

LENTEN Devotional

2025



The Light in the Soul

LUTHERAN CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

SEASON OF LENT & EASTER

THE BE ATTITUDES - MATTHEW 5:3-12

This Lent we will study the beatitudes as a way to our lives as Be Attitudes.

****March 5, Ash Wednesday - Matthew 5:3**

Poor in Spirit

March 12 - Matthew 5:4

Those who Mourn

March 19 - Matthew 5:5

The Meek

March 26 - Matthew 5:6

The Hungry and Thirsty

April 2 - Matthew 5:7

The Merciful

April 9 - Matthew 5:8

Clean of Heart



1:00pm - Chapel; 7:00pm - Sanctuary

**** additional 7am Sunrise Service on Ash Wednesday-Holy Communion and Imposition of Ashes only**

Each worship service is preceded by a meal:

*Lunch at 12:00 noon and Dinner at 6:00pm
(5:30pm confirmands)*



HOLY WEEK WORSHIP



Maundy Thursday, April 17 - 1p - Chapel; 7p - Sanctuary
Holy Communion at both services

Good Friday, April 18 - 1p and 7p - Sanctuary

Easter Eve, April 19 - 5p - Sanctuary

Easter Sunday Services, April 20

7:30a with Holy Communion; 9:00a and 10:30a

*Easter Egg Hunt to follow Easter Sunday 10:30a service.
Bring your Easter Basket!!*

****all 7p Lenten services & the 10:30a Easter Service
will be livestreamed***

INTRODUCTION

The Light in the Soul

So often, it seems Lent comes in like a new wave off the crest of Christmas. All that joy and celebration suddenly turns into the dark gray clouds of Ash Wednesday. But Lent has its own wings of celebration, and we are given six full weeks to ponder our faith, to examine ourselves, and to search deeply into our hearts. This year's journey takes a look at the soul, the "Dark Nights of the Soul", penned by John of the Cross in 14th Century Spain. It is the Soul's quest for unity with God, for understanding the nature of God through the Holy Spirit, and finally about the Life and Light of Jesus who comes to dust away the ashes of our sin and offer us new Life through the Cross. May your journey through Lent grant new wisdom and new hope in the power of the Cross.



The Open Window

One can say Lent is a “Spiritual Journey to Open the Eyes of the Soul” – your soul, my soul, the souls of all those who believe. But sometimes, something is missing, something that clouds the Light of God from tunneling in deeper, the Light which divinely reveals the Truth. Apart from God, our souls are empty and clandestine, like black holes in space. We were born in this dark condition and except for the Grace of God, we would remain. But the mysterious, indescribable Love God has for each of us allows a small window for a flicker of the Holy Spirit to enter. Through our Baptism, we are given a tiny seed of faith and purity to begin the journey of our lives. But our soul cries out for more. The loneliness we feel apart from God beckons Him closer, for we know deeply we are flawed and in need of Spiritual sustenance. St. John of the Cross, a priest in 15th century Spain described this inherent need and intense abandonment as **“The Dark Night of the Soul”**. This “Dark Night” occurs when our eyes are shielded from the sacred Truth of God – we are imprisoned in the culture of our world, but our hearts are forever crying out for rescue. And that rescue comes when the Holy Spirit is finally able to penetrate the eyes of our soul, reconciling ourselves to the Will and Wisdom of God. When we see God with the eyes of the Spirit, we see the Truth.



And isn't this very need the lifelong cry of our heart, which longs to be heard and assured that there is indeed a place of comfort and healing. There is a haven of peace far from this world of fear, pain and suffering. And when it is our time, we will find ourselves in the lap of God, the Lover of our Souls.

“But you are a chosen people...belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light.” 1 Peter 2:9

Thursday, March 6, 2025

The One



The One who calls us His own. The One who calls us to be His Bride. The One who inscribes our souls in the Book of Life before we are even a seed of truth. The One who clothes us in the wedding gown of His unfathomable Love. He is the One who understands our inability to comprehend His wholeness and plenary power. The One who owns the universe and every dimension of time, light and space. This Absolute and Perfect One, who can be anywhere and everywhere, forward and backward. The One who can fill all space with His essence of fire or appear as a flicker of light in the darkness. God's aim is to bathe our souls with love so the Holy Spirit can enter and begin His work to cleanse us from within, from the world's meanness and divisiveness. He is

the One who measures drip by drip the sea of His love and fuels our ships so we can sail safely through our lives. But we must ask Him in.

God calls us through many channels – through the profound beauty of His Creation, through the glory and kindness of His Will and Grace; through the dark profile of a stranger desperate for a glimmer of hope, a plea for forgiveness, a piece of manna to restore his soul. The Holy Spirit calls us through His Flame of Love to quiet our souls, to dissipate our anger, our pride, our fences and defenses, to unburden our hearts, to become vulnerable and humble, to forgive others when we are not forgiven. This is the burden placed on our souls by the Pentecostal Spirit of Fire and God’s Flame of Love. ***“Follow the way of Love....let Love be your greatest aim....Eagerly pursue and seek to acquire the Love of God -- make ityour great quest.” I Corinthians 14:1.***

Friday, March 7, 2025

Introspection

The Light of God goes beyond understanding scriptural doctrines. By this is meant, God’s Light dawns within us and penetrates each of our hearts. It becomes a golden orb of love and truth, protecting, guiding and inspiring each of us throughout our entire lives. We must also keep our ears sensitive and attuned to the “Voice” of God. Jesus said, “He who has ears, let him hear.” Matthew 11:15. He is always with us and whispers wisdom, but we must cultivate a means to listen and follow the journey He has set before us. This is not easy, for we have many competing voices in the world clamoring for our attention. Some may be of our own accord, and others may be from the dark spiritual forces swirling around us, preying on opportunities of weakness and windows of temptation. The 10th Commandment says, “Do not covet”. But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the Commandment, produced every kind of covetous desire.” Romans 7:8. These are not quiet voices, and our fleshly nature has little means of censoring them. How often when we are deeply involved in a spiritual experience, singing the Liturgy, listening to a sermon, focusing on prayer, have we been interrupted by a cacophony of chatter, dissonance, and straying thoughts? We feel guilty, being invaded by some outside force, and we must fight to turn our attention back to our intimate worship. How many times have pernicious images, or profane words scratched their claws across our thoughts, causing us to burn with shame even though we know we did not willingly generate them? St. Paul, examining his heart and mind, realizes these truths: “I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out...When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.” Romans 7:18



There are times when the Lord lets our souls come under spiritual attack to demonstrate our vulnerability and our feeble righteousness. He wants us to understand our great need and our dependence upon Him. And though we try to stand firm and strong in these temptations, He alone shows us the way to walk in the Spirit. St Paul in Romans 7:20, gives us great comfort by stating firmly, “Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who does it, but it is sin living in me who does it.” The loving Light, Voice, and Wisdom of God stands near in every temptation we face. And like every protective Father, He sends the stronger spiritual forces of the Holy Spirit to shield and defend us.

The Womb of His Heart

God is surging after you. Like the waves in the ocean rush to the shore and lap upon the sand, God is rushing like a riptide after your heart and your soul. He is the Lover; you are the Beloved. He asks only that you pause and open yourself up to the receptacle of His Love. You can never be filled enough; you can never overflow from His grace and generosity. The more He gives, the deeper your cistern becomes. Like a new parent, His Love for you knows no bounds, has no conditions, makes no mistakes.



When a child is born, it has no attachments, only that which will fill or quiet its wants and needs. Only when the mother bonds with the infant physically does the child cling after her. God clings to you when you are the tiniest cell in the womb – the Womb of His Heart. And while you begin to grow intellectually, emotionally and spiritually, you begin to sense something new, something quite unique, like a nimbus or an aura forming around your heart. It becomes a quiet longing without an origin, so it seems. Then, a gentle breeze it drifts by, and something stirs. The beauty of God’s presence reaches out to touch your soul. He longs to take you by the hand into His Spirit. It is there where the longing of your soul finds its desire -- to belong to God.

God is awakening you, disturbing you from your numbing sleep. And it is only through His Spiritual call that you will hear the delicate whisper of His Voice. The Lord alone throws you the anchor of Life. “Today, if you hear His Voice, do not harden your hearts.” Hebrews 4:7. He invites you to come to Him, with all your pride and weaknesses, your shortcomings and failures. God offers to take you by the hand and lead you where you cannot go. “Let us then approach the Throne of Grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” Hebrews 4:16

Monday, March 10, 2025

Immeasurable Love



It’s difficult to comprehend the vast complexities of the Almighty and His Ways. Galaxies and solar systems are far too diminutive to contain His Wisdom and His Power. God’s Love cannot be bound by any celestial ceiling, its depth defies the deepest of seas, even the Pacific ocean which

is the oldest and deepest of the earth’s ocean basins, measuring 63 million sq. miles at a depth of 36,797 feet. Why would we be at all surprised by this comparison? Because the Father of Ancients created it and everything else on this earth, as He abruptly questions Job. “Who is this who darkens my council with words without knowledge? Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundations? Tell me if you understand!” Job 38:2,4. God is not whole, nor does He possess singularity. He is like the air all around, at all times, untouchable, unseeable, transient, beyond all imagination, an everlasting Energy, the Alpha and the Omega, without beginning or end. God is in all our five senses and expresses hundreds, perhaps millions of His own. How can we know the Father of Ancients and the Father of all

Futures? How can we touch the air and hold it? Where is the Light of Love so distant beyond infinite space, the Hands of Whom hold the fabric of the universe and keep it from unraveling? The I AM is beyond words, beyond limits, beyond entirety, beyond infinity. Yet in His masterful mystery, He walks right beside us and picks us up when we fall. I John 4:16 says, “God is Love. Whoever lives in love lives in God and God in him.”

