

Seeds of Hope is a booklet of 40 stories and heartwarming reflections based on the book *Inspiration*, by the late Fr. Jim Willig. It is sure to inspire us all to keep growing in grace!

Use this booklet on your own, with your prayer group, or with your family.



Fr. Jim Willig



Fr. J. Michael Sparough, SJ

Seeds of Hope has been adapted as a daily video series by Shalom World TV and Heart to Heart. Each story is brought to life by master storyteller Fr. J. Michael Sparough, SJ.

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*Stories for Lent
and throughout the year!*



SEEDS OF HOPE

Based on the book *Inspiration* written by Fr. Jim Willig, originally edited by Tammy Bundy, with additional content by Nina O'Connor & Fr. J. Michael Sparough, SJ

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We dedicate this booklet to Jesus...
*"my way, my truth, and my life." **John 14:6***

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FOREWORD

“A sower went out to sow some seeds... And some of those seeds fell on good, rich topsoil and produced an abundant harvest – thirty, sixty, one hundred fold.”

MT 13:1-23, MK 4:1-20, LK 8:4-15

For many, these can be discouraging days. It's easy to get depressed with so much negative news being reported through the media. The stories we are presenting here, however, are seeds of hope. When planted in the good, rich topsoil of our soul, they can spring up to produce abundant fruit.

Jesus knew the power of a good story to transform our lives—which is why he so often preached with parables. Here are 40 stories and reflections, 40 seeds of hope. If they are planted in love, watered by prayer, fertilized with daily discipline, and placed in the warm sunshine of God's grace, they will grow.

And we will change—probably not suddenly, but day by day, gradually producing the fruits of the Spirit that feed our hungry hearts.

Fr. Jim Willig was an exceptionally gifted teacher and preacher. He so often opened up the mystery of God's Word by paralleling Jesus' parables with stories and reflections of his own. As Fr. Jim explains in his introduction, this collection was composed at a time of great stress in his life, shortly after his cancer diagnosis.

He struggled with fear and discouragement. Yet, in confronting the disease that would eventually take his life, he dove more deeply into studying God's Word and opened his treasure trove of stories to rediscover hope and to re-ground his life.

Fr. Jim founded Heart to Heart, a small publishing company to carry his messages of hope and healing far beyond the narrow confines of the parish he pastored just north of Cincinnati. His original collection of stories and reflections was simply called *Inspiration*, but Fr. Jim's life was cut short before it could be widely distributed.

Today Heart to Heart continues Fr. Jim's vision of embracing Jesus' commission to carry the Good News to the whole world. We have teamed up with Shalom World TV to record my dramatic retelling of Fr. Jim's stories and reflections.

We are republishing his volume as *Seeds of Hope*. We encourage you to read the stories, watch the videos, journal your responses to the reflection questions, and share your inspirations with your family and friends.

Seeds are useless if they simply sit in their package... Take these seeds and plant them deep in the good, rich topsoil of your soul!

Fr. J. Michael Sparough, SJ, President

Heart to Heart, Inc
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INTRODUCTION

I will never forget the time I was sitting alone in the doctor's office when the doctor walked in, looked at me with a serious face and said, "I'm sorry to inform you... you have cancer." It was an incredible shock. I always felt healthy, and I always tried to take good care of myself. I never imagined I would get cancer.

Filled with denial, I questioned the doctor for further details. Then he showed me the scan results revealing a ten-pound tumor inside my right kidney. My denial began to fade. For the first time in my life, I was facing a cross that completely overwhelmed me. Not knowing what else to do, I asked my kind doctor if I could offer a prayer with him. I remember praying, "Jesus, I place my life in your hands."

At that moment, I knew my life would never be the same. The very day I walked out of the doctor's office, I entered into one of life's classrooms. In this classroom, I found myself taking a course on suffering. This course has led me directly to the cross, which has taught me more lessons than I ever dreamed I'd learn.

Some of those lessons are about life, some are about suffering, some are about God, and some are simply about ourselves. That which I've learned, I share with you now in this booklet. The lessons from my classroom are expressed in stories, images and reflections that come from many sources.

While I've tried to give credit where it is due, some of these inspirations have come from the internet. Others have come from friends. Still many have come from my own prayer and struggles. It is my hope that all have come from the Spirit—the source of all Inspiration.

Fr. Jim Willig

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SEEDS OF HOPE - STORY 1

MICHELANGELO'S DAVID



"Just as we have born the image of the earthly one, we shall bear the image of the heavenly one."

1 Corinthians 15:49

One of the great masterpieces of sculpture in classical art is undoubtedly the statue *David* by Michelangelo.

Did you know that when this was first contracted to be sculpted in Florence, it was given to a man by the name of Agostino di Duccio? He went to the quarry to select the block to begin the sculpture and discovered it was too narrow and there was a fault line crack in it. He abandoned the project.

Another man, Antonio Rossellino, was then brought in. He, too, studied the rock and marble and decided there was nothing he could do with such imperfection.

It wasn't until forty years later that a young sculptor

entered the scene. It was 26 year-old Michelangelo who had a great gift for envisioning the man inside the marble. He set forth with only his determination, chisel, and tools to bring forth this masterpiece, the statue *David*.

Isn't it interesting how Michelangelo sculpted such artistry out of a piece of marble that was rejected by two other notable sculptors?

The same is true with God and with us. Inside each of us is a precious and most beautiful person. A masterpiece!

