



# Faith in 52

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

*Week 17: February 25th through March 3rd, 2013*

## For Individuals

(pages 106-113 of the book *I Believe in Love*)

### **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:
  - Meditate upon the Cross of Jesus Christ. Humanly-speaking, it seemed like the greatest failure: Christ, the Lord of love, was abandoned, tortured, and put to death by His own people. Yet, "this failure of failures was the victory of victories" (p. 107). Picture the triumphant Christ, resurrected and emerging from the tomb, and behold the reality of the passage: "For love is strong as death" (Song of Songs 8:6). Spend a moment now relating to the Lord any disappointments or "failures" that greatly trouble you. See your afflictions in His afflictions and His sorrows in yours. Say to Him: *"Your will be done."*
  - "Your will be done": reflect upon these simple yet most perfect of words, where they occurred in Scripture (Mary's *fiat*, the *Our Father*, Christ's prayer in the Garden of Gethsamene, upon the cross, etc.), and say them yourself to your loving God.
  - Pray with the following passages from St. Paul: "...giving thanks always and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father" (Eph 5:20); "Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God" (Phil 4:6); "And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Col 3:17); "In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thes 5:18). In the spirit of St. Paul, say: *"O Jesus, I thank you*

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for everything" (p. 110).

- Finish by saying the *Our Father* in a spirit of complete abandonment. ■

## Where Sin Abounded Grace Has Overflowed

Where can the weak find a place of firm security and peace, except in the wounds of the Savior? Indeed, the more secure is my place there, the more he can do to help me. The world rages, the flesh is heavy, and the devil lays his snares, but I do not fall, for my feet are planted on firm rock. I may have sinned gravely. My conscience would be distressed, but it would not be in turmoil, for I would recall the wounds of the Lord: he was wounded for our iniquities. What sin is there so deadly that it cannot be pardoned by the death of Christ? And so if I bear in mind this strong, effective remedy, I can never again be terrified by the malignancy of sin.

Surely the man who said: My sin is too great to merit pardon, was wrong. He was speaking as though he were not a member of Christ and had no share in his merits, so that he could claim them as his own, as a member of the body can claim what belongs to the

head. As for me, what can I appropriate that I lack from the heart of the Lord who abounds in mercy? They pierced his hands and feet and opened his side with a spear. Through the openings of these wounds I may drink honey from the rock and oil from the hardest stone: that is, I may taste and see that the Lord is sweet.

He was thinking thoughts of peace, and I did not know it, for who knows the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? But the piercing nail has become a key to unlock the door, that I may see the good will of the Lord. And what can I see as I look through the hole? Both the nail and the wound cry out that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. The sword pierced his soul and came close to his heart, so that he might be able to feel compassion for me in my weaknesses.

Through these sacred wounds we can see the secret of his

heart, the great mystery of love, the sincerity of his mercy with which he visited us from on high. Where have your love, your mercy, your compassion shone out more luminously than in your wounds, sweet, gentle Lord of mercy? More mercy than this no one has than that he lay down his life for those who are doomed to death.

My merit comes from his mercy; for I do not lack merit so long as he does not lack pity. And if the Lord's mercies are many, then I am rich in merits. For even if I am aware of many sins, what does it matter? Where sin abounded grace has overflowed. And if the Lord's mercies are from all ages forever, I too will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever. Will I not sing of my own righteousness? No, Lord, I shall be mindful only of your justice. Yet that too is my own; for God has made you my righteousness.

- Taken from St. Bernard's sermon on the *Song of Songs*. ■

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## For Group Sharing

(pages 106-113 of the book *I Believe in Love*)

### **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.
- According to the author, what is “the most beautiful of all successes, the most fruitful of all victories” (p. 107)? Share with each other some instances from your lives which seemed like failures at the time but from which actually came about tremendous good.
  - How is “fidelity to the will of God ... the whole of spirituality” (p. 108)? Where in the Bible do we see people giving themselves over to the will of God? What do you think is God’s will for your

### **Why Do We Pray?** by Fr. Bernard Bro, O.P.



*The Annunciation by Lorenzo Lotto*

**W**e do not pray in order to improve our talents, to develop more clearly an intellectual synthesis, or widen our culture, religious or otherwise. We pray in order to tell God once again that we love him and know that he loves us, and to relate ourselves to the plan of mercy that is his.

We run still greater risks in the realm of sen-

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life?

- How and why can Fr. de Caussade believe that “there is nothing so easy, so common, or so accessible to everyone as holiness” (p. 110)?
- What does the author recommend we do if we fail to keep our promise and thank Him for everything (p. 110-111)? Is this an obstacle to or another opportunity for holiness?
- “O Jesus, I thank You for everything” (p. 111). The author hopes that “if you were to retain nothing but that (prayer) from this retreat, it would be a great thing” (p. 112). Why is perpetual gratitude to God essential to the Christian life and a prayer that “reaffirms your disposition of love for Him in total abandonment” (p. 111)?

### **STEP 4: RESOLUTIONS & VIRTUES**

1. Invite the individuals in the group to say aloud petitions on behalf of themselves, their loved ones, some just cause in the world, for the deceased, etc. After each intercession, all should respond: “O Jesus, I thank you for everything.”

### **STEP 5: CLOSING PRAYER**

1. When finished with the discussion, the entire group should conclude with the *Ave, Regina Caelorum* or *Hail, O Queen of Heaven*:

**H**ail, O Queen of Heaven. • Hail, O Lady of angels. • Hail! thou root, hail! thou gate, • from whom unto the world, a light has arisen. • Rejoice, O glorious Virgin, • lovely beyond all others; • farewell, most beautiful maiden, • and pray for us to Christ. ■

Why Do We Pray? (Continued from page 3)

sibility, and in believing that our prayer has value only when we have “felt” something. The modern world takes special interest in “experiences,” descriptions, states of the soul; there is a kind of cult for everything that can yield some kind of “interior witness.” We delight in working out a projection of ourselves that arises from the senses.

Prayer is an extremely favorable opportunity for realizing such a projection. But this will always be the great difference between Christian and non-Christian prayer: the former does not contain its own end. A person does not pray primarily in order to find himself, but to give himself, to enter into a plan of salvation that goes beyond himself. In Christian prayer, what matters above all is not the quality of the interior experience, which can sometimes be very shallow, but the Person who is the “object” of this experience. Saint Paul speaks of “groanings” (Rom 8:26) or of a “cry” (Gal 4:6). What is important is not our experience but the gift we make of ourselves. We should enter into prayer, not to receive, but to give, to give ourselves and lose ourselves. And if friendship with God is to remain pre-eminent in our prayer, we must enter into prayer in order to give ourselves as a free gift, with the knowledge that we may not always really give what we are giving, and yet without being concerned about what we are giving. ■

### **Next Eucharistic “Hour of Power” in English**

- Saturday, March 2nd, 7-8 p.m., St. Peter Church

### **Next Parish Dessert Potluck\***

- Saturday, March 2nd, 8-9 p.m., McMahon Hall