

## Diocese of Tyler Spiritual Companion Program - January 13<sup>th</sup>, 2018

### 1. Welcome & Opening Prayer

### 2. Review of Prayer

- 'Methods' of Ignatian Prayer (Meditation; Contemplation; Prayer of Consideration)
- The 'Prayer on My Dossier' (& Psalm 39)
- A brief review of the 'Spiritual Exercises' of St. Ignatius
- The Examen

### 3. Spiritual Direction (in the Ignatian Tradition)

- A reading of Chapter 1 of 'The Practice of Spiritual Direction' (William A. Barry & William J. Connolly) will be helpful (but not essential).
- Direction
- Guidance
- Companionship
- Case Studies (these will not be 'in-depth' studies at this point. They will be used to determine what might be considered spiritual direction and what might not)

### 4. 'Qualities' of the Spiritual Director / Companion

- Personal Prayer
- Direction
- Knowing oneself; knowing one's biases.
- (If time permits) Spiritual 'Inventory'

### February 'assignments'

Read: The handouts; Worldviews, Desires (we'll discuss these a little in February)

Pray: Continue with "My Dossier" & continue with your 'inventory' at your leisure.



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## The Prayer of Consideration

You may feel that the only thoughts, images, and convictions that enter into prayer come out of Scripture, or out of theology.

But when we raise our minds and our hearts to God, we raise a mind and a heart steeped in concrete circumstances in our life world. Our minds are filled with perceptions of friends' needs and children's hopes. We go into God's gaze having made definite decisions about everyday affairs. We bring to God a heart shaped by everyday habits.

Does God ask that we set aside all the current realities of our life world, our life, and our self? Where could we have gotten that idea?

One of the great woman saints was asked by a young novice how she prayed. The great woman said, "Oh, great heavens, I have to talk to God about rent and medicine, about the problems in our schools and hospitals, about this sister and that sister. I haven't time to do anything more." And she was a great saint.

Some great pray-ers pray with their calendar. They consider what they have done for God, and what they are doing now. They look into what is to come, and ask what they ought to do for God. What better prayer is there than that?

But we also go into God's gaze with lines from Scripture, or with words from our oral prayers and our creeds. Sometimes, before we

have any feelings about these, we take them apart with our reason and our understanding. We might be thinking, Why did Jesus ask Peter three times whether he loved Him? Why not twice or five? And we might wonder what it meant that one of the twelve that Jesus chose would be such a rotten character. Sometimes we wonder whether we will find it hard to die, when that time comes. Sometimes we muse about the way the Church is going. We squirm with embarrassment about a little falsehood we told. We delight at the image of our child playing in a championship game.

Now—as long as we continue in God's gaze—we are praying while we think and wonder and muse and squirm and delight. Particularly if we turn to God and speak to God—Lord, You know . . . —particularly then we know for sure we are praying.

Those who live busy lives in the marketplace, whose everyday life shifts from merely very full to nearly frantic—they know the value of this prayer. They know that they need time to consider under God's gaze, to ponder and wrangle and exult, to worry with Him and walk with Him.

For those who bring faith and hope and God's love into the world, consideration makes the most appropriate and necessary prayer. ♦



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## Praying with the Scriptures

*Beforehand, find the passage you will pray with. When you open the book, be aware that you are in the presence of the Living Word, the One who guarantees all that is written.*

- Now, first, read through the whole passage slowly, moving your lips or even reading softly out loud (to distinguish this from reading reports or newspapers).
- Then, second, put the book aside and from memory write down words or phrases that stay with you. (If you can recall none, check the text or read it once again, then jot down what impresses you.)
- Third, take each of the words or phrases you have jotted down and think about it. What does it mean? Who said it? What was the speaker feeling? To whom was the word or phrase addressed? While you are considering this way, you may think of God in the third person.
- Fourth, all along, or as you are coming to the end, think about what this all means to

you: to your personal history, your life world, your life, your self.

- Finally, end this way: Consciously gather up your thoughts and then turn to God our Lord. Now think of God as "You." Tell God what you thought about, and feel in God's presence what you have felt. What would you give to God? What do you want of God?
- In general, you do not "finish" a passage. A passage is not an assignment; it is a place to find God. Sometimes, you will find almost no meaning in a passage; then, beg God for insight and a tender heart, and stay with the passage as long as you can.
- Any passage where you find tremendous meaning, and any passage where you find nothing but dust and boredom—you need to return to these until you know you have done with it. Then go on to another. Praying Scripture has nothing to do with "getting through" passages and books; it has everything to do with letting the meaning and the values of each single word sink into your life. ♦

## About Contemplation and Other Ways of Praying

*Astronauts learn many different procedures so they can be ready for any exigency. Tennis players learn several strokes so they will have the right one for each return. Computer hackers learn ways of programming so that they will have varied protocols to call up when they want the computer to accomplish some task. If people are all that careful about human activities, why shouldn't we note various ways that the human spirit prays? Then we are free to use these ways when we think them useful.*

*You will find different names used elsewhere, which does not matter. What matters is that we call on all of our powers in order to love God better: memory, understanding, sense perception, imagination, judgment, decision. With these powers, we think of God as "He" or "She," which is good praying; and we speak with God as "You," which is good praying. Each one of us is as able to pray as to breathe, for God is making us to pray.*

### PRAYING WITH FANTASY

Daydreaming is fantasizing. A man puts himself at the controls of a moon vehicle and drives around its surface; he's fantasizing. A diver stands on a springboard and in her mind goes through the dive she is about to execute; she's fantasizing.

In praying with fantasy, you go into God's gaze and ask for what you want. Then you imagine things that have not really happened and perhaps cannot happen. You might have heard the fantasy of imagining that you are falling into the sun, not harmed, and coming to its center, and there you imagine that you have actually fallen into God's Self. Or you might fancy yourself discovering a mirror standing in a springtime field, reflecting the sun's light back to the sun—just the way each one of us reflects God's knowing and loving back to God. Or you might fantasize a terrible, desolate place devastated by atomic war, feeling the deadly radiation, and hearing the echoes of thousands of cries of horror—and recognize the landscape of sin.

Always, you gently begin the fantasy and gently let it fade. Ordinarily, you will come back to yourself with some insights or images, some deepened or strengthened convictions. Always turn to almighty God and speak in the second person, "Lord, You know how my imagination teaches me . . ."

### THE PRAYER OF CONSIDERATION

This way of praying calls on your reason and understanding. You do in prayer just the same things you do when trying to understand why a person wrote a will as she did, or what really underlies serious disagreements among a school faculty.

Having asked the Lord God to keep you aware of the divine presence, and for help in understanding and determining, you would ask questions beginning with who, what, where, when, why, how: Who did this? How could that have happened? What does it mean? Has it anything to do with my life? With the lives of those God gives me?

Most immediately, the prayer of consideration applies to a statement or a document. You would be joining many great pray-ers and theologians, for example, if you consider the Creed or the prologue to St. John's Gospel, or paragraphs from the letters of St. Paul. You reason about them, ask God to help you understand them, and then reflect on your own life world and life and self, asking God to help you see more clearly and choose life.

You can also consider one of Jesus' parables as though it were not so much a story to listen to as a text to be interpreted. In this kind of prayer, you would be helped by the studies of scripture scholars, though of course you do not need to be one. Who really is the "prodigal son"? Whom does the elder brother represent? Why would the father be so patient with both of them? This way, reasoning and understanding, you come to know God better and yourself, too. You might look at the example of "The Lilies of the Fields."



But you ought to know that one kind of prayer of consideration has been neglected and yet by rights ought to be constantly used. Think of it this way: You find yourself wondering during a long wait somewhere whether you are leading your life as a real believer in Jesus Christ. You feel God's presence, and in your mind you run through your days. Then you ask God to strengthen you to keep growing. Again: you run an office, and every day before anyone else comes, you sit at your desk and consider how you are dealing with each of your employees and whether you are acting like a follower of Christ toward them, and then you hold each one up to God for blessing. Again: you sit quietly in God's presence, considering how you and your spouse might help one of your children and you ask God for help. Again: you flip through your calendar, examining what you are doing and why you are doing it, begging God to help you with each appointment and meeting and holiday. Again: after reading one of the bishops' pastorals, you find yourself feeling a little confused. You turn to God and for a long time wonder whether you really accept what the bishops are teaching, and you finally feel the need to ask God to illumine your mind and open your heart.

