PRAYER

1. Speaking to the Holy Spirit, say: *“O Holy Spirit, soul of my soul, I adore You. Enlighten, guide, strengthen, and console me. Tell me what I ought to do and command me to do it. I promise to be submissive in everything that You ask of me, and to accept all that You permit to happen to me. Only show me what is Your will”* (Cardinal Mercier).

STEP 2: PRAYERFUL READING

1. Prayerfully read **ONLY** the weekly assigned pages of *I Believe in Love*.
2. While reading, pay careful attention to the phrases, ideas, or images that might bring about comfort or even those that are challenging. Rest on these a while and speak with the Lord about them, receive His graces, and ponder what has been laid out before you.

STEP 3: MEDITATION

1. Keeping your imagination quiet, figuratively or literally shutting your eyes to all the things of sense, and closing your ears to all the sounds of earth, so as to be able to withdraw into the sanctuary of your baptized soul, which is the temple of the Holy Spirit, do the following:
 - St. Paul said: “When I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor. 12:10). This statement flies in the face of worldly wisdom yet it is true. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you your weaknesses: lack of virtue, personality defects, etc. Ask God to enter into them; give them to Him. Know that these failings do not deter His love for you but increase it. Now imagine yourself as a child held in the strong arms of your Heavenly Father; allow yourself to be comforted by Him and doted upon by Him. Make an act of faith and tell Him repeatedly, *“Father, I believe that I am your delight... and You are mine.”*
 - When we do not trust the Lord to be the Lord, when we do not trust that He is truly loving, “it is just this fear that wounds Him” (p. 21). What fears keep you from completely giving yourself to Jesus? Specifically name them. How do they “wound” Jesus? Hear Him say to you: “Be not afraid.” Which of your personal fears is He addressing? Give them to Him.
 - “People examine themselves on faults and failings, and not on their intimacy with Jesus” (p. 23). Examine your conscience: Have you committed the sin of omission and failed to love Jesus? Make a plan to go to Reconciliation to confess these sins or, at the very least, do so now in prayer.
2. Finish by saying the *Our Father* prayer once.

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STEP 4: REREAD

1. If possible, repeat these steps or reread these pages throughout the week but do not read any further. This is not a book study but prayer; trust that He will speak to you in these pages.

Dark Night of the Soul

The *Dark Night of the Soul* was a poem composed by St. John of the Cross, a Carmelite mystic of the 16th century and a Doctor of the Church. He wrote it during his imprisonment at the hands of his brother Carmelites who rejected his efforts to reform their mutual religious order. The poem describes the soul's sojourn from its bodily home to complete union with the Lord. The many steps of detachment from the world and our own wills can be most difficult and surrounded in hardship and spiritual darkness.

The phrase "dark night" is often used to describe a soul suffering aridity and a lack of consolations or ease in prayer: "The greatest saints passed through the dark night of the soul, painful periods of dryness. Yet in those hours of purification they loved" (p. 20).

We remember that "love is not sensible piety" (p. 20), but "the uniting of our will to the will of God. It is abandoning ourselves totally into His hands, as a habitual disposition, even if we feel nothing" (p. 21).

One dark night,
fired with love's urgent longings
- ah, the sheer grace! -
I went out unseen,
my house being now all stilled.

In darkness, and secure,
by the secret ladder, disguised,
- ah, the sheer grace! -
in darkness and concealment,
my house being now all stilled.

On that glad night,
in secret, for no one saw me,
nor did I look at anything,
with no other light or guide
than the one that burned in my heart.

This guided me
more surely than the light of noon
to where he was awaiting me
- him I knew so well -
there in a place where no one appeared.

O guiding night!
O night more lovely than the dawn!
O night that has united the Lover with his beloved,
transforming the beloved in her



Painting of St. John of the Cross, d. 1591

Lover.

Upon my flowering breast
which I kept wholly for
him alone,
there he lay sleeping,
and I caressing him
there in a breeze from the fanning cedars.

When the breeze blew
from the turret,
as I parted his hair,
it wounded my neck
with its gentle hand,
suspending all my senses.

I abandoned and forgot myself,
laying my face on my Beloved;
all things ceased; I went out from myself,
leaving my cares forgotten among the lilies.

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For Group Sharing

(pages 18-24 of the book *I Believe in Love*, stopping at the ☞ symbol)

STEP 1: OPENING PRAYER

1. Gathering with your spouse, family, or a group of friends at a time of your choosing, though preferably on the following Sunday, make the Sign of the Cross and then say together to the Holy Spirit: *"Come Holy Spirit, come by means of the powerful intercession of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, your well-beloved Spouse."*

STEP 2: PUBLIC READING

1. Depute or invite a competent reader among the group to read aloud the weekly assigned pages of *I Believe in Love*. All should be encouraged to listen attentively; any distractions, i.e., cell phones, televisions, etc., should be turned off or removed during this time.

