

The Call to Be His . . .

In the seldom visited, poorly lit corner of Holy Innocents Catholic Church in New York City, is a little known painting called *The Return*. It is not even three feet tall, and is attached to a column. You have to know that it is there; it's not visible as you enter the church.

The artist, Charles Bosseron Chambers, was inspired to paint this scene during the one of the most horrible periods in history – the immense human tragedy that we now call World War I. This war, occurring a hundred years ago, resulted in the death of 17 million people.

A devout Catholic, the artist had just attended Mass when he noticed a young soldier kneeling at the foot of a large crucifix. He was deeply moved as he silently observed this intimate moment of prayer. The soldier was seeking forgiveness for his sins, just days before leaving to join the French Army. Well over a million French soldiers lost their lives in that war.

The fate of the man in this painting is unknown. Was he a husband? A father? Were his parents still alive to witness their son bravely facing the call to arms and going away into the jaws of such a conflict? We don't know.

We do know that at this moment in his life he felt the deep need to turn to his Savior. He found a place that met his heart's need. A place that spoke of tremendous sacrifice. A place that reminded him that a life was given. Given freely. Given to free him, a sinful man. He went to the foot of that great cross, in a darkened church, with a few votive candles flickering near him, marking the offering of others' prayers. He went there because he understood his need.

Do you understand your need?

As we begin this workshop together, think about your need for a Savior. The whole history of human need, human suffering, and God's choice to come to the cradle and to the cross, brings us to

this moment. Right now. Your soul. Your neighbor's soul. The constant and grave danger of temptation, your weakness, your sins. And the steadfast offering of God's immense, all-sufficient, and generous graces. A life for a life. His life, to save yours.

Do you need a Savior?

All of salvation history comes to this question for each human heart, for your heart now, a person who desires to learn to give God more fully to others. Do you see, through the blinding and distracting temptations of the world, the flesh, and the Devil, the one great need you have – for God to have mercy on you, a sinner?

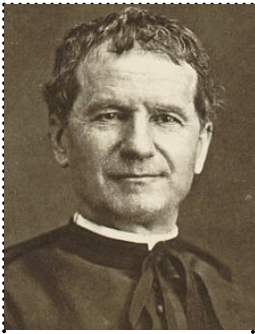
As you consider the great sweep of salvation history, of all the Bible records and the unfolded generations to the present day, allow yourself to really question whether this is more to you than just a history of days gone by and people long past.

"I thirst," Jesus said from the cross (John 19:28). As His life ebbed away, Jesus spoke these two words – to you.

So let us begin this workshop with the words of St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta, who received her First Holy Communion and Confirmation as her nation's people battled and suffered in the First World War:

"He longs for you. He thirsts for you. . . My children, once you have experienced the thirst, the love of Jesus for you, you will never need, you will never thirst for these things which can only lead you away from Jesus. . . It is very important for us to know that Jesus is thirsting for our love, for the love of the whole world. . . Ask yourself, have I heard Jesus directly say this word to me personally? Did I ever hear that word personally? 'I thirst.' 'I want your love.' . . . If not, examine yourself: why could I not hear?"





Good Questions

In considering my spiritual walk as the masterwork of my life . . .

How well do I know Jesus from the Gospels?

Who will be my guides, my deep companions in my daily walk?

To whom am I accountable in my spiritual life?

What does it look like for me to listen in earnest?

What sins do I most lament and struggle with – those that steal my peace?

What sins do I least lament and struggle with – those I have made peace with, wrongheartedly?

Does God the Father desire to hide Himself from me?

How does God the Father desire to show me His life, my call, and our shared eternity?

What do I need to leave to follow Him better?

What could I gain by following Him?

What would I consider two positive habits I have successfully and intentionally formed in recent years?

What is the best time of day for me to give time to God regularly?

What could a chosen prayer environment at home look like for me?

What does my Sunday look like; it is His day?



The school of holiness is always familial.



Jesus My Jesus, show me what is not yours in my life.

How has my childhood fathering and mothering impacted me as a praying adult?

How has my awareness of God's call impacted me as a praying adult?

How does God father me?

How does the Church mother me?

In God's plan, why do I need the Church as a Mother?

What do I need from God in terms of intimacy?

In what ways might prayer offer that intimacy to me?

What do I need from God in terms of toughening?

What does it mean to be devout?



Good Questions

In considering my spiritual walk as the masterwork of my life . . .

What are my most persistent human fears?

What are my greatest fears in considering the idea to explicitly seek to be a saint?

What is a saint? What currently is my greatest spiritual weakness; doing God's will . . .

Quickly? Carefully? Constancy?

Can I sit with the Lord through a few holy hours (constancy), in the near future (quickly) and journal with all these questions in earnest (carefully)?