This is serious prayer. It is the prayer of consideration, which means applying our highest powers of intelligence to our life world and ourself in the light of what we believe and hope for in Jesus Christ. The prayer of consideration seems like the most appropriate mental prayer for those of us who live very busy lives.

### **MEDITATION**

When you meditate, you remember a real event by imagining it as it happened, perhaps in great detail and in exact sequence. You might not get entirely into it and become a part of the action yourself; rather you are

more like a camera taking in the action and the sound. Even if you do get into it, so that you feel and sense completely a part of what happened, you do not rest there when you meditate. Instead, you then reason with yourself about what happened and try to understand more about the people involved and the events themselves. So not only images and feelings, but ideas play a role in meditation.

For example, you might meditate on the Transfiguration by picturing Jesus and His three closest friends on the top of a mountain. Then you watch as Jesus starts to glow with the love of God, and Moses and Elijah appear and talk with Him, and then the disciples say how good it is to be here. You wonder, then, what does God's power do in us that we glow with it, and why wouldn't all of us glow that way who are seized by God? Why would God make Jesus appear so glorified only to these three? And so on. The result of this prayer is an enlightened faith and hope, a deeper understanding of God's ways, and stronger conviction. And you can always say what you prayed about, because this kind of prayer tends to be full of images and to remain very verbal.

You meditate on events in Jesus' life for the meaning they bring to your own life world and self. The Fathers of the Church called this getting at the "spiritual meaning" of Scripture. Thus, you could meditate on Jesus feeding bread and fish to His friends on the lakeshore, and that reminds you of the truth that Jesus Himself will always nourish us, body and spirit, in the Sacrament. In that same event, you might visualize John saying, "It is the Lord!" and Peter grabbing his gown and leaping into the water to swim ashore. That makes you eager to recognize Jesus Christ wherever He is, and to go to Him promptly. In some way like this, the events in Jesus' life become somewhat like a text to learn from and not only a story to listen to.

*(Continued)*



## CONTEMPLATION

One way of contemplating you do not develop on your own but receive from God. When you pray this way, you become completely absorbed in and by God the Lord, and you seem to do very little or even nothing at all. You are simply resting in God. For many pray-ers, this kind of prayer goes on without words or images. Sometimes, they feel as though they are in a kind of opalescent darkness, in which knowing itself seems dark. Sometimes, they wonder whether they are praying at all, and they often cannot find words to say what they have prayed about. But as long as they sense God creating them and loving them, and as long as they keep growing in goodness and away from enacting their sinfulness, then they are praying.

Another way of contemplating you develop on your own with gifts of faith and hope and love. This kind belongs to the Ignatian Exercises, precisely because you exercise—using memory, imagination, and free will to call up many images and feelings and to approve of or reject them. You use your imagination to know a real event from Jesus' life. The event is in the past to you, but all things are present in God, so in God you enter into the event. You are simply there, hearing and seeing and feeling. You take part in what goes on—allowing Jesus to wash your feet, for instance, or helping Andrew pass around the multiplied loaves.

You enter into the interior experience of real people. You feel the stillness of the paralytic as Jesus reaches out to touch him. You feel the grief in our Lady Mary's heart when

Jesus leaves Nazareth for the last time. You feel Jesus' joy when little children climb all over Him.

You also experience the dynamic of the event, the "inscape" of thought and feeling and decision. At Cana, you sense the tension that the wine is gone—then the puzzlement of servants, the pleasure of Mary, the surprise of the host—and the delight of all the guests to get some more wine, and such good wine! At the Pretorium, you feel the madness that sweeps through the crowd, the tired cynicism of Pilate, the hatred of some of Jesus' enemies, the quiet sureness of Jesus.

You are not a spectator. You really enter into these activities. At Bethlehem, for instance, you let Mary hand you the Child to hold. You talk with the people, with Jesus or Joseph, and let them talk to you. You imagine that you touch them and they touch you. You accept the blessed Bread in the Upper Room; you clutch Jesus' cooling legs as His friends lower His body from the gibbet.

The result of this kind of prayer goes beyond comprehension. The prayer itself is an experience, very real and as memorable as any other real event. It does freshen your affects and deepen your love, though. Commonly, you carry away from it the memory of a gesture or a vivid scene for a long time. Often enough, you come away from contemplation with an idea or an affect to jot down, though it will seem a hopelessly poor summary of what you have experienced.

In spite of all that, you always know that what you are contemplating has definite and strong connections with your everyday life. ♦

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## Prayer of Consideration: The Lilies of the Field

*Jesus called on His disciples to "consider" the lilies of the field, and we should do that.*

- The lily does not choose in which field it will stand. When it grows from seed or runner, it finds itself in this field, with this hard clay or soft loam. So do I find myself on a "field"—the twentieth century, America, a state, city, town, neighborhood. How much of my life world is my making; how much is God's?

- The lily has no control over what grows around it. When it shoots up, it might have to fight for its life with thorns or clumps of crabgrass. Or it might be outshone by great sunflowers. So have I very little control over what surrounds me. I live in corporate structures, in political processes. I am caught up in earning a living, buying insurance, preparing for illness and old age. I cannot change the stock market or banking practices or taxation. I cannot make the ghettos disappear, or dry up acid rain. How much of my life world is my making; how much is God's?

- The lily of the field has absolutely no control over the weather—rain or drought, it must simply stand and endure. So have I no control over nations warring on one another, or over international cartels poisoning the air with pollutants. I cannot control whether people around me drug themselves and fill the atmosphere of my life world with fear and vio-

lence. I cannot control people feeling prejudice toward me and my kind. I cannot make male chauvinism or strident feminism go away, or stop people from aborting babies or abusing their children. How much of my life world is my making; how much is God's?

- The lily came up a certain kind of lily, of a certain color and shape, and its shapeliness and health depended on the spring and the summer, and whether grazing cattle let it grow. So did I come up a certain kind of person, of a certain color and shape. So were my psychic health and physical shape much influenced by forces around me when I was coming up. And until now, all created things have let me live and even thrive, though many, many threatened and still threaten me. How much of my life growth is my making; how much is God's?

- For all that, not even Solomon dressed up in gold-embroidered brocade was any more lovely than that lily. So for all that has shaped and misshaped me, for all that has given me health and inflicted ill health on me—I am precious in the eyes of God, and honored, and God loves me as I am. Otherwise, I would not be as I am, though God would be glad were I to slough off my selfish sins. But they are trash compared to God's creating love in me, whose love will burn them away like flakes on the bark of a flaming pine log. How much of me is mine; how much can be God's? ♦



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## The Principle and Foundation

Every person in the world is so put together that by praising, revering, and living according to the will of God our Lord he or she will safely reach the Reign of God. This is the original purpose of each human life.

Every other thing on the face of the earth is meant for humankind, to help each person come to the original purpose God has put in each of us.

The only thing that makes sense in the use of all other things, then, is that a person use everything that helps realize that original purpose deep in the self, and turn away from everything that alienates us from the original purpose in ourself.

We can push this a little further: When we are under no obligations in conscience, we

ought to keep ourselves free of any fixed preference for one or other created thing. Instead, we ought to keep ourselves at balance before anything. What does this entail? It means that before we ever face any decision we do not determine to do everything that will keep us healthy and nothing that might make us sick, to be rich rather than poor, to be considered somebody important rather than a nobody, to live to a very old age rather than to die younger. In that way, we would keep a balance before any created thing when the times come for decision.

We set ourselves to live in careful balance, to want to choose solely on the grounds of what leads more directly and more certainly to our original purpose. ♦



Diocese of Tyler – Spiritual Companions.  
January 13<sup>th</sup>, 2018 – Session I – Foundations.

- I. What we intend to do through *spiritual direction / guidance / companioning*, and how the helper and the seeker interact.

**Direction** The novice master gives direction to help others mature in a spirituality. The head of Regnum Christi gives direction. The directee seeks to follow the spirituality of the society or group. The master will instruct on methods of prayer, attitudes, and habits to foster and avoid, and the like. The master shares out of his own experience and shares, judiciously, his own experiences of the spirituality. If you are not incorporating someone into a group you would not give much direction.

**Guidance** The guide listens carefully to a seeker who asks counsel to know better how to grow in Christ-life. His careful listening is that of a person who has a matured grasp of his own spiritual experience in prayer and action, and also has learned enough about theology and spirituality to have formed a framework within which to listen. This framework differs from the psychologist's, and is most wisely rooted in one of the great spiritual traditions such as Franciscan or Ignatian. The guide's contribution to the seeker's spiritual life combines prudent judgment, loving affirmation, and timely intervention. The guide is rightly expected to be further along in spiritual maturity than those who seek him out.

