spiritual life/Online

Online continuation of ***spiritual life*** *magazine* *Published 4 Times a Year*

Volume 5 Number 3 • Fall 2019

St. Therese of Lisieux, Doctor of the Church

68 **Editorial**

70 **Thérèse: A Doctor for the Third Millennium**
By Fr Camilo & Fr Chalmers

75 **Caryll Houselander: "Neurotic" Mystic**
By Victor Parachin, MDiv

92 **The Leadership Principles Of Francis of Assisi**
By Tom Keller

103 **Book Notice**
104 **Books from *ICS Publications***
105 **Donations**

Editor
Edward O'Donnell, OCD
EdODonnell@aol.com

Publisher
Washington Province of
Discalced Carmelite Friars,

Changing Your E-mail Address or Adding a New Address: Please go to our website and enter your new e-mail address at:
spiritual-life-online.org

spiritual life/Online is the continuation of the print edition of ***spiritual life*** (1955–2014) (ISSN 0038-7630). ***spiritual life/Online*** is a Catholic four-times-a-year electronic publication: Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter.

Edward O'Donnell, OCD

THE RESTLESSNESS OF THE HUMAN HEART is well documented in literature and in our current news media. So many stories are told to us of human beings, seemingly possessing all they need to be satisfied in life and yet find themselves filled with deep feelings of emptiness and the craving for more—for something that will satisfy.

King Midas yearns for more wealth and suffers the consequences of his consuming greed. Faust sacrifices all for more wisdom and knowledge and loses all. Lesser known people—who appear regularly in our news media—try to satisfy their desire for more wealth, fame, or power and often ruin their lives in the process.

Perhaps we have not reached the level of outrageous desire that has driven these people to ruin. But we no doubt have sat in troubled silence and yearned for a more fulfilled or happier life, because something seems to be missing that will soothe our restless and troubled hearts. We are not yet in a state of crisis, but our hearts are touched with a longing for something that seems out of reach.

And no doubt we have read or heard quoted to us the famous saying of St. Augustine about the human heart and its restlessness—"our heart is restless until it rests in you"—and may feel guilty that we have not found lasting peace in God, have not finally felt satisfied with God's great love for us. But a bit more of Augustine's prayer will help us realize that, even though he loved God greatly and sought him diligently—as we do also—

Augustine's heart was like our own, not at rest:

> "Who will grant it to me to find peace in you? Who will grant me this grace that you should come into my heart and inebriate it, enabling me to forget the evils that beset me and embrace you, my only good?"

So, where will the satisfying peace of God's presence in our heart come from? Are we destined to search constantly for this hidden God of ours and only be completely at peace in the eternal rest of death? Death will certainly complete our destiny as children of God, but while we continue as searching pilgrims on this earth, we can find moments of peace that satisfy us even as we crave for more. Augustine illuminates the way:

> "Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved you! You were within me, but I was outside, and it was there that I searched for you. In my unloveliness I plunged into the lovely things which you created. You were with me, but I was not with you. Created things kept me from you; yet if they had not been in you they would have not been at all. You called, you shouted, and you broke through my deafness. You flashed, you shone, and you dispelled my blindness. You breathed your fragrance on me; I drew in breath and now I pant for you. I have tasted you, now I hunger and thirst for more. You touched me, and I burned for your peace." (*The Confessions*)

Edward O'Donnell

Excerpt of the Letter of Father Camilo Maccise, OCD, and Father Joseph Chalmers, OCarm, to the Carmelite family

Thérèse: A Doctor for the Third Millennium

Thérèse of Lisieux the Woman, Doctor of the Church

THE EXPERIENCE AND DOCTRINE of Thérèse of Lisieux gain special significance in our day when new horizons are opening up for the presence and action of women in society and in the Church. Women are called to be "signs of God's tender love towards the human race," and to enrich humanity with their "feminine genius." The young Carmelite of Lisieux accomplished both things in her life. We can see this clearly in her writings.

Thérèse of the Child Jesus transmits her spiritual experience with an engaging feminine style that is direct and intimate. Despite the expectations of her times, she manifested her Gospel conviction on the equality of men and women and the importance of mutual collaboration as disciples of Jesus. We can see this especially in her letters to her missionary brothers with whom she shares her human and spiritual experiences. She does not hesitate to express her point of view on theological

issues and Christian experience. She writes about her concept of God's justice, the way of spiritual childhood, and trust in divine mercy.

Her femininity, like that of Teresa of Jesus, resulted in greater commitment to the Gospel and to overcoming all the prejudices that margainalized women of her times. Thérèse of Lisieux knew from experience what it was to be a woman in society and in the church at the end of the 18th century. In manuscript A, she tells us clearly and humorously what she felt during her trip to Rome before entering Carmel:

> "I still cannot understand why women are so easily excommunicated in Italy, for every minute someone was saying: "Don't enter here. Don't enter there, you will be excommunicated!" Ah! poor women, how they are misunderstood! And yet they love God in much larger numbers than men do; and during the Passion of Our Lord, women had more courage than the apostles since they braved the insults of the soldiers and dared to dry the adorable Face of Jesus."

Her womanhood, which she expressed with the freshness and sincerity of a free person, led her to a reflection on the Gospel: the exclusion of women makes them participate more closely in the mystery of Christ who was despised at his passion:

> "It is undoubtedly because of this that He allows misunderstanding to be their lot on earth, since he chose it for himself.… In heaven, He will show that His thoughts are not men's thoughts, for then the last will be first."

Jesus made women the first witnesses of his resurrection.