Of course, God needs to sculpt and to hew away the rough edges of our personality and our spirituality in order to fashion and form us into the most beautiful creature that He sees we are.

Today, let us invite God to go to work on us, so that we can be something beautiful for God. Then we truly will be a Masterpiece!



FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

What are your rough edges that you would like to ask God's help in making smooth?

What is it about you that makes you a special masterpiece of God?

SEEDS OF HOPE - STORY 2

ONE YEAR TO LIVE



*"Lord, make us know the shortness of our life, that we might gain wisdom of heart!" **Psalm 90***

Imagine if you went to your doctor and he or she informed you that you have a terminal disease and had only one more year to live. What would you do? You might be tempted to say, "Go to another doctor!" But if you, yourself, knew you had only one year to live, what would you do?

The reason I ask this question is because, for most of us, it is only when we realize how short life is, that we finally understand how precious life is. It is only then that we comprehend how important it is that we live life to the fullest.

So, ask yourself again: "What would you do if you had only one year to live?" This is how I answered it when my doctor told me that very thing.

First and foremost, I would want to love God more, to the point where I could be one with Jesus. To

be able to do that, I know I would need to pray more frequently and devoutly. I would try to do everything I could that would lead me to deepen my friendship with Jesus.

Secondly, if I knew I had only one more year to live, I would want to help more people love God more so they, too, could be one with the Lord. I know this is all that ultimately matters and has eternal value. For this reason, I would preach more passionately. I would pray more fervently. And I would do more in service to bring God to more people, and more people to God.

Finally, do you know what I would do? I would do exactly what I am doing right now, except with more love.

In other words, I would love everybody more.

So, what would you do if you found out you had only one more year in which to do it? Whatever it is, may you do it with great love.

Now, what are you waiting for?



FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

What would you change in your life if you found out you only had one year to live?

What practice in your life would you keep, but try to improve upon, if you only had one year to live?

SEEDS OF HOPE - STORY 3

NOAH'S ARK



“Then the Lord said to Noah, “Go into the ark, you and all your household, for you alone in this age have I found to be truly just.” **Genesis 7:1**

You may not have realized that the story of Noah’s Ark offers many wise observations we can still use today. For instance, here are 12 of them.

1. Plan ahead. It wasn’t raining when Noah built the Ark.
2. Take it from 600 year-old Noah—You’re never too old for God to use you.
3. Don’t listen to the critics—do what has to be done.
4. Build on high ground and follow God’s directions.
5. Follow the animals’ advice: it’s safer to travel in pairs.
6. We all need to learn to get along—otherwise, it’s sink or swim.

7. Faster isn’t always better. (Yes, the cheetahs were on board—but so were the snails.)

8. Don’t miss the boat—come on board with the Lord!

9. Remember that the ark was built by amateurs and the Titanic was built by professionals.

10. Realize that the woodpeckers INSIDE are often a bigger threat than the storm OUTSIDE.

11. Your present situation may stink, but considering the outside alternative, try to make the best of it.

12. When rainy days seem to go on and on and on, just look for the rainbow—for the sign of God’s hope.

So the next time the storms of life have you running for cover, learn from the lessons of Noah and the ark. And take comfort in knowing that we’re all in the same boat.



FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

Which one of these “lessons” do you need to work on remembering?

Which one of these “lessons” is easy for you to remember?

SEEDS OF HOPE - STORY 4

UNANSWERED PRAYERS



"And I tell you, ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you."

Luke 11:9

One of the most frustrating things about praying is when we feel our prayers are not being answered. No matter how hard we pray, how often we pray, or how many people are praying for us, we still seem not to get an answer. Or would it be more accurate to say we are not getting the answer we want to get? Actually, God may be responding simply by saying, "No." He understands it is not the way we had hoped He would respond, but He is answering us nevertheless.

Now, every child and every parent knows there are many times when a child asks a parent for something, and the parent says, "No" for the child's own welfare. Seldom does the child understand this, much less agree with it. But the parent, has

indeed answered. And so it is with God and with us. We often ask for things that seem, to us, good. However, from God's perspective, He knows that is not what is best for us.

As Scripture tells us, "God's ways are not our ways." We see this with Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane asking that "this cup of suffering" pass Him by. But God the Father saw that a greater good would be accomplished by His suffering and by His dying for our salvation. Also, there was St. Paul. Remember, he prayed three times that the proverbial thorn in his flesh would be removed from him. But God responded, "No. My grace is sufficient for you. For when you are powerless, I am strong."

Therefore, my suggestion for you, if you have been praying and praying and praying and nothing ever seems to happen, is to try asking God a different question. This time ask Him, "God, what are You trying to tell me? Please teach me Your ways." You may not always like the answer you receive. But remember, our Heavenly Father knows best.



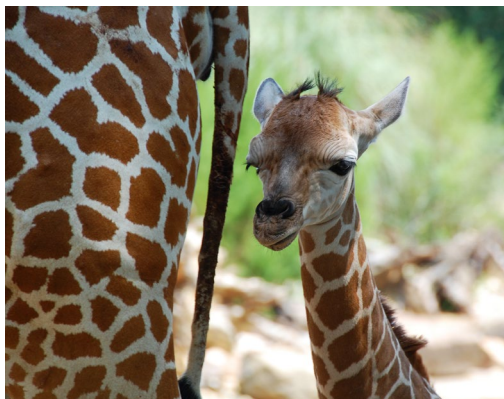
FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

What have been your most fervent prayers?

