

Faith in 52

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

Week 42: August 19th through August 25th, 2013

For Individuals

(pages 228-236 of the book *I Believe in Love*, beginning and stopping at the ☞ symbols)

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:
 - “The victim will always be love’s privileged one” (p. 228). We spend so much time protecting ourselves from being hurt; listen to Jesus speak to you, “Do not be afraid. Do not fear to offer yourself as a victim. You do not need to protect yourself... not anymore.”
 - “To unite ourselves to the Mass, to offer the Sacrifice, to consume the Victim, is to say that we would like to be victims with Him” (p. 229). In your next Mass and in Eucharistic Adoration, do not forget to offer yourselves, your anxieties, your sorrows, your troubles, your miseries, and your needs in union with the “divine Head crucified” (p. 230). Offer yourself as a willing victim of love.
 - Jesus said, “I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing!” (Lk 12:49). Imagine Jesus’ immense love and his sadness when it is not reciprocated: “There is the King, begging for love, begging for hearts which He can fill with His merciful tenderness, and finding none—having a heart overflowing with loving goodness, a longing to share it, and finding no one who wants to receive it” (p. 231). How will you respond? Will you abandon Him, too, or will you let Him love you and respond in kind? Say to Him with all your affection: “I want this love which men reject. I open my heart wide to this divine love; let it invade me; let it burn me, let it consume my heart completely. Thus I shall console my divine Savior. Thus I shall die a victim of love, immolated in this ocean of flames” (p. 232). “Offer Jesus His own Heart, His own love...” (p. 236).
 - Finish by saying the *Our Father* in a spirit of complete abandonment. ■

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And What Do We Offer?

And what do we ourselves offer when we offer our bodies and blood with Jesus at Mass? We offer what Jesus offered: life and death. By “body” we offer all that actually constitutes our physical life: time, health, energy, ability, sentiments, perhaps just a smile, that only a spirit living in a body can give and which is so precious at times. By “blood,” we express the offering of our death; not necessarily our final death, or martyrdom for Christ or our brethren. Death means also all that right now prepares and anticipates our death: humiliations, failures, sickness that cripples us, limits due to age or health, everything that “mortifies” us. When St. Paul exhorts us by the mercy of God to present “our bodies,” he didn’t mean just our senses and carnal appetites, but all of ourselves, body and soul; especially our minds and our wills. In fact he goes on to say: “Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom 12:2).

However, to conform to all this we must start practicing what we have said as soon as we

come out from Mass. We must really make the effort, each one within his or her own limits, to offer our “bodies” to our brethren, and that is to say, our time, energy and attention—in a word, our lives. When Jesus had pronounced the words: “Take... this is my body; take... this is my blood,” he didn’t allow much time to pass before doing what he had promised: a few hours later he gave his life and blood on the Cross. Otherwise, it’s all just empty words, lies. Therefore, after saying to our brothers and sisters: “Take, eat,” we must really allow ourselves to be “eaten” and especially by those who do not act with the gentleness and kindness we expect... On his way to Rome where he was to die a martyr, St. Ignatius of Antioch wrote: “I am the grain of Christ; that I may be ground by the teeth of wild beasts to become pure bread for the Lord.” If we think about it, each one of us will realize that there are sharp teeth grinding us: criticisms, contrasts, hidden or open oppositions, different ideas in those surrounding us, differences in character. We should even be grateful to those who help us like this. They are of infinitely more benefit to us

than those who approve or flatter us...

... But we mustn’t forget that we have also offered our “blood,” and that is to say our passiveness, and mortification. It is when we can no longer do what we want that we can be closer to Christ. After Easter Jesus said to Peter: “When you were young, you girded yourself and walked where you would; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish to go. This he said to show by what death he was to glorify God” (John 21:18ff). Shortly before this Jesus had said to Peter three times: “Feed my sheep,” but now he makes him understand that it is in dying that he will give the greatest glory to God.

Because of the Eucharist there is no such thing as a “useless life” in the world. No one should say: “What use is my life? What am I doing in this world?” You are in the world for the most sublime of reasons, to be a living sacrifice, to be Eucharist with Jesus.