Being Guided and Guiding Souls



*For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. . .
 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness,
 gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law.
 ~ Galatians 5:1, 22-23*

Intending His Will – What’s the point of all this?

Holiness is perfection in love – the point of every life. The basis of holiness is...

- ⤴ Not _____ or intelligence
- ⤴ Not social background
- ⤴ Not giftedness
- ⤴ Not _____ level
- ⤴ Not random

The basis of holiness is desire for the _____ of relationship.

*Make up your mind to become a saint.
 ~ St. Mary Mazzarello*

Intending His Ways – How do I find reliable ways to grow?

What are forms of divine guidance?

- ⤴ God’s Word – guidance – as a source of truth and a way of prayer
- ⤴ God’s Word made _____ – example – our highest desire
- ⤴ God’s Word made _____ – enablement – liturgical life and sacramental fidelity

What are forms of human guidance?

- ⤴ Parental / _____
- ⤴ Pastoral / regular confessor
- ⤴ Like-to-like _____ friendship / catechists or other teachers / spiritual advisor / spiritual director
- ⤴ Reading and other learning / Mary and the saints / _____ – daily examen

Live well today.

*If you are not ready to see God today,
 then you are not likely to be ready tomorrow. ~ St. Francis de Sales*



Intending His Goals – What does it look like to make progress?

*Every experience God gives us, every person He puts in our lives
is the perfect preparation for the future that only He can see. ~ Corrie Ten Boom*

- ▲ **Love** – If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. ~ John 14:23
- ▲ **Joy** – These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. ~ John 15:11
- ▲ **Peace** – I have said this to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. ~ John 16:33 – calm confidence
- ▲ **Patience** – Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. ~ John 14:1-3
- ▲ **Kindness** – I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you. ~ John 14:18
- ▲ _____ – Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. ~ John 15:13
- ▲ **Faithfulness** – The Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from the Father. ~ John 16:27
- ▲ **Gentleness** – What I am doing you do not know now, but afterwards you will understand. ~ John 13:7
- ▲ **Self-control** – I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ~ John 16:12

*One cannot be strong in prayer and also continue to sin habitually.
Either he will give up prayer or he will stop sinning.
~ St. Alphonsus Liguori*

Intending His Joys – How can I help others grow?

Joy cannot be dissociated from sharing. In God Himself, all is joy because all is giving. ~ Bl. Pope Paul VI

- ▲ Asking Mother Church what are the reliable _____
- ▲ Asking Mother Church what are good _____
- ▲ Asking Mother Church what to _____

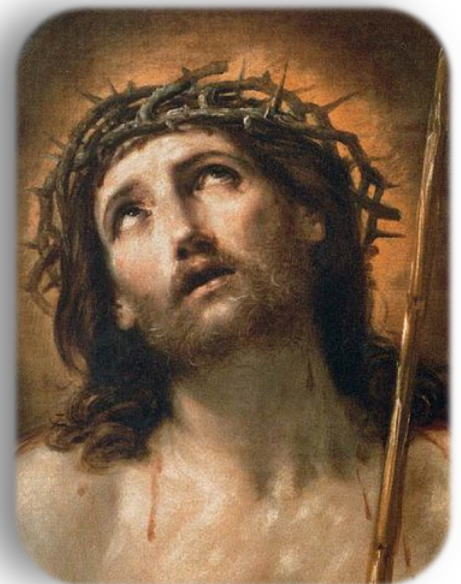
*We are so very much attached to our own opinions and our own judgments,
and we esteem them so highly. That is why so few of us reach perfection.
~ St. Francis de Sales*

Love to be real, it must cost – it must hurt – it must empty us of self.

~ St. Teresa of Calcutta

- ▲ Being a student of God’s _____
- ▲ Being a student of human _____ and diversity
- ▲ Being a student of _____

*Lord, may I have balance and measure in everything, except in love.
~ St. Josemaria Escriva*



Being Guided and Guiding Souls

Do not presume – one of the thieves was lost. Do not despair – one of the thieves was saved. ~ St. Augustine

References

St. Gregory the Great	“The greatest barrier to ministry is lack of self-knowledge.”
St. Augustine	“Prayer is desire.”
St. Augustine	“If you should ask me what are the ways of God, I would tell you that the first is humility, the second is humility, and the third is still humility. Not that there are no other precepts to give, but if humility does not precede all that we do, our efforts are fruitless.
St. Francis de Sales	“Only gradually does the dawn drive away the darkness.”
St. Josemaría Escrivá	“Reading has made many saints.”
St. John of the Cross	“In the evening of our life we will be judged on love alone.”
St. Francis de Sales	“If you are not ready to see God today, then you are not likely to be ready tomorrow.”
GDC 239	“... It is the love, not so much of a teacher as of a father, or rather of a mother.”