What might God be teaching you with His "answers"?

SEEDS OF HOPE - STORY 5

BABY GIRAFFES



*"Jesus looked at them and said, 'For human beings it is impossible. But not for God. All things are possible for God.' **Mark 10:27***

We can learn a lesson of life from the animal kingdom.

When a baby giraffe is born, it falls ten feet from its mother's womb and usually lands on its back. Within seconds, it rolls over and tucks its legs under its body. From this position, it takes in the world for the first time. This is when the mother giraffe rudely introduces her offspring to the reality of life.

The mother giraffe lowers her head to look at her baby. Then she does something that seems odd to us. She swings her long leg outward, kicking her calf, sending it sprawling head over heels.

When the baby doesn't get up, the process is repeated over and over again until the young calf finally stands on its wobbly legs.

So what does the mama giraffe do now? She kicks it off its feet again.

Why would she repeat this cruel routine? She does this because she instinctively knows she needs her baby to remember how to get up. In the wild, a baby giraffe that cannot stand and run quickly away from predators, will quickly become a meal. The mother giraffe knows the only way we learn to get back up is by being knocked down.

Are you feeling like life has been knocking you down lately? Like the baby giraffe, do you feel as soon as you start to get back on your feet, you get knocked flat on your face again?

Keep getting up no matter how futile it seems. Keep getting up. And when you feel you don't have the strength to get up on your own, ask the Lord to help you. We can learn even more from **His** kingdom.



FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

When was a time you felt "knocked flat on your face"?

Can you recall a time when a disappointing failure turned into a valuable learning experience? What did you learn from that?

SEEDS OF HOPE - STORY 6

BIBLICAL DIRECTIONS



"Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path."

Psalms 119:105

I am sure you have had the experience of going some place where you have never been before and you needed clear directions in order to get there. That is exactly what God provides for us so that we can get to heaven. Through the Bible, He gives us very clear directions and instructions on how to live the life that follows the way that leads to Him and eternal life. The unfortunate thing is that many of us never look at the directions because we think we already know the way. The fact is, though, we get detoured and sometimes lost, even though we may not realize it at the time.

I have a feeling that someday when we finally reach heaven, the Lord will say, "Did you have any trouble getting here?" Some of us will be able to answer, "No, not at all. I read your directions and tried to follow them as best as I could. They were really

good directions and they got me here. Truthfully, I did miss one turn, or maybe even two, and I got completely off track this one time. But that was my fault. Your directions were perfect."

Others of us will have to say, "I didn't even know you gave us directions. I was just wandering around all the time!"

That's the great gift of the Scripture: God is giving us directions.

My brother gave the Bible to my cousin for graduation, but he didn't tell him that inside the Bible he had placed a check for a generous amount of money. It wasn't until two years later when my cousin was going through a difficult time that he at last opened the book and found the check. He called my brother and wisely said, "I have finally come to discover the tremendous treasure there is in Sacred Scripture."

What about you? Have you opened your Bible lately? You might be surprised what treasures are waiting for you inside.



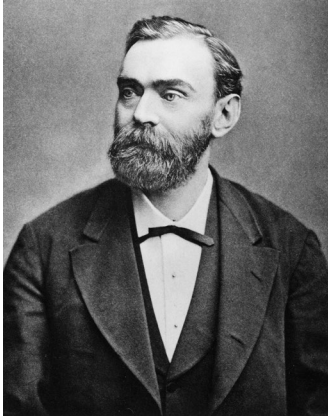
FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

Do you ever open the Bible you have in your home?

What is your favorite story in the Bible? Why?

SEEDS OF HOPE - STORY 7

ALFRED NOBEL'S EPITAPH



“Turn to me and be saved...for I am God, and there is no other.” Isaiah 45:22

In the year 1888, Ludwig Nobel died. He was a humble Swede, but a French newspaper confused him with Alfred, his younger, much more famous brother, for Alfred was a Swedish entrepreneur and inventor. He had amassed a vast fortune by inventing and selling dynamite and other ballistics.

So the French newspaper ran a scathing headline “Merchant of Death dies.”

Like Ebenezer Scrooge in Charles Dickens’, *A Christmas Carol*, Alfred Nobel, had the rare experience of witnessing what his legacy would be while he was still alive.

He was shattered to think that he would be remembered as “The Merchant of Death.”

He decided that day to change his destiny.

On November 27, 1895, he went to the Swedish Club in Paris, sat down at a writing desk, and wrote his last will and testament.

He set out what he wanted to leave to his family and to his staff. He then specified that the rest of his estate be invested into a fund, “the interest on which shall be annually distributed in the form of prizes to those who, during the preceding year, shall have conferred the greatest benefit to mankind.”

Thus were born the Nobel prizes!

And when we remember Alfred Nobel, we no longer think of him as the “merchant of death” but one whose legacy continues to ennoble all of humanity!

Remember: As long as our ticker is ticking, and there’s breath in our lungs, it’s not too late for us to plant new seeds of hope for future generations.



FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

If you died today, what would your epitaph be?

But what would you like your epitaph to be?

SEEDS OF HOPE - STORY 8

DAILY DECALOGUE OF ST. POPE JOHN XXIII



“Whoever is wise enough to observe these things, they shall understand the loving kindness of the Lord.”

Psalms 107: 43

Saint Pope John XXIII called the Second Vatican Council, because the garden that is the Church needed some pruning. His reflections, known as his Daily Decalogue, have been adapted by Al-Anon and called “Just for today...”

