



Faith in 52

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

Week 39: July 29th through August 4th, 2013

For Individuals

(pages 210-218 of the book *I Believe in Love*, from the ☞ symbol until the end)

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 is laden with the weight of every sin committed for all time. Such a load is impossible to fathom, but meditate upon the mystical size and burden of such a Cross. Do you desire to help Him carry it? Know that when you carry your cross, you actually help carry His: *“When Jesus gives me a cross, it is His Cross which He really puts on my shoulders, and He is relieved of that much of it”* (p. 211). Our contribution might seem infinitesimal when compared to the enormity of the Cross, but imagine the relief Veronica brought to Jesus with a simple wet cloth. Her gesture was small but to Jesus it was everything. Accept your crosses out of love for Jesus and in the desire to alleviate a small portion of His own.
 - Finish by saying the *Our Father* in a spirit of complete abandonment. ■



Christ Falls on the Way to Calvary (detail)
by Raphael

O Cross, chosen and designed to do such ineffable good: you are praised and exalted not so much by the minds and tongues of men, or even angels, as by the works that have been done thanks to you. O Cross, in whom and by whom salvation and life have come to me, in whom and by whom all good things come to me: God would not have me glory unless it be in you (cf. Gal. 6:14).

- from St. Anselm, *Prayers & Meditations*, 4.

Faith in 52

Week 39: July 29th through August 4th, 2013

Suffering: The Measure of Humanity

The true measure of humanity is essentially determined in relationship to suffering and to the sufferer. This holds true both for the individual and for society. A society unable to accept its suffering members and incapable of helping to share their suffering and to bear it inwardly through “com-passion” is a cruel and inhuman society. Yet society cannot accept its suffering members and support them in their trials unless individuals are capable of doing so themselves; moreover, the individual cannot accept another's suffering unless he personally is able to find meaning in suffering, a path of purification and growth in maturity, a journey of hope. Indeed, to accept the “other” who suffers, means that I take up his suffering in such a way that it becomes mine also. Because it has now become a shared suffering, though, in which another person is present, this suffering is penetrated by the light of love. The Latin word *con-solatio*, “consolation”, expresses this beautifully. It suggests *being with* the other in his solitude, so that it ceases to be solitude. Furthermore, the capacity to accept suffering for the sake of

goodness, truth and justice is an essential criterion of humanity, because if my own well-being and safety are ultimately more important than truth and justice, then the power of the stronger prevails, then violence and untruth reign supreme. Truth and justice must stand above my comfort and physical well-being, or else my life itself becomes a lie. In the end, even the “yes” to love is a source of suffering, because love always requires expropriations of my “I”, in which I allow myself to be pruned and wounded. Love simply cannot exist without this painful renunciation of myself, for otherwise it becomes pure selfishness and thereby ceases to be love.

To suffer with the other and for others; to suffer for the sake of truth and justice; to suffer out of love and in order to become a person who truly loves—these are fundamental elements of humanity, and to abandon them would destroy man himself. Yet once again the question arises: are we capable of this? Is the other important enough to warrant my becoming, on his account, a person who suffers? Does truth matter to me

enough to make suffering worthwhile? Is the promise of love so great that it justifies the gift of myself? In the history of humanity, it was the Christian faith that had the particular merit of bringing forth within man a new and deeper capacity for these kinds of suffering that are decisive for his humanity. The Christian faith has shown us that truth, justice and love are not simply ideals, but enormously weighty realities. It has shown us that God — Truth and Love in person—desired to suffer for us and with us. Bernard of Clairvaux coined the marvellous expression: *Impassibilis est Deus, sed non incompassibilis* [29]—God cannot suffer, but he can *suffer with*. Man is worth so much to God that he himself became man in order to *suffer with* man in an utterly real way—in flesh and blood—as is revealed to us in the account of Jesus's Passion. Hence in all human suffering we are joined by one who experiences and carries that suffering *with* us; hence *con-solatio* is present in all suffering, the consolation of God's compassionate love—and so the star of hope rises...