**Companioning** The spiritual companion shares the experience of God and of the interior life with another or other companions. Companions can be beginners or very experienced in the spiritual life. They help each other (or one another if there is a group) by generosity of judgment, candor in telling their own experiences, and patient, empathetic listening. Companions tend to approve of what they listen to, though they try to re-frame issues, challenge, and even confront when any of those are the loving response. Companions listen and react always as equals.

***How do we actually put these understandings into practice?***

- Most spiritual helpers began as companions, and every helper must wisely continue to have spiritual companioning, guidance, or even direction for himself.
- Very experienced helpers are able to play all of the roles, and remain aware during listening of which role will give the greatest help to the seeker.
- Listening in a specific way is the foremost function of all three. The helper who talks too much has actually adopted the role of instructor – an honored role in the Church but different from directing, guiding, and companioning.
- The helper's interior life and spiritual practice contribute directly to his work as a helper. Anyone who does not pray "mentally" – spending time alone with God, with or without texts, meditating or considering or contemplating – would be wise not to act as a helper.



II. A reading of Paul B. Macke's "What Makes a Good Spiritual Director?"

1. Spiritual guidance is what a prepared person gives in response to a request for help from someone who wishes to live a more completely grace-filled life.

*Who makes the request?* Men and women ask for help both when they are in straightened circumstances and when they simply wish to have a better sense of growth in the interior life. More and more today, perhaps because of our diminished sense of sin and the relative unavailability of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, people come with conscience issues. *Who do you expect to approach you?*

A person is a person only in relationships (without them, he or she is mad). Everyone lives aware that our relationship with God is deeply intertwined with our relationships with one another. Think of the Great Commandment: "love the Lord your God...love your neighbor as yourself."

2. Any spiritual helper's main function is *listening*. But every helper will be asked by seekers about what they should do or not do and reasonably responds; you encourage people best when you help them discover what *they* think they should do or not do.

Keep keenly aware that a person's experience of prayer, and what that person is or is not doing, are tightly intertwined. This is so true that when a seeker complains that "prayer hasn't been so good", the shortest way to find out why is to have them reflect on how they are behaving outside the time of prayer

3. The helper needs to give full attention to the seeker. Any interruption seems a diminishment of the seeker or the issues.
4. The helper almost never does any harm by keeping quiet.
5. Anything at all communicated during a conference is best considered under the seal of confession, period. This practice gives the helper peace of mind, and the seeker as well. Should the seeker bring up something in public, the helper does well to ask to be reminded of what was said, as though the memory is stored too far back for easy access.
6. Spiritual helping is a personal relationship, so the helper is good who has good relationships in regular life. Since this is a relationship, the helper will make personal remarks as a matter of course. He does well to respond to questions about his health or his work generously, if always briefly – perhaps habitually ending with a counter questions about the seeker's health or work.
7. The general temper of the helper affects what seekers are willing or even able to share about themselves. The best way to prepare for this is to *practice* the Gifts of the Holy Spirit (Gal.5:22)



8. Writers on the topic of spiritual direction who work in the Ignatian tradition, commonly work out of the directives Master Ignatius put at various points in the *Spiritual Exercises*.

In the Ignatian retreat, the seeker carefully develops dispositions of openness to whatever God asks. The work of the director of the Exercises is to promote that openness and then to stand aside as the seeker and God interact, intensely. In this context, advising someone what to do is manifestly taking over God's role, or that of the seeker. However, this must be said; many Ignatian directors apply this same piece of advice to spiritual direction, guiding, and companionship even apart from the Exercises. The director should "keep at a balance" and not want the seeker to choose one thing or another. This note is in "Annotation 15"; the Annotations being 20 paragraphs at the very beginning of the book describing the method of directing the experiences of Spiritual Exercises.

In companionship, the helper is not indifferent to whether the person makes progress or not. In guiding, the helper wishes to point the person in the direction of making progress, encourage and even urges what the seeker comes to see (with his help) is God's will in a given situation. In direction, the helper at times commands, though always in a way that allows the seeker his freedom in Christ.

9. The helper's grasp of the patterns and working of the interior life allows him to see and feel where the seeker is more or less free. The serious guide keeps at work on the patterns in his own interior life.
10. This "contemplative attitude" is one element in any framework of the interior life. In Ignatian spirituality, it has more to do with what is done or not done than with the splendors of physical creation.

Today, people who say they are "contemplating" often means they are going into a spiritual state, finding contentment in God during quiet. When they say they "find God", they seem to mean they find peace, contentment, and joy in being alone and quiet. In the Ignatian framework, when you find God, you find One who is very busy doing and reacting. An integral belief in Ignatian spirituality is this; *You become what you do*. This may be the core of Ignatian spirituality, since when we follow Christ, we find ourselves embracing the Cross in union with His redemption life.

11. Most spiritual guidance entails conversation.
12. The spiritual helper accepts the invitation of the Holy Spirit to enter into human experience wholly, finding there the Son and also the Father-at-work.

Jesus cleaned out the Temple. His actions symbolized the reality of His achievement; humankind will not "go up to the House of the Lord" in Jerusalem in order to find out how to live a holy life. Instead, they will "come to Me", turn to Jesus Christ. This thirst becomes a deep experience, as it was for Jesus. He said, *zeal for your house will devour me*. The "house" is Jesus' own Self – the Temple of God (John 2:17).

13. We live in relationships. The spiritual helper lives in spiritual relationships – parish, group, family, religious community.



14. We are constantly reminded today of violations of the proper personal boundaries as people violate one another sexually. You have to be really clear about your boundaries, even in such matters as giving an embrace of peace at the beginning or end of a session.
15. No one knows everything, and our own experience is limited (however extensive it may be). Since the helper must speak out of his experience, he will certainly be presented with experiences he has not had. *Humility* means that he not only listens to them but learns from them.
16. An appointment by the Church through the pastor or bishop gives a man a call.
17. You give what help you can and when you can no longer help you move seekers along. You also know that you can help only so many seekers at a given time. You need to be able to say *no* without feeling guilty.
18. Most of the time, seekers give evidence of what they ought to do now or stop doing now. A good helper can hear and discern those evidences. When he helps by doing it, he feeds them back to the seeker. Sometimes, he helps by clarifying and explaining; sometimes he urges and even confronts.
19. Personal charism is important. So is official position.
20. A good helper develops a relationship with a seeker deeper and more personal than that of an office manager or agent. The relationship is *personal*, even while the helper keeps his own boundaries (as he must in every relationship).
21. Helpers get a lot of help from sharing with other helpers.
22. The bishop's call to give spiritual direction, guidance, and companioning constitutes a vocation (within a vocation often) a vocation of *being molded in the image of Jesus Christ*. Those so called are correct to presume that the Holy Spirit will supply whatever gifts are required to meet the challenge of that vocation.



## Session 1 – Qualities of a Spiritual Companion

- A person who is possessed by the Holy Spirit
  - Habitual prayer
  - Reception of the Sacraments on a regular basis
  - Reading, study
  - In touch with his or her own brokenness
  - An ability to empathize
  - An ability to move beyond one's own disordered affections
  - An ability to see in a new way
  - Rules of the Church
  - Accepts weakness
  - Tolerance
- A person of experience of God, someone who has already trod the spiritual path to a considerable degree, someone who has struggled with their own conflicts, darkness and light.
  - Experience of God active in his or her life
  - Trusts in God's benevolence
  - Can see in the client one's own past perhaps
  - Has experienced consolation and desolation
  - Has wrestled with his or her own "demons"
  - Does not judge the client
- A person who is learned, not with a PhD, but who is familiar with Catholic tradition, including some knowledge of Scripture and is competent in some spiritual tradition (Franciscan, Benedictine, Carmelite, Ignatian)
  - Must be willing to continue educating himself or herself by reading about spirituality
  - Must become more and more familiar with Ignatian spirituality
  - Has some competency in Scripture study
  - Can help the client to see God's movement throughout Christian history
- **Personal characteristics**
  - Patience
  - Generosity
  - Counsel
  - Hopeful
  - Joyful
  - Tolerance
  - Fortitude

- Prudence
- Generosity
- **GOOD LISTENING SKILLS**
  - Non-judgmental
  - Willing to see another perspective
  - Not certain that "my way is the right way"
  - Can negotiate conflicts between speaker and listener
  - Can detect the difference between what is spiritual help and counseling

Questions to consider:

What are my strengths?