Just for today, I will seek to live this day positively without wishing to solve the problems of my life all at once.

Just for today, I will take care of my appearance: I will dress modestly; I will not raise my voice; I will be courteous in my behavior; I will not criticize anyone; I will not claim to improve or to discipline anyone except myself.

Just for today, I will be happy in the certainty that I was created to be happy, not only in the other world but also in this one.

Just for today, I will adapt to circumstances, without requiring all circumstances to be adapted to my own wishes.

Just for today, I will devote 10 minutes of my time to some good reading, remembering that just as food is necessary for the life of the body, so good reading is necessary for the life of the soul.

Just for today, I will do one good deed and not tell anyone about it.

Just for today, I will do at least one thing I do not like doing; and if my feelings are hurt, I will make sure no one else notices.

Just for today, I will make a plan for myself: I may not follow it to the letter, but I will make it. I will be on guard against two evils: hastiness & indecision.

Just for today, I will firmly believe, despite appearances, that our good God of Providence cares for me as no one else in this world.

Just for today, I will have no fears. In particular, I will not be afraid to enjoy what is beautiful and to believe in goodness. Indeed, for 12 hours I can certainly do what might cause me consternation were I to believe I had to do it for my entire life. To conclude, here is an all embracing resolution. I want to be kind, today and always, to everyone.



FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

Which one of these declarations is the hardest for you to live?

Which do you feel is the most important?

SEEDS OF HOPE - STORY 9

PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS



*"Happy is he who trusts in the Lord."
Proverbs 16:20*

I believe virtually everyone wants to be happy. Don't you? It is actually written in the Declaration of Independence as the unalienable right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. And we surely have pursued happiness.

A recent poll revealed that more than anything else, the one thing parents want most for their children is for them to be happy in life. The problem is that many of us just don't know how to find happiness.

Some think that maybe money will buy them happiness. Obviously, the wealthy show us dollars don't guarantee it. Others are consumed with the purchase of happiness, thinking if they live in a certain house, or get a certain car, or buy a particular product, then they will be happy. Sooner or later, we discover that short term pleasure is,

indeed, a long distance from enduring joy.

Many think if they could only be healthy, they would be happy. Certainly relief from physical pain makes us feel better, but simply being physically healthy does not make us emotionally happy.

Some think if they can only get over this problem, overcome this situation, get another job, or pursue something else, then they will be happy. Yet, somehow when we get to that new place, we find more problems awaiting us.

We need to realize that happiness is not so much out there, but in here. This is to say that happiness is an inside job. It is a matter of heart. And the heart of happiness is joy. Joy is simply a by-product of living a loving life with God, with others, and even ourselves. We can never experience that pure joy until we enjoy our life with God, our life with others, and our life with ourselves.

May you always remember that happiness is a matter of heart. And may you always keep God at the heart of the matter.



FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

What unsuccessful ways have you attempted to find happiness?

What has been one of your life's happiest moments?

SEEDS OF HOPE - STORY 10

GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE



*"Come to me all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest." **Matthew 11:28***

Are you suffering or struggling in any way? Let me offer a word of encouragement to you to look to Jesus. Remember Him, especially as He faced His worse suffering and, ultimately, His death as He did in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Here we see some valuable lessons as the Lord shows us how to deal with such a heavy cross. First, Jesus went to a garden that, for Him, was a sanctuary for His soul, a place of quiet refreshment.

Secondly, He took along with Him His three closest friends and asked them specifically to pray with Him and pray for Him, in this His hour, where He felt their need for support.

And finally, Jesus Himself prayed from the depth of His heart—praying what was in His heart—that God would let this cup of suffering pass Him by. But

then, He profoundly prayed, "Not my will, but Thy will be done," in an ultimate surrender of His life to the Lord.

This is exactly what we need to do. As we suffer and struggle along, we need to find that place—that place that is, for us, a garden of sanctuary for our soul. We need to go to this special place where we find refreshment and peace.

Secondly, we also need to bring along with us those family members and friends we feel closest to, who can be a support to us. We need to ask them to pray with us and pray for us.

Finally, we, ourselves, need to pray from the depths of our hearts whatever it is we are feeling. We must honestly tell God what this is, even if it is to take this suffering away. But ultimately, we must pray our full and total surrender. We must place our lives and our trust entirely in God's hands.

God will bless us. God will be with us. And God will take care of us. What more could we ask for?



FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

What are the biggest struggles in your life today?

Where do you go to find your "Garden of Sanctuary" for your soul?

SEEDS OF HOPE - STORY 11
MOTHER TERESA'S ADVICE



"For I know nothing by myself; yet I am not hereby justified, but he that judges me is the Lord."

1 Corinthians 4:4

Here is some good advice from Mother Teresa of Calcutta:

People are often unreasonable, illogical, and self-centered.

Forgive them anyway.

If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish ulterior motives.

Be kind anyway.

If you are successful, you will win some false friends and some true enemies.

Succeed anyway.

*If you are honest and frank, people may cheat you.
Be honest and frank anyway.*

What you spend years building, someone could destroy overnight.

Build anyway.

If you find serenity and happiness, people may be jealous.

Be happy anyway.

The good you do today, people will often forget tomorrow.

Do good anyway.

Give the world the best you have, and it may never be enough.

Give the world the best you've got anyway.

You see, in the final analysis, it is between you and God. It was never between you and them anyway.



FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

Think of a time when you allowed someone to take away your serenity, happiness, etc. What could you have done to prevent it?

What is the best you have to give to the world? Are you giving it now?

SEEDS OF HOPE - STORY 12

TWINKLE, TWINKLE, LITTLE STAR



*"Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing." **John 15:5***

Wishing to encourage her young son's progress on the piano, a mother took her boy to a concert of the great pianist, Paderewski. After they were seated, the mother spotted a friend of hers and walked over to say hello.

Grasping this opportunity to explore the wonders of the concert hall, the boy wandered away from his mother until he eventually found a door marked, "NO ADMITTANCE".

When the house lights dimmed indicating the concert was about to begin, the mother returned to her seat and was aghast to find her son was missing. Suddenly the curtains parted and the spotlights focused on an impressive Steinway on the stage. In disbelief, the mother saw her little boy seated at the piano, innocently picking out "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star." At that very moment, the great piano master made his entrance, quickly moved to the piano, and whispered in the boy's ear, "Don't quit. Keep playing." Then, leaning over, Paderewski reached down with his left hand and started

filling in the bass part. Soon his right arm reached around to the other side of the child and he added a running obbligato. Together, the old master and the young novice transformed a frightening situation into a wonderfully creative experience. The audience was so mesmerized that they were unable to recall what else the master played that night. Only the classic, "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" was remembered.

And that's the way it is with God. What we can accomplish on our own is hardly noteworthy. We might try our best, but the results aren't exactly the most flowing music. But with the hand of the Master, our life's work truly can be beautiful.

So the next time you set out to accomplish great feats, listen carefully. You can hear the voice of the Master, whispering in your ear, "Don't quit. Keep playing." Feel His loving arms around you. Know that His strong hands are there helping to turn your feeble attempts into great masterpieces. He is always there to love and guide you onto great things.

For life is hard as a solo, but with God, it can be a Divine duet.



FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

Think of a time in your life when you tried to do something on your own and the results were less than desirable.

Can you recall a time when you felt as if God were whispering in your ear to not quit...keep going?

SEEDS OF HOPE - STORY 13

HOUSE BUILDING



*"Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like the wise man who built his house on the rock." **Matthew 7:24***

An elderly carpenter was ready to retire. He informed his employer contractor of his plans to leave the house building business and live a more leisurely life with his wife, enjoying his extended family. He would miss the paycheck, but he needed to retire. He knew they could get by.

The contractor was sorry to see his good worker go and asked if he would build just one more house as a personal favor.

The carpenter agreed to do it. But in time, it was easy to see that his heart was not in his work. He resorted to shoddy workmanship and used inferior materials. It was an unfortunate way to end a dedicated career. When the carpenter finished his

work, the employer came to inspect the house. He handed the front door key to the carpenter, saying, "This is your house. It is my gift to you." The carpenter was shocked. What a shame! If only he had known he was building his own house, he would have done it all so much differently.

And so it is with us. We build our lives one day at a time, often putting less than our best into the building. Then, with a shock, we realize we have to live in the very house we have built. If we could do it over again, we might do it much differently. But we can never go back.

You are the carpenter of your life. Without knowing it, each day you hammer a nail, place a board, or erect a wall. Someone once said, "Life is a do-it-yourself project." The attitude and choices you make today build the house you live in tomorrow.

Build wisely on the proper foundation so you may live in the House of the Lord forever.



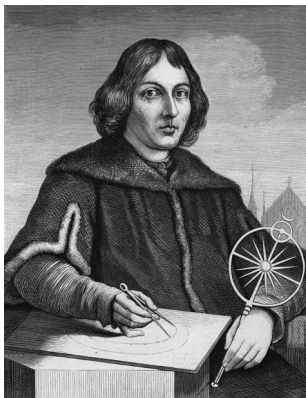
FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

What have you "constructed" into your life that should be "remodeled"?

What additions could you bring into your life that would add value to it?

SEEDS OF HOPE - STORY 14

COPERNICUS



*"When I behold your heavens, the work of your hands, the moon and the stars which you set in place—What is man that you should be mindful of him—or the son of man that you should care for him?" **Psalm 8:4***

The Polish Astronomer Nicholas Copernicus (1473-1543) spent much of his life attempting to correct "Ptolemy's Theory of the Universe" that claimed the earth is the center of the universe and all the planets revolve around the earth in perfect circles.

Copernicus was the first person to see the universe in a new and different way. Though he and Ptolemy only saw the planets and sun through the naked eye, Copernicus realized that the planets and sun do not revolve around the earth; rather the earth and planets revolve around the sun. Thus the sun, not the earth, is the center of our solar system. This became known as the "Copernican Revolution."

Because Copernicus' Theory seemed to contradict

the authority of the Bible, according to those who interpreted it literally, his discovery was not officially accepted by the church until the mid-eighteenth century (more than 200 years later). Despite his lack of acceptance, Copernicus remained a faithful believer.

Years later, Galileo was able to confirm Copernicus' Theory by looking through a telescope. The Pope and Cardinals of the church condemned and excommunicated Copernicus and Galileo for holding to this theory and refused to even look through a telescope to see for themselves.

Today, the expression "Copernican Revolution" is used to refer to a conversion, when we see ourselves in a new way. The greatest Copernican Revolution occurs when we see that we are not the center of our little world, but we place the Son of God at the center of our lives. Then, everything we do revolves around Jesus Christ.