God is Love, therefore Love is God. And God is the Universe and everything else above and beyond it. Love without limits is the Love I AM has for us – like a Bridegroom has for his Bride, an analogy He uses often in the Bible. “As a Bridegroom rejoices over his Bride, so will your God rejoice over you.” Isaiah 62:5. What could be closer, deeper or more intimate?

Tuesday, March 11, 2025

The Highest Word

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. The Word was made flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His Glory, the Glory of the one and only, who came from the Father, full of Grace and Truth.” *John 1:1, 14*. God the Master, sent the perfect living Word, His only begotten Son to be present for us, to save us, to be our advocate and our access to the Father. He is to be our peace, joy, salvation, conviction, and our certitude of eternal Glory, all won for us on the holy Cross. In Him, is our Cornerstone, the principal stone, the largest and most solid of all the foundation stones. Jesus is the Cornerstone of the Church, the construct upon which everything else is laid. He is the Cornerstone of our souls where the Lord Almighty is to dwell. “Christ Jesus himself is the chief Cornerstone...in Him, you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by Jesus’ Spirit.” *Ephesians 2:20,22*.



One might wonder then, “How can a person, even a holy man, also be the “Word?” Translations of different languages can change the whole meaning of a word or a phrase. In Greek, “Word” is also translated as “Logos”, which means the “expression of a thought”. God is the expression of or the thought of all matter, and all universes. “Rhema” is another Greek word meaning “utterance” or “thing said”. English translations of both Logos and Rhema combine them into one meaning.

There is a substantial distinction though, in the original Greek. In Christian theology, “Rhema” is called the “spoken word”, referring to the revelation received by the disciples when the Holy Spirit “spoke” to them. Jesus also used “Rhema” when he was tempted by Satan, repeating actual Scripture to disarm him. In this usage, Logos refers to Jesus, as the “Word”. To make matters more complicated, the word in Hebrew is “Dabar”, which means the “Word of God.” In Christianity, “Rhemata Christou” means utterance, or the actual words of Jesus in the four Gospels. And Jesus is the living embodiment of God’s thoughts concerning mankind. Through His Word, God has made known the mysteries of Jesus Christ, Who holds the keys to God’s incomparable Wisdom. Two in One.

God Speaks

Inherent in our human nature is the desire to seek and to personally know our Creator. Children as young as 5 or 6 start to evoke an image of a God-like designer to explain the complexities of the world around them. Adults who have atheistic or narcissistic natures, often suspect deep in their minds, the formulation of millions of cells, spirals of DNA in the body, electric impulses and pathways in the brain do not happen spontaneously or by happenstance. Darwin's theory about nature's primordial soup has been dissected, modulated and re-theorized hundreds of times. A sublimely Higher Power or Intelligent Designer, with simply a 'Word' created the Universe, every galaxy, planet, asteroid, black hole, northern light and creature within it. But there's always doubt, always questioning, mostly from the free will God allowed us and the enormous cargo of ego contained within it. Even in our paucity of Higher Intelligence, humans have always likened themselves to be bigger and brighter than God, such "geniuses" as Satan, early Greek philosophers, the Pharaohs, the Herods, the Caesars, and about a thousand other characters in the Bible, in addition to those who pontificate today.



But in all our efforts to seek an understanding of the profoundness of God, we often shut off His signals. Perhaps we missed His gentle whisper or the slight intonation of His voice as He tries harder to get our attention. Do we misinterpret the "burning bush", or the "clouds which traveled by day and the fire by night?" Do we ignore the earthquakes, tornadoes and hurricanes, the volcanoes and mud slides, the plagues and pandemics? The Almighty will allow nature to take its course if He wants to get our attention and remind us of "Who" is in control. Through all these tragedies, natural catastrophes, even subtle reminders, God sheds a tear. He pours out His Love willingly, but for many it falls on empty hearts. Our stony heartened souls, whom the Lord described as "stiff-necked people", remain prisoners of their free will, held hostage by the earthly desires of their hearts. If only we could foresee the treasures, the bliss, the enduring blessings, and the extravagance of the Love He pours over us. The Light of His Love can never be quenched, His Voice never silenced.

Thursday, March 13, 2025

Stillness

At some particular and deeply profound moment in our lives, we may suddenly be struck with the wonder and presence of God. It may be just a quick, transient spark, or a prolonged period of consummate, mercurial light. Whichever it may be, it is a "quickening of the Spirit." We are overjoyed, awed and excited. We want that moment in space and time to be forever engraved upon our hearts and souls. Many of us have had such a moment, even if we have missed it or misplaced it, if we have the love for Jesus embodied within, it is still there to cherish. The subtle or sublime presence of the Holy Spirit has come to infuse our souls with the precious Light of Christ, and it awakens us to focus more ardently on the unfolding days of Lent.

After a while, this divine gift may begin to lose its brilliance and we "see through a glass darkly; but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know even as also I am known." *1 Corinthians 13:12.*

But unless through our own free will, we dismiss it, the Light will ebb and flow, but it will never die. We must learn to silence the lowly parts of our human nature before we can ever come to really unravel our contorted and confused thoughts about the Creator. Because of our humanness, we may be discouraged or distressed or disturbed at God during times in our lives. We may resort to using our own



emotional or intellectual rationalizations about the nature of God. But the Bible teaches us to “guard our hearts and minds in true faith in Jesus Christ.” *Philippians 4:7*. Paul is telling us that we cannot see everything clearly yet, but if we stay deeply in the faith, we will “see clearly” when we are face to face with Christ. Then we feel the Peace of God, which transcends all understanding and resides in the inner sanctuary of the soul. It is here the Spirit of God, and all His Being is kept secure, untarnished by human doubts, fears and uncertainties. Only

Jesus, in the presence of the Holy Spirit can draw us into this utter Stillness, the Light that flickers on the surface of the sea, and the silence of the turning tide as the moon descends.

Friday, March 14, 2025

Knowing God

Some people have a “sixth sense”, a keen intuitive power, or perhaps a window open wider to the presence of God. It may be a kind of supernatural aura, or a clairvoyance that allows a connection, an internal communication with the Spirit of God. Meditation and contemplation, in the past these words suggested practices that seemed unnatural to traditional religious institutions. Ritualistic chanting, speaking in tongues, asceticism, mantras, tantric principles, even some ancient yoga sutras are examples. Many of the tenets of Buddhism are reflected in these practices. You may wonder, “where does prayer fit in?” Prayer covers all of them and may even be seen as the first step in the deeper journey to the Ancient of Days. But prayer is often just a means of conversation with God, a one-way dialogue of praise, gratitude, hope, direction, or simply requests for wants and desires. Some people think of God as a kind of “cosmic bellhop”, who is always available to fill our luggage of wants and wishes. We may hope there is some celestial “other” being who could play that role, but it is not God. It’s probably not wise to try to understand Him with our intellect, because Our Creator is far beyond the minor constructs of the human mind. And our hearts have long been shown to lead us to mis-truths and down paths of vanity and romantic dreams. All we have left is our souls, but do we dare trust these

essences of mystery? On our own, no. But our souls are not our own, they belong to God. So, from this knowledge, we are powerless to know God, unless we ask Him in. Unless we allow Him to infuse our souls with His Breath, His Light, and His Presence; unless we open our souls to His Divine Love, we will never know the mystery God. And we will never know Jesus as He is known by His Father. “The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God...no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.” 1 Corinthians 2: 10-13. But even if we do not have a sixth sense or a keen intuitive power, God is the Lover of our Souls.



Saturday, March 15, 2025

“The Things of Men

One of the things which trips us up most in our everyday lives and relationships is the tendency to rely on our own wisdom to guide our life’s journey. The Lord gave us a wonderful gift called “free will”, but as man is likened to do, the gift became distorted by selfish aims and ambitions. A soul cemented in self-seeking and pride invariably stands in the way of a humble heart. We all know people who are wrapped tightly in their own pride and stubborn ways. Much like the Pharisees in Jesus’ time, these people consider no one else equal to their standards of false, puffed up narcissism. How far from God’s love and truth they have wandered, some so far, they will never find their way back. We saw this so markedly during Jesus’ teachings, arrest and crucifixion. And we see it today. People who believe they are superior to others not only segregate themselves from others, but they segregate themselves from God. Even the disciples tried to “one up” Jesus. When Peter denied Jesus’ death and resurrection in Matthew 16:23, “Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan!... You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.”

King Solomon, a man of great knowledge, knew he needed wisdom and discernment from the Lord. “But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. I Kings 3:7. The Lord recognized the sincerity of Solomon’s heart, granted him wisdom, and watched while Solomon built the most magnificent and supernal temple of all time. Jesus said in Mark 10:15, I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the Kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” Children view the world with eyes of innocence and wonder. They don’t burden themselves with trying to out-think God. Are we able to discern what will happen to us the in the next second or hour or year of our lives? We are not our own Creator. The Lord charts the course of our lives in nano seconds, and should we see the first mighty wave of life coming toward us, we would fall down and drown. “For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct Him?” I Corinthians 8:16. “In the same way, no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God...The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.” I Corinthians 8:10-11.

Monday, March 17, 2025

The Power of Grace”

We can never “know” God. He allows us small slivers of insight, recognition, and familiarity through His Will and the gift of His Grace. The Creator is far too profound for any human comprehension. If we think of the Pacific Ocean, the largest and deepest ocean with an area of 63.8 million sq. miles and a maximum depth of 36, 201 ft, we can imagine the massive layers of waves coming into shore and then somersaulting back to the oceanic pole of inaccessibility, also known as Point Nemo. This area is so remote, only the astronauts aboard the International Space Station come close to it, when they pass overhead. Point Nemo is an uncharted mystery and a reminder of the untamed power of nature. Think of God’s wisdom as a trillion times farther than Point Nemo, and we are just at the brink of the knowledge possessed by Him. Based on this it would seem, we are incapable of truly “knowing” the Almighty Creator. He created us and knows all our plusses and minuses. He alone is the only way men can become one with Him. He offers this freely for anyone who believes, for anyone who accepts His Grace and the Gift of His Love.