What are my weaknesses?

Do I know the light and darkness of my own life?

Where do I find hope?

Do I habitually try to bring the Good News to others?



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January 13<sup>th</sup>, 2018 – Session I – Foundations.  
Discernment: Confirmation in its Beginning & its End.

**What you do, you become.** If you encourage everyone all the time, you become a positive force in your life-world. If you lie time after time, you will become a liar. If you judge others carefully and kindly, you will be a judicious, kind person. If you keep stealing, you will become a thief.

**Conscience.** In some measure, you decide what to do in and through the functioning of conscience. Conscience is the faculty – ability and authority – of deciding between good and evil. When you choose to do something because it is a good thing to do, you have followed your conscience. When you decide that making remark about someone is wrong, you have applied your conscience. Most of the time, in most choices that our life-world makes today, the conscience remains mute. Conscience, in fact, moves only when it must. If you imagine that your conscience is always telling you what to do, you are probably in one of two situations:-

- You are either in a situation of sinning continually.
- Or you are making your superego as a conscience, perhaps driven by some fixed prejudices, or by a need for being perfect (*perfectionitis is rooted in sloth*).

**Discernment.** When a person who lives a good life and stays away from deliberate sin comes to choose, that person chooses by what we have come to call discernment. The term has become pretty elastic, but it can be held down to some sensible meanings. Here are some things to consider about what is, after all, a process:-

- Discernment is a process that begins as soon as we choose to act. The process begins with perceiving various options (none of which is sinful or leads to sin – or else conscience is involved), deciding which of the options to take, and enacting your decisions.
- Enacting means that you as a whole person are the agent of the perception, decision, and action. For the whole person discerns. You take in options according to your current understanding, learning, convictions, and habits, even according to your personality and energies. You weigh options in the light of mental and emotional habits – your habitual way of thinking and feeling. Then *you* decide. Even if you are trying to make a decision involving your relationship with God, your whole self makes that decision.
- Earlier on, spiritual writers spoke about *discretion*, by which they pointed to a set or state of spirit allowing ready scanning of options and the application of prudence, fortitude, and temperance in distinguishing the better or worse among options, and then choosing with balance or quiet of spirit. Now we call that *discernment*. Keep in mind, then, that discernment means practicing the cardinal virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit as well.
- One way or method of discerning is the Ignatian discernment of spirits. This process requires that you take note of how your spirit moves – of how the Holy Spirit and other spirits (worldly, nobly human, and evil) move in your own spirit. **This is one of the ways or methods we address in this course\*.**
- How does the spirit of a good person move? The answer describes the whole tone of life of a good Christian. It must begin with what Jesus of Nazareth told us. We have the gift of the Holy Spirit, for the Father and the Son have come and taken up residence in our hearts. We have Christ's peace in our hearts and among us. We are endowed with tremendous spiritual powers which St. Paul describes as gifts of the Spirit. In sum, we are called by God to live with peace in our hearts and in our behavior. We are privileged to live joyful lives, even when we are carrying a hard cross. We will not easily grasp that without the witness of the saints; not only those of the past but also those living in more recent times; Miguel Pro, Dorothy Day, Mother Teresa, Pope John XXIII, Bishop Romero, and many more.



Diocese of Tyler – Spiritual Companions.  
January 13<sup>th</sup>, 2018 – Session I – Foundations.  
St. Paul – Galatians 5

**St. Paul summarizes in Galatians 5** the life of a Christian truly devoted to Jesus Christ must expect to live. He recognizes that there are forces around and within us that fight against that.

In Galatia, he faces a local church in which strong conservatives were vexing the community, determined that every Greek pagan who accepted Jesus Christ had *ipso facto* to choose to be circumcised and embrace the Old Law. Those who insisted on this were following an urge or a spirit that moved the whole community, so that Paul had to chide them forcibly so that they did not follow that urge into a schism from Christ.

We do not need to know very thoroughly the historical circumstances before we can get what he's driving at. The basic choice every Christian and Christian community (encounters) is pulled in two directions:-

First: I follow the very human conviction that I *must do some concrete things* in order to make myself pleasing to God, and not doing them proves that I am not pleasing to God. This way is rooted in self-will. It inevitably tries to solve the mystery of suffering and the Cross and leads to temptations against hope.

Second: I follow the graced conviction that God is pleased with me and is creating me as I am. This way is rooted in humility. It leads to the firm belief that God the Father is molding me in the image of His Son, gives me gifts (habitual graces) and the power to enact them. I also accept suffering, not as a problem to be solved, but as a participation in the things that Christ still has to undergo for the sake of His Church. In this humble mindset and heart-set, I accept the gifts God gives – and we note here the graces that St. Paul summarizes as the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Hence, we can correctly read in this splendid chapter of Galatians descriptions of how a person enacts a poor decision (doing one's own will) and what moves a person to enact a good decision (doing God's will). In everything, we are free to choose, but that freedom can lead to deeper and stronger freedom, or to choices that actually end up binding us both interiorly and in our relationships.

FIRST: Confirmation comes with a *larger freedom*, enacted in acts of joy and hope.

*Christ sets us free, so that we should remain free. Stand firm then, and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery. It is I, Paul who am telling you that if you have yourselves circumcised, Christ will be of no benefit to you at all. Once again I declare to every man who has himself circumcised that he is bound to observe the whole Law. Once you try to be reckoned upright through the Law, you have separated yourself from Christ, you have fallen from grace. We are led by the Spirit to wait in confident hope of saving justice through faith. For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision can effect anything, but only faith working through love (Galatians 5: 1-6).*



## CASE I

Leslie comes to talk to you once again, as she has three or four times during the past year. She is a woman of perhaps 55 or so, very well educated, married to a retired man who was a great success in the oil business. Leslie is in the parish and she knows that you give spiritual guidance and came at first to talk about prayer. During your earlier sessions, she told all the religious activities she is engaged in more than she told you about prayer.

She and her husband say a number of novena-type prayers on most days. On more than one occasion, you wondered about how much her husband really enters into these prayers; he is a man with a dry wit and some things he's said struck you as more acerbic than comfortable. Leslie goes to a prayer meeting on Wednesdays and chose to belong to a group who sponsor and guide an hour of adoration before the Blessed Sacrament every Friday evening. Leslie likes Mother Angelica's TV station but she has decided that her favorite is the Jesuit prayer site, *Sacred Space*, which she tries to visit at least two or three times a week. You tried to help her find a more quiet prayer, to put books aside, and to go rather to the Gospels than to things being written today. She is serious she has told you more than once that she prays a lot and tries to enter into contemplation.

This time, she mentions that she has decided to join another group, one dedicated to the prophecies of Fatima. She feels that listening to the Blessed Mother will help purify her heart of worldly desires, which afflict her a lot. But the reason she came to talk to you this time is not devotions and prayer.

What moved her to make an emergency meeting with you is that she feels tremendously confused and even wonders whether she might be having a nervous breakdown. You can see by the way she looks that she is exhausted. She goes on to tell you how confused she is in some of her relations, even wondering why she is having sexual fantasies at her age. She weeps as she talks. Then she asks what you think she should do.

*How will you frame what Leslie is going through?*



Diocese of Tyler – Spiritual Companions.  
January 13<sup>th</sup>, 2018 – Session I – Foundations.  
St. Paul – Galatians 5 (Continued)

SECOND: One confirmation rarely addressed has to do with our relationships. For just about every single discernment and decision we make affects those in our life-world, especially those closest to us. They, in turn, sometimes support and sometimes resist our decision.

*You began your race running well who has hindered you from following the truth? It was surely not an enticement from the one who called you. A little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough. I am confident of you in the Lord that you will not be led astray, and that the one who is troubling you will be condemned, whoever he may be. As for me, brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case, the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished. I could wish that those who are unsettling you might go further and castrate themselves. (Galatians 5: 7-12)*

Our discernments today – the choices we make about how we are living – are tainted by our time's individualism. Usually, as a consequence, we tend to think that the peace that confirms a good decision is in our hearts. It is, of course.

But we are not merely individual, we are also persons in relation. Hence, it is more reasonable to expect to find peace in our relationships, as well, when we have come to a good decision. When our decision affects others, we will necessarily have taken their interests into account before we decide. Thus, a mother of young children would consider her children's care before deciding to go into the workforce. Sometimes, of course, others' interests are roadblocks to some among the options (those children may still need daily maternal care). In every decision, we have to keep mindful of those whom God has given us to love and be loved by, particularly those who are closest to us. You will not often hear this addressed in talks on discernment.