And with the Son at the center, our lives will truly be out of this world.



FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

Have you ever assumed something was the center of your life, only to find out it wasn't? What was it?

What can you do today to put Jesus more directly in the center of your life?

SEEDS OF HOPE - STORY 15

WALKING ON WATER



*"Peter said, 'Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.' He said, 'Come.' Peter got out of the boat to walk on water." **Matthew 14:28***

Oftentimes, one of the greatest challenges to those who are suffering is not so much the physical pain, as it is the accompanying emotional anxiety and mental agony. When our thoughts and feelings are pulled down into the problems of pain, things can only get worse. The challenge remains to rise above it, keeping our focus on that which is healing and helpful.

A good example of this is the time that Jesus invited Peter to walk on water. Now, there is a whole lot more to this story than what first appears on the surface. The water, the storm at sea, was an indication of those things that are beyond our

control and often threaten our inner peace. Jesus was challenging Peter to rise above those things. By looking at the Lord and following His advice, Peter was able to walk on water. However, as soon as he looked down at the waves and felt the rough wind against his face, he immediately began to sink. Of course, he wisely reached out for the Lord's help in saving him.

The lesson for us is to do the same. Jesus wants us to rise above our problems. We must keep our eyes fixed on the Lord who alone can help us overcome those things that are beyond our control—that inner storm that dwells within the sea of our minds and hearts. If we can do so, we will have an incredible peace. The Lord is with us and He will keep us from sinking by teaching us how to walk on water by walking in faith.



FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

What "storms" in your life have you endured when things were out of your control?

Was there a time you did walk in faith, trusting the Lord would be there beside you? Remember it now.

SEEDS OF HOPE - STORY 16

MILLARD FULLER'S MARRIAGE



"Do not lay up for yourselves an earthly treasure where moths and rust destroy and thieves break in and steal. But instead store up heavenly treasure which neither moths nor rust destroy, nor thieves break in and steal."

Matthew 6:19-20

Millard Fuller was a 29 year-old successful businessman and self-made millionaire. He was able to buy his lovely wife, Linda, everything he thought her heart desired. But one day he came home from work and was shocked to discover a note his wife had left telling him she was leaving him and their marriage.

He spent the night frantically searching for her until he was finally able to track her down. Together, they talked through the night and into the next morning about their failed marriage. He soon learned that he had failed to satisfy her greatest needs and desires. In spite of the fact that he thought he was taking good care of her, she informed him what she really needed was his time,

attention, and affection. She felt he had neglected her all those years and appeared to be more married to his business than to her.

At that very moment, Millard had a change of heart. He promised he would completely rearrange his life. Then, the two of them, Millard and Linda, knelt down, right where they were, and dedicated the rest of their lives and their marriage to the Lord. What is more, they decided to sell most of their wealthy possessions and devote themselves to a common mission of helping the poor and the homeless.

This couple, Millard and Linda Fuller, went on from there to found what we know today as "Habitat for Humanity," an organization that provides thousands of houses throughout this country for the once homeless.

So let us pray, today, that God will bless us with the desire and ability to do His work and be one with the Lord. Only then will we know true riches.



FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

What do you feel is cluttering your life, keeping you from a better relationship with God?

Are you ready to right now get down on your knees and dedicate your life to God, asking him how you can serve Him?

SEEDS OF HOPE - STORY 17

STRENGTH THROUGH STRUGGLE



*"Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered; and when perfected, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him." **Hebrews 5:8***

A man found a cocoon of an emperor moth. He took it home so he could watch the moth come out of its cocoon. On the day a small opening appeared, the man sat and watched the moth for several hours as it struggled to force its body through that little hole. Then the moth seemed to be stuck and appeared to have stopped making progress. It seemed as if it had gotten as far as it possibly could.

The man, in his kindness, decided to help the moth, so he took a pair of scissors and snipped off the remaining bit of the cocoon. The moth easily emerged through this opening. Its body, however, was swollen and small...its wings were wrinkled and shriveled. The man continued to watch, expecting to see the wings enlarge and expand to support the

rest of the body. But that never happened. In fact, the little moth spent the rest of its life crawling around with its swollen body and shriveled wings. It was never able to fly.

The man in his kindness and haste did not understand that the struggle required for the moth to get through the tiny opening was necessary to force fluid from the body of the moth into its wings to enable the moth to fly upon achieving freedom from the cocoon. Freedom and flight would only come after the struggle. By depriving the moth of a struggle, he deprived the moth of strength.

So the next time life's struggles seem to cripple you, look deeper to find strength in understanding that the obstacle that makes you feel so weak may be the very thing that makes you find your innermost strength.

And like a moth, once you find that source of strength, be prepared to spread your wings and fly to heights you've never before known.



FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

Remember a struggle you once witnessed someone going through.

Did this struggle strengthen this person in any way? How?

SEEDS OF HOPE - STORY 18
PRAY FOR THE HEART OF JESUS



"Jesus said, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your might.'"

Matthew 22:37

In the Gospels we find Jesus' beautiful teaching of the Great Commandment. It is here Jesus tells us that the first and greatest commandment of all is to love God with your whole heart and soul and mind and strength. But He does not stop there. He adds that the second commandment is to love others as yourself—suggesting that the two go together.

The question is, "How can we do this?" How can you love God with your whole heart and love others as yourself? We all know that is not easy. To help answer this, I looked to someone whom I believe is the greatest example of love that I have known in my life: Mother Teresa. This is a woman who truly was a living saint because she loved God with all her heart and loved others every bit as much as she

loved herself.