To be one with the Father and the Son, to be transformed into the likeness of Christ, we must receive Him into our very being, which only He can consummate. Grace, His Grace gives us the mystic beauty of His love and His divine compassion which reaches through all the dark forests surrounding us. And He carries us forth with strength and courage to transubstantiate our souls, our natures, and finally, to reflect the face of Jesus. From that point of wondrous Light, the Holy Spirit begins to indwell further reflecting Grace, which is the presence and will of God's living power within. Always working to reveal the Light, our souls begin to see the divineness, and the peace of our journey which God wants to give us now and forever. We will rise to a new and fresh morning bathed in the celestial Light of God's Holy Being.

He wants the gift of His Grace to bring a new dawn in our souls, where His Spirit can reside and guide. He wants the eyes of our souls to see and appreciate His Holiness, His Beauty, His Presence, His awesome Profundity. "The path of life leads upward for the wise to keep them from going down to the grave." Proverbs 15:24.

Tuesday, March 18, 2025

Know Thyself

St. Augustine prayed to God, "Let me know myself, Lord. And then I will know You." This may sound egotistical and pompous, vainglorious at the very least. But this was not Augustine's intention. A Philosopher, Theologian, Bishop of Roman North Africa, and renown Christian Thinker, Augustine brought the practice of Biblical exegesis or critical interpretation to the medieval and modern worlds. By these words, Augustine asked the Lord to help him to spiritually inquire of himself—his own deep thoughts and beliefs, to be certain they aligned with those of God. We can never really know if we are on the right track, the spiritual and sacred trail that follows the Way of the Spirit. Because we are human beings, our natural self will always revert to thoughts and statements which begin with I, or Me, or My. It is our nature, because we live in our own bodies and minds, to take great pains to keep ourselves safe and alive, and to follow the paths which will protect us. Augustine said we must know our inner selves to distinguish our own voice from the Voice of God.

David, boy or king, what a confident and complicated soul wrapped in the burial clothes of a mere man. His life after his defeat of Goliath, reads like a reality TV series. Lust, jealousy, rape, murder, betrayal—these even fan the flame igniting the furnace of hatred in his children's lives. For a while, David was a

man without a country, a man without a soul. His life and character could mirror many of ours today, strong but weak, determined but afraid, doubtful but righteous. He was given so much, but he lost so much. David and his son, Solomon both faced the "Dark Night of the Soul". And as the Lord looked down at David and saw his cancerous and bitter demise, tears fell like molten lava scattering the earth. Yet, the characteristic of David, son



of Jesse, which stands most boldly comes straight from the lips of God, “I have David, son of Jesse, a man after My own heart.” Acts 13:22b.

To listen and understand the Voice of God, we must listen to and understand our own voices. We must examine the content, sincerity, truth and motives we harbor in our hidden places and the shadows which hide our guilt and shame. To hear the Voice of God, we must understand that everything we know of God is limited by our own comprehension. Isaiah 57:15 tells us, “How can any human mind conceive the transcendent God who inhabits eternity?” When David was deep in the “Dark Night of the Soul”, the Son of Man and the Son of God brought the Light of the Cross to mirror His humility and His humble state, in the portrait His Father painted for us. “For when I am weak, then I am strong.” II Corinthians 12:10b. Throughout all our travails and weaknesses, our Heavenly Father comes to us and opens His Womb of Love, where we may ever dwell safely with Him.

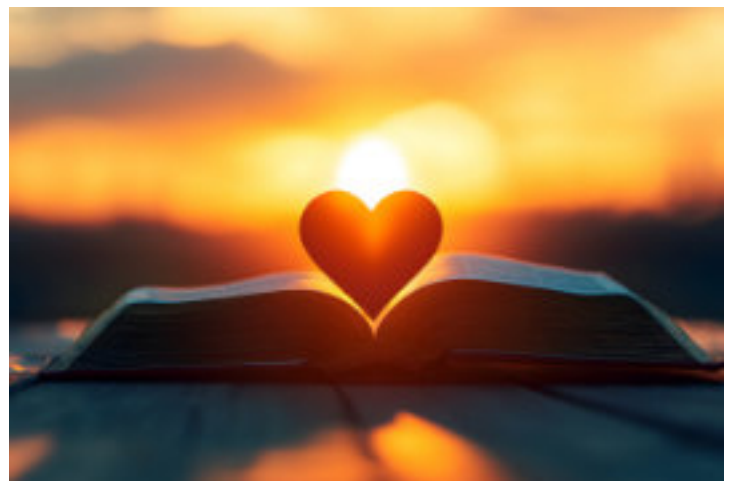
Wednesday, March 19, 2025

Trials of Love

There is a time in every believer’s life when we may think the Lord has forgotten all about us. This seems especially true when crisis occurs, and suffering overtakes us. We’ve all experienced extremely arduous and anguishing seasons in our lives when we ask ourselves, “Where is God? Why is He allowing this to happen?” This is a quixotic question. From the beginning of time, the man called “Job”,(believed to be the first book written in the Bible), endured torment after torment rendered upon him by Satan, when God offered him up as a true man of righteousness. “The arrows of the Almighty are in me; my spirit drinks their poison; God’s terrors are marshaled against me.” Job 6:4.

Like Job, there are episodes in our journey when, like the eruption of an earthquake, we fall into deep crevices and our lives shake from the impact. We may wonder, “I thought God loved me. Why does He allow such unloving things to happen to me?” God does love us. He loves us deeply. He wants to surround us with His love to kindle the delight and joy we could never feel on our own. But the scope of His love is vast and transcendent, existing in a dimension of reality beyond our understanding. Try as we might, we misunderstand the way His Love works. God’s Love has limitless dimensions, but often the one we tend to experience most is a celebrational kind of love, where we feel delighted, charmed, even giddy. But is this not more of a superficial type of love without much depth or profundity? We may feel good, but have we grown or learned something that magnifies our souls? Sometimes it is necessary for love to wound, to shock the soul in order that we may experience the magnitude of His Love, the parameters of which are beyond profound. It calls for many moments of deep thought. Perhaps this is the perpetuity of Heaven.

“Job replied to the Lord: I know that no plan of Yours can be thwarted. Surely, I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know.” Job 42:2-3.



Thursday, March 20, 2025

Hearing From God

We bow our hearts in prayer. We kneel before the Altar; we close our eyes tightly and recite our pleas. We ask, “is He present, is He listening?” Weeks go by, months, even years....silence. Yet God speaks to us often and timely, with relevancy and deliverance. Often, we are simply unable or unwilling to hear or see or feel His answers. Through the Holy Spirit, the Lord responds in supernatural words or actions—ways we cannot understand. His window of knowledge, experience, and profundity sees every second of our lives on a continuum plane. He sees and foresees things to which we are impossibly blind. Events happen in our lives, and we are unable to recognize His hand in it, directing and managing everything for our best interest. We must remember God’s intellect and ours are galaxies apart. We might have murmured a prayer petitioned 20+ years ago, and suddenly an image appears, or an action occurs, and we experience an “Aha” moment. God is limitless. He works on a scale of Infinity, yet He never lets a sparrow starve.



Abraham was promised the land from Canaan, stretching from Egypt to modern day Iraq, but the promise was fulfilled 400 years later for his ancestors. Moses never lived in the “promised land”, but God gave him a glimpse of it from a mountain vista minutes before he died. “Then the Lord said to Moses, “This is the land I promised to Abraham, Issac and Jacob. I have let you see it with your own eyes, but you will never cross over into it.” Deuteronomy 34:4.” All four patriarchs failed to see the fulfillment of their hopes, dreams and prayers. God fulfilled those promises in His perfect timing, not always in sync and scripted to their desires, thought patterns, and beliefs. Therein lies the Catch 22. The Lord speaks through the Spirit and often we do not hear; then we leap to our own conclusions why our requests are not met. Instead, He desires we seek Him first and pray for His understanding and His wisdom. “For the Spirit sees far more than literal words can express and has the miraculous ability to affect lives far beyond all we can imagine or expect.” John of the Cross, Ascent to Mt Carmel, Book II, Chapter 19. One day we will see the answers to our prayers and pleas unfold in His perfect timing which, “works for the good of all who love Him and have been called according to His purpose.” Romans 8:28

Friday, March 21, 2025

The Spiritual Man

Do you ever secretly wonder why life seems so easy for some people and not for others? Deep inside we all know that everyone has their own cross to bear. But why do some people seem to float through life easily, content with relationships; adequate material wealth; personal, or career success and a thousand other circumstances too numerous to mention? None of us know the answer to this beleaguering question, the key guess which fills in all the blanks and solves the puzzle from start to finish. In His boundless love and mercy, the Lord may grant numerous sweet blessings to the temporal

man, who does not understand the ways of the Spirit. But it is far to our advantage to grasp with great strength the cross He chooses to give us. For in this way, He opens our minds to the depths of His Wisdom and Spirit which will eventually take us to the greatest heights of Heaven. But we ask, why is believer subject to such grave hardship and difficulty? Life can be played out like a board game where we move our pawns and rooks and bishops in a calculating way, only to be knocked off and ambushed by an opponent knight, and an evil one at that.