Particularly when our decision reaches for the *magis*, the better thing, we may find tensions with persons in our lifeworld. We also find resistances to our holy choices in the culture at large. Consequently, a good decision well made – say, a man chooses carefully and prayerfully, in concert with his wife, to be a deacon – sometimes brings surprising opposition. One has to be careful in assessing that opposition. For it is all too easy to take it as a sign from God that you made a poor choice.

But the opposition may just as well be from one of the other spirits; the world, the flesh, or the devil. St. Thomas Moore was strongly opposed by his second wife when he chose to remain in prison and to risk his life. Hers was a deep and genuine human love – according to the flesh. He resisted, lovingly. Genuine love in Christ gives others room to make their choices and keep approving of the persons.



## CASE 2:

Roger is 55. He has had a long, successful career with an international company. His work, happily, kept them home in Oklahoma for twenty years of their marriage. He and Emilia have two children, one married and the other doing graduate work in university. As Roger worked up through the ranks, putting in very long days, Emilia basically raised the two.

As the younger moved into grammar school, Emilia chose to teach for a few years, both to help with finances and also because she enjoyed it. As the children moved into high school, she began to get interested in counseling and began taking occasional courses in the local state university.

Both children were out of the home when the corporation moved Roger to a higher-paying position in California. They were to live there for 10 years. Emilia decided to continue part-time study in counseling. During those years, Emilia's father died. Her mother had died when she was quite young and her father's death was hard on her (he was her last living close relative). She found her study of counseling a source of insight into her grieving. That motivated her to begin work toward a graduate degree in counseling, with a view to getting licensed.

Emilia goes to a conference on teenager counseling in Catholic Schools. While she is gone, Roger discovers that he can retire with full medical benefits and about 90% of his retirement package. When she comes back, Roger tells her that he wants to retire. Both of them miss their home state and city in Oklahoma and both are glad that Roger can retire. They talk about this and pray over it. The numbers add up to retiring now, and their very human desire to be back in their own state is strong. So without much hesitation, they decide to retire.

He does so, and they move back to Oklahoma. Emilia transfers her credits to the state university where she first studied counseling and continues her work towards a license. Now the scene is changed in a way they had not anticipated. Roger is home all the time, as she had been during their working life together. So he expects her to be home all the time still. She isn't; she is as busy now as he had been while working.

When he tells about this, he says that he figures that she had been waiting for him all those years, so now it's his turn. On the other hand he doesn't like it and feels very restless and at a loss. He has begun volunteering in the parish, and finds that somewhat rewarding. They begin to feel a kind of tension in their marriage that they had not known before.

Her issue is whether she wants to continue training and move into counseling work, perhaps risking married contentment. His issue is whether to go back to work and how he is to keep his disappointment from hindering Emilia. So he is beginning to fear that they made a poor decision when he took retirement.

*What are the effects – human and in grace – of their decision to retire?*

*What do the consequences tell about whether they made a good decision well – or perhaps a poor decision?*





*Tulsa Deacons Seminar / Montserrat Jesuit Retreat House*  
*Session Two: February*  
*Foundational Theology of Spiritual Direction*

*J. A. Tetlow, S.J.*

**One: Where Christian spirituality functions** *Every person who comes for spiritual direction or counseling has a worldview, which informs all their experiences and frames the meaning they give to their lives. For instance, at a prayer day in St Louis recently, some Catholic-educated teenagers said that they did not believe in life after death. That disbelief surely shaped what they were willing to do and what they think life is about. How can a guide listen for this?*

Christian spirituality is the experience of those who, guided by the Holy Spirit, respond at some depth to revelation. It requires prayer and reflection and an informed mind. The experience begins in the Church and leads to a deeper belonging to it. For spirituality's context is the Church's view of human life and all of creation. This worldview is handed on in the *story* of creation and salvation; in *symbols* such as the creed, liturgy, art and song; in the *praxis* of Sunday worship, works of mercy, and the great spiritual traditions; and this worldview faces all the *great questions*. In this context, each Christian matures a personal mind and heartset, first of all by reflecting on the Christian responses to the great questions.

*The Story.* God created all things from nothing and placed humankind over all the other creatures on earth. Humans failed, did wrong, and chaos spread on the earth. God then chose a people and gave them a land and a Law. They, too, failed by worshiping other gods. Then God became human, Jesus of Nazareth, and worked redemption through His blood. God added to His people to fill out the work of redemption, even though they remain sinful. God creates them moment by moment and the Holy Spirit guides the evolution of the Reign of God. We look forward to the moment when all suffering will be wiped away and death will be defeated. Then the people will live enfleshed forever in glory.

*The Symbols.* First is the Mass and the sharing of His Body and Blood. Church buildings are concrete symbols -- as are statues, icons, books, and bibles. Liturgies are symbols, and many kinds of prayer and song. Some symbols endure for centuries (baptismal water) and some are ephemeral (Lourdes water). Many public actions are symbolic (food banks, pilgrimages). Some are counter-cultural (the Cross) and some acculturated (the St Louis Jesuits' songs). All Christian symbols stand on their own, both growing out of beliefs and hopes and embodying them, and spirituality uses them to grow in faith and hope.

*The Praxis.* The Catholic's praxis begins with the seven sacraments in all their complex consequences. It requires regular worship of God who is One and Three, and begins prayer with thanksgiving. The praxis has



been, from the very beginning, inclined to spread the Good News. Catholics try to be people for others, positively constructing their lifeworld, freely giving what they have freely received. Catholics do not sacrifice animals or do voodoo and are skeptical about things like horoscopes. They stay away from orgies (Gal 5:16f) as not of the Holy Spirit, and keep a certain holiness code (not blaspheming or maligning). Spirituality adds interior prayer and other things to this praxis.

*The Mind and Heartset.* Accepting that worldview, each member of the Body of Christ shapes a personal mindset which fixes the heart first on God and then on loving others. Some Christians remain vague and follow what everyone else thinks and wants; others pray and study. All are confirmed in the freedom of the Children of God. Christians commit to *foundational beliefs* such as that each person's dignity is inviolable and every single person is precious in God's eyes. These are like ideals. They also commit to some *consequent beliefs* that are closer to everyday life: God loves me as I am; whatever comes into my life comes from God. Many have in mind that they have a call, a personal vocation from God. It must be added here that much in a Christian's mindset may come from some other worldview than Christ's. Christian spirituality leads us to examine that constantly, for out of this mindset, Christians develop aims, goals in life, and motivations.

### **Spiritual Situation ☼ Zachary**

You have been meeting with Zachary every month for about six months. He approached you after Mass one day to thank you for your homily. The two of you hit it off well and he asked whether he might come see you sometimes. He'd had spiritual direction before.

Clearly an educated and accomplished man, he does not reveal much about himself. He is about 45, you would guess, and has a devout wife and two grade-school children. You have the impression that he was a kind of diplomat before moving to the city, and you suspect that perhaps he's in one of the intelligence services. He tells almost nothing about his daily life and seems to have no special agenda in his interior life.

You have found your discussions more difficult than you had anticipated. At the beginning, he seemed mainly to want to learn how to "pray better," giving you the impression that he was following Carmelite prayer. When he talked about his prayer, however, he seemed to have remained up in his head. He recounted few feelings or convictions. He typically recounted many ideas that he had had, and spent a lot of time telling about what he'd read in bible studies. He was sometimes spending his time (a half-hour each morning) comparing passages in the synoptics. Once he talked at length about what Jesus had meant when he said, "the Kingdom of heaven is *at hand*."



*Fourth, What can set this straight?* Jesus Christ has already set it straight. His Kingdom is already now, but not yet. For while His redeeming act is already done, He has shared with us the fulfillment of that act. In Him, if we accept it, we will find guidance from His Spirit to know the next good action that will further His Reign.

Christian spirituality functions in the whole of a person's life, characterizing not only thoughts and beliefs, but also actions and motivations. Of course, spirituality takes expression in prayer. But it is understood first of all by looking to what we do.

### ***Spiritual Situation ☼ Yolanda***

You are advisor to a group of young people (late teens, early 20s). They gather every other week to share and talk and, of course, to eat junk food (you join them!). You set a topic for them and give them a (very little) bit of reading. This week, you've asked them to talk about vocation.