Today as areas for greater participation in society and church open up for women, they can find encouragement in Thérèse of Lisieux to live as John Paul II said, " a culture of equality between men and women." Again Hans Urs von Baltahasar noted, on the occasion of the celebrations for centenary of Thérèse of Lisieux's birth, that she opened the whole field of theology to feminine reflection: "The theology of women has never been taken seriously nor integrated by the establishment. However, after the message of Lisieux, it must finally consider it in the present reconstruction of Dogmatic Theology."

This corresponds to what the postsynodal document *Vita Consecrata* presents as new perspectives for women in the Church: "In the field of theological, cultural, and spiritual studies, much can be expected from the genius of women, not only in relation to specific aspects of feminine consecrated life, but also in understanding the faith in all its expressions."

Conclusion

God surprises us anew with this sister of ours. In her he breaks so many patterns of human logic in a way that calls attention to his own gratuitous initiative in choosing those he wants. God seeks to realize his works and manifest the greatness of his power and action in those who open themselves confidently to his merciful love as they accomplish his will.

With the proclamation of the doctorate of St. Thérèse, the Lord confirms what the Old Testament states and the New Testament restates in its fullness: that God communicates himself to the simple, giving them his wisdom and revealing to them the secrets of his life and workings throughout history. In effect, as the book of Wisdom told at the threshold of Christ's coming:

> "Length of days is not what makes age honorable, nor number of years the true measure of life; understanding, this is grey hairs; untarnished life, this is ripe old age. Having won God's favor, he has been loved. …Having come to perfection so soon, he has lived long" (Wis 4:8-10, 13).

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus, full of joy in the Holy Spirit, proclaims a divine logic so very different from ours:

> "I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to little children. Yes, Father, for that is what it has pleased you to do" (Lk 10:21-22).

The Lord, Father of all light, from whom comes all that is good, all that is perfect (cf. Jm 1:17), has given Carmel yet another gift with Thérèse of Lisieux's doctorate. It is a free gift that demands a response of love and generous commitment to our vocation and mission in the Church and in the world.

May our sister Thérèse of Lisieux obtain for us from the Lord the grace to be his collaborators in bearing witness and proclaiming the good news to our brothers and sisters of the third millennium. May we be authentic followers of Jesus, in communion with Mary, the

first one to receive the joyful news of salvation and who proclaimed it with the joy of one who has discovered that God gives himself freely to the poor, humble, and simple.

St Thérèse's Final Days

During her final days, St Thérèse went through an incredible amount of pain. Whereas some Saints bore the suffering quietly, without complaint, St Thérèse kept it real. She complained about how painful it was, and also the temptations and self-doubt she experienced.

According to the testimony of a nurse who was by her side in her last days:

"Three days before she died, I saw her in such pain that I was heartbroken. When I drew near to her bed, she tried to smile, and, in a strangled sort of voice, she said: 'If I didn't have faith, I could never bear such suffering. I am surprised that there aren't more suicides among atheists.' "

Victor Parachin, MDiv

Caryll Houselander: "Neurotic" Mystic

The one thing she (Mary) did and does is the one thing that we all have to do, namely, to bear Christ into the world. Caryll Houselander

IN EARLY 1942, AN UNUSUAL but fascinating medical referral took place. Dr. Eric Strauss, one of Great Britain's most distinguished psychiatrists and neurologists, quietly began sending emotionally disturbed boys to spend time with a woman who was a spiritual writer, wood carver, poet, and mystic. Her name was Caryll Houselander.

This was a most curious triangle of relationships. First, there was Dr. Eric Strauss, a distinguished and highly published British medical doctor, who would become President of the Psychiatry Section of the Royal Society of Medicine and of the British Psychological Society. Second, there was Caryll Houselander, who had no formal training in either medicine or psychology. She had come to Dr. Strauss' attention through her volunteer work at a school for boys who had been traumatized by the war, many of whom responded im-

mediately and positively to her sensitive spirit. Third, there were the boys sent by Dr. Strauss to Caryll, all of whom were suffering from what today would be called Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome as a result of the war—one boy, for example, had lived alone in the Malayan jungle after the murder of his parents. These boys were sent one by one to Caryll Houselander after all traditional medical and psychological therapies were ineffective. Under Caryll's care and her intuitive application of music and art therapy as well as patient listening, the boys quickly recovered from their psychological scars and wounds. As word of her success with traumatized boys spread, other doctors soon began sending their adult patients.

Houselander's biographer, Massie Ward, interviewed Dr. Strauss, asking him about the work Caryll had done for him. Dr. Strauss indicated he was so impressed with Caryll's work with the boys that immediately after the war, he unhesitatingly sent her adult patients for what he called "social therapy." Intrigued by the phrase, Ward said: "Forgive my dense ignorance, but what exactly is 'social therapy'?" Strauss replied: "With Caryll it meant she loved them back to life."

A Living Paradox

Caryll Houselander (1901–1954) was a living paradox. On the one hand she had a deep and profound spirituality that connected with an amazingly wide spectrum of people. On the other hand she battled with

a variety of issues: a chain smoker, she was painfully shy, at times seriously anorexic, often frail physically, struggled with issues of abandonment, suffered from panic attacks, and covered her face with a chalky white substance giving her a grotesque appearance. Those were some of the reasons she was labeled "neurotic" by her physicians. In fact, she considered herself damaged goods. One physician, however, was more complimentary, saying she was not neurotic but a highly sensitive individual. Because of her own trials and traumas, she was sensitized to the emotional and psychological wounds of others. This allowed her to connect in a deep way with suffering people. Through the 1940s and early 50s, Houselander emerged as one of Great Britain's fascinating mystics and writers of spirituality. She penned fifteen books and wrote more than 700 poems, short stories, and articles.