Only the Ancient of Days, in His profound Wisdom knows the ultimate map to the maze which is our life. We think we can use our temporal reasoning and human perception to attain what is significant and meaningful - the purpose for which we are always searching. But this is not the way of God. We may think we understand how Yahweh works, so to speak, but we have no comprehension how to pilot His transcendent and spiritual time, place or space. It would be like trying to grasp air and keep it in your hand. The Creator of the Universe occupies and fuses together many dimensions of relativity and continuum of actuality, which we are only a paper thin slice. Consider an elementary analogy, that of an MRI or Magnetic Resonance Imagery where there is one essence but also thousands of cross-sectional impressions. This is the Wisdom of our God, the Almighty Father, the Eternal Dominion. He is omnipresent in all spectrums of time, space and essentially, a force beyond every quantum, astrophysical principle, or theory discovered by mankind. The Creator is quantum space far beyond our understanding, but His Presence is as near to us as a finger on our hand. His blood courses through our veins to the temple of our souls where He convenes to give us His Spirit and His Son.

“The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God for they are foolishness to him...The spiritual man makes judgments about all things.”

I Corinthians 2:14-15.



Saturday, March 22, 2025

The Shadow of God

The Father of Ancients waits patiently for our souls to reach His Light. He allows us time, even a lifetime, to learn and grow spiritually as we are tightly bound to our earthly life. Growing spiritually through the tender love of God and the Holy Spirit is likened to a tiny seed pushed into the soil without nutrients or water. It waits to push through the hardened earth woven with weeds and rocks. The Lord nurses it to sprout and grow, sending the Holy Spirit to guard the weak seedling, fortifying it with the “Fruits of the Spirit” Galatians 5:22. Part of the growing process may include times of intense darkness. We may find ourselves wandering through a spiritual wilderness where we doubt ourselves and question our faith. Through these desperate, agonizing times, the Lord loves us limitlessly as the Holy Spirit helps us cope and gives us courage and hope. Like the sun can blind our eyes, the Spiritual Light of God also blinds us like the scales Jesus placed upon the eyes of St. Paul. We must remain in that blindness; in the “cleft of the rock”, and in the “burning bush” until we are able to receive to the brilliance of God’s Presence, the Glory too overwhelming for the human eye. Therein lies the truth. We must know ourselves to distinguish our voice from the true Voice of God. David in the psalms tells us the nearer God comes to us, the greater are the clouds of darkness before His presence is revealed. “The troubles of my heart have multiplied; free me from my anguish. Look upon my affliction...Guard my life and rescue me... Show me Your ways, O Lord, teach me Your paths; guide me in Your Truth for You are God my Savior.” Psalm 25:4,5,17,18,20.

We will experience a kind of purity and light. We will stop doubting God and doubting ourselves. We will not be defeated by our fears and anxieties, for we will know for certain we are under the protection and presence of our Heavenly Father. And nothing is greater than the power of the Cross and the Lover of our Souls.

True Righteousness”



Most Christians have devout intentions and motives in their conversations with the Lord. We ask to be forgiven for our sins, we ask for good health, for enough friends and sufficient funds to cover our needs. We may seek wisdom, God-fearing guidance and maturity in parenting, in forming and maintaining relationships with others based upon love, friendship, loyalty and trust. Some Christians ask for perfection and freedom from sin, as if that could ever be a possibility. Most ask for pure intentions, to be righteous and faithful, free from human and unspiritual flaws. We may comment, “So, what’s wrong with wanting to be a stellar Christian, to be free of sin, to try to be perfect, to be holy like God? The Creator gave Adam and Eve that chance.

And how long did they live in this perfect state? A day, a week, a year? Wouldn’t it be fascinating to know how long Adam and Eve managed perfection?

Considering mankind’s weakness to temptation, a few days might be the correct guess. Like Pandora’s Box, desiring to be privy to all knowledge, they opened the vault to the dark corners of this world. All the dark angels, all the demons, all the beasts are here to stay. God made it clear at the Fall that man could never be free of sin again. Man would always be floating in sin and could never redeem himself. “And the Lord God said, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to take from the Tree of the Knowledge of God and Evil and eat and live forever....After He drove the man out, he placed one the East side of the Garden cherubim with a flaming sword to guard the way to the Tree of Life.” *Genesis 3:22.*

Wouldn’t we all beg to be freed from sin? Don’t we all want to be perfect and righteous, and proud to stand in front of the Throne of God? Don’t we want Him to love us as unblemished lambs? For some preternatural reason, we already are...because He sent the most precious Lamb of all, His Son.

Tuesday, March 25, 2025

Our Highest Purpose

At the moment of our conception, Almighty God placed in our souls a Higher Purpose. That Higher Purpose is profound and holy, singular yet multidimensional. That Higher Purpose is Jesus Christ. Long before Jesus was begotten, born and lived on earth, the Father’s plan for our higher purpose in life was to revere and replicate the character of Christ. This is an enormous behest from God because it requires a radical change in our soul’s substance. We may think, “Well, I pray, I meditate, I attend church and commune with God, I tithe. Alas, these forms of worship, while still giving the Lord reverence and joy, fall somewhat short of His true desires. We must let God look deeply into our souls—the deepest caverns where we harbor all our misbeliefs, doubts, angers frustrations, and even those about God Himself. Do not be afraid, He is already aware of them. We must open the bolted gate and allow God’s mighty hand to scrape out all the strife and envy, the coveted desires and excesses which have been hidden there. In doing this, God



rekindles the sweet flames of His Love for us, burning away the tarnished feelings and thoughts once rendered there.

Our souls may react to His divine touch first with a jolt, then with the joy and relief that comes from releasing to Jesus all the baggage, all the stain and spoil of sin, and then receiving consummate forgiveness. We feel the strain of our shoulders immediately slumping and find ourselves bathing in the cleansing waters of God's Love. He yearns to rescue you, His Child, and bring you back to Himself, purified, cleansed and perfected in His Glory, the Glory of His Son, Jesus Christ.

"I sought the Lord and He answered me; He delivered me from all my fears...The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous...the Lord hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed I spirit." Psalm 34:4, 17-18.

Wednesday, March 26, 2025

True Faith

"True" Faith found only in the Spirit of God. Faith is the soul's ability to form thoughts, feelings and rational ideas about the God who created us. Most of us have a strong belief in our understanding of our faith and our God. All aspects of our character, our purpose, our actions and decisions point to the existence and presence of the God who navigates our lives. But how can we really "know" Him?

The answer is we can't. How parlous and uncomfortable this makes us feel. We begin to question our beliefs, our faith, our church. Yet most of our active faith is based on our 5 fleshly senses and our mental calculations about who the Lord is and what He can do. We think we know God--the God of our limited vision and intellectual reasoning. This 'little earthly faith' grows in the weeds and roses of our fecund planet, and in the fig trees and olive branches growing on the dry, dusty deserts where Jesus once walked.

And when our faith is put to the test, or the Lord does something contrary to our beliefs, we begin to predict or limit our understanding of God. We then place ourselves in a dangerous place with doubt festering, teetering on the decision to dismiss Him altogether. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." Proverbs 9:10. Human faith sees with eyes crusted over from the smoke and ashes of the world in which we live. "True" Faith sees with the eyes of the Soul—the eyes which only God can open. This spiritual faith is transcendent, above all our reason and imagination. Yet we want to believe what our brains and emotions tell us. We don't like to give up control over our lives and our minds. We believe faith should be based our deep feelings, logical truths and solid evidence. Yet the Bible tells us, "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. By faith we understand that the Universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible." Hebrews 11:1-2.

When we put limits on God, when we bookend Him within the confines of our human logic, we limit the boundaries of His unequivocal, boundless Love. In a mustard seed, this is the faith God intends for us to cultivate and treasure. "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine, to Him be glory... *Ephesians 3:20-21.*



Living Above

How difficult it is to unleash our hearts and souls from the loftier things in life. Material possessions, yearnings of the heart, pacifiers of the desires which haunt us every day, and become like the bit and bridle of an unruly horse. At times these desires which easily become needs, seem to rear up like a black stallion heading wild into the wilderness. We hang on to these earthly treasures, fearing they will be taken from us, and we will be left entirely alone with nothing tangible to hold onto. We cleave to these possessions like a cool spring in a sweltering desert—they satisfy our thirst, and we convince ourselves we cannot live without them, because without them, pleasure and contentment fall like stars in a midnight sky. No amount of willpower, self-sacrifice, or denial can defeat the urgings of the inner soul of man. Our souls become restless and agitated because we are bonded to our Creator and He has mined a cavern in our hearts where an eternal fire smolders but will never burn out. Some have climbed up through this avalanche of desire choosing instead the path to spiritual contentment. St. Paul, John of the Cross, St. Francis of Assisi, Mother Theresa, among many others, along with the Holiest of Sacrifice—Jesus Christ. All of them were led by the sacred inner Spirit of God to seek His desires and wisdom rather than their own. How sad are we, when we are offered His divine treasures - pure Love, pure

Peace, pure Joy, lasting Assurance, Contentment and Serenity - all flowing in the freshwater stream from the fountain of God's Grace, but we fail to see, feel or hear them. Our earthly desires keep us captured like the Israelites in the acrid dust of Egypt.

Yahweh knows we have inner desires and necessary comforts, doubts and fears which are easily snatched from His Light. He provides a Friend, a Teacher and a Guide, who will show

us how to eschew our worldly needs and find His Inner Light of strength and self-control. But first, we must open ourselves to it. Forbid distractions and interruptions of wayward thinking, focusing purely on our Heavenly Father until you feel the gentle swell of His flowing waters and float within the quiet stillness. "Labor to get into His rest." *Hebrews 4:11*. And you will find at last a landscape of tranquility and bliss, in the sweetness of the Lover of Your Soul.

Carrying Our Suitcases

Jesus said in *Matthew 8:34*, "If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me." This statement may sound terribly foreboding and intimidating, especially in these worldly and materialistic times. We wince at these words, we tremble, we quake. We plead innocence, hoping Jesus will give us a pass. We desperately try to make valid excuses and exemptions: "This is a different world; I can't forgo my personal and professional career commitments; this is how we live in this world!" Sheepishly, we bleat back to our normal lives, hoping the regnant words of Jesus are really meant for others, not for us. And we furtively push them deep into the distant corners of our hearts and minds.