- from *The Eucharist: Our Sanctification*,
Frances Lonergan Villa, Trans.
(Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press,
1993), p. 22-24. ■

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For Group Sharing

(pages 228-236 of the book *I Believe in Love*, beginning and stopping at the ☩ symbols)

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.
 - “The word *victim* frightens us” (p. 228). Does it frighten you? What does *victim* connote?
 - Why does the Lord often keep His love “neither seen nor felt beforehand” (p. 228-229)?
 - How does the active offering of oneself as a victim in the Sacrifice of the Mass change our participation in it (p. 229)? Many people complain that they “get nothing out of Mass,” that it is “boring.” What should our disposition toward the Mass be? Do we come to it in order to receive or to give?
 - According to the author, what distinguishes the two kinds of victims: victims of justice and victims of love (p. 230-232)?

Bread-With-Us

**by Fr. Peter John Cameron,
O.P.**

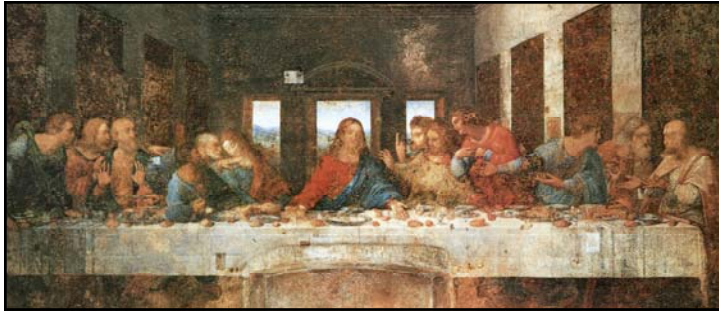
“In what does man’s wretchedness actually consist?” asks Pope Benedict XVI. He answers that the root of human wretchedness is loneliness, the absence of love - the fact that our personal existence is not embraced by a love that makes our existence “necessary.” Our misery arises when we live without a love strong enough to justify our existence no matter how much pain and limitation go along with it. What our heart is crying out for is a true companion in whose love we experience how truly necessary

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The Last Supper (as restored in 1954) by Leonardo da Vinci

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Which kind of victim was St. Therese (p. 231-232)?
Which kind of victim are you?

- “The great sin of which our Lord complained more than any other to St. Margaret Mary was ingratitude, lack of love” (p. 234). How do you feel when people appreciate and thank you? When do you feel grateful to Jesus? How do you express your thankfulness?
- “To be a victim is to smile” (p. 235). What does this mean? How does an actual smile change a conversation or relationship?
- “Total abandonment... All your life, then, becomes a Mass in which you are the host and Jesus the Priest” (p. 235). Discuss this beautiful idea.
- What can you give Jesus when you find yourself “at a loss to what more to do to give Him reparation which would be worthy of Him” (p. 236)?

STEP 4: CLOSING PRAYER

1. When finished with the discussion, the entire group should conclude with the prayer *Anima Christi*:

Soul of Christ, sanctify me. Body of Christ, save me.
Blood of Christ, inebriate me. Water from the side of Christ, wash me. Passion of Christ, strengthen me. O good Jesus, hear me. Within Thy wounds, hide me. Suffer me not to be separated from Thee. From the malignant enemy, defend me. And at the hour of my death, call me; and bid me come to Thee, that with Thy saints I may praise Thee forever and ever. Amen. ■

Bread-With-Us (Continued from page 3)

and invaluable our existence is.

The very word companion derives from the two Latin words *cum*, meaning “with,” and *panis*, which means “bread.” A companion is literally “bread-with-us” - in other words, everything we need. This literally is the Eucharist! The Eucharist proclaims that God is not a distant fact toward which human beings strive with great effort. “Rather he is Someone who has joined man on his path, who has become his companion” (L. Giussani).

In the Sacrament of the Altar, writes Pope Benedict XVI in *Sacramentum Caritatis*, the Lord meets us and becomes our companion along the way. True joy, he says, is found in recognizing that the Lord is still with us, our faithful companion along the way. For as Saint Thomas Aquinas pointed out, no possession is joyous without a companion...

Christ’s presence is the companionship of those he has called like us. “Christ is realized in us and among us through our companionship” (L. Giussani).

- from *Jesus, Present Before Me: Meditations for Eucharistic Adoration* (Cincinnati, OH: Servant Books, 2008). ■

Next Eucharistic “Hour of Power” in English

- Saturday, September 7th, 7-8 p.m., St. Peter McMahan Hall

Next Parish Dessert Potluck*

- Saturday, September 7th, 8-9 p.m., Upper Room Library