How did she do this? I actually had the pleasure of hearing her explain this very thing when I heard her speak years ago in a church. She told us that every day and all throughout the day she prays to God, "Give me Your heart of love." She believed that when she shared that love with others, she was sharing love with Jesus Himself.

I was so moved to hear this that after the speech, I remained in the back of the church, knelt down, closed my eyes, opened my hands upward, and prayed, "Dear Jesus, give me the heart of Mother Teresa." No sooner had I prayed that prayer than one of her sisters came around, approached me, and placed something in my opened hand. I opened my eyes, and there was a medal of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. I said, "Wow! Truly this is the heart of Mother Teresa, the heart of Jesus."

Today, pray to Jesus for His heart of love and your life will never be the same. It will be filled with His life, His love, and His joy.



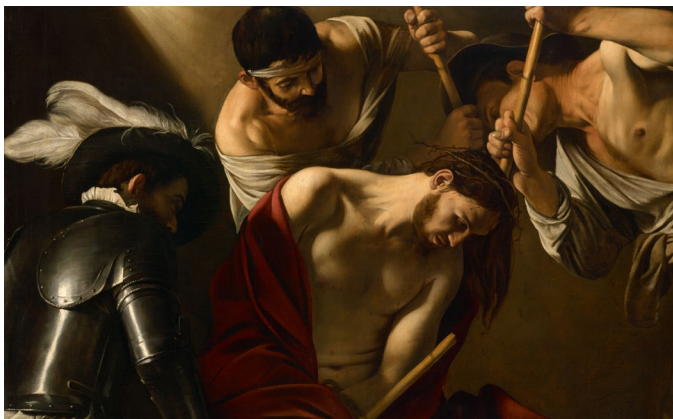
FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

Who are the people you know you could do a better job of trying to love?

What are some ways you will try to enable yourself to love the people you mentioned above?

SEEDS OF HOPE - STORY 19

THORNS IN THE FLESH



"Three times I begged the Lord about this, that it might leave me, but he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.'"

2 Corinthians 12:8-9

I have been thinking about fatigue lately. Truer still, I have been experiencing fatigue lately. You see, that is one of the side effects of my cancer treatment and medicine, and it is quite disconcerting not to have the strength and energy I once had.

I have taken this to the Lord in prayer, and here I am again reminded of what St. Paul himself experienced and relates in 2 Corinthians 12, when he spoke of the thorn in his flesh. I imagine each of us has a certain thorn in our flesh of some kind. Paul prayed as I prayed (and you may have prayed) that our Lord will remove the thorn or source of pain. Paul said, "Three times I begged God that he

might remove this and each time God said to me, 'My grace is enough for you; for in weakness, power reaches perfection'."

It would really be something if we could all come to understand that our greatest strength is nothing compared to this Divine strength that we can rely on when we are weak.

St. Paul goes on to say, "So I willingly boast of my weakness, instead, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

It may seem like quite a paradox that our weakness can be a blessing, but I have come to understand that God's blessings are often disguised as hardships. And that very hardship, or thorn, becomes an opening up to the Lord to rely on His power and His grace which is so much better than the best we could ever offer.

So, today, let's all boast of our weaknesses. And the power of Christ will rest upon us more and more. Let your source of energy be from the Son.



FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

What are the weaknesses you have been trying to overcome lately?

How has the power of Christ ever helped you?

SEEDS OF HOPE - STORY 20

GOD'S LANGUAGE OF SILENCE



*"For the Lord gives wisdom, from his mouth come knowledge and understanding." **Proverbs 2:6***

When I speak to couples, I often ask them what they feel is the most important ingredient in keeping their relationship growing. More often than not, their answer will be, "Communication." And that is so true. Communication is the key to intimacy.

I think the same is true concerning our relationship with God. For communication is also the key to our intimacy with God. In fact, it is quite a gift to realize that God can communicate with us and we can communicate with God. That is really something! The challenge though, as you well know, is that it is not considered easy to communicate with someone who is rather invisible and often inaudible.

This is why it remains our job to learn the language of God in God's Spirit. He speaks to us all in a language of silence. We must find that silence in solitude and there we can begin to hear, internally, the quiet Spirit speak to us. This Spirit will speak to us through understanding and insight. This Spirit speaks to us through the events and people in our lives. Yes, God speaks to us. But in order to enter that silence and solitude, we must empty ourselves of the busy and noisy sounds of our mind that can run on, and on and on, and keep us from hearing God.

Someone once said that concerning communication, we should never forget that we are given only one mouth, but two ears. We need to do appropriately and proportionately what that would suggest; listen twice as much as we speak.

So the next time you start to pray, don't just say your prayers. Hear God in prayer. Through the silence of your mind, heart, and soul. He will speak to you.



FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

How do you think you could improve your time in prayer?

What is the favorite part of your time spent in prayer?

SEEDS OF HOPE - STORY 21

GOD'S REAL TWEETS MIGHT JUST SAY...