But perhaps we missed something in translation. Perhaps those sacred words from the mouth of our Savior were said to help us navigate a different journey from how we interpret them? Does not Jesus pierce through the hearts of His beloved to



penetrate the truth in their souls? He knows our weaknesses and our strengths, our honesty and sincerity, our deceptions and our little “white lies”. His greatest concern is our salvation, and if we prize our possessions, our professions, even our families more than Him, there will be a price to pay. Christ said, “You are not your own, you were bought with a price.” / *Corinthians 6:20*. If we give all these things the foremost seat at the table, there is no room for Jesus.

There is joy and freedom in true self-denial and that is living in harmony with Christ. Loaded down dragging a U-Haul of material possessions denies us the opportunity to feel closer to God. Jesus is not interested in our material possessions. He wants our Spirits--our hearts and our souls; these are the sanctuaries where He waits to receive us. Money, prestige, power, status are meaningless to Him. We may seek to give them up; to remove them from our lives so we can follow Jesus. But giving up material things merely frees our deep attachments to them. We must try to step deeper into the spiritual pathway Jesus asks us to walk with Him. He doesn't want our potato chips, or chocolate or social media. Jesus wants us, especially during Lent, to carry our cross with His.

Saturday, March 29, 2025

Carrying Our Cross

We can accept our natural attraction to material attachments, but do we truly understand “spiritual” attachments? Most of us like to think of spiritual attachments as the faith and trust we place in God; the love and devotion we have for Jesus; the comfort and guidance we receive from the Holy Spirit. But spiritual attachments mean not only the joy and sweetness of being closely connected to God, but also the underside of that joy—the struggle and despair, the deep sorrow and suffering that accompanies our walk with the Cross. If our desire is to truly commune with the Lord, we will walk through the dross of our souls; we will taste the bitterness of betrayal and rejection. We will wander on the trails and lose the sweetness of the Lord we thought was perpetual and infinite. And we will weep and question and doubt, as Jesus did in the Garden. We will want to run, to give up, to go back to a life without this bond of Love. But He won't give up. He will pilot us through these dark and doubtful deserts of our soul when we cry out and rage against the injustices of this world. His Spirit will teach us the Way of Jesus, Way of the Cross: to deny oneself and learn the meaning of our true Self, which is to take the “self” out of our hearts and minds and souls. God wants us to give our “self” to Him, to come to a place of inner stillness, like the last few rays of a daunting sunset.

When we can approach God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit with no thoughts of ourselves, but only thoughts of Him, then we can truly understand our spiritual attachments and the Cross becomes a beacon of endless Love—Love which spans the entire spectrum of life here and in Paradise. The Cross becomes a symbol of the Soul's strength and purity, and our cross and Jesus' intertwine. And isn't this the true meaning of Lent?

Monday, March 31, 2025

The Innocents

The idiom “Hell Fire and Brimstone” was always believed to come from the preachers from the 18th and 19th centuries in Europe and America. Images of black frocked Puritans pounding on their pulpits, like theological terrorists threatening their constituents with black smoke and burning sulfur. The most popular of the hellfire preachers was Jonathan Edwards in whose sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God”, the realities of hell were depicted so violently the congregants could smell the burning sulfur. Edwards sought in his message to warn people of the bog and torture of the boiling lake of fire, but also of God's mercy in saving believers from entering in it. In actuality, the term “hellfire preaching” does not appear in the Bible. But as a pejorative in some forms of preaching, it imagined a perpetually wrathful, vengeful God who for His pure enjoyment strikes people down and may or may not condemn them to hell. The Old Testament is ripe with circumstances and stories of an angry and jealous God who with the snap of a finger can wipe out entire tribes. Consider the story of Uzzah,

one of the two brothers carrying the Ark of the Covenant, “Uzzah reached out his hand to steady the Ark, because the oxen had stumbled. God’s anger burned against Uzzah and He struck him down because he had put his hand on the Ark. So, he died there before God.” I Chronicles 13:9-10. This wrathful act on behalf of God to someone who was simply trying to “save” the Ark would have most people’s knees knocking. We may even wonder, “Did poor Uzzah wind up in hell just for touching the Ark of the Covenant?” And Job’s revealing statement, “Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Job 11:7, is stressed continually in the Bible. “His understanding no one can fathom.” Isaiah 40:28.

God wants us to fear Him in reverence and obey Him in righteousness. God’s wrath is always holy and always justified. He doesn’t want us to second-guess Him or test His Will, because we can never fathom His Wisdom. This is what separates man from God. Can you imagine life with man’s narcissistic will, faulty decision making, and mis-directed guidance? When we start to question God, we find ourselves in murky water on its way to self-absorbing quicksand. That is man’s greatest challenge: to believe in something or Someone greater than himself.

Tuesday, April 1, 2025

The Wrath of God’s Love

Our family went to a gorgeous Lutheran Church in northwest Detroit called “Holy Cross”. It was of Gothic architecture with Saxon influences boasting 30 ft. vaulted arches, flying buttresses, corbeled arches, a Clerestory, plinths, pinnacles and the most exquisite colored glass arched windows one would find in a European Cathedral. It was a celestial experience to worship there and even at my very young age I sensed something mystical was happening. But the words from the pulpit conjured up an angry and vengeful God. Not a God who loved, but a God who punished on a whim. My Pastor at Holy Cross was an Old Testament guy – lots of fire and brimstone. I always wondered why God was so angry, why He wiped away whole tribes of people; or would turn someone to salt just by looking back at a city (Genesis 19: 26); and would even strike down a faithful servant for steadying the Ceremonial Box; yes, it was the Ark of the Covenant (I Chronicles 13 :9).

It was all absorbed deeply in the caverns of my young, impressionable mind. I didn’t understand what these people did that was so terribly wrong, and I worried that something like that would happen to me. I knew my parents couldn’t fight a God like that. That child’s trepidation laid heavily like a backpack long into my adult years. And I wonder how many others turned away from the church because they sensed a God of wrath and judgment. Even Martin Luther believed in the original concept of praying to Mary, the mother of God, to intercede on a sinner’s behalf on account that God was an angry and vengeful litigator, harsh in His judgment and sentencing. Thank our Heavenly Father, Luther used nails and his 95 theses to radically alter our faith and the world.



Wednesday, April 2, 2025

Unmerited Mercy

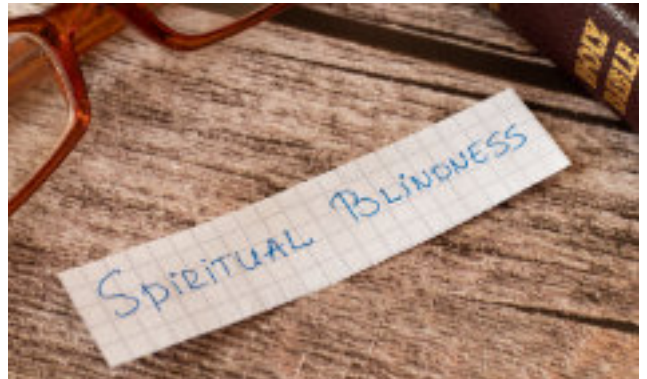
It's not just children who are led astray by emotional reactions, distorted perceptions and unhealthy assumptions. The human experiment is susceptible and contagious to many divisive experiences and people who mislead and influence poorly. If we stay only in the Old Testament, we can become very confused about

the true nature of God and see Him only with the eyes of a trembling child. But if we think deeply about the story of Creation and the Fall of Man, we may see an inkling of the reasons for God's anger. The Lord Divine had created a paradise for His children. It wanted for nothing. It was miles above perfection, luscious, lovely beyond all thinking, complete. He asked little of Adam and Eve, except that they must not eat of the "Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil", Genesis 2:17. But like small children and puppies, that is exactly what they wanted to do, and sin fell upon them like a sodden cloud of black manna. Of course, God was angry. Sin of any kind was completely abhorrent to Him. And now the perfect Paradise He had created was steeped in it. The Lord had every right to be angry, more than angry. He could have destroyed the whole world with a single word. He could have thrown all of it into the depths of hell. But He didn't. And the Old Testament is the embodiment of a world He kept for their disobedience. Would He let the world destroy itself, destroy His Divine Creation and the children He loved so much? Abraham asked Him just that question in Genesis 18:23-32. "Will You sweep away the righteous with the wicked?" And after much prodding from Abraham, God relents and says "For the sake of 50, then 40, 30, 20, and finally 10, I will not destroy the earth." It could have been just one person, even one not so righteous person, and the patience and mercy of the Almighty would wipe His slate clean.

Thursday, April 3, 2025

Spiritual Blindness

Paul speaks often about false prophets, false teachers, false leaders, even false shepherds. It's easy to reckon false prophets' spurious intentions. Some of these factitious pedagogues have convinced themselves they are entirely spot on in their beliefs and teachings, requiring strict service, dogmatic doctrine, severe self-criticism and puritanical regulation. To these people, basking in the luxury of the sweetness of God was heresy. The victims of these false prophets became upset and frustrated, guilty and angry. Angry at God, angry at the constant sin they feel because of the Law. They feel no allegiance to a God who blames and convicts them, even when they are faithful and obedient.



They become despondent, without hope to carry on. Martin Luther was a perfect example of a righteous person so smothered with the weight of sin, he could see no hint of salvation, no lamp of goodness to light his way. On the lowest rank, last in line, with nothing to believe in, they are "spiritually blind." Paul earned the reputation as top rank chief when it comes to spiritual blindness. Realizing Paul's flinty fervor and ramrod dedication to destroying the Jews, Jesus used a spiritual paradox. He rendered blindness to Paul which allowed him to truly 'see' his dubious and dis sentient mindset. And for his own sake and that of millions of other souls, he chose the path less followed, certainly not the easy path but the Path of Jesus. Martin found Grace in the very pages of the New Testament. "For it is by Grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast." Ephesians 2:8

To choose to follow this path, to believe with "spiritual blindness", is the mystery of faith and the presence of God in our souls. Though spiritually blind, through our soul's stillness, it becomes transcendent, allowing us to hear the Voice of God. In a quiet breath, we can feel the touch of God, His Presence and Light spreading over our entire being, a perfectly fitted cloak of His Love.