Books

Thomas Á Kempis	<i>The Imitation of Christ</i>
Elizabeth Seton	<i>A Daily Thought from the Writings of Mother Seton</i>
St. John Bosco	<i>The Autobiography of Saint John Bosco: Memoirs of the Oratory</i>
St. Francis De Sales	<i>Introduction to the Devout Life</i>
Clarence J. Enzler	<i>My Other Self: Conversations with Christ on Living Your Faith</i>
Sr. Ronda Chervin	<i>Spiritual Friendship: Darnkness and Light</i>
Thomas Dubay, S.M.	<i>Seeking Spiritual Direction: How to Grow the Divine Life Within</i>
Timothy Gallagher, OMV,	<i>The Examen Prayer: Ignatian Wisdom for Our Lives Today</i>
Corrie Ten Boom	<i>The Hiding Place</i>
Michael Scanlan, TOR	<i>Appointment with God</i>
St. Thérèse of Lisieux	<i>Story of a Soul</i>
Frank Sheed	<i>To Know Christ Jesus</i>
Henri Ghéon	<i>The Secret of the Curé d’Ars</i>
Fr. James Sullivan	<i>The Good Listener</i>

Paintings

Charles Bosseron Chambers	<i>The Return</i>
Michaelangelo	<i>The Creation of Adam</i>

Being Guided and Guiding Souls

Excerpt taken from *Introduction to Devout Life* by St. Francis de Sales

CHAPTER 1 — True Devotion



You aim at a devout life, Philothea, because as a Christian you know that such devotion is most acceptable to God's divine majesty. But seeing that the small errors people are wont to commit in the beginning of any undertaking are apt to wax greater as they advance, and to become irreparable at last, it is most important that you should thoroughly understand wherein lies the grace of true devotion — and that because while there undoubtedly is such a true devotion, there are also many spurious and idle semblances thereof; and unless you know which is real, you may mistake, and waste your energy in pursuing an empty, profitless shadow. Arelius was wont to paint all his pictures with the features and expression of the women he loved, and even so we all color devotion according to our own likings and dispositions. One man sets great value on fasting, and believes himself to be leading a very devout life, so long as he fasts rigorously, although the while his heart is full of bitterness — and while he will not moisten his lips with wine, perhaps not even with water, in his great abstinence, he does not scruple to steep them in his neighbor's blood, through slander and detraction. Another man reckons himself as devout because he repeats many prayers daily, although at the same time he does not refrain from all manner of angry, irritating, conceited, or insulting speeches among his family and neighbors. This man freely opens his purse in almsgiving, but closes his heart to all gentle and forgiving feelings towards those who are opposed to him; while that one is ready enough to forgive

his enemies, but will never pay his rightful debts save under pressure. Meanwhile all these people are conventionally called religious, but nevertheless they are in no true sense really devout. When Saul's servants sought to take David, Michal induced them to suppose that the lifeless figure lying in his bed, and covered with his garments, was the man they sought (see 1 Sm 19:11-16); and in like manner many people dress up an exterior with the visible acts expressive of earnest devotion, and the world supposes them to be really devout and spiritual-minded, while all the time they are mere lay figures, mere phantasms of devotion.

But, in fact, all true and living devotion presupposes the love of God — and indeed it is neither more nor less than a very real love of God, though not always of the same kind; for that love shining on the soul we call grace, which makes us acceptable to his divine majesty — when it strengthens us to do well, it is called charity — but when it attains its fullest perfection, in which it not only leads us to do well, but to act carefully, diligently, and promptly, then it is called devotion. The ostrich never flies — the hen rises with difficulty, and achieves but a brief and rare flight, but the eagle, the dove, and the swallow, are continually on the wing, and soar high — even so sinners do not rise towards God, for all their movements are earthly and earthbound. Well-meaning people, who have not as yet attained a true devotion, attempt a manner of flight by means of their good actions, but rarely, slowly and heavily; while really devout men rise up to God frequently, and with a swift and soaring wing. In short, devotion is simply a spiritual activity and liveliness by means of which divine love works in us, and causes us to work briskly and lovingly; and just as charity leads us to a general practice of all God's commandments, so devotion leads us to practice them readily and diligently. And therefore we cannot call him who neglects to observe all God's commandments either good or devout, because in order to be good, a man must be filled with love, and to be devout, he must further be very ready and apt to perform the deeds of love. And forasmuch as devotion consists in a high degree of real love, it not only makes us ready, active, and diligent in following all God's commands, but it also excites us to be ready and loving in performing as many good works as possible, even such as are not enjoined upon us, but are only matters of counsel or inspiration.