- from Pope Benedict XVI, *Saved in Hope: Spe Salvi* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, November 30, 2007), §38-39. ■

Faith in 52

Week 39: July 29th through August 4th, 2013

For Group Sharing

(pages 210-218 of the book *I Believe in Love*, from the ☩ symbol until the end)

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.
- What approach does the author suggest we take “when we speak to those who are suffering physically or morally” (p. 210)? Do we have any obligation to alleviate their suffering? To what understanding do we wish to lead them “little by little” (p. 211)? How do we

The Always-Love

Jesus did the will of the Father when it was not at all pleasing to his human nature. It was not pleasing, even long before the Passion, to be treated with ingratitude, to be disappointed again and again, to receive such small returns for his love. But he did the will of the Father always and not just when it was agreeable to his humanity.

Out of that constancy comes directly that persevering love absolutely characteristic of Jesus. Saint John says of him that, “having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end” (Jn 13:1). Again, we see in ourselves, flowing right out of the previous consideration, a sometimes-love, a self-centeredness. Christ was always Father-centered and other-centered. It is when we are focused on ourselves that we have sometimes-love. When we look back on our own lives, we realize that we have sometimes experienced that feeling of “What’s the use?” in situations, particularly at times with persons. And yet there is that unquenchable love that God has put in our hearts, which comes up like a tide and against all evidence to the contrary. It urges us to say, “No, I will try again.” This is what we want to

(Continued on page 4)

(Continued on page 4)

Faith in 52

Week 39: July 29th through August 4th, 2013

(Continued from page 3)

bring up the Cross tactfully and compassionately in the face of great pain? How did Jesus treat the afflicted?

- “Another great treasure of suffering is that it teaches us to be compassionate. When one has suffered himself, he understands much better the sufferings of others” (p. 212). Where have you witnessed greater compassion borne out of suffering?
- “There is a certain union of love which is not realized except in shared sorrow” (p. 212). What does the author mean by this? Can you think of instances wherein shared sorrow brought people uniquely together?
- Practice making the Sign of the Cross as a group. When and why do we Catholics make the Sign of the Cross? What does this ritualized gesture mean to you?
- ““Could Christ have saved us without having suffered and died”” (p. 215)? How do St. Thomas Aquinas and the author respond to that question (p. 215-216)?
- What does it mean to say that “the death of Christ was not caused by sin, but by His love...” (p. 217)?
- What role does the Resurrection have in the Christian understanding of suffering (p. 217)?

STEP 4: CLOSING PRAYER

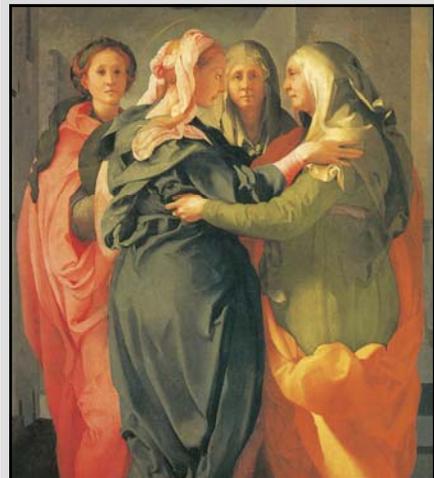
1. When finished with the discussion, the entire group should conclude with the prayer *To Our Lady of Sorrows*:

O most holy Virgin, Mother of our Lord Jesus Christ: by the overwhelming grief you experienced when you witnessed the martyrdom, the crucifixion, and death of your Divine Son, look upon me with eyes of compassion, and awaken in my heart a tender commiseration for those sufferings, as well as a sincere detestation of my sins, in order that being disengaged from all undue affection for the passing joys of this earth, I may sigh after the eternal Jerusalem, and that henceforward all my thoughts and all my actions may be directed towards this one most desirable object. Honor, glory, and love to our divine Lord Jesus, and to the holy and immaculate Mother of God. Amen. ■

The Always-Love (Continued from page 3)
nurture in ourselves. This is of Christ. It is the always-love.

This persevering, constant love, like mobility and the faith response, comes out of suffering and pain. The love that is not persevering, the sometimes-love that separates us from Christ, is a matter of emotions, situations, persons, circumstances, surprises. But the persevering love of Jesus is the unquenchable love.

- from Mother Mary Francis, P.C.C., *Anima Christi: Soul of Christ* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2001). ■



The Visitation by Jacopo da Pontormo

Next Eucharistic “Hour of Power” in English

- Saturday, August 3rd, 7-8 p.m.,
St. Peter McMahan Hall

Next Parish Dessert Potluck*

- Saturday, August 3rd, 8-9 p.m.,
Upper Room Library