Born on October 29th in 1901 in Bath, England, Houselander's parents were Willmott and Gertrude Provis Houselander. Caryll was the second of two daughters. Her sister, Ruth, was four years older. The family, while not extremely wealthy, was financially prosperous enough to permit luxuries. They had a nurse and governess for the children. Willmott had time to become a skilled huntsman, and Gertrude played tennis at Wimbledon. Their family structure began to change when Caryll was six. At that time Gertrude underwent a strong religious conversion to Catholicism. This created distance from her husband who did not share her religious enthusiasm. When Caryll was six, she was

baptized into the Roman Catholic Church along with her mother. The impact of her mother's conversion was double edged for Caryll. On the one side, she felt that her mother's prayers and practices were oppressive. There were long daily prayers, altars set up inside the home and frequent mass attendance. Caryll referred to her mother's religious orientation as a "persecution of piety." On the other side, however, Caryll was deeply influenced by her mother's devotion and would, over time, find herself drawn more and more to Catholic spirituality.

Eventually, Willmott, who could not accept his wife's religious ferver, left the house, and the marriage ended in divorce when Caryll was eight. That event impacted Caryll harshly, and it took years before Caryll could properly integrate it into her life. In order to provide for herself and her daughters, Gertrude ran a boarding house. An opportunity emerged for the mother to send Caryll off to a convent boarding school when Caryll was eleven. Thus, in her short life, Caryll experienced parental abandonment twice: once when her father left the house and second when her mother sent her away to a boarding school.

The Convent of the Holy Child boarding school located in a Birmingham suburb was run by French and Belgian nuns. One sister, however, was German, and she was the one nun whom Caryll became close to. The sister was intuitively drawn to Caryll, probably because of the little girl's sensitivity and loneliness. It is quite probable that the sister herself was a lonely woman.

She was a German working with French sisters just as the First World War was to break out. Animosity between Germans and French was running high. Also, the sister spoke very little English or French and was thus somewhat isolated from the community.

One day as Caryll walked by the room containing convent boots, she saw the German sister alone cleaning a pair of shoes. Caryll walked into the room intending to offer her help when she noticed that the sister was crying. "Tears were running down her rosy cheeks and falling onto the blue apron and the child's shoes," Caryll would later write in *A Rocking Horse*. Speechless and embarrassed, Caryll did not know what to say or do. They both remained silent for a few moments and then, Caryll experienced her first vision. She describes that moment this way:

> "At last, with an effort, I raised my head, and then—I saw—the nun was crowned with the crown of thorns. I shall not attempt to explain this. I am simply telling the thing as I saw it. That bowed head was weighed under the crown of thorns. I stood for—I suppose—a few seconds, dumbfounded, and then, finding my tongue, I said to her "I would not cry, if I was wearing the crown of thorns like you are." She looked at me as if she were startled, and asked, "What do you mean?" "I don't know," I said, and at the time, I did not. I sat down beside her, and together we polished the shoes."

Three Visions

When Caryll was sixteen, her mother abruptly withdrew her from school because she needed her daughter's

help running the boarding house. Returning reluctantly, Caryll found herself working for her mother as a domestic servant. One of her many tasks was shopping for groceries, and her second vision occurred while she was buying potatoes. At that time in 1918, the major news story was the murder of the Russian Tsar and the entire royal family. This was much on Caryll's mind. As she made her way to the potato vendor's stall, she was suddenly stopped in her tracks. "I was held still, as if a magnet held my feet to a particular spot in the middle of the road," she recalls. In front of her, as if displayed on a large theatre screen, was a "gigantic and living Russian icon." Vividly, she saw Christ crucified, his head down, his arms reaching to span the world. Caryll was so moved by her vision that by the time she arrived at the potato vendor's stall, tears were running down her cheeks. The woman selling potatoes, assuming Caryll was in some kind of trouble, tried to comfort her by giving her an apple after she had purchased the sack of potatoes.

A few days later, she experienced part two of the same vision at the same corner. She passed a newsstand and saw a newspaper picture of the Czar. When she bent down to see the picture more closely, she was startled to see that the face was identical to the face of Christ in her vision. Because of the vision which involved Russia, Caryll soon left her mother's employment and secured a position working with Russian immigrants who had been displaced because of the war and revolution in Russia.

Her third vision which came years later differed considerably from the first two because she saw Christ not in one person such as the German nun or the Russian Czar but in all of humanity. That vision took place while she was riding a crowded London subway:

> "I was in an underground train, a crowded train in which all sorts of people jostled together, sitting and strap-hanging—workers of every description going home at the end of the day. Quite suddenly I saw with my mind, but as vividly as a wonderful picture, Christ in them all. But I saw more than that; not only was Christ in every one of them, living in them, dying in them, rejoicing in them, sorrowing in them—but because He was in them, and because they were here, the world was here too... not only the world as it was at that moment, not only all the people in all the countries of the world, but all those people who had lived in the past, and all those yet to come."

Caryll said as she emerged on the street from the subway, the vision lingered as she saw Christ walking in every pedestrian.

These three visions combined were a source of spiritual enlightenment for Caryll. Through them she realized that despite two World Wars, Christians have no enemies, that Christ can be seen in all of humanity. For Caryll, the implications of her visions were deep and profound. She would spend the rest of her life seeing Christ in every person she met. As a result, ordinary life took on a sacramental dimension. She sought to manifest the presence of Christ in her life while seeking to evoke that same presence out of other lives.