Even as a man just recovering from illness, walks only so far as he is obliged to go, with a slow and weary step, so the converted sinner journeys along as far as God commands him but slowly and wearily, until he attains a true spirit of devotion, and then, like a sound man, he not only gets along, but he runs and leaps in the way of God's commands, and hastens gladly along the paths of Heavenly counsels and inspirations. The difference between love and devotion is just that which exists between fire and flame — love is spiritual fire and when it bursts into flames it is called devotion — and what devotion adds to the fire of love is that flame which makes it eager, energetic and diligent, not merely in obeying God's Commandments, but in fulfilling his divine counsels and inspirations.



CHAPTER 4 — The Necessity of a Guide

When Tobias was bidden to go to Rages, he was willing to obey his father, but he objected that he knew not the way — to which Tobit answered, *“Find a man to go with you”* (Tb 5:3), and even so, Philothea, I say to you, if you would really tread the paths of the devout life, seek some holy man to guide and conduct you. This is the precept of precepts, says the devout [St. Teresa of] Avila — seek as you will you can never so surely discover God’s will as through the channel of humble obedience so universally taught and practiced by all the saints of olden time.

When the blessed Teresa read of the great penances performed by Catherine of Cordova, she desired exceedingly to imitate them, contrary to the mind of her confessor, who forbade her to do the like, and she was tempted to disobey him therein. Then God spoke to Teresa, saying, *“My child, you are on a good and safe road — true, you see all this penance, but verily I esteem your obedience as a yet greater virtue”* — and thenceforth St. Teresa so greatly loved the virtue of obedience, that in addition to that due to her superiors, she took a vow of special obedience to a pious ecclesiastic, pledging herself to follow his direction and guidance, which proved an inexpressible help to her. And even so before and after her, many pious souls have subjected their will to God’s ministers in order to better submit themselves to him, a practice much commended by St. Catherine of Siena in her *Dialogue*. The devout Princess St. Elizabeth [of Hungary] gave an unlimited obedience to the venerable Conrad; and one of the parting counsels given by St. Louis [of France] to his son ere he died was, *“Confess yourself often — choose a single-minded, worthy confessor, who is able wisely to teach you how to do that which is needful for you.”* *“A faithful friend,”* we are told in Holy Scripture, *“is a sturdy shelter: he that has found one has found a treasure”* (Sir 6:14), and again: *“A faithful friend is an elixir of life; and those that fear the Lord will find him”* (Sir 6:16).

These sacred words have chiefly reference, as you see, to the immortal life, with a view to which we specially need a faithful friend, who will guide us by his counsel and advice, thereby guarding us against the deceits and snares of the Evil One — he will be as a storehouse of wisdom to us in our sorrows, trials and falls; he will be as a healing balm to stay and soothe our heart in the time of spiritual sickness — he will shield us from evil, and confirm that which is good in us, and when we fall through infirmity, he will avert the deadly nature of the evil, and raise us up again.

But who can find such a friend? The wise man answers, *“Whoever fears the Lord”* (Sir 6:17), that is to say, the truly humble soul which earnestly desires to advance in the spiritual life. So, Philothea, inasmuch as it concerns you so closely to set forth on this devout journey under good guidance, do you pray most earnestly to God to supply you with a guide after his own heart, and never doubt but that he will grant you one who is wise and faithful, even should he send you an angel from Heaven, as he sent to Tobias.



In truth, your spiritual guide should always be as a Heaven-sent angel to you — by which I mean that when you have found him, you are not to look upon him, or trust in him or his wisdom as an ordinary man; but you must look to God, who will help you and speak to you through this man, putting into his heart and mouth that which is needful to you; so that you ought to hearken as though he were an angel come down from Heaven to lead you thither. Deal with him in all sincerity and faithfulness, and with open heart; manifesting alike your good and your evil, without pretense or dissimulation. Thus your good shall be examined and confirmed, and your evil corrected and remedied — you will be soothed and strengthened in trouble, moderated and regulated in prosperity.

Give your guide a hearty confidence mingled with sacred reverence, so that reverence in no way shall hinder your confidence, and confidence in no way lessen your reverence: trust him with the respect of a daughter for her father; respect him with the confidence of a son in his mother. In a word, such a friendship should be strong and sweet; altogether holy, sacred, divine and spiritual. And with such an aim, choose one among a thousand, St. Teresa says — and I say among ten thousand, for there are fewer than one would think capable of this office. He must be full of love, of wisdom and of discretion; for if either of these three be wanting there is danger. But once more I say, ask such help of God, and when you have found it, bless his holy name; be steadfast, seek no more, but go on simply, humbly and trustfully, for you are safe to make a prosperous journey.