They clear away the notion that the only vocation is to serve in the Church and range on to other topics. A vocation can be to any form of life, however God wishes to have you use your gifts. Your vocation grows from your own gifts, which after all are from the same God who gives you the vocation. Probably, God makes a good match between gifts and vocation. You can make a mistake trying a vocation that God hasn't given you the gifts for. One man tells the story of a cousin who tried a medical career but was dyslexic and not all that bright, so failed.

One of them says that she believes God does not care what she does with her life as long as she does good. Others say yes, but God does have some ideas for you. One volunteers that his father says that you have to follow your vocation or else you'll sin. They go at that pretty hard, not all that clear about how you are both called and free.

After the session, Yolanda hangs around to talk with you. You know her pretty well, aware for instance that she is an honor student with a super brain. She is disturbed. She thinks she wants to be a grade-school teacher in the Catholic school system but her parents are dead set against it. She reminds you that the family is regularly at church and both parents are active in various organizations in their parish. They are good Catholics. How could they oppose what she feels is a clear call from the Lord? It's her vocation, isn't it, not theirs?

She asks you what you think.

**Reflect:** Does God have hopes for each person? How is a person to know? How does a personal vocation fit into the Church?



### *Foundational Theology of Spiritual Direction*

**THREE: Ongoing Creation in the Concrete** *Children have to believe that God made them. Adults, if they are to be spiritually mature, have to learn that God is making them still. God creates us, not in the abstract, but in our real, concrete selves. No one can have a serious spirituality without this intimate relationship filling their hearts. Apart from this understanding of God the Creator, prayer is likely to remain on the surface or be about something other than God.*

God our Lord, we profess in the Creed as "Creator of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible." The Creed does not make so clear that God is, at every moment of time, our Creator.

St Thomas argued that "God is pure act." Whatever that means for in metaphysicians, for us it means that God is always acting in time and place. It means that when we look for God, we are looking for the One who is doing and acting, not for someone far away and passive. When we find God, we will find an active God doing real things at this time, not the god of nirvana, the All Nothing.

God our Creator acts constantly in each human life. The Church has declared infallibly that God directly and Personally creates each human life in the mother's womb. Not two, but three are involved in each human life's beginning. Parents want a child, perhaps hoping for one or the other, but God has known each person's name from eternity. God chooses the moment and the place of our birth.

God chooses our parents and our siblings and cousins, we do not. God chooses whether we are to be male or female, American or Chinese. God creates us so tall and so stout, of this or that color and ethnic group. In truth, everything about us that we do not choose comes directly from God's hand, because He loves us to be as we are.

God does not stop making us as we grow, either. God gives us talents in language or art or sports, and chooses the cultural influences that shape the worldview we are to share.

The gifts that God gives to each one are not only for the individual, but also for their lifeworld (which is the spatial equivalent of one's lifetime). For as the gifts of an Einstein and of our own grandparents shaped the world we live in, so our own gifts are to shape the world of those whom God gives us to love and to be loved by. This is how God wishes to bring about a world of justice and peace.

We are in truth co-creators of our lifeworld, and even of our selves. For God gives us understanding and freedom, and we are to choose which of our gifts to develop and which to leave aside. In becoming who God wishes us to become, we are also making our lifeworld -- hopefully, the way God wants it to be.

Grandest of all, God gives to each one of us a Personal Vocation -- the thing that God wishes us to do which no one else will or even can do. This personal vocation is a kind of lived dialogue with God, making the self and making the world. As Pope John Paul II used to say, each of us is "unique and unrepeatable." And God loves us as we are.



### *Spiritual Situation Three: Xavier.*

You have known Xavier for a long while. He had gone through the RCIA while you were directing the program, and the two of you hit it off well. Xavier is a serious man and deeply religious. He eagerly learned the doctrines of the Church and has been very steady in his practice of the sacraments. You felt and still feel that he has not entirely accepted the Church's stances on some social issues. He talked with you, for instance, about the bishops' statements on the death penalty and you could feel that he was struggling to be open-minded.

Xavier has several children. Two are middle-school aged and a boy is playing football at the Catholic high school. His oldest is a daughter who has been off at college. It was the daughter that brought Xavier to talk with you after the "spring break" of the universities was over. It proves a difficult conversation.

Xavier explains -- after a lot of struggling and hesitating -- that his daughter had returned from college and told him his wife that she is lesbian. His wife took this news very hard and has been weeping on and off. He tells you that at first he did not believe his daughter -- there is so much foolishness around and so much confusion. He wanted to find out whether his daughter was under the influence of a teacher or of someone who had seduced her, but she had claimed that she was not and had come to this on her own. You wonder, yourself, but do not ask, what did happen to the daughter.

Then, he says, he had gotten very angry. He said that he did not show that to his daughter -- what good would that do? -- but he was angry at himself and his wife. What had they done wrong, and how could he love his daughter as he had always loved her? What was he going to tell her? When he got to that point, he said, he was afraid that he had demanded of God, Why did you do this to my daughter?

But now he is really fearful. He keeps asking how God can be good who would let someone suffer from this kind of confusion? He is afraid that he is losing his faith. He feels strongly that the homosexual orientation is somehow produced by human culture in a vicious way. Does the Church really believe that it's a "metaphysical disorder" and what does that mean in his daughter? But he knows that those who live this lifestyle really have a hard life ahead of them. He cannot, simply cannot, understand how anyone could express love this way. As he says these things, he begins weeping. "How could God do this?"

How would you describe the spiritual difficulty Xavier now goes through? Is it a matter of faith? of morality?

Where are you going to start to help Xavier? If you decide to give him advice, what advice will you give him?



### *Foundational Theology of Spiritual Direction*

**FOUR: Some thoughts about desire.** *The desire drives the American worldview. Advertising elicits desire which drives consumerism which shapes our lifestyle which is a vast advertising board (Izod, Ralph Lauren, and all that). Our kind of individualism goes this way: "You asked for it. You got it," that is, you wanted it so you have it. We tend to trust that each person's desires, sincerely acted on, will lead to that person's fulfillment, and we tend to distrust authorities when they try to guide personal desires ("repression" is a nasty word). Still, desire is at the core of spirituality. What do we need to know about desire?*

God our Creator makes known in many ways what He wills. As the Christian worldview appreciates it, God first of all creates all things seen and unseen in an intelligent design. This, for instance, makes the universes expand outward and radioactivity decay at a steady rate -- as God wills. Then, God weaves deep in our bodies and souls this intelligent design. This teaches us, for instance, that oleander kills and spinach nourishes and that love builds and hate destroys -- as God wills. For centuries, the Church has called this intelligent design *the natural law*.

To humankind as a whole, God reveals that natural law. God also reveals what He wishes and hopes for through chosen prophets like Moses, Isaiah, and Jesus of Nazareth. These report the Commandments and the Beatitudes to The People and, at the time when God chose, to all peoples. Unhappily, false prophets who mislead about God's will are always among us.

In this, the "last age," God also confirms the Church to declare clearly what God wants here and now. Pursuing this, serious disciples try hard to think and feel with the Church. We listen to the pope about abortion, for instance, and to the bishops about peace and poverty. This is no simple matter; it requires discernment.

Finally, to every single person, God reveals what He wishes. He does this, first, by giving us concrete gifts that enable and also limit what we can do: being male, Chinese, healthy. Our gifts indicate God's wishes in us and God's hope for us. The intelligent person, for instance, can be sure that God wishes her to think and grow wise.

God makes us intelligent and free, so that we must decide what God wishes for our life as a whole and in particular matters. God does this giving us desires. A personal vocation in life rises first as a desire to do or be something.

Our deepest authentic desires rise directly out of God's passionately creative love. Desiring Jesus as my Savior comes right out of God's wish that Jesus should save all humankind.

In everyday life, each person's desires are influenced by others. The infant wants to learn words. The adolescent wants what every other adolescent wants. The adult wants to be in fashion and to have a Lexus. This is why advertising works -- and it does work.

And here comes the problem. Because our desires are influenced so profoundly by others and do not rise unhindered out of God's pure, passionate love, our desires tend to get skewed. We tend to desire things that are not authentic to our selves. In most matters, what we want is of no great consequence (sugar in your coffee? No?). But what we want in big things counts: What vocation do you want to follow - and what makes you



want that? Whom do you want to marry -- and did that desire grow in holiness?

Each person is free to follow the desires that rise right out of God's passionately creative love or to follow another way. The vast numbers of humankind follow another way -- the world, the flesh, or the Evil One.

A little aside: In spirituality, we feel concern mainly for conscious desires. Certainly, we are driven by what psychologists call "unconscious" desires: a person overeats because he unconsciously feels inferior. That difficulty, psychologists handle. The spiritual guide would be concerned with the conscious habit of overeating.

