

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius

January 4, 2015

Spiritual Ponderings

Spiritual Randomness

My Spiritual Ponderings this month will be another round of Spiritual Randomness which means I will have a different topic to ponder each week. Today, I would like to reflect on the third part of Fr. Ronald Rolheiser's book: *Our One Great Act of Fidelity: Waiting for Christ in the Eucharist*. In the third part of his book Fr. Rolheiser suggest four steps/actions that a person should take in developing a Eucharistic spirituality. Quotes from his book will be in bold.

1. Receive

Moreover, we would have in our lives first and most important virtue of all, the sense that all is gift that nothing is owed us by right.

There is a great difference in people are aware that their life and everything they have is a gift and those who do not see their life as a gift. Here is a story from the book: *The Spirituality of Imperfection: Storytelling and the Search for Meaning*:

A very learned man who had heard of the rabbi of Berditchev—one of those who boasted of being enlightened—looked him up in order to debate with him as he was in the habit of doing with others, and refuting his old-fashioned proofs for the truth of his faith. When he entered the zaddik's room, he saw him walking up and down, immersed in ecstatic thought. The rabbi took no notice of his visitor. After a time, however, he stooped gave him a brief glances and said: "But perhaps it is true after all!"

In vain did the learned man try to rally his self-confidence. His knees shook, for the zaddik was terrible to behold and his simple words were terrible to hear. But now the Rabbi Levi Yitzhak turned to him and calmly addressed him: "My son, the great Torah scholars with whom you have debated, wasted their words on you. When you left them you only laughed at what they said. They could not set God and his kingdom on the table before you, and I cannot do this either. But, my son, only think! Perhaps it is true. Perhaps it is true after all!" The enlighten man made the utmost effort to reply, but the terrible "perhaps" beat on his ears again and again and broke down his résistance.

Admitting that we are not in control opens us up to the possibility of miracles. We no longer have to control or explain every moment of our existence but rather we admit that perhaps there is a Great Being that loves us.

Adam and Eve began to take by force, as by right, what was theirs only as gift. The result of that is always shame, a darkened mind, rationalization and the beginnings of a dysfunctional world.

2. Give Thanks

To be a saint is to be motivated by gratitude, nothing more and nothing less. To give thanks, to be properly grateful, is the most primary of all religious attitudes. Proper gratitude is the ultimate virtue. It defines sanctity. Saints, holy persons, are people who are grateful, people who see and receive everything as gift. The converse is also true. Anyone who takes life and love for granted should not ever be confused with a saint.

Doing good for someone who has done good to me makes doing the good not only easier but makes it something that I want to do. Following God's commands are so much easier when I realize that He has given me so much.

To consider life as tragic is not to live out the Eucharist.

3. Break

But it is on this very point that, perhaps, we struggle the most at Eucharist. What's wrong at the Eucharist generally is not that we don't pray and sing, but that we don't break down. There is too little anguish in our Eucahrists. To become one in heart with each other involves precisely breaking down, anguish, the painful letting go of distrust, selfishness, bitterness, hurt, jealousy and even of shyness. All these things keep us apart and all of these are strongly held and fiercely guarded inside of ourselves. If our Eucahrists do not succeed in breaking down the barriers that

separate us from each other, then we have little reason to hope that these barriers will break down in our world. If we cannot succeed at forming community in church, we will not succeed in forming it elsewhere.

The more that I allow myself to realize that I am in a safe place and can offer God not only my positives but also my negatives the more Eucharist means to me. Father Rolheiser in another part of the book writes this:

The Eucharist is such a prayer of helplessness, a prayer for God to give us a unity we cannot give to ourselves. It is not incidental that Jesus instituted it in the hour of his most intense loneliness, when he realized that all the words he had spoken hadn't been enough and that he had no more words to give. When he felt most helpless, he gave us the prayer of helplessness, the Eucharist.

4. Share

Theologians tell us that God is as much a verb as a noun. God is a trinity of persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For Christians this is more than a simple dogma that we are asked to accept, even if we don't understand it. It is something that invites us to a whole way of life: God is a family, a community of persons sharing life together in such a way that a spirit, and energy of gratitude and joy, flows out of that shared life. We are asked to do the same—to share our lives with one another in such a way that joy and gratitude flow out as an energy that nurtures others.

Jean-Paul Sartre once suggested that community is hell. On a given day, the tensions inherent within community life can certainly make that seem true. However, in our better moments, we all know that the reverse is the truth: alienation and alones are hell; shared life is heaven.

Something so great as the Eucharist makes me want to go forth and share God's love with the world. This is why the Mass ends so quickly after we receive the Eucharist. Perhaps this is also why Mother Teresa requires her sisters to have a daily holy hour and Mass every day before they go forth and do their work and may be this is why they are able to change the world in the way that they have.