Although she was sixteen and working hard for her mother, Caryll continued to attend Mass. Because of her busy work schedule, it was not easy to find a Mass that fit into her time frame. However, she found a church that had a service at noon on Sunday. This meant walking a considerable distance across London to be in that service. Unknown to Caryll, that church continued the practice of pew rental. While there were a few free pews available for visitors, by the time Caryll arrived they were full. Penniless, she slipped into a six-penny pew. She recalls what transpired:

> I had scarcely knelt down and hidden my face, which was scarlet, when the verger prodded me in the ribs with a collecting bag on the end of a long cane . . .
>
> "Sixpence," said the verger and went on prodding.
>
> "I haven't got sixpence," I whispered.
>
> "All right, then," said the verger, "you must go into the free seats."
>
> "There isn't one," I said.
>
> "Well, then, sixpence."
>
> I was scalded. There was a priest standing in the aisle watching the scene. When I sprang to my feet and pushed out of the sixpenny seats, he came forward and put his hand on my shoulder.
>
> "You're not going, child?" he said. I shook him off.
>
> "Yes, I am, and I will never come to Mass again."
>
> I went, beginning the long walk home again, hardly able to stop my tears of rage.

Religious Independence

The angry promise against attending Mass was one which she would keep for eight years before returning.

During that time, Caryll did not stop going to church but began exploring alternative spiritual opportunities. She visited with Anglican priests and attended their services. She attended Methodist church services. During a Salvation Army service she was moved to offer a "testimony" but at the last moment remained silent. Caryll worshipped in the Russian Orthodox church with some of her Russian refugee friends. In addition to Christianity, she spoke with representative of Buddhism and Judaism. After spending considerable time exploring other religious traditions, she returned to the Catholic Mass but was a transformed person. During that period of seeking and searching, Caryll made the transition from a faith that previously had been placed upon her by the adults in her life to a faith that was now more clearly defined and based upon her own experience and awareness. Although she returned to the church, she would remain faithful but cautious about faith that was institutionalized.

Caryll and her companions in faith were uneasy about organized Christianity, preferring a more spontaneous and less institutional approach to life. This is evident when they formed a small society to help the poor called "The Loaves and Fishes." In the 1930s, when people were feeling the impact of the depression, Caryll had a good position at a company that sold supplies and decorations to churches. Although she was comfortable, Caryll was tormented by the plight of so many who had so little. One day Caryll was speaking with two of the firm's partners, Louis Billaux and Jaxques

Doneux, along with several staff members. They were discussing individuals who were very much in need and identified two problems: how to generate the funds to help and how to provide the help in a way that was not demeaning to the poor.

Their conversation led to a discussion of the Gospel story about Jesus' multiplication of a few loaves and fishes. Abruptly, Caryll said, "Let us put down a penny each. If God wants us to do something, he will multiply it." At that moment, Louis' father, Charles Billaux, walked into the room, looked at the coins laid out on the table. Puzzled, he said, "Whatever those are for, I will multiply them." He laid down five shillings. Caryll and her group took that as a divine sign to proceed by forming a small society called "The Loaves and Fishes." That initial group formed the executive committee, and each member took turns serving as chairperson. The identity of the chairperson was kept secret. When others joined their efforts, they became known as "Sprats." Those who received help were called "Sea Horses." Their ministry grew quickly as each Sprat knew of several sea horses in need of aid.

Recipients were usually the poorest of the poor; those who fell between the cracks and were completely ineligible for aid via Britain's welfare system. All assistance was given discreetly so as not to shame or humiliate the recipient. Names of those helped were divulged only when necessity demanded it. The group adhered rigidly to the command of Jesus that giving should be done as anonymously as possible: "When you give to the needy,

do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret" (Mat 6:3, New International Version). Each sprat tried to catch a "mackerel"—a wealthy person who would make a donation. Among those helped were those without skills and who could not get work during the depression, the sick, and the old who never earned enough to establish any retirement funds, young people who had no family to fall back on for help, and refugees. On one occasion, money was given to a woman who suffered from a gum disease causing her to loose her teeth and have bad breath, both of which made it difficult for her to find work. She was given a gift of cash to purchase false teeth. This small, secretive society continued long after Caryll's death.

Eccentricities and Gifts

One aspect of Caryll many found unusual was her odd appearance. When Massie Ward, who with her husband, Frank Sheed, were cofounders of the publishing firm of Sheed & Ward, decided to write a biography of Caryll, Massie was caught off guard by Caryll's strange appearance even though her husband had alerted her. Caryll developed the unusual habit of entirely covering her face with a white, chalk-like substance. Ward recalls:

> "My husband had prepared me for Caryll's appearance. Yet as I stood waiting outside the door of her flat and she came up behind me laden with parcels, I was conscious of a genuine shock. The dead-white face, the thick glasses, the fringe of red hair, a touch somehow of the

grotesque—it was so surprising as to take one's breath away."

Even Caryll's friends never grew accustomed to her appearance, referring to her makeup as that "abominable chalky-white substance." Many interpretations were offered as to why Caryll covered her face in white. Some thought she was able to hide behind that clown-like whiteness as if she wore a mask. Some thought she didn't want to resemble her mother. Still others thought she deliberately made herself "ugly" as a form of asceticism to ward off any personal pride in appearance. Interestingly, Ward once asked her why and Caryll replied simply, "I don't like a pink face."