STEP 3: PRAYERFUL DISCUSSION

1. After the public reading, someone should facilitate the public discussion. This facilitator should read aloud the questions below. Considering the constraints of time or the particular audience, not every question need be asked nor discussed. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you when in doubt.
2. Everyone may speak but should not speak over others, should not dominate the conversation, and should not ridicule others. All should try to be like Christ who is "gentle and humble of heart." Moreover, all should be asked to keep confidential the contents of the discussion. No one should reveal more than what they feel comfortable sharing or be forced to speak.

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Two Faiths

"For Jeremiah warns us: 'Do not say, "we are the Lord's temple".' Neither should you say: 'Faith alone in our Lord Jesus Christ can save me.' By itself faith accomplishes nothing. For even the devils believe and shudder. No, faith must be joined to an active love of God which is expressed in good works'" (St. Maximus the Confessor).

We might say that there are two types of faith. One faith is a belief in the existence of God. St. Maximus tells us that even the devils have this kind of faith. They know that God exists. What they do not possess is a formed faith, a saving faith, a faith conjoined to love.

Consider the Lord's teaching that not all who say to Him, "'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 7:21). On what grounds will they be denied entrance into Heaven? Jesus replies: "'I never knew you'" (Mt. 7:23). Of course Jesus knows all of His creatures so it is not so much that He never knew them but that they never knew Him, never truly knew Him in a relational way.

So often we have the first kind of faith and discuss the Lord as if He were a thing, a subject, or an idea: "We speak admirably about Him, but we do not speak to Him" (p. 22). Speaking to the Lord entails a relationship, a belief not only that He is there but that He is there **for you**.

When you pray, do you speak about God or do you speak to God; do you think about things apart from Him or do you tell them to Him?

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For Group Sharing

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- The author provides a litany of the many assaults upon our Faith (p. 19). What are some of the forces or efforts attacking our Lord today? Where do you see the spirit of “anti-Christ”? What does the Lord ask us to do in the face of such opposition?
- We often think of love as an emotion and a sensible attraction. Is it ever more than that? When has your feeling of love ever been mistaken, i.e., when have you felt “loving” while not acting in a loving manner? What does this reveal about the true nature of love?
- Sanctity is “a disposition of the heart which makes us humble and small in the arms of God, conscious of our weakness, and confident to the point of audacity in the goodness of our Father” (p. 20). If possible, retrieve and share photos of yourself as a baby, especially when held by parents or guardians. Is this how God sees you? Why is it easy or hard to believe that God is a loving, all-good Father to you?
- “There are persons who are baptized, who are confirmed, who receive Communion, who are in a state of grace, who are temples of the Holy Spirit, yet who pass their whole lives on earth without ever having experienced this heart-to-heart relationship with their Father in Heaven” (p. 23). Does this describe you or those you know? Would you like to have this kind of relationship with Jesus? Do you believe “you are a joy for Jesus?” (p. 22).
- Jesus could be to us a “Father, a Brother, a Friend, a Spouse of our soul, Center and King of our hearts, Redeemer and Savior” (p. 23). How do you see Jesus? Which of these associations do you have with Him or perhaps yours isn’t mentioned? Do you wish you had one of these particular relationships with Him? After this discussion, the entire group should take turns praying for each person in the group while the facilitator says these or similar words: “Heavenly Father, through Jesus, Your Son, and Your Holy Spirit, we ask you to bless N., and be a true _____ to him/her. Free him/her from any fears or obstacles to such a loving relationship. Be his _____. Be his _____. Amen.” If the Spirit so moves and all are comfortable, consider laying hands upon the head or shoulders of the person being prayed for while praying.

STEP 4: RESOLUTIONS & VIRTUES

1. The facilitator practices with the group, saying the following prayer seven times: “Jesus, You are my joy, and I, too, am Your joy.” He encourages the group to say this frequently every day.

STEP 5: CLOSING PRAYER

1. When finished with the discussion, the entire group should conclude with a Marian prayer, preferably the *Salve Regina* or *Hail, Holy Queen*.

Next Eucharistic “Hour of Power” in English

- Saturday, Dec. 1st, 7-8 p.m., St. Peter Church

Next Parish Dessert Potluck*

Hosted by TBD

- Saturday, Dec. 1st, 8-9 p.m., McMahon Hall

*All attending are asked to bring a dessert or an appetizer to share that would feed at least 15 other people.