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius

January 11, 2015

Spiritual Ponderings

Spiritual Randomness

My Spiritual Ponderings this month will be another round of Spiritual Randomness which means I will have a different topic to ponder each week. Today, I would like to reflect Fr. Benedict Groeschel's advice on how to avoid temptation from his book: *Stumbling Blocks And Stepping Stones: Spiritual Answers to Psychological Questions*. Quotes from his book will be in bold.

A helpful resolution is to remain calm and accept the fact that resisting temptation is bound to cause discomfort. Many succumb to temptation because they are not prepared to endure the discomfort of hours of anxiety that temptation may entail.

1. Get away from the situation involving the temptation. This is called "breaking the set" in psychological terms. Places, people, situations often "trigger" temptation. Insofar as it is possible, these occasions should be avoided. If you find yourself in such a situation, move away quickly. Sometimes the trigger has nothing to do directly with the temptation. For some, anxiety and fatigue can be the most dangerous situations.

What are the things that cause you to sin? If you remove one or two of those things the chances of you committing the same over again diminishes greatly. For example a person struggling with internet pornography can bring his or her computer out into a public location, put on accountability software, etc. and this will greatly aid them in overcoming this habitual sin. Sometimes adding something to the set pattern can help. For example when someone is feeling tempted to look at pornography they can go for a walk or pray the rosary (or both). By adding time and distance they can help short circuit the sin.

2. Relax. Temptations are highly charged with anxiety. Reducing anxiety will usually reduce temptation. Anyone being tempted should avoid “hassles,” even if they appear to have little to do with the temptation itself. The famous slogans of Alcoholics Anonymous, “Let go and let God” and “Easy does it,” both reflect the fact that temptations to compulsive sin are related to high levels of anxiety.

I have discovered that a lot of my sins come as a result of me being stress and thus not thinking right. By taking the time to relax and in a special way remind myself of God’s love for me I can put an end to a lot of patterns that could end in sin before they go that far.

3. Spend time in prayer. Meditation that is quiet and trusting is most helpful. This may not be easy but it should be done as well as possible. If you are too distracted to pray from your heart, use some formal prayer, but make it brief.

I cannot stress this one enough. When I pray, I avoid sin. When I don’t pray I swim in it. In my prayer it is important that I am real and that I am honest with God about what I am feeling and thinking. If I am mad at Him then I need to express it to Him in prayer. If I am feeling hurt, then I need to let Him know that as well.

4. Finally, stand back and evaluate the whole situation. Anyone who is tempted often should step back and, with the help of spiritual friend, ask what may be done to reorganize his way of life to deal more successfully with this difficulty. There may be a need for counseling or spiritual direction.

Many of our sins make no sense after we have committed them. Why have I just looked at pornography when I know it hurts the ones I love by making it easier for me to objectify them or others? Why did I just get angry with that person who has done so much for me? Remember that the seven deadly sins distort our reality for example envy distorts our reality to make us think that we are in competition with others for God’s love when in reality God loves all His children equally.

5. Someone struggling with a compulsive problem may realize the need for a supportive group like AA or Courage. Another may recognize that his situation or jobs need to be changed radically to improve the spiritual quality of life.

True strength comes from knowing when to admit that we need help. It is actually a greater sign of weakness to refuse to get help and to continue to hurt your love ones and you are fooling no one while trying to act so brave because your refusal to get help shows that you are a coward.

Overcoming temptation often means taking legitimate care of oneself.

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius

January 18, 2015

Spiritual Ponderings

Spiritual Randomness

My Spiritual Ponderings this month will be another round of Spiritual Randomness which means I will have a different topic to ponder each week. Today, let us reflect on the idea of the illusion of immortality and how it affects our relationship with God. Fr. Henri Nouwen in his book: Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life tackles this very topic. Quotes from his book will be in bold.

The greatest obstacle to our entering into that profound dimension of life where our prayer takes place is our all-pervasive illusion of immortality.

Since on many levels we are quite aware of our mortality. Who thinks that he is immortal?

Although we keep telling each other and ourselves that we will not live forever and that we are going to die soon, our daily actions, thoughts and concerns keep revealing to us how hard it is to fully accept the reality of our own statements.

The following is an article from USA Today which should shatter any of our beliefs in immortality.

Two hydrogen bombs broke loose as B-52 crashed. Disaster averted by one safety mechanism.

Report: Nuke that fell on N.C. in 1961 almost exploded

Michael Winter, USA TODAY 9:14 p.m. EDT September 20, 2013

One of two hydrogen bombs that a doomed B-52 accidentally dropped on North Carolina in 1961 came perilously close to exploding, according to a recently declassified report.