In keeping with some of the biblical prophets who seemed to see and sense things others did not, Caryll was able to see not only with her physical eyes but with her mind. Some might describe her as psychic or one who had the gift of extra sensory perception (ESP). Friends frequently commented that Caryll could "read your mind." To Caryll, this ability was simply a gift from God, which was to be used to help others. Before they called on her for help, Caryll was often at their door or visiting at their hospital bedside or calling them on the telephone. Once Caryll's mother's Siamese cat disappeared. Her mother was fiercely devoted to her small companion and was extremely upset. She phoned Caryll in tears about the animal's disappearance. That night Caryll had a dream in which she saw her mother's cat trapped inside a basement cupboard. She immediately phoned her mother. The elder Houselander, who

lived in an apartment by herself, at once went down to a disused part of the apartment basement, locating a cupboard. Inside the cupboard was her beloved cat.

Because of her books, newspaper columns, and published poems, Caryll became inundated with letters from readers. While some wrote to thank her or to compliment her for her wisdom, many wrote asking for advice or seeking encouragement. Caryll answered every letter written to her, and this often meant working late into the night and getting less sleep than she needed. Despite a heavy schedule of working, writing, and corresponding, Caryll continued to volunteer her time for the poor and those on the fringes of society. One of the great spiritual experiences of her life took place when she visited patients at a "lunatic asylum" or what today would be referred to as a psychiatric hospital. She records: "I had an incredible day at the Lunatic Asylum yesterday." Among the patients were several who identified themselves as queens, one of whom permitted Caryll to kiss her hand and who then conferred many titles upon Caryll.

Caryll was especially affected by the simple prayer service held in the small chapel that evening. It was organized entirely by the patients. She describes the small group that gathered:

> "An ex-Trappist monk; a young girl; an old lady bent double nearly, but despite it and of being insane, beautiful; and a handful of others–all people who had started out in life intent on a high vocation, and given it indeed—utter abnegation, put away in a lunatic asylum."

Yet, that unusual group facing their own personal issues, reached out in prayer to the world. Caryll was amazed and moved by their prayers, quickly joining them. When requests for prayer were asked for, she recalls the following petitions: for Russia, for the suffering people of Europe, for the starving people of India, for the sick, for prisoners, for the conversion of the world, for the purity of heart in the world, for purity of heart here. After spending that time in prayer with mental patients, Caryll says her own perspective was greatly clarified: "Think of my grumbling petitions."

In addition to the many demands from readers, Caryll accepted responsibility of caring for her aging parents as well as an elderly aunt. When, in 1949, one friend expressed disappointment over how little time Caryll spent with her, Caryll wrote a note expressing regret but explaining why her time was so limited:

> "My father is eighty, my mother is seventy-five, and they live in the opposite ends of London. Each has to be visited at least once a week. Then I have an invalid aunt in Brighton, who would like a weekly visit but has to have a two-weekly one or less; there are several neurotic invalids who can't leave their homes, and several people in the mental hospital, also requiring regular and frequent visits. My dinner when alone here only takes about 15 minutes to cook and eat! Also I continue to work while eating it."

This note reveals the depth of Caryll's compassionate caring for others. She was a person who was accessible to those who most needed her, and that meant not always being available to friends whose very friendship

might have been an important source of nurture for herself.

Final Illness

Caryll's last few years were filled with illness. Beginning in 1949, she suffered from pneumonia, influenza, and tuberculosis, and finally was diagnosed with cancer. At that time, hospitalization meant being placed in a large public ward, with little or no privacy. Caryll, an introvert, dreaded the thought of being there. The specialist who was to treat Caryll arranged for her to have a somewhat private cubicle at the end of a public ward at Westminster Hospital. Even in a place that some would characterize as one of humiliation, pain, and suffering, Caryll experienced new spiritual growth and awareness. Writing from the hospital to a friend, Caryll explained:

> "You will be astonished to hear that, much as I dreaded the public ward—and I did dread it, more than the operation—I have now learnt to be glad I am in it, and if I ever come again, which is all too likely, I will choose it!"

Caryll further explained that although she had some privacy inside the cubicle, many of the other patients would come in to visit and their visits were greatly encouraging to her:

> "My admiration and liking for human nature has gone up by leaps and bounds since I came in there. There is, no doubt, a Communion with Christ through pain, which gives people the power of His love, regardless of what, if anything, they believe."

She had surgery, but it left her in great pain and

limited hope. In another letter written to a friend, Caryll said:

> "They say they have removed all the cancer.... But as it was already in the second stage, there is no guarantee at all that it won't return—the chances are about 50-50. After the operation the wound got infected and would not drain properly, and I had a week of real agony, which was helped by drugs, astonishing kindness and wonderful nurses and doctors."

After six grueling weeks in the hospital, she was discharged but had to have daily follow-up treatments of radiation. Caryll knew that her odds of survival were slim. She did not fear death but rather faced that possibility with much calmness of mind and spirit. "I felt no fear of death, though I did not want to die," she said. To another friend she wrote, "I honestly long to be told 'a hundred per cent cure' and to return to this life and celebrate it with gramophone records, giggling and gin."