Friday, April 4, 2025

The True Light

God is alive and present in the very substance of the Soul, even in the souls of the worst of sinners. We may think, "How could God be present in the hearts, minds, and souls of Hitler, Stalin, Mao Zedong, Mussolini, and hundreds of other merciless murderers and serial killers who stung this world with their savage butchery? Better yet, how about the Pharisaical high priests, political avengers and angry mobs who killed the Son of God? Surely these beasts have not even a pittance of God-like qualities, which makes us wonder if they even had a soul. Yet the Bible says God is within us. His eternal Spirit awakens our souls to His presence and creates an everlasting union with Him. John says in the first chapter, "The true Light that gives Light to every man was coming into the world. Through Him all things were made; in Him was Life, and that Life was the light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it." John 1:4,5,9. The "darkness" perfectly describes these evil men, who did not recognize the Light, but craved the intoxication of the darkness. God has the power of death over the good and the evil, and to the evil, life means nothing. They become gods and idols of themselves.

"Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become Children of God — children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God." *John 1:12*. God gives us so many chances; there are no "three strikes and you're out" in God's plan for our lives. He gives the men in darkness the same chances and choices. No one is exempt. Yet the Darkness continues to fester, continues to breed more and more evil. And still Jesus pleads, "Forgive them for they know not what they do."

Luke 23:34. In this context, they did not know

they were murdering God. In the Darkness, men become possessed with themselves. Their souls are empty of God. This is the true force of Evil. And Jesus prays for His Disciples, "My prayer is not that you take them out of this world, but that You protect them from the Evil One." John 17:15. How much can we believe God is protecting us from the Evil One? The short answer is: an ETERNITY.



Saturday, April 5, 2025

Poor in Spirit

In Matthew 5:3, Jesus preaches the Sermon on the Mount to a crowd of the hungry faithful. They are eager to listen to this deified figure with the empyrean speech which contradicts many of the doctrines the priests and Pharisees have pronounced upon them. In the Beatitudes, Jesus speaks of "the Poor in Spirit". Surely no one in this devout audience can be "poor in spirit", in fact, some become indignant, claiming their righteousness before God; others taking the word "poor" as a stigma to their status in the community. But Jesus gently delivers the true meaning to the Beatitude, "Poor in Spirit".

To be "Poor in Spirit" means we must give our "selves" away. There is no consciousness of self when we are poor in spirit. Our professions of faith and acts of service become rolling stones if we credit ourselves for them. For a novice Christian, acts of service may provide a sense of happiness and pride— like a child riding a two-wheeler

for the first time. This is not vexatious, if we know in our hearts, we are not doing these acts to gain favor with God. There is a common truth among believers that, though they know they are saved by faith through grace alone, intentional and public acts of service may score them extra points and upgrade their seats in Heaven to first class.

But the term “poor in spirit” which Jesus used, seems to contradict itself. To be “poor in spirit” would indicate someone is lacking in adequate faith, moral and ethical character; surely not something any religious person would claim. From that standpoint, we all fit the bill of being poor in spirit. But God wants us to be “poor in spirit”. In Ephesians 4: 22-24, Paul tells us to live as “Children of Light” and to “put off your old self... to be made new in the attitude of your minds, and to put on your new self, created to like God in true righteousness and holiness.” The Lord wants us to recognize our utter spiritual bankruptcy. We have nothing to offer God, and because of our sin, we are spiritually destitute and depraved. We must recognize our spiritual poverty, no matter what status we are in life, we are all under foreclosure, and we have no spiritual currency to pay for our sins. We all need a Savior to advocate for us. And that Savior, that Grace, is Jesus Christ.

Monday, April 7, 2025

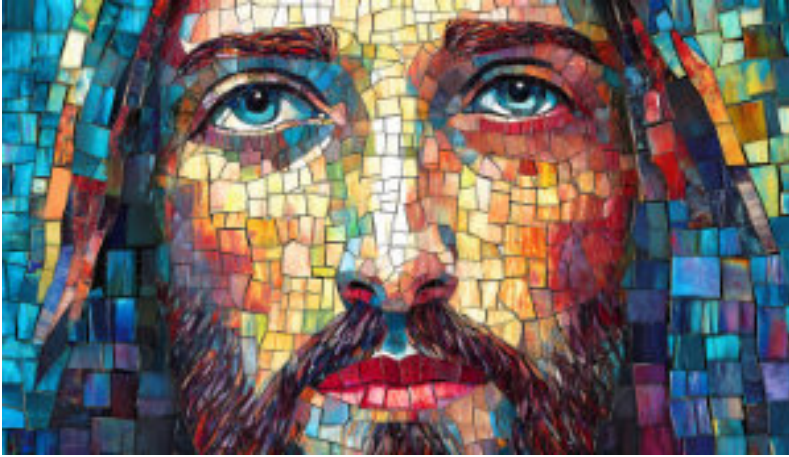


Deep Calls To Deep

A small group of onlookers at the beach gather excitedly when someone calls out “Dolphin!” Everyone stops and hurries to the lapping waves, all staring wildly at the same spot, hoping the big fish will surface again. No one has a clue which way the dolphin is swimming because the deep, dark water covers the graceful sea creature, and keeps it safely hidden. Yet the beach walkers stay and keep watch. One might think Jonah would be spit out, or Peter would walk on water for all the attention and fanfare this graceful creature attracts. If this were to be rated on a spiritual

awareness scale, where would this experience rank? It’s a vast vista between the galaxies of God’s Spirit and the events on earth which excite our hearts and emotions. In between is a veritable array of mysteries and miracle moments we have missed. Looking for miracles does not always involve “seeing” them. Sensing the miracle moments teaches us how to recognize them. They may be obvious, or hidden like a new sprout in the forest. “Deep calls to deeps in the roar of Your waterfalls; all Your waves and breakers have swept over me. By day the Lord directs His love, at night His song is with me—a prayer to the God of my life.” *Psalms 42:7,8.*

We often pray to God asking Him to show us the “Light” or “His Light”. But our eyes are incapable of seeing His brilliance, the splendor of His awesome Glory, the Glory found in Heaven. So, we ask for things which delight our earthly senses, or for things we need or want from God, not the things He desires to give us. The deep things of the Almighty go well beyond our faith, our beliefs, and our version of truth. The deep things of God wait for us in Heaven and have no basis of reality or perception in our lives here on earth. There must be times when the Lord of Lights wonders why we absorb ourselves in such diminutive, picayune things, things in the greater scope of life have little or no significance to our future salvation. Yet, we are still His children, and He cares for us, drawing us up into the Light of Life – the new Life He created for us, the Life which brings the Truth...the Truth that is Jesus. “To them, God has chosen to make known... the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of Glory.” *Colossians 1:27.*



The Face of Jesus

The Most High waits patiently for our souls to reach His Light. He allows us time, even a lifetime to learn, follow and grow spiritually. Growing spiritually through the vast and tender love of the Heavenly Father, who channels the Holy Spirit to prepare each of His children for His gracious intervention. It takes time to pursue the soul, to shape and soften it, to carve a small window through which the Holy Spirit can slip through and begin His work. Every soul is unique and has righteous and unrighteous qualities, temptations, habits. The Lord allots for this, aware of every

atom and strand of DNA He placed so exquisitely in our genetic makeup. Often, we will begin our walk with the Holy Spirit through trials of faith and loneliness. We may feel lost in a spiritual wilderness, or we may feel completely unbound, as if we were suspended in space without a lifeline.

This is the Almighty's purging and cleansing, wringing out all the earthly impurities we collected and absorbed from the world. We may feel lighter, free from the usual assaults and circumstances of life that used to trouble our anxious hearts. Take care to recognize the Lord's hand in all of this. Listen for the urging of the Holy Spirit to flood your mind and heart with the sweet flow of transcendence as you focus on your soul's journey. You may notice the air surrounding you is not as heavy, there is a lightness, a sense of rest and tranquility. The Lord is lifting you higher, step by step to a new level of awareness of yourself and all the people around you. There are no threats, no worries, no guilt or shame, because we feel the atoms of His intense Love calming our fretful nature. And suddenly, we realize what the Father is doing through the Messenger- the Holy Spirit. There is a brilliant Light and an image of ourselves reflected. He is bringing us closer, so close we can feel the breath of the One who came to save us. And there before us is a brilliant light, a profound awareness, and an image of ourselves reflecting the Holy Face of Jesus. "I saw the Lord always before me. Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. You have made known to me the paths of life; You will fill me with joy in Your presence" Acts 2:25,28.

Wednesday, April 9, 2025

God's Peace

"Peace". It's a small five letter word, but it packs a punch of manifold meanings. For some, it is the absence of clamor and chaos. For others, it is serenity and unadulterated bliss. Some people think of physical peace as a lazy afternoon under a languid willow tree, others the peace of mind that comes from the absence of stress and deadlines. We all have our personal concept of peace which coddles and comforts, but is it the "peace" that passes all understanding?" Probably not. At the very least, this is not the "Peace" Jesus offers. We humans tend to place a huge emphasis on finding and enjoying our kind of peace. But this is merely a 'feeling', an undependable whim, in



a way that provides temporary comfort and assurance. Peace is a sensory experience which comes from both our intellectual mind disguised as rational thought, or from our hearts as a temporal and transient emotion we must chase after to experience. We want our peace to surround us like bubble wrap, to protect us from cracking and carry us on to the next day or the next struggle. But life doesn't work like that and no matter how much we try to hibernate in our peace, events and circumstances sling their arrows at us and we are remiss to stop them. These onslaughts, this coup de main, is ironically the Lord trying to show us how penetrable our peace really is. His Peace is strong enough to foster our souls with courage, strength and fortitude, so we can make it through the darkness the world offers, and know without a doubt, He is there in the midst of all of it.

