

November 17, 2019

THE MINDFUL CATHOLIC

ARE YOU A MINDFUL CATHOLIC? Maybe, like me one month ago, you have no clue about what this question is all about. Last September, one of my brother priests suggested to me to read "THE MINDFUL CATHOLIC", a best-selling book by Dr. Gregory Bottaro, published last year (you can find it on Kindle books or buy it on Amazon). The sub-title of the book is self-explanatory: "FINDING GOD ONE MOMENT AT A TIME". Bishop Frank Caggiano of Bridgeport, Connecticut, wrote: *"Through his insightful exploration of the PRINCIPLE OF MINDFULNESS, Dr. Bottaro has given his readers a powerful tool to grow in psychological and spiritual health. This book will be of tremendous benefit for anyone who wishes to develop HEALTHY, JOYFUL AND HOLY RELATIONSHIPS beginning with our PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LORD JESUS."*

I have just completed reading Dr. Bottaro's book and I have found it quite helpful. If you desire to find practical ways to ATTAIN PEACE and TRUST GOD more in your lives, go ahead, read the entire book (174 pages), and do the dozen of suggested exercises. I am confident that you will not be disappointed. If you are afraid that you cannot find seven to ten hours and are not sure that this book is for you, I suggest you read the following paragraphs and apply some of the suggestions to your own life.

You may have no idea about the principle of mindfulness. In my younger days I had been exposed to Zen Buddhism in Japan, and I had learned some techniques to become more aware of my environment with the goal to help empty my mind. You could call that: "Buddhist mindfulness". "Catholic mindfulness" in many ways is the opposite: the goal is to help fill our minds with God at all times (as opposed to emptying it). While the goal is totally different, there are some similarities in the practical exercises (e.g. focusing on the movements of our breathing, paying attention to the sounds around us). Three of my favorite spiritual books are often quoted by Dr. Bottaro and I also encourage you to read them: "The Practice of the Presence of God" by Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection, "Abandonment to Divine Providence" by Jean-Pierre de Caussade, and "Searching and Maintaining Peace" by Fr. Jacques Philippe.

Throughout Dr. Bottaro's book, you will find the importance of distinguishing two ways our minds function: the "DOING" and the "BEING". In our society, our minds tend to focus on the "doing" mode. However, we will be more at peace, manage our stress more effectively, and find God's presence more frequently in our daily lives when we use the "being" mode. While Dr. Bottaro suggests very specific, practical exercises, which are most helpful, I would encourage you to reflect on the way your own mind tends to work. Can you focus on "being", i.e. on the current moment, or do you keep thinking

about past errors or are you obsessed about planning future activities? While the differences between "doing" and "being" modes of thinking might be blurred at times, one can see the fundamental contrast between focusing on "WHO I AM" (including my personal relationships, especially with God) as opposed to "WHAT I DO". How do you answer the questions: "Who am I in relationship with God, and with the world?" and "What do I do in my daily life and for what purpose? My own answer today would be simple: "I AM a Catholic Priest" and "I perform the daily responsibilities and duties of a Catholic priest such as: celebrating the Mass, hearing confessions, visiting and anointing the sick, giving spiritual advice to individuals or couples, baptizing children, preparing engaged couples to the sacrament of matrimony. Dr. Bottaro's book is helping me in being more aware of the presence of God at all times, being less distracted and more focused in my prayer life. It also helps me manage better the stresses of being a pastor and diocesan priest.

The last 18 months (since my open-heart surgery for a triple bypass) have been for me a roller coaster with ups and downs. Following my operation, I was anxious whenever I felt some kind of chest pain or shortage of breath... I had several returns to the emergency room of nearby hospitals. I was also afraid that I might not be able to handle the normal, daily stressful situations that a pastor or priest faces. Thanks to your prayers and your words of encouragement, I have been able to surmount this fear of anxiety and am now back to where I was before the open-heart surgery. My cardiologist now wants to see me only every 6 months...I still have high blood pressure but it is managed by my praying, exercising (swimming), eating "healthy" and taking medications. I was of course attracted to read Dr. Bottaro's book as I was told that it would help me reduce my blood pressure... It has not yet happened! However, I have done the recommended exercises only once or twice and this is by far insufficient. I need more time and I hope that I can find it with better prioritization of my daily activities. My brother priest is continuing those exercises six months after completing the book and he is quite satisfied with the results. This encourages me to persevere. I would love to hear from those of you who choose to read Dr. Bottaro's book.

As we search for PEACE, may we deepen our personal relationship with GOD. May we live in the present, FINDING GOD ONE MOMENT AT A TIME!

One in Christ,
Father Alain