Despite having cancer or perhaps because the cancer threatened to shorten her life, Caryll's appreciation of living deepened. In fact, she experienced some remorse that she did not engage herself more fully with life. "I realized I had never really let myself enjoy life—so many scruples and inhibitions and things preventing me from really enjoying the sheer loveliness of the world, the people in it, and even the material things in it, food, drink, the sun, spending money, etc." Clearly, Caryll was feeling that she had lived a life filled with too much austerity. Some of that may have been passed on to her via her mother:

> "When my poor mother died, in 1950, in St. George's Hospital, I went out into the park opposite the hospital and sat down and suddenly realized how lovely it was—the sky, the bare trees (it was November), the grass, the very touch of the air—and it suddenly swept over me, with a terrible pang, that my old mother had never really enjoyed life. She was always worried, always working, always thinking about money—never, or certainly hardly ever, sufficiently detached from self to enjoy the beauties and pleasures of this life. Then and there I made up my mind to enjoy my own... When following hard on this, I nearly lost my own life, I made only one resolution: if I was given another chance (as I have been), I would enjoy everything in life that I can, for as long as I can, and as wholly as I can."

Although Caryll soon returned to her normal routines, she was very much aware that her time was short. In the summer of 1954, Caryll's health began to deteriorate. Her physician told her it was unnecessary for her to return for further check-ups. At that time, treatment of cancer was limited, and the doctor knew there was nothing more that medicine could do for Caryll. She died on October 12, 1954, just a few weeks before her fifty-third birthday.

The wonder and lingering impact of Caryll Houselander lies in her eloquent ability to articulate the profound truth that the heart of the Christian faith is love: the love of God and the love of humanity.

Victor M. Parachin, MDiv, is a graduate of the University of Toronto School of Theology. While there he took theology courses at the University of St. Michael's College federated, with the University of Toronto.

Tom Keller

The Leadership Principles Of Francis of Assisi

NICCOLÒ MACHIAVELLI GETS too much credit! You would think no one ever pondered the topic of leadership until his most famous book, *The Prince,* prescribed the political brutalities of the Renaissance warlords. Didn't anyone in the Middle Ages ever consider what it means to lead? What about Francis of Assisi? St. Francis got the wolf of Gubio to change his evil ways, and the fish poked their heads out of the stream to hear him preach.

People love this animal lore. It's what comes to mind first when most people think of Francis and it's what makes him beloved. It's not unusual for mainstream Protestants to gather in October to have their pets blessed in honor of this Catholic saint's feast day. The Episcopalians have printed his famous "Peace Prayer" in their principal text of worship, The Book of Common Prayer.[1]

As the patron saint of nature, Francis does inspire imagination and devotion, but most people are oblivi-

ous to his real significance. Born in a time when the ecclesiastical hierarchy seemed distant from the commonplace lives of Western Europe's Christians, this Medieval figure led one of the most powerful reform movements in the history of Christianity. Francis was one of two formidable preachers who launched a tidal wave of change that made the Church far more responsive to everyday people living everyday lives. The other charismatic figure was Domingo de Guzmán, or St. Dominic. The two were contemporaries. Francis's Friars Minor received the papal blessing in 1210, and the Dominicans attained approval from Rome in 1216.[2]

What made Francis such a potent force for change? It certainly wasn't his administrative ability. Toward the end of his life, his followers stripped him of any meaningful say in the operational direction of the movement he founded. At his Order's Chapter of 1221, the last large gathering of Franciscans that Francis would attend before his death, we see him tugging at the habit of the new minister general, Brother Elias of Cortona, begging permission to speak.

Say what one will about Brother Elias's devotion, the Order of Friars Minor needed his administrative talent as Francis neared death. As a chief executive officer, Francis's performance was sometimes mediocre and sometimes dismal. His managerial skills didn't improve with age. Yet, he remained the spiritual leader of that crew of professed beggars right to the day he died. Francis of Assisi's source of power was his rela-

tionship with God. He treated people as he felt God wanted them treated, and every time he turned around he found more people walking behind him.

The Peace Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.
O Divine Master, grant that I might not so much seek
to be consoled, as to console;
to be understood, as to understand;
to be loved, as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

In the *Peace Prayer*, Francis did an extraordinary job of summing up what he expected of himself in his dealings with others. Surely, it's hard to imagine a more succinct formula for treating others with respect and dignity than that offered in this simple prayer. And, of course, people will be attracted to those who consistently acts as if they actually are "children of God."

Personal Struggle

There was a time when the "Peace Prayer" became crucial in my life. At the charity where I worked, I was one of several senior managers who believed we were losing sight of our organization's central mission. Civil war broke out. I chose the side I believed to hold the

moral high ground, but that didn't change the fact I was battling along with the rest.

As the struggle rose in intensity, I asked myself some tough questions: Would I have the courage to sacrifice a job I had held for close to twenty years? More importantly, could I continue to live up to the moral standards that had become central to my spiritual life? Somehow, I latched on to St. Francis's "Peace Prayer," reciting it frequently each day, and its phrases formed a code for my behavior.

Then an amazing thing happened to me, a man who had never seen himself as a leader. Suddenly people were asking for my opinions, even my guidance. Later, people started looking to me for direction. Though I was only one of the leaders in this struggle, there was no denying that leadership had come my way. How had that happened?

Peace Prayer and Leadership

Most people think of Francis's great prayer as a guide to humility, but, as Francis's own experience shows, it is also a guide to the kind of comportment that draws a following. Let's take the prayer one phrase at a time, examining it, not from the perspective of the inner life but from that of practical leadership.

"Lord, make me an instrument of your peace."

If leaders are charged to do one thing, it is to create change. Let's make it clear right away that leadership

is something very different from management, even though most people don't understand that difference. Management and administrative skills are perfectly adequate in maintaining the status quo; similar skills sustain a steady state in nonwork settings. When it's time to turn over tables in the Temple, however, a whole different set of behaviors is required. The creation of change requires the skills and practice of leadership.