The desires we address here are *conscious*. I want something and I know that I want it. Set aside for a moment the moral issue whether what I want is good or evil and notice several things about our desires. ★

First, they come from what we *value*. The worldview we share includes many values, and one way we know whether we are following Christ's or the world's is by noting what we really desire. The person who cheats others in order to get rich does not value what Christ values. Values also rise from the mind and heartset that each of us slowly develops. Jesus said, "Where a person's treasure is, there is that person's heart" -- meaning their desiring. Spiritual guides listen for what a person desires, as that reveals what the person values.

Second, our desires rise right out of our habits. Everyone has many habits, otherwise no one would get anything done. When I get up in the morning, I want to clean my teeth and comb my hair -- matters of habit. Some of our habits are part of our worldview (Americans tend to neighborliness) and some from our personal heartset, as Jesus pointed out.

But notice that we *develop habits* by deciding to do this or that repeatedly. In a real sense, we are responsible for the habits that we have. Taking responsibility for our habits goes against our culture, which tends to consider any habit -- but particularly a habit that we particularly like or particularly hate -- either an addiction or a compulsion. We may recognize some ways of acting as addictions (incessant excessive drinking) or compulsions (incessant attempts to please co-workers). But the spiritual companion recognizes that we can choose to develop or defend a habit and would want to know why.

Third, there are two points in spirituality worth noting. One: taking responsibility for our habits usually frees up some surprising authentic desires that God raises in us. Developing greater simplicity of life, for instance, has quite often freed people to feel the desire to help others. And a habit of daily reflection certainly clarifies our authentic desires -- prayer lets God do what God wishes in us.

Two: a negative consequence of enduring bad habits is that such a habit all too commonly prevents us from correcting inauthentic desiring as it hides behind the habit. A man argues and insists on his own opinion, claiming that it's a bad habit from high school debating days, and therefore not taking responsibility for his desire (inauthentic in a disciple of Christ) to dominate others or to be superior. A woman wastes her evenings by drinking more wine than she needs. She never recognizes that she is wasting time; it's just a habit she has.

To take responsibility for our desires requires constant reflection on our values and on our habits.



### Spiritual Situation Three: Walter

You are in charge of the liturgy group in the parish. You have tried to keep their ministry on a spiritual footing, leading them in prayer and starting spiritual conversations with them. You have to train the readers, the Communion ministers, and the choir, too. You have wisely appointed what you call the "Leader" -- the Lead Reader, and the Lead Communion Minister, and Choir Leader. You meet with them almost every weekend informally and formally in preparation for the change of liturgical seasons. And of course, the parish has its regular "retreat" and you have good input into that.

The first two leaders, Reader and Minister, are working out very well. Not so the Choir Leader, a man named Walter. You were hesitant when you accepted him as leader -- that is to say, when he insisted so much that he wanted to do it that you finally gave in. Actually, Walter is a skilled musician and can conduct the singing at Masses well. He is not a good leader, however, and choir members are complaining that he is disorganized and too passive. Now as Advent begins you have to decide what to do.

You had discovered how difficult he could be at the most recent meeting of the choir and other music helpers. Three issues rose. The guitarists for the youth Mass had suddenly quit, and Mary not only took up the slack but also made a lot of changes. She explained what she had done and why, and then wondered whether she had the authority to do things. You waited for Walter to approve and give her the OK to go ahead, but he said nothing. A couple of people asked questions. Nervously, Mary then said she'd just go ahead as though she had the right, for the youths' sake. Walter still sat silent.

Then Tommy, who had been planning Midnight Mass -- integrating a children's group, the choir's work, and how the pastor would like to sing his part -- gave copies of the plan he had drawn up. Suddenly, Walter said that the piece chosen for the children was not appropriate. Tommy was surprised and said softly that he'd already shown this to Walter. Walter denied that he has seen it. Tommy said, "I showed it to you a month ago." When the other leaders said they felt the children's piece appropriate, Walter truculently waived his hand and said, "Go ahead. It's too late. Whatever you want."

Finally, the choir wanted to know what pieces they would have to learn for Laetare Sunday, only two weekends away. Walter asked what they wanted to do. Several mentioned preferences and two ran a long discussion promoting their own preferences. Walter said all of them were good and he would decide later. Some pointed out that they need to know promptly what to practice. Walter said he understood that but he could not decide right away. Then they went to another topic.

You now feel that Walter really does not have the skills to be Choir Leader. He does not plan well. He showed clearly a lack of any sense of delegating, in the way he handled Mary and Tommy. How you are wondering: you face a management issue, removing an unskilled leader; and you face a spirituality situation, helping Walter find what he really wants.

#### Reflection:

What do you see as the spiritual issue here?  
On what grounds will you try to help Walter understand what is going on?



## *Foundational Theology of Spiritual Direction*

**Five: Theology of desiring.** *We need to take responsibility for our desires and we need to know how to distinguish which come from God and which from somewhere else. This is not simple in a culture where desire is incessantly elicited. One way to distinguish among desires is by testing the spirit behind them. Here are the first two of four "spirits" -- the world, the flesh, and the Devil, Christlife -- with their worldviews and answers to the great questions.*

**Noble humanism.** "So Paul stood before the whole council and made this speech: 'Men of Athens, I have seen for myself how extremely scrupulous you are in all religious matters....' (Acts 17:21). Think of public figures like U Thant and Edward R. Murrow, thinkers and artists like David Thoreau, scientists dedicated to progress like Buckminster Fuller, political leaders like Golda Meir.

Their answer to who we are is in terms of the human community as it is now and in its future promise. What's going on is human progress, which is furthered by science and democracy, but which is marred by the disorder of human violence, poverty, and injustice. The earth is made for all and adequate to support all in dignity. All of the wrongs are due to ignorance and lack of good governance. The solution is within humankind, which is able to organize itself to bring universal peace and prosperity, if only each person will recognize the unity of the human community and learn right thinking. Some noble humanists (think of Mohandas Gandhi) find God while others believe this life is all.

This spirit inhabits libraries and museums. It animates the research of doctors and psychiatrists. It is behind the creation of the United Nations, the World Food Organization, the American Civil Liberties Union, the American Conservatives. Noble humanism appears in magazines such as *The Economist* and finds concrete expression in architecture and urban design. The spirit often drives a person to genuine self-sacrifice.

"Make sure that no one captivates you with the empty lure of a 'philosophy' of the kind that human beings hand on, based on the principles of this world and no on Christ" (Colossians 2:8).

St Paul's "flesh"-- fallen humanism. "When self-indulgence is at work, the result are obvious: sexual vice, impurity, and sensuality, the worship of false gods and sorcery; antagonisms and rivalry, jealousy, bad temper and quarrels, disagreements, factions and malice, drunkenness, orgies and all such things" (Galatians 5:18; cf Rom.1:23).

Think of public figures like Cassius Clay, thinkers like Ian Ryan and artists such as Gore Vidal, characters like Agent 007, Sophie Tucker, Marilyn Monroe, and Elvis Presley. Think of the fashion section of every Sunday newspaper, of publications such as *GQ*, *Playboy*, *Home and Garden*, and so on. The places where all this happens is, innocently enough, shopping malls, Wal-Marts, and five-star restaurants. Not so innocently, it happens in bars, massage parlors, and rock concerts. Think of what's on TV now and in advertisements.



Those who live this way tell who we are: we are temporary creatures whose main drive is pleasure and who do well not to think of mortality but to have fun, instead. What's really going on is pleasure -- do whatever makes you feel good, and that is the right thing to do. What's wrong? Well, there's not enough time to enjoy everything, and money isn't spread widely enough. And of course, government is always trying to limit us. What can set this all straight is each individual's own determination to grab life with two hands and let no one frustrate the dreams. That's also the only thing that can set all this straight -- that, and enough money (of which there is not really ever enough).

"I tell you now as I have told you in the past, that people who behave in these ways will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:21).

#### ***Spiritual Situation Five* □ *Valerie and Vincent***

Valerie and Vincent are a couple who have belonged to the parish since they were young. They married there and had their five children baptized there. They attend Mass regularly and on occasion volunteer to do something at a fair or special event. Vincent has a middle-management job and his salary has allowed them to buy their home (just five more years of mortgage payments) and to take summer vacations in New Mexico or on Padre Island. They have put their children through the parish school and the local Catholic high school, and now are preparing to send the two oldest (twins) to college. This provokes a crisis and since you and your spouse have known them all these years, and you are now the diaconal couple in the parish, they ask you opinion.