The 4-megaton Mark 39 bombs -- each packing 260 times the explosive power of the weapon that decimated Hiroshima -- broke loose over Goldsboro, N.C., as the bomber went into a tailspin and crashed.

The Mark 39 hydrogen bomb had an explosive yield of 4 megatons, equal to 4 million tons of TNT. Two fell accidentally on Goldsboro, N.C., in 1961, and one nearly detonated. (Photo: U.S. Air Force)

All four safety mechanisms designed to prevent accidental detonation worked properly on one bomb, which landed in a meadow, but three failed on the other, and only a low-voltage switch kept it from exploding upon impact in a field in Faro, N.C., said the 1969 report.

Had the warhead exploded, radioactive fallout could have spread over the Eastern Seaboard, hitting Washington, Baltimore, Philadelphia and New York.

The accident happened just three days after President John F Kennedy was inaugurated in January 1961. Five of the eight crew members survived the crash.

The report was obtained by Fast Food Nation author Eric Schlosser for his newest book, *Command and Control*, about the nuclear arms race. Schlosser found that between 1950 and 1968 alone, at least 700 "significant" accidents and incidents involving 1,250 nuclear weapons were recorded.

Mother Jones first reported Schlosser's findings Sunday, and the Goldsboro incident attracted new attention Friday based on an article in the *Guardian*. The British paper also published the report, written by Parker F. Jones, the supervisor of the nuclear weapons safety department at Sandia National Laboratories.

Jones titled his report "Goldsboro Revisited or: How I Learned to Mistrust the H-Bomb," a nod to Stanley Kubrick's 1964 nuclear satire, *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*.

My point in sharing this article that I have kept from the USA Today website is not to scare anyone but to remind us that we should not put off for tomorrow what the Lord desires us to accomplish today. Who do you need to forgive or seek forgiveness from? Who needs your helping hand? Who needs to hear a kind and/or loving word from you? What are you doing with the time the Lord has given you?

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius

January 25, 2015

Spiritual Ponderings

Spiritual Randomness

To end this month of Spiritual Ponderings, I would like to share with you an examination of conscience that I developed at the request of a friend. This examination of conscience focuses on our use of social media. If you do not use social media, I am sure that there are still some good things to reflect on.

I. I am the Lord your God; you shall not have strange gods before me.

1. Have I treated people, things or activities as being more important than God?
2. Have I spent more time on the internet/phone/etc. than I needed to?
3. Has the use of social media taken away from my prayer time and relationship others?

II. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

1. Have my words or actions put down God, Church, or others?
2. Have I mocked Church leaders, teachings, or fellow Christians openly online?
3. Have I brought scandal to others by drawing undue attention to problems within the Church between people?

III. Remember to keep holy the Lord's Day.

1. Have I attended Mass at the appropriate times?

2. Have I allowed commenting on Facebook, Twitter, or blogging to replace my prayer life?
3. Have I spent too much time on the internet to the neglect of prayer and family time?

IV. Honor your father and your mother.

1. Do I show my parents proper respect both offline and online?
2. Do I maintain good communication with my parents or do I hide a lot of my behavior?
3. Do I criticize my parent to others especially online?

V. You shall not kill.

1. Have I physically, verbally or emotionally abused someone through anger, gossip, or rumor.
2. Have I destroyed another reputation online?
3. Have I joyfully ridiculed others online and rejoiced in their setbacks?

VI. You shall not commit adultery.

1. Have I respected the physical and sexual dignity of other and of myself?
2. Have I used the internet to visit porn sites or engage in sinful conversations about sex?
3. Have I used the internet in such a way that I could be leading others into sin?

VII. You shall not steal.

1. Have I taken or wasted time or resources that belonged to others?
2. Have I spent valuable work time on the internet?
3. Have I used the internet to perform any sort of crime?

VIII. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

1. Have I gossiped, spread lies, or exaggerated stories in order to hurt another?
2. Have I posted or reposted comments online that I suspect may not be true?
3. Have I used posted false information about myself on social media pages in order to get in appropriate attention?

IX. You shall not covet your neighbor's spouse.

1. Have I given all my relationships the appropriate time and energy?
2. Do I spend too much time online dreaming of a different life than the one I have?
3. Do I fantasize about different people that I have "met" online?

X. You shall not covet your neighbor's goods.

1. Do I spend time browsing online stores desiring things that I cannot afford leading me to become jealous and angry at those who can?
2. Do I spend too much money online?
3. Am I giving an appropriate amount of my income to charity?

When was the last time you went to confession?