While such words as "peace" don't readily come to mind at times when people are seeking to create critical change, it's important to remember that no battle should be fought for the sake of the battle itself. Every struggle toward change should have as its goal the creation of new circumstances in which peace can prevail as a primary value.

"Where there is hatred, let me sow love."

Talk about tough stuff. It's difficult to remember to "love your neighbor as yourself" when that neighbor is glaring at you from the other side of a table. If that's true in the context of labor negotiations or arguments about marketing strategy, it's just as true when disagreements surface at committee meetings in the basement of a church.

We might take a tip from the bracelets some of our kids have taken to wearing—"What would Jesus do?" When Jesus made his last stand in Jerusalem, he was prepared to forgive his enemies as he hung dying on the cross, but that did not restrain him from raising a ruckus at the Temple.

"Where there is injury, pardon."

If Jesus forgave his persecutors, St. Francis also became adept at forgiveness. It wasn't easy. At the beginning of his spiritual journey, he was disinherited by a father who had always doted on him. Eventually, Francis was able to set aside the resulting animosity. Indeed, he found it necessary to stop nursing that grudge. It was at the end of his journey on earth, however, that he had to practice forgiveness in order to practice leadership. Even as Francis lay blind and wracked with pain, Brother Elias was rejecting principles Francis held very close to his heart. To his dying day, Francis refused to accept the resulting reforms, but he did not destroy the Franciscan movement by actively opposing Elias.

While not the perfect model of acceptance during this whole period of the Order's life, Francis did hang back from asserting leadership that might have thwarted the men who would carry the Franciscan ideal to a new generation. Because he tried mightily to forgive those who opposed him, the Franciscan movement survived the death of its founder.

"Where there is discord, union."

Forgiveness is crucially important. Always. At this point in the "Peace Prayer," the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer[4] adds a few words that go to the heart of why this is so. In a phrase not typically found in translations in the Roman Catholic tradition, the

Episcopalians ask that they might sow union where there is discord.

In any period of tumultuous change, it is important that leaders remember that unity will be needed at the end of the struggle. Without the creation of a new unity, a new situation will not find the fertile soil it will need to take root. The objective of change should never be to create conflict. Discord should only be accepted as a necessary step in the creation of something new that is, we hope, better.

"Where there is doubt, faith; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy."

One of the most difficult tasks of leadership is to formulate and gain acceptance of a new vision of how things ought to be—of a new reality that can replace something that's currently in place but, for some reason, falls short. Then comes the part that is easily the most difficult of all leadership challenges: motivating people to continue to march toward the vision.

Because the creation of change involves struggle, people will lose faith along the way. They will experience dark periods of doubt and discouragement. They will get down emotionally when things don't go as planned and when the vision seems very distant. When the darkness falls, people look to their leaders to hold up the torch of the vision. It is the leader's responsibility to fire people's imaginations, to inspire them to keep going when all may seem lost, to encourage them to

be and do more than they believe they are capable of being and doing.

"O Divine Master, grant that I might not so much seek to be consoled, as to console; to be understood, as to understand; to be loved, as to love."

In any troubled time, all of us need emotional rest as much as we need physical rest. We also need the support of friends, who can uphold us when we just want to let it all go.

Leaders are not immune from these needs, but getting those needs fulfilled is not a function of leadership. It's the leader's job to keep a finger on the pulse of the group, to know what people are thinking and feeling, and to be in tune with the emotional undercurrents that motivate key individuals, significant aggregations of people within the larger group, and the group as a whole.

Even so, a leader has a responsibility to take care of his or her own spiritual and emotional health. Losing touch with one's grounding can take a leader to some strange places where failure or worse can easily happen. Yes, as believers, we count on our relationship with God, but let's remember that even Jesus took a few close friends aside in the Garden of Gethsemane. St. Francis followed that example, depending on the counsel of St. Clare and a small circle of others.

"For it is in giving that we receive."

Once they reach a certain level of wealth, many busi-

ness leaders move their attention to philanthropic causes. This happens because most real leaders are driven by allegiance to something much larger than themselves. With Francis of Assisi, it was the desire to follow Jesus wherever he led, to no matter what. He turned away from his family's wealth to pursue that mission. In the depths of his heart, he believed he was called to reintroduce Jesus into the lives of ordinary people. He gave of himself boundlessly in that work, and his achievement is marked by history.

Leadership may result in great rewards—perhaps in material compensation, perhaps in spiritual or emotional dividends. There's some justice in that. The risks of leadership are often sizable. When the situation is appropriate, one might expect the payoffs to be considerable as well. But in the end, that's not what it's all about, at the root of things, with a real leader.

"It is in pardoning that we are pardoned."

Wherever points of view collide, there will be hard feelings. While conflict rages, a leader can depend to some extent upon the momentum of the conflict itself to carry his or her team along. Once the conflict is over, however, that momentum is gone, leaving the leader with the need to find new ways to motivate the team.

That's a good thing, actually. If negative energy is necessary to destroy or displace an old paradigm, positive energy will be required to fill the empty space with a newly constructed paradigm. This new work involves

the translation of an envisioned change into a concrete reality. The negative energy that fueled the conflict will be of little use in erecting something of positive value.

Yes, some will go away angry, never to return. Others, members of the winning team as well as those who lost the day, will prove unable to beat their swords into plowshares. As much as a leader may hate to do so, he or she must move forward. Sometimes that means leaving some beloved people behind, focusing instead on those whose positive energies allow them to put their hands to the tools of construction. This is difficult. Prayer helps.