Their thinking is this: If the twins go to a first-rate university, they are more likely to get ahead, and even more likely to finish their educations successfully. Both are capable and could make good professional careers if they have the right preparation. The couple feels that it would be a comedown to have the children go to the local state school, which they consider dangerous in any case. But the problem is that the twins are good students but have not reached the level at which universities would compete for them and give them scholarships. The twins have been accepted, for instance, into Loyola University in New Orleans and St Louis University, but while both offered some grants-in-aid, neither granted scholarships. Hence, if the twins are to go to such institutions, Valerie will have to take a job to raise income. The problem with that is the welfare of the three other children, one of whom is in high school and the other two, in middle school. The dilemma is this: while the older children need her to have an income, just now the younger children really need Valerie's attention, full time.



Vincent and Valerie are torn. After all, if they cannot send the twins to good universities, they won't be able to do anything for the younger ones, either. And the difficult truth is that most of their friends' children are making it into good institutions. The couple are not sure they want to have to admit that the twins just did not make it into top-flight schools. They are wondering what you think.

### Reflection:

Analyze the spirit or spirits that move Valerie and Vincent.  
In the last analysis, how would you counsel them?

Persons clearly embody evil in our lives. Think of Job's friends and of Judas Iscariot in the sacred realm, and think of the religious fanatics who poison words of life followers. Think of drug peddlers and gangs and those who give themselves to violence as a way of life. There are places for these dark energies: houses of prostitution and pornography websites are first instances. But the spirit takes a great deal in our lives. Evil is a political force and so is a disturbing question and answer. And anyone who gives himself to hatred or hatred and pain cannot but take on a taste of the dark.

For the spirit of darkness, the human person is totally isolated and self-sufficient and all other humans are means to some end. What's really going on is the destruction of human nature along with the destruction of God's creation. The only thing wrong is the hope of rescue and redemption. That hope can be set straight only by violence and destruction.

"Father... I am not asking you to remove them from the world, but to protect them from the evil one." (John 17:15)  
The spirit of Jesus Christ "in the abundance of his glory may be through his spirit, enable you to give him in power with regard to you, inner self to that Christ may live in your hearts through faith, and then, planted in love and truth on love... you may be filled with the most intense of God." (Ephesians 3:16)

We looked at the worldview of the Christian and at the mindsets and desires. We need to note that these form the basis of belief, because they weave together values that we hold dear that we love and treasure - which inform our perceptions and our perspectives on everything that comes into our life and worldview. In total, the place is the core of our lives is "but on the mind which is in Christ Jesus."

The John Paul II was constantly asking and reminding who we are - persons for others and into the world with good news, living in communion with Christ. That people like Mother Teresa are constantly calling attention to what is really going on - the rich have and the poor suffer. The US bishops keep calling attention to family moral issues and legislation, defending the forgotten people of Appalachia, for example, and absolutely refusing to condone abortion. The spirit of Christ dwells in the Church and - if people live well - in every Christian family, neighborhood, school, and institution.

At the same time, we need to accept the revealed truth that each one of us has been given a unique personal vocation, "marked out beforehand" (Eph. 1) and made manifest to us by the desires that rise in our



### *Foundational Theology of Spiritual Direction*

**Six: Theology of desiring, 2** *We all feel desires rise out of all four spirits and will have to continually look at which spirit we serve. Each of us, however, commits himself or herself to live principally out of one of the four.*

**The Spirit of the Dark** "You are from your father, the devil, and you prefer to do what your father wants; he was a murderer from the start" (John 8:44).

Persons clearly embody evil in our lifeworld. Think of Idi Amin and of Saddam Hussein in the secular realm, and think of the religious guru Jimmy Jones who poisoned scores of his followers. Think of drug pushers and pimps and those who give themselves to violence as a way of life. There are places for these dark actions: houses of prostitution and pornographic websites, are first instances. But this spirit tinges a great deal in our lifeworld: nihilism in politics is dark and so is cheating depositors and investors. And anyone who gives himself or herself to hatred and bitter enmity has taken on a tinge of the dark.

For the spirit of darkness, the human person is totally isolated and self-sufficient and all other humans are means to some end. What's really going on is the destruction of human nature along with the destruction of God's creation. The only thing wrong is the hope of some, naïve and unfounded. That hope can be set straight only by violence and destruction.

"Father..., I am not asking you to remove them from the world, but to protect them from the Evil One" (John 17:15).

**The Spirit of Jesus Christ** "In the abundance of his glory may he, through his Spirit, enable you to grow firm in power with regard to your inner self, so that Christ may live in your hearts through faith, and then, planted in love and built on love... you may be filled with the utter fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:16f).

We looked at the worldview of the Christian and at the mindset and heartset. Here, we need to note that these form the basis of desiring, because they weave together values that we hold, habits that we form and maintain -- which inform our perceptions and our perspective on everything that comes into our life and lifeworld. In total, this gives us the core project of our lives: to "put on the mind which is in Christ Jesus."

Pope John Paul II was constantly stating and re-stating who we are -- persons for others, sent into the world with good news, living in communion with Christ. Holy people like Mother Theresa are constantly calling attention to what is really going on -- the rich thrive and the poor suffer. The U.S. bishops keep calling attention to faulty social mores and legislation, defending the forgotten people of Appalachia, for example, and absolutely refusing to condone abortion. The Spirit of Christ dwells in the Church and -- if people live well -- in every Christian family, neighborhood, school, and institution.

At the same time, we need to accept the revealed truth that each one of us has been given a unique personal vocation, "marked out beforehand" (Eph.1) and made manifest to us by the desires that rise in our



selves from our personal gifts and even our limitations. We can trust them because "He has given us a share in his Spirit" (1 John 4:13), a share that forms us in "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Galatians 5:22). All desires marked by those gifts and deepening those gifts are from the spirit of Christ.

"We are God's work of art, created in Christ Jesus for the good works which God has already designated to make up our way of life" (Ephesians 2:10).

### ***Spiritual Situation Six    ▣    Utley and Ulrika***

You are stationed in a small parish which is almost rural. You have responsibility for all marriage preparation and for witnessing most weddings. This past Spring, you instructed a couple whom you've grown close to, particularly since you had known the young man for some years. You knew that Utley was from a very difficult family and that he and his only sibling had suffered a good deal in childhood. He was quite intelligent and lively, though he had struggled in school because of his family situation. Utley had the searing experience of returning one afternoon from high school to find his father in a pool of his blood, having shot himself in the head.

Ulrika, too, you learned during the marriage preparations, had had a difficult childhood as the only child of parents who did not live together well. They argued a good deal and had not slept in the same room for some time. They had coddled Ulrika but did not show her real love and all the while pressured her to do very well in school.

When they asked you to give them marriage instructions so they could marry, you agreed as a matter of course. The instructions went well, actually; the young people were in their late twenties. They were good Catholics and conscientious adults, and it was clear that they were in love. You came to appreciate them deeply. They had some areas of tension, you could see. They were open when you talked to them about different attitudes towards money and finances. They also had different tastes in relaxation and having fun; Utley liked parties and Ulrika did not; Ulrika enjoyed serious dinner conversation and Utley tended to become dull drinking beer after work. But you felt that they were aware of these things and knew what was moving them. They really wanted to embrace matrimony. The plans they made for the wedding Mass were fine. So was the wedding.

You saw them sometimes after their marriage, but then there were some moves as Ulrika got a promotion and began working harder. Utley had a modest job which did not seem to be leading anywhere. So you didn't see them for some months. Then Utley phoned one evening, a bit late, and asked whether they could, please, come by. You both were getting ready to retire, but the tone of his voice made you say, Of course.



When the doorbell rang, you were faced with two very serious, solemn young people. You were distressed to see that Ulrika had a great bruise on the side of her face. You were not surprised to hear that Utley had punched her. He had been drinking in the evenings, not really getting drunk but making himself quite dull. You suspected he also made things difficult in bed.

Ulrika had begun complaining that he was not making enough money. Both knew the drinking was getting out of hand and she began harping on it. Earlier that evening, they argued, and then it happened. Both wept. And they wanted badly to see you.

After you counseled them, you prayed over them a longish while.

### Reflection:

While they were telling you what happened, what were you listening for? What data -- information and affects -- would you think to pick up?

If you look at what spirits are driving them, what do you see? How would you anticipate that these particular spirits would grow from their experiences?

Come to advice: What would you advise them to do or not do?