



Faith in 52

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

Week 3: November 19th through November 25th, 2012

For Individuals

(pages 13-18 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:
 - Jesus famously asked Peter thrice whether he loved Him (Jn. 21:15-17). Meditate and picture Christ speaking to Simon Peter along the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Now imagine Him speaking with you; he is addressing you by name, “N., do you love me more than these?” How will you respond? Tell him your honest answer. Repeat this entire exercise numerous times, leaving intervals of silence in between. Is your heart moved to love Jesus, or to want to love Jesus, or to at least want to want to love Jesus?
 - “Without love, everything is painful, everything is tiring, everything is burdensome. The Cross, taken up hesitantly, is crushing; taken smilingly, by free will, and with love, it will carry you much more than you carry it. Love makes time eternal by giving a divine value to everything” (p. 18). Enumerate your pains and give them to the Lord. Name every burden that afflicts you. See them piled high upon the cross He bears. Jesus accepts them as He accepts you. Will you, like Simon of Cyrene, now help Him carry the load?
 - Your free will is like a muscle; exercise it. When confronted by temptation, an accusing thought, or a terrible hurt, deliberately look to Christ and say *“Jesus, You whom I have never seen, never heard, who seem sometimes so far away, You who are truly the ‘hidden God,’ although the attrac-*

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tion of that which You have denounced is so strong and the forbidden fruit so close, it is You, Jesus, I choose, You I prefer, You I love" (p. 16-17). Say it repeatedly and feel your will increase in strength.

2. Finish by saying the *Our Father* prayer once.

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.

Creatio ex Nihilo

How does one describe nothing? A child might respond with a drawing of deep, swirling blackness; but is not a void something? Is not black—even if it is truly the absence of color—still one among many “colors” in a palette of paints? It is impossible to comprehend nothing because it is precisely that: no thing.

The inspired author of the Book of Genesis suffers these same limitations. He, too, must draw upon metaphor as he describes nothing as that “without form or shape,” as “darkness” and “abyss” (Gen. 1:2). Indeed, it is our Judeo-Christian belief that the Lord of the universe created everything... from nothing, *creatio ex nihilo*.

Why is this important? Because the Creator did not have to make anything. He did not lose a war with other rival gods; He did not give shape to something already there; He did not need the assistance of any other spirits or deities to make the “heavens and the earth.” God—and this is what is so important—made everything **freely**. The Eternal One made a choice to make the world and to make you.

If there are two ways of doing things, out of duty or out of love, which did the Lord exercise in the six days of creation? Was He bound by onerous



Creation of the Sun, Moon, and Plants by Michelangelo

obligation? No, He made a free choice: He preferred, He desired, He loved the world into existence. *Predilexit*. And man, made in the Divine image and restored by grace, is also equipped with freedom, for love is not love that is coerced: “Here on earth love proves itself by free choice. When a man loves, he chooses that which he prefers. Jesus wants to be chosen, to be preferred” (p. 16).

When the Lord commands us to love, He does not ask the impossible. He asks us to make a choice for something and, even more importantly, for Someone, for with God, “all things are possible” (Mt. 19:26).

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For Group Sharing

(pages 13-18 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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3 Loves

Reading the New Testament in its original Greek makes it clear that when Jesus asked Peter, "Do you love me," He asked for a specific kind of love. In Greek there are many words for love: *eros*, a romantic love; *philia*, a true love of friends, family, and the world; and *agape*, the unconditional love of the Lord.

When Jesus first asked Peter, "Simon, Son of John, do you *agape* love me more than these," (Jn. 21:15) He was asking him if he loved the Lord as the Lord loved him: "I have given you my Heart without reserve, in order to have your heart without reserve. I have put no limit on my love; you must put no limit on yours" (p. 14). Peter's response says it all. He responds: "Yes, Lord, You know that I *philia* love you." Peter is either incapable or unwilling to love Jesus in the complete and sacrificial way of *agape* love. He loves Jesus but only like a brother, in *philia* love.

Jesus phrases the question in the same way and again asks Peter of his love, and again Peter replies in the affirmative but with a lesser love.

Finally, the Lord does a most astonishing thing: The third time, Jesus slightly changes His words and asks Peter, "Simon, Son of John, do you *philia* love me?" The Christ, aware that Peter was not ready to love Him unconditionally, readjusts His expectations. He meets Peter where he is and accepts his offer of brotherly love.

There are many varieties of love, greater and lesser, but whatever love, some love is better than no love: "It is love alone that counts" (p. 15).

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For Group Sharing

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- What is love? Is it a feeling, an attraction, or a choice? When God commands us to love, what kind of love does He expect in return?
- Jesus' love for Simon Peter was not based upon his talents, skills, or leadership (p. 14). It was based solely on him as a person, yet so many times we believe that we will only be loved if we possess certain things, talents, or relationships. When have you experienced unconditional love in your life? In the circumstances, was it expected or unexpected? Tell the story.
- Many people think of religion as only a system of ethics and rules, but "religion is not something; it is Someone" (p. 17). How does that insight change our approach to religion? Does a personal relationship with Jesus Christ mean we are free from the commandments or that we have an even greater need to fulfill them? What does it mean to say that "all dogma was contained in this word: "I have loved you"; all morality in this other word: "That I may love You!" (p. 15). How does God's love for us affect our moral response to Him?
- There is a great "abyss between the two ways of doing things: for duty or for love" (p. 18). Why are the things we do for love more enjoyable than the things done under obligation? How can love give duties purpose and even transform them into joys? Please give examples.

STEP 4: RESOLUTIONS & VIRTUES

1. The facilitator addresses the group: "When domestic duties are demanding, studies are confounding, work is vexing, and the soul is aching; when the joints cry out in pain, and the temptation to sin is but an arm's length away, say out loud or to yourself: *'I choose you, Jesus; I prefer you, Jesus; I love you, Jesus.'*" The facilitator should practice the italicized expression many times with the group until they know it by heart. He should encourage them to develop the habit of saying it frequently and in every circumstance, especially when tempted to impatience, anger, or to curse.

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*.

Hail, holy Queen, Mother of mercy, our life, our sweetness and our hope. To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve: to thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears. Turn then, most gracious Advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us, and after this our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus, O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary! Amen.

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.*