"And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life."

A difficulty many leaders face is a need "to be remembered" or "to make their mark." Wanting fame is not necessarily a bad thing, but how realistic is this desire? Very few human beings ever achieve a brief footnote in history. The memory of the temporal world is just that—temporal. It's best when what we do, we do for God. It's best to simply lose that prideful desire for fame. It gets in the way. It clouds a leader's decision-making. When the attention becomes focused on the egotistical needs of an individual or even a group, mindfulness is drained away from the goal that's being sought. But, when a leader releases that desire to be remembered, he or she clears the path in front of the whole team.

"Amen."

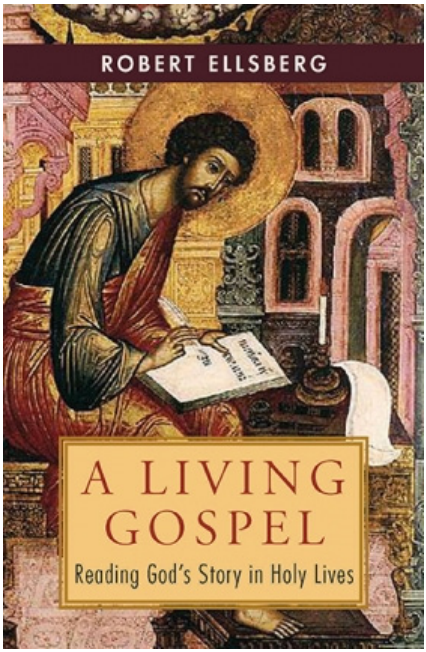
Along with the talk of saints and prayer, this work was meant to be entirely practical. When we look to the lives of the saints, aren't we really seeking practicality? Aren't we actually looking for a real example that will help us as we live out our real lives?

Yes, Francis of Assisi, Dominic de Guzmán, and all the other great saints of Christianity have much to tell us about life on the high plain of spirituality. But they too had to face the same reality that confronted Peter, James, and John after the Transfiguration as they climbed down the mountain and headed toward Jerusalem. Francis and the other great saints lived most of their lives in a very material world, just like us, and their lives have many very pragmatic lessons to teach.

Tom Keller works and worships in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Let your way of life among people be such that whoever sees or hears you will glorify and praise our Heavenly Father.
—St Francis of Assisi—

Book Notice



The Holy Spirit writes no more Gospels except in our hearts.... We, if we are holy, are the paper; our sufferings and our actions are the ink. The workings of the Holy Spirit are his pen, and with it he writes a living gospel."

Jean Pierre de Caussade, SJ

A Living Gospel: Reading God's Story in Holy Lives.
By Robert Ellsberg
Orbis Books $22.00

In a number of award-winning books, Robert Ellsberg has reflected on the lives of saints, prophets, and spiritual masters, drawing particular attention to models of holiness that speak to the needs of our time. The message of such figures, as he shows in this new book, is found not only in their writings but in the "text" they wrote with their lives.

Among the particular figures he examines are Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, Henri Nouwen, and Flannery O'Connor. He especially holds up the example of holy women, who charted their own path, and those who exemplify a "holiness of the everyday." In learning how to read the "living gospel" in their stories, he shows how we may learn to read our own lives in the same light.

Robert Ellsberg, Publisher of Orbis Books, is the author of many award-winning books, including *All Saints, The Saints' Guide to Happiness*, and *Blessed Among Us* (based on his daily reflections for *Give Us This Day*). He has edited the diaries and letters of Dorothy Day, as well as anthologies by Flannery O'Connor, Gandhi, and Pope Francis.

ICS Publications

The Dark Night: Psychological Experience and Spiritual Reality

By Marc Foley, OCD

ICS Publications Paper $19.95

READING ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS' *Dark Night* can be daunting; living the dark experience of purification it describes can be much more so. The description of the dark nights (yes, there is more than one!) which St. John presents seems so stark and painful that one might be tempted to just close the book and stop reading. On top of that, both the process St. John describes and the language he uses can be confusing and intimidating.

The language of 16th-century scholasticism is not easily understood by 21st-century readers living in a completely different culture and context. Perhaps even more challenging is the fact that our modern lives, filled with the non-stop clutter of social media and technology, as well as comfort and ease, do not prepare most of us well to look honestly into our own depths to see who we are and who we are intended to become as fully alive human beings.

Fortunately we now have this helpful book to guide us to the full life that St. John invites us to in *The Dark Night*. Father Marc Foley combines his own theological and psychological background, as well as his experience as a spiritual guide, to help modern readers understand the experiences, challenges, and graced events of the purifying nights of sense and spirit.

In addition to exploring certain key terms that John uses in Spanish and their meaning in the saint's time and today, Father Marc includes pertinent selections from a wide range of writers, ancient to modern, that illustrate the themes he covers. Each chapter concludes with insightful questions for personal reflection or group discussion.

Autumn

Please make a donation, if you are able, to help us continue our ministry by filling out the form below. Thank you for your generosity

---

DETACH HERE or MAKE COPY

Donation to Support spiritual life/Online

Tax Deductible (501(c)(3) Organization)

Name_____

Address _____

City State Zip_____

Telephone_____

$_____ Amount of Check or Money Order made out to Spiritual Life

Detach or Copy this Form and Send to:

Edward O'Donnell, OCD
Spiritual Life
2131 Lincoln Road NE
Washington, DC 20002

Thank you for your generosity.

Your Tax Deductible Donation will be acknowledged.