

Forty Weeks ~ Sacred Story



Week Twenty One Encouragements & Wisdom

E & W reflections are additional helps for your Sacred Story prayer journey. Reflect on them ahead of your prayer exercises for the week or outside of your fifteen-minute prayer windows during the week.

A Word of Encouragement—Don't Judge a Book by its Cover

As a retreat director, I used to always hear anxieties from retreatants that they did not think they were getting as much out of the retreat. They were judging this based on “how much holier everyone else looked.” Well, don't judge a book by its cover. Also, look at the effect that such thoughts have on you! They make you discouraged. And you know by now that if the fruit of the thoughts is fear or discouragement of God's love for you, then the thoughts are not inspired by the Holy Spirit!

Remember the story of Jesus watching people put money in the Temple treasury (Mk. 12: 41-44)? Many rich people put in huge offerings but Jesus commented on the woman who put in a single copper penny worth almost nothing. She did more than all the rest, because she gave what she could not afford, while the others gave out of their surplus. Some people can look very far advanced in the spiritual life while others like they have not yet begun. But God is the one who judges the heart about how much one is giving and where real holiness resides.

So don't waste precious energy judging your own spiritual worth by how holy *other* people look. Such thoughts do not come from God and they will never lead you to greater holiness, hope and peace!

A Word of Wisdom—*Watch* What You Say!

One of the very first things St. Ignatius did at the beginning of his conversion was to gain control of his tongue. He became a man of few words, and each word was carefully weighed so that it would make a positive impact. I would invite you for the next two to four weeks to

consciously gain control of your tongue.

Here is what I suggest: You have many duties and obligations. Yet you don't always have to respond verbally to accomplish your daily tasks. Allow yourself for two to four weeks to *simply listen* to other people at work or at home. Imagine what you would say if you "jumped into the conversation." Be conscious of the "why" of your *imagined* responses. This is a tremendous discipline but one that produces astonishing illumination about our character, our issues, our concerns, our angers and upsets etc. It provides great prayer material for "memory" in our *Sacred Story* prayer.



If you have to respond to a direct question, still "watch yourself" formulate your response and ask yourself "why" you are responding the way you are. My friend Michael Brown would say when you speak, "don't react, respond." It seems much of our verbalizing is "reacting" to what other people say. Why? Because they say things that *ignite* our issues. As part of our "waking up" process, watch your speech and then *respond* when you need to, but be very vigilant about *reacting* verbally when the words of another *ignite* your issues.

As a way to help you listen to yourself in this process, look at the helpful Narcissism chart on the next page we have constructed. It condenses the two forms of narcissism: active and passive. Oftentimes our being “sparked” or “ignited” into verbal reactions is linked to our own narcissism issues. Remember, approach this spiritual discipline with compassion and curiosity for yourself and for others. The Divine Physician walks with you and wants to help you awaken to your true character by illuminating the fault lines in your heart that can undermine your ability *to produce fruit that endures to eternity.*

Watch your Real or Imagined Verbal Reactions in Light of your Narcissism

THE PASSIVE NARCISSIST...	THE AGGRESSIVE NARCISSIST...
sees him/herself as <i>victim</i> .	sees him/herself as <i>winner</i> .
determined to make others see how special he/she is by <i>pointing to his/her unfair suffering</i> .	determined to make others see how special he/she is by <i>defeating all opponents</i> .
is cynical and excuses bad behavior by insisting it is justified because of how much he/she has suffered.	is cynical and excuses bad behavior by insisting it is justified because he/she has <i>earned</i> it.
<i>wallows in self-pity</i> when hurt, whether the hurt is real or imagined.	<i>gets even</i> when hurt, whether the hurt is real or imagined.
<i>blames</i> anyone who criticizes or opposes him/her.	<i>threatens</i> anyone who criticizes or opposes him/her.
protects him/herself from being hurt again by <i>keeping wounds as fresh as possible</i> – if anything is too difficult or painful, he/she will <i>retreat into those painful memories</i> and turn <i>inward</i> , away from others.	protects him/herself from being hurt again by <i>eradicating vulnerabilities</i> – if anything is too difficult or painful, he/she will act in a <i>conqueror role</i> and <i>dominate</i> others.
wins by <i>emotional manipulation</i> .	wins by <i>direct confrontation</i> .
is secretly in love with his/her own <i>woundedness</i> .	is secretly in love with the <i>power of defeating others</i> .
is terrified of <i>taking control and taking personal responsibility</i> & would probably have difficulty admitting it to him/herself.	is terrified of <i>surrendering control and being vulnerable</i> & would probably have difficulty admitting it to him/herself.