Yet, some rebuff or reject His abiding Peace because it threatens their sense of control and ownership. It calls into question the frightening rejection of one's powers and the belief that we can manage our lives better on our own. But when we allow the Master sole and "soul" control over our lives-- our fears, doubts, sorrows, defeats and weaknesses, we find ourselves "at rest in the shadow of the Almighty". Psalm 91:1b. We can finally free ourselves from the world's temptations and our own inner desires. We can remove ourselves from the expectations and demands made of us. We can begin to see life and the peace we so earnestly search for, through our soul's eyes of faith in the sanctuary of our Master's Peace

Thursday, April 10, 2025

The Wayward Soul



We've all heard the expression referring to a person as a "know it all". This disdainful, yet often veritable phrase applies in both social and business settings, but it can also exist in the religious realm. When someone speaks and acts like a religious "wizard" (clergymen exempt), they most often defer from the spiritually correct tract, especially the one God Himself designed individually for each of us. Most of us are aware of the Jewish Pharisees, who in Jesus' time wore their dubious religions on their sleeves for all the world to see. It gave them a sense of power and pseudo self-esteem to parade the streets in loud prayer and pronounce judgments on others. Their religion was based on the Law, and they passed down decrees and jurisprudence on both wealthy and common

Jews. They became their own warped "Svengali's". But they were as far from a soul-bond with God as a pebble in a dusty path. The Pharisaical approach to faith is still very much present today in the third millennium.

History tells us scores of deeply rooted people of faith have questioned the roots of its origin and evolution. Both Christians and secular people search for something to connect to, and to complete their unending search for meaning and reason. It's that clawing need to fill the emptiness and silence they feel, the overwhelming urge to discover 'Someone or Something' beyond themselves. Someone they could trust, some Entity they could see or hear or feel or touch. The soul feels lost or abandoned, as Jesus' did in Gethsemane, and in Golgotha with His agony on the Cross. He was experiencing as John of the Cross described in 16th century Spain, the "Dark Night of the Soul". This will be the most cloying, wrenching, tortuous pain the soul can experience, for the Lord will reveal the dark cauldron in which the soul has been in bondage, blinded by its own ignorance, disintegrating in a desert of indifference and apathy. But for every soul there is the Blood and the Light of Jesus, the hope and the promise that these wayward souls will find their resting place in Him. And then our souls will discover the quiet serenity of the Holy Spirit bearing you in His arms and leading you to complete peace. "You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast because he trusts in You. *Isaiah 26:3*



The Cleansing Fire of Love”

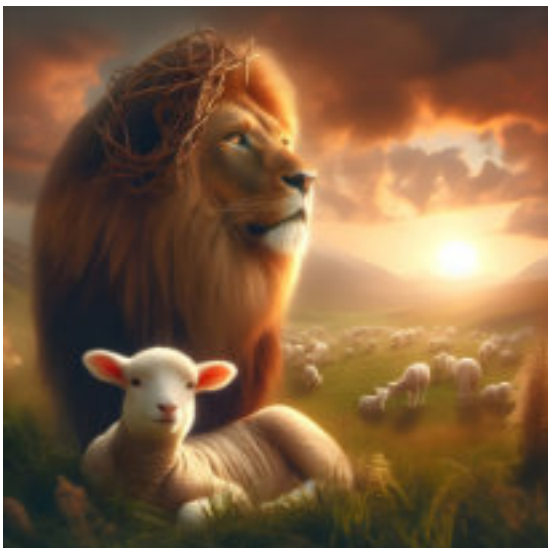
After reading the book of Job, many people have multifarious opinions about the nature and grace of the Almighty. Some feel shocked and confused that God would ever allow Satan, the most pernicious of the fallen angels, to affront Job with such horrific circumstances, destruction and death. If we believe in the concept of a kind and loving God, this is a stark contrast and could easily incur doubt, anger and disbelief. The disconsolate Job, whom the Lord calls “blameless and upright, who fears God and shuns evil.” *Job 1:8*, is offered up as a sacrificial lamb. But somehow Job’s interminable situation causes us greater alarm. Satan, in his innocuous glee strikes back at God with: “But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face.” *Job 1:11*. Is God enjoying seeing His faithful servant suffer bitterly and without cause? Job begins to question and bear resentment toward God. “As surely as God lives, who has denied me justice, the Almighty, who has made me taste the bitterness of soul...” *Job 27:2*. Like most human beings, Job feels justified and victimized by the Lord. He believes God is unaware and not paying attention to his abhorrent situation, as if the Lord is not empirical or ubiquitous. Job pulls God down to his own level of humanness. He views God as a big brother who will come and rescue him from his abyss. Job beseeches God fervently to take away his afflictions. But the Lord assails Job for four chapters before He deigns to let Job speak. And what does Job have to say? How can he argue with the God of all dimensions, the God of all created things? He is reticent, he knows he is unjustified. He blunders, “Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know.” *Job 42:3b*.

The true sacrificial Lamb, the Lamb of God, walked silently to the Garden of Gethsemane, also alone in His suffering, praying with tears of blood. Jesus fell with his face on the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. But not as I will but as You will.” *Matthew 26:39*. The Creator did not answer Job or Jesus straightaway, but both of them believed in His almighty love, mercy and forgiveness, granted to each in His always perfect Timing.

Saturday, April 12, 2025

The Divine Paradox

“Paradox” is a complicated word—it’s a paradox or contradiction, by its very implication. Webster defines “Paradox” as: “One such person, situation, or action having seemingly contradictory qualities.” God, the great I AM, is at the same time, our Heavenly Father, our Abba. He seems like a Divine Paradox. He can level the entire Universe with one wave of mighty His hand. “Who shut up the sea behind doors, when it burst forth into the womb?” *Job 38:8*. He simply pointed to reveal the fiercest creatures on earth and in the oceans. “Look at the Behemoth which I made along with you... Can you pull in the Leviathan with a fishhook or tie down his tongue with a rope? Nothing on this earth is his equal—a creature without fear.” *Job 41:1.33*.



Nothing on this earth or in infinity is God’s equal. The flame of God’s Presence can smolder entire kingdoms, dry up the seas, tumble tall mountains. But when the Flame comes to consume our darkness, it comes tenderly, to rest in our souls, to purify us with its consummate Light. The Lord disciplined Job like a father disciplines his child—with severity but book ended with compassion. He does

not want you to fear Him. To respect, to revere, to learn are His desires for you. To show you the vastness and sincerity of His love for you, He gave you, His Son. There is no greater proof of His Love. He knows how desperately you desire Him, like the Prodigal Son who returns from the world, dried up and forsaken, begging for his father's mercy. He throws a banquet for you with the arrival of His Son on a lowly beast but clothed with golden splendor which He offers you; the Golden Splendor that rises in the east and covers the Dawn of Redemption. All this is done for you, to you and in you. This is the Divine Paradox – that the King of Kings and Lord of Lords walked out of Paradise to be your Friend.

**Sir Robert Anderson, Intelligence Officer, Theologian, and Writer in his book, "The Coming Prince" confirmed through multiple mathematical calculations and calendar revisions that Jesus Christ rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, precisely on the day Daniel had prophesied.

Monday, April 14, 2025



Living Flame of Love

"The Father of Lights" bestows His "Living Flame of Love" upon us in the form of a Spirit, the Holy Spirit. He sends this Flame not only to shed His Light on us, but to light the Path of Love, the Path of Jesus. "I am the Way, the Truth and the Light, no one comes to the Father except through me." John 14:6. From the beginning our Father beamed with the brilliance of Light and Love He lavished upon His children. This Love was the vortex of Creation, and it wrapped the earth in unblemished celestial beauty. Then in a

luscious Garden, this Love died, vanished and vanquished by the taste of forbidden fruit. The decay of Original Sin sent its tentacles to taint God's Original Love, and the Father filled the oceans and seas with His tears. Somehow man survived God's wrath, but Beauty, Joy, and Nature, like Love, were forever stained. Heaven on earth rotted away along with the forbidden fruit. But there would be another deliverance. God in His very nature could not bear to watch His progeny suffer the consequences of their forefather's sin. No amount of effort inherent from man could save them from the darkness of their fate. Something else was needed, something preternatural, something anomalous to shock mankind from its complaisance and recalcitrance toward the God who created them. That extraordinary phenomenon was Jesus. "For Christ died for sins once and for all, for the righteous and for the unrighteous, to bring you to God." 1 Peter 3:18.

Herein lies the truth of the Trinity: The Holy Father at the apex sending down His Love through His Son and His Spirit, each fundamentally and equally intrinsic in nature. St. Patrick used the image of a shamrock to illustrate the concept to the Celts in the 13th century.

Tuesday, April 15, 2025



Pure Joy

"Consider it Pure Joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds..." James 1:2. Pain is not a joyous state. Suffering portends anguish in both body and mind. Laughter is seldom heard in times of torment, unless it comes from the dark soul of the demented or a demonic Roman soldier. Joy in its normative state does not equate with agony, evil, tribulation, desolation nor any emotion or action that renders raw the heart and soul of

a human being, especially the Son of God and Son of Man. Yet James, the half-brother of Jesus tells us to consider it “pure joy”. We don’t know how much pure joy Jesus felt during His life on earth. We don’t know how many, if any, happy moments He was blessed to enjoy. The Bible never mentions Jesus laughing or telling an innocent quip. Surely the faces of children would elicit a smile from His face of Grace. He must have enjoyed the company of his family, Mary, Martha, Lazarus, His Disciples, and those His message touched. But His earthly life was not meant to garner joy and laughter. “He was a despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, acquainted with suffering.” Isaiah 53:3. (note: the word “Sorrow” is mentioned 7 times in the Bible, while “Joy” is cited 250 times). Imagine being born into a life only to die an agonizing death, unappreciated and unknown by thousands. Imagine knowing every day that your next step would lead you closer to the Cross. Jesus was a human man, with all the same emotions and anxieties that the evil one throws like flaming arrows at us every day. And the Son of God was his main target, the Bounty that he thought in his perverse mind would put him on an equal plane with God.

