



Faith in 52

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

Week 52: Oct. 28th through Nov. 3rd, 2013

For Individuals

(pages 275-280 of the book *I Believe in Love*, from "Read and reread the texts..." 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:

- "Ever since the Fall we have been profoundly marked by fear... as if, since then, there had not been Bethlehem, the sweetness of Nazareth, the Redemption of Calvary, the ineffable gift of the Eucharist, the total victory of the Resurrection" (p. 277). Of what are you still afraid? What keeps you from believing in "a liberator who can accomplish everything, a Savior" (p. 276)? Once and for all, name your fears, those things and ideas which you believe you cannot live without, denounce them in the name of Jesus, and give them to His merciful Heart. When spiritually attacked or discouraged, always run to the truth of the Gospel: "'Fear not, for I have redeemed you, and called you by your name. You are mine.... Since you have become honorable in my eyes, you are glorious. I have loved you: and I will give men for you, and people for your life'" (p. 277; Psalm 8:4-6).
- In gratitude for the graces received through this yearlong retreat, please say one *Hail Mary* for the repose of the soul of Fr. Jean C. J. d'Elbée, author of *I Believe in Love*. St. Therese of Lisieux, pray for him.
- Finish by saying the *Our Father* in a spirit of complete abandonment. ■

Each day, every day of our lives, God presents to us the people and the opportunities upon which he expects us to act. He expects no more of us, but he will accept nothing less of us; and we fail in our promise and commitment if we do not see in the situations of every moment of every day his divine will.

- from Fr. Walter Ciszek, S.J., *He Leadeth Me* (San Francisco, CA.: Ignatius Press, Feb. 1, 1995). ■

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I Love that I May Love

Love is sufficient of itself, it gives pleasure by itself and because of itself. It is its own merit, its own reward. Love looks for no cause outside itself, no effect beyond itself. Its profit lies in its practice. I love because I love, I love that I may love. Love is a great thing so long as it continually returns to its fountainhead, flows back to its source, always drawing from there the water which constantly replenishes it. Of all the movements, sensations and feelings of the soul, love is the only one in which the creature can respond to the Creator and make some sort of similar return however unequal though it be. For when God loves, all he desires is to be loved in return; the sole purpose of his love is to be loved, in the knowledge that those who love him are made happy by their love of him.

The Bridegroom's love, or rather the love which is the Bridegroom, asks in return nothing but faithful love. Let the beloved, then, love in return. Should not a bride love, and above all, Love's bride? Could it be that Love not be loved?

Rightly then does she give up all other feelings and give her-



The Adoration of the Magi (detail)
by Quentin Massys

self wholly to love alone; in giving love back, all she can do is to respond to love. And when she has poured out her whole being in love, what is that in comparison with the unceasing torrent of that original source? Clearly, lover and Love, soul and Word, bride and Bridegroom, creature and Creator do not flow with the same volume; one might as well equate a thirsty man with the fountain.

What then of the bride's hope, her aching desire, her passionate love, her confident assurance? Is all this to wilt just because she cannot match stride for stride with her giant, any more than she can vie with honey for sweetness, rival the lamb for gentleness, show herself as white as the lily, burn as bright as the sun, be equal in love with him who is Love? No. It is true that the creature loves less because she is less.

But if she loves with her whole being, nothing is lacking where everything is given. To love so ardently then is to share the marriage bond; she cannot love so much and not be totally loved, and it is in the perfect union of two hearts that complete and total marriage consists. Or are we to doubt that the soul is loved by the Word first and with a greater love?

- from St. Bernard of Clairvaux (*Sermo 83, 4-6; Opera omnia*, Edit. Cisterc 2 [1958], 300-302). ■

An Encounter with Jesus

For Bernard, in fact, true knowledge of God consisted in a personal, profound experience of Jesus Christ and of his love. And, dear brothers and sisters, this is true for every Christian: faith is first and foremost a personal, intimate encounter with Jesus, it is having an experience of his closeness, his friendship and his love. It is in this way that we learn to know him ever better, to love him and to follow him more and more. May this happen to each one of us!

- from Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Oct. 21, 2009). ■

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For Group Sharing

(pages 275-280 of the book *I Believe in Love*, from “Read and reread the texts...” 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.
- Briefly describe to those in the group your lived relationship with God up to this point in your life. Is this exercise difficult or easy? What is meant by a “lived relationship?”

(Continued on page 4)

When Our Hearts Cry Out

by John Janaro

Prayer is conversation with God, and it is God who initiates the conversation. That does not mean that we should wait until God starts speaking inside our heads. He is always speaking, calling to us, drawing us to prayer. He speaks to our hearts. We begin to hear him when we become more aware of our need for him. This is where prayer begins: when our hearts cry out, “Lord, have mercy on me!”

We always need mercy, but the awareness of that need arises and intensifies when we are suffering. One of the things that has helped me see the mercy of God at work in my own suffering is the fact that it has forced me to shut up and listen. The ear of the heart that hears God has a very simple shape.

The cry of that heart is also simple: “Help. Have mercy on me. I need you.” We may not be able to articulate these words, but that inward groaning that seeks him is the foundational response to the love he continually offers us.

We are dear to God in our weakness. He is close to us when we are suffering. He lifts us closer to him if we allow him to enter inside of that need that groans within us. He shapes us, in his way and in his time.

- from *Never Give Up: My Life and God's Mercy*
(Cincinnati, OH: Servant Books, an imprint of St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2010). ■

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(Continued from page 3)

- Having read the entire book *I Believe in Love*, how would you summarize the “little way” of St. Therese of Lisieux? How does St. Paul reveal the same truth when he says: “For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor 12:10)? What are the spiritual “exercises designed for feeble souls” (p. 278)?
- “There is nothing in the world of which I am more sure than I am of the love of Jesus for each one of us” (p. 280). Do you share his conviction?
- “You must repeat again and again, to believing and unbelieving souls, in awaiting His return, that Jesus loves them” (p. 280). This is the heart of the New Evangelization. How will you remind others that “Jesus loves them”? Will you invite others to read and to pray with the book *I Believe in Love*?
- Now that you have concluded this yearlong retreat, how has your faith changed? Do you look at God the same way? Have you received healing in an aspect of your life or freedom from any errors, misconceptions or interior lies? How has your personal relationship with the Lord grown deeper? What particular grace or truth did you receive during this yearlong retreat that you need to maintain and hold onto for years to come?

STEP 4: CLOSING PRAYER

1. When finished with the discussion, the entire group should conclude with the *Hail Mary* prayer:

Hail Mary, full of Grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now, and at the hour of our death. Amen. ■

We Need a Christ

by **Fulton J. Sheen**

[Jesus Christ is the] One who will step into the breach of death, crushing sin, gloom and despair; a leader to whom we can make totalitarian sacrifice without losing, but gaining freedom, and whom we can love even unto death. We need a Christ today who will make cords and drive the buyers and the sellers from our new temples; who will blast the unfruitful fig tree; who will talk of crosses and sacrifices and whose voice will be like the voice of the raging sea. But He will not allow us to pick and choose among His words, discarding the hard ones, and accepting the ones that please our fancy. We need a Christ who will restore moral indignation, who will make us hate evil with a passionate intensity, and love goodness to a point where we can drink death like water.

- from *Life of Christ* (McGraw-Hill, 1958). ■



The Purification of the Temple (detail) by El Greco

Excerpts from and references to *I Believe in Love* come from the edition by Fr. Jean C.J. d'Elbée, *I Believe in Love* (Manchester, N.H.: Sophia Institute Press, 2001).

Quotations from Sacred Scripture were taken from the New American Bible (NAB).

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