

Lent 2015: Second week..... Feb. 23 – March 1

(Maximum 2 hours... but it can be less)

1. Welcome..... And let's start

2. Play three minutes of quiet, meditative music. Let's be still.

3. Conversation: What was it like this week, doing "spiritual exercise 1", from the meditation of last week? Please be brief. Did you sense the presence of the Lord in a new way? Two minutes each person. If you did not do it, then speak about a special blessing or grace of this week.

4. Read Mark 9: 2 – 10 (but no lectio divina with this text)

5. Reread the lectio Divina guide, before reading the text.

I prefer people use their own bibles, rather than us copying a text. They can use various translations.

6. Lectio Divina: Do LECTIO DIVINA with Romans 8: 31 - 39

Begin the Lectio Divina

7. When "lectio" is finished, play a few moments of an inspirational CD of music

8. Time of prayer together (This will be time of Spontaneous prayer. People take turns to pray... as they wish. There are two parts)

a) Spontaneous prayer of thanks; praise; blessings

e.g. I thank you Lord for.... I praise you Lord for.... I bless you Lord for.....

b) Prayer of petition (e.g. I ask you Lord for... I pray for this situation...)

9. Read the contemplation for this week. (We will discuss it next week. For now just read it)

10. The meeting is ended. It is time to head home, til the next meeting. There should be no coffee and cookies after the meeting.

Contemplation: Week 2 – Asking Jesus to help us see rightly

Contemplation: As we daily hear the terrible news of violence in Paris, the growing strength of Boko Haram and their horrific actions, the work of Al Qaeda and such organizations, it is easy to be lured into thinking that the world is bad, and going from bad to worst. For the most part, the nightly news is negative. We daily hear of kidnappings, violence, killings, uproars, and this seems to be a global reality. The world seems glum and perilous. All appears very negative. In this regard, Catholics need to be very discerning about how much they watch of this stuff, and how much they expose themselves to the continual bombardment of negative press. We should use our good judgement about how much we should and could read of it. If we overload on this stuff, and are undernourished in contemplation, it is like eating a daily overdose of poison and insufficient fruits, vegetables and the real good nourishment. We can become sick.

In reality, things are quite the opposite. St. Paul says this: “Where sin abounds, grace abounds much more” (Rm 5: 20) Grace far outweighs evil, and God’s victory of the Kingdom is far more present than we realize. There is immensely more good than evil in the world, but our eyes and hearts are not attuned to it. We are not sufficiently contemplative, prayerful people. As a result, we see things distorted and crooked. We see the surface and miss the essential. We do not see reality with the eyes of the heart. And so yes, all seems bad.

All of this is a distortion. We miss the grace which is quiet, silent, and ever present. Here is an example of what I mean. The newspapers report that a priest has done something very evil. Or perhaps they report that some police man has shot someone, apparently for the wrong reason, or again, some mother killed her child. You conclude that “all priests are bad, or all policemen are bad, or again the world is full of bad mothers”. Is this true? Let’s think. This same week, how many priests did a good job, or policemen were of service to society? How many mothers in this same city took good care of their children and loved them to bits? And yet, the one priest, policeman and wayward mother got all the media attention. The trees in the forest are all growing quietly, beautifully, and the one tree which falls makes all the noise! Thousands of priests, policemen and mothers did a good job, and yet, we conclude that “the world is going to the dogs”. Seen rightly, the “good” is far greater than the bad.

Here is another example of distortion. You travel to another country and get a cold reception from someone in the airport and conclude that “people in this country are unfriendly”. This is not true! One instance of unfriendliness should not tarnish a whole country.

The truth is that God’s grace is far more prevalent and active than we realise, teaching and guiding people to be charitable. Good far outweighs evil. Love is stronger than violence. Our problem is that we do not have a “contemplative gaze”. Our hearts are blind to grace.

Spiritual Exercise: Read the news each day. Pick ONE item of bad news. Sit quietly with this information, in your prayer corner. Think of only ONE situation... not several. For example, you hear

of someone who was shot by a bandit. You hear of the actions of Boko Haram. You hear of a raping. You read about a wayward doctor who does a bad job during an operation. Take one situation each day, and sit with this information. First: Pray quietly for the "victim" or "victims". Second: Ask the Lord to open your eyes to see "the good people and caring individuals" doing their best to remedy to this tragedy. As you pray for the rape victim, think of how many individuals in our society live very respectful lives, caring for their neighbour. As you think of the person who is shot, imagine the ambulance drivers rushing to the scene, the policemen protecting the place, the nurses, doctors and hospital personnel who work to treat the victim.

Think of the taxi drivers who ensure that the victim's family travel safely back and forth from the hospital. Think of the mechanics who ensure that the police vehicles and ambulances function safely. In sum, ask the Holy Spirit to help you see the "grace and enormous good" which far outweighs this tragic situation. Ask the Holy Spirit to see "far and wide" the action of His grace urging all people to live loving and good lives. If you read about northern Nigeria, where Boko Haram are doing such evil, pray that this evil would cease! Then think of all the Nigerian parents and people caring and loving their children, and seeking to be respectful of their neighbour. The 1000 soldiers of this evil organization are far outnumbered by the millions of good folks of Nigeria. Perhaps because of your prayers, some evil acting soldier may have a change of heart and repent of this horrific behaviour!

Now sit quietly, and let your heart swell with gratitude for all the folks doing good, despite this evil situation. Be still. Be aware of God's love working in people's hearts. Think of all the millions of people in your country, who are today, feeding their children, caring for the homeless, visiting lonely neighbours, driving friends to hospital appointments, working in the banks ensuring that your money is safe... etc. Think of the smiling people you met today (not the bad mood waitress who was grumpy!) Think of them one by one. Think of the orderlies, nurses and cleaning staff ensuring that our hospitals are functioning well today. Let your heart swell with contemplative gratitude. The Lord is moving hearts! Grace far outweighs evil.

Now, move into silence. Quiet your mind, and think of nothing. Sit quietly. Be aware of whatever is in your heart. **Be aware of the Lord.** Just let things well up in your heart... and breath peacefully. Be aware of your breath. If you get distracted, repeat these words, over and over: "Thank you Lord for this beautiful day". Be aware of what you are feeling. Do you feel sad? Glad? Loved? Enveloped? Grateful. Resist thinking thoughts, but just be aware.

Do all this 10 minutes, daily. As you finish, give the Lord thanks for allowing you to be in His presence. Quiet, stillness and attention are essential to contemplation. This is a great secret to joy..... in the stillness dancing.