Yet in His wisdom and righteousness, God the Father did not exempt His Son from the trials and temptations humans suffer every day. When James says, “Consider it Pure Joy”, he wants us to understand how our own personal sufferings and sorrows draw us closer to the life and heart of Jesus, how He went before us to pave the way, to ease the burden and bring all the pain we endure, as He did for us, to a blessed end in Heaven’s lap of everlasting light. “Consider it Pure Joy” when we are blessed with the opportunity to share in the sufferings and everlasting Light of Jesus.

Wednesday, April 16, 2025



In a Little While

“I am tired, Father,” He prayed, “The pain has no boundaries, it racks my body like the rattle of chains. I see no relief on the horizon on this hot and dusty plain, and each new sunrise brings only torment in the remnants of a sleepless night. Pain pursues my days like vultures after a dying carcass. How long must I wait in this tomb of suffering? My prayers are perfunctory, I have no more provocative words to speak. They remain the same remedial repetition, sometimes with another heartfelt sob of the soul, that You might reconsider the path upon which I walk. I am like the homeless man begging on the corner

for alms, for just a penny or two. The hollow eyes look at me searching, beseeching me for rescue from this dark and tangled world that cares for no one. He says, “God Bless You”, when I cover his head with my hand. He begs me to stay. I pray for others now, no longer for myself. The comfort I crave becomes the comfort they need so desperately. I hear the sheep bleating in the hills and somehow this comforts me, for I know there is a shepherd protecting them, guiding them away from the wolves waiting to devour. I am loving them in this silent act of prayer. When I pray for others, my pain eases to a mist, yet this is not enough to silence my longing to return to You. “Dear Father,” I ask, “How long? How long for them?”

Jesus knew his disciples were confused and perplexed. He knew they were unaware of what was happening and when it was over, they would grieve for the wrong reasons. He said to them, “In a little while you will see Me no more, and then after a little while, you will see Me. Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one can take away your joy.” John 16:20,21.

“No one can take away your Joy.” Not now, not ever. For where He goes, you will be Risen!

Examine Your Heart



The nature of our inner being rests on the true exegesis of Christ's character, brought to us specifically in the parables and teachings recorded in the New Testament. Jesus exemplified all the qualities the "natural man" did not possess. If we examine the Beatitudes, for instance, we discover the key elements of the soul's spiritual essence—the perfect persona of the Divine Son. This has always been a profound problem for mankind since the Fall. We can try nobly, but we can never emulate the holy character of Christ. Humility is a prime example. In our society, being humble is looked upon as weakness, timidity, lack of

backbone or ambition: definitely negative qualities, especially regarding men. Yet Jesus, also a man, took the trademark when it came to presenting that looked-down-upon characteristic. The evening of the Last Supper, much to the shock and shame of His disciples, Jesus performed his selfless act of no greater love and humility, when He tenderly washed the feet of each one in the holy Upper Room. When He is finished, he says, "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you." John 13:15. During those times, washing the filthy, dust-caked feet of someone was considered an abomination, or *bête noire*, an abhorrence even to the lowest of the low. Yet, Jesus without hesitation performed this act.

When we are contemplating an act of service, our soul is sent a subtle poke from the Holy Spirit asking us to check our motives. Most acts of charity, philanthropy, or welfare involve a gracious, giving and loving heart. We are answering the call of the Lord to help His children in need. Often times, these acts are done without fanfare or even notice. At other times, we are duly applauded for our efforts. The attention and gratitude delights our hearts and gives us a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction, which in turn heightens our sense of self-esteem. Jesus knows our hearts, and He can see when something is done out of love of our fellow man, or for the sweet delight our souls feel. It's natural for humans to feel these self-oriented emotions, and they are not necessarily "bad". Jesus doesn't judge us for having these feelings. He just wants us to be on guard for them. Examining our hearts helps us guard our motives. "I am among you as the one who serves." Luke 22:24.

Friday, April 18, 2025 - GOOD FRIDAY

The Defining Moment

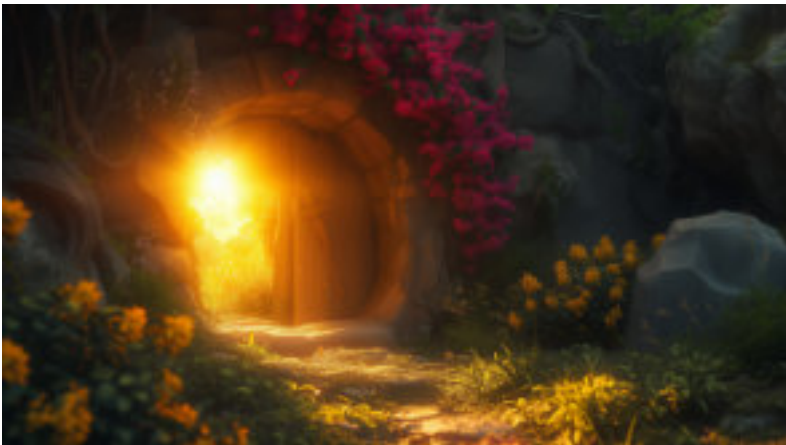
After all the relentless beatings, torture and humiliation, Christ's abandoned and brutalized body would hang from the Cross for the next three hours. Screams of sorrow, wailing and sobbing pervaded the atmosphere as the sun became dark with its own remorse, and the earth was covered in a cloud of evil. The enormity of what Jesus had to suffer suddenly crushed down upon Him as He gasped for His next breath crying out to His Father: "Eloi. Eloi, Lama Sabachthani?" "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" It was at that moment when Jesus felt the horror and the hopelessness of being abandoned and separated from God. It was the ninth hour, the exact time that the unblemished lambs were being sacrificed at the temple for the Passover, Jesus, our Paschal Lamb was sacrificed



on the Cross for the sins of all mankind. The “Dark Night of the Soul” found its defining moment in the profound agony of the Cross on the place called the “Skull”.

The Cross took the final victory when Jesus cried out, “It is finished.” John 19:30. And when He finally gave up His Spirit, the earth shook and the Temple Curtain, separating men from the most Holy Place where God Himself indwelt, was torn in two. No longer would men be separated forever from the Creator again. The Cross which calls to mind abhorrent suffering and tortuous death, now becomes the greatest of all symbols of Love—the immeasurable Love Jesus had for all of mankind, even for those who delivered Him to Golgotha. Death had been conquered forever. Jesus Christ was Victorious and because of His Cross, so are we.

Saturday, April 19, 2025



Just One More Day

God always gives us His Refuge and Strength. When there is only one life jacket left, He provides another. He never leaves us with just loose ends, but He knits together and casts out a huge net, filled with more provisions than we could ever need. When we think we cannot bear another moment of pain, or anguish or discouragement, He sends us a brand new day. Just one more day and the sun will pierce through the melancholy sky and warm us with its golden waves of light. Just one more day and the wind will breeze the laughter of the leaves,

and joy will beam once again. Just one more day and you will walk in fields of wildflowers dropping seeds of emeralds and pearls, and a Mourning Dove will nest upon your hand. Just one more day, time and space will bridge with the infinite, there will be no sense of sequence or schedule, vacancy or separation, anxiety or pain. Sunrises and sunsets will become more beautiful than the one proceeding, and the stars will light the sky from morning to dusk.

Just one more day, and you will float instead of walking, laugh instead of crying, stand out instead of hiding. You will see the Hand of God reaching for yours, beckoning you to take your joy and your victory. There will be no past, nor future, only the present dawning all around you. The former You of yesterday is gone and vanished. The tattered coat of sorrows you once wore-- the longing and the regrets will be cast off forever. And you will come forth clothed as His new Creation, woven in the Holy Handiwork of God.

Sunday, April 20, 2025 EASTER

The Holy Spirit's Seal

The wonder and mystery of the Holy Spirit assures us the third Person of the Trinity is critically essential. The Spirit was with God the Father, and Jesus Christ the Son, from the first beacon of light when “the earth was empty and formless, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” Genesis 1:2. He is God’s sacred Seal on His people. The Seal marks us with the absolute, never ceasing love of the Father for His children. The Seal is the warranty of our heavenly inheritance Christ secured for us on the Cross— the unbreakable Seal on the Tomb, the unbreakable Seal of God.

The Holy Spirit is the Giver of Life – new life born of the sweetness in the heart of the Father, and the selfless act of Love by the Son on the Cross. He dwells steadfast in our inner chambers, untouched and untarnished by the world where we exist. We know for certain He will never leave us, and He weaves the golden threads of the Almighty’s Love like a sweater for our souls. He opens the door to Jesus, who loves us like a brother and sister, like a sacred friend who walks beside us every day, and will until we have turned to dust, only to rise again Him into the heavens. And as we limp through the trials and sorrows and disappointments of life, He is always there, wrapping us in the cloak of His Father’s deep and pure Love.

As Jesus grants the thief on the cross new Life, He assures all of us, “I tell you the Truth, today you will be with

He is not here
HE IS RISEN

MATTHEW 28:6

Have a Blessed Easter!

This booklet was written by our very own member, Marilyn Staargaard, with excerpts
penned by John of the Cross in 14th Century Spain.

Thank you for your time and wisdom.