*"From heaven the Lord looks down; he sees all humankind. From His fixed throne he beholds all who dwell on earth." **Psalm 33:13***

There have been 16 messages that have appeared on billboards and buses in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, during this past September, October, and November. The agency in charge of this advertising will only say that an anonymous individual is footing the bill for all these notices that have caused quite a bit of attention. Here are these messages as they appear:

*"Let's meet at my house Sunday before the game."
...signed, God*

"Come on over and bring the kids."...signed, God

"What part of 'Thou shalt not' didn't you understand?"...signed, God

"We need to talk." ...signed, God

"Keep using my name in vain and I will make rush hour longer."...signed, God

*"Loved the wedding. Invite me to the marriage."
...signed, God*

*"That 'Love thy neighbor' thing—I really meant it."
...signed, God*

"I love you. I love you. I loved you."...signed, God

*"Will the road you're on get you to My place?"
...signed, God*

"Follow Me."...signed, God

"My way is the High Way."...signed, God

"Need directions? Just ask."...signed, God

"You think it's hot here?" ...signed God

*"Need a marriage counselor? I'm available."
...signed, God*

"Tell the kids I love them."...signed, God

You could add your own message to this list. In fact, if you want messages, you could find many of them probably in your very own home. It's not a billboard, though. It's your Bible.



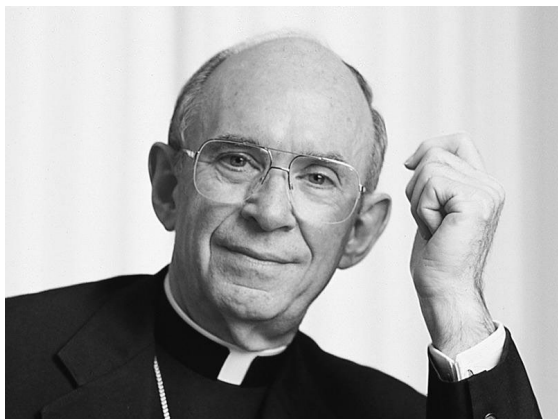
FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

Which of these messages do you need to work on remembering the most?

What message would you add for God?

SEEDS OF HOPE - STORY 22

FIND A SAINTLY MENTOR



*"But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess it forever and ever." **Daniel 7:18***

When I was ordained a priest, someone gave me the best advice by telling me, "If you want to be a really good priest, then identify someone whom you believe is a really great priest and get as close to them as you can. Learn everything you can about them. Then hope and pray to God they rub off on you."

That was such wonderful advice as I did, indeed, identify someone. In fact, that someone happened to be the very Archbishop who ordained me, Archbishop Bernardin, who later became Cardinal Bernardin. Even since his death, he has always been for me my inspiration and example. He is my model of what a good priest can be.

That good advice can pertain to the saints, as well. There is nothing we could do that would be better for our spiritual growth than to identify a really great saint whom we can imitate and try to grow closer to. We need to learn everything we can about them. Then, we need to hope and pray to God that they rub off. And you know what? They will.

I encourage us all today to learn more about the great saints so that we can become more like them. Find your favorite saint, or two or three. Read about them, study them, get close to them. Talk to them and ask them to intercede for you. Pray to them, and with them, pray to God. I guarantee you, that is one of the best ways we can grow spiritually.

Whatever happens, it's great to know friends in high places!



FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

Who are your favorite saints? Why?

What can you learn from them? How can you imitate them?

SEEDS OF HOPE - STORY 23

A LESSON ON IMPACT



"But you, brothers and sisters, be not remiss in doing good work." 2 Thessalonians 3:13

There is a wonderful story about a great storm that passed through a small southern coastal town. After the storm had subsided, an old man from the town walked to the beach to inspect the damage. As he approached the water's edge, he could see thousands of starfish that the raging winds and waves had washed ashore. Here on the beach, the starfish would surely bake in the hot southern sun and be dead by the afternoon. The man shook his head sadly at the fate of the starfish.

Down at the other end of the beach however, there was a little boy who was slowly and methodically bending over and tossing the starfish back into the sea, one by one. The old man watched him for some time knowing that the child could never pick up

all those starfish before the sun would claim them forever. Finally unable to watch the futile efforts of the child any longer, the old man approached the boy and said to him, "Son, why are you wasting your time? You cannot possibly rescue all of these starfish. What difference is it to throw a few back into the sea?"

The little boy looked at the starfish that he held in his hand and hardly paying any attention to the old man, he proudly tossed it back into the ocean. The child then looked the old man in the eyes and remarked, "It sure made a difference to that one." So stunned by this little boy's wisdom, the old man did something remarkable. He joined the child in rescuing the starfish by throwing them back into the sea...one by one.

This is a perfect example of what a difference we can make in life by simply trying to do good little by little and loving people...one...by...one...by...one...



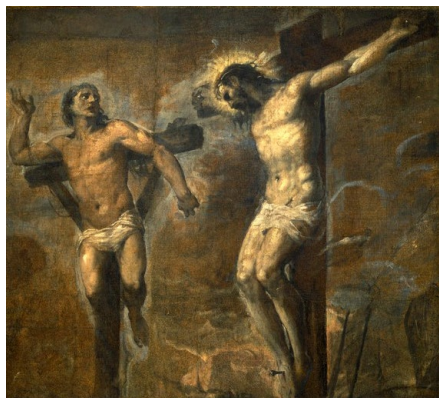
FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

When have you decided not to even try to change something because you felt there was no way you could make a difference?

Think of one thing you can do this very moment to make someone smile. Then do it.

SEEDS OF HOPE - STORY 24

BITTER OR BETTER



*"He then said, 'Jesus remember me when you enter upon your reign.' And Jesus replied, 'I assure you, this day you will be with me in paradise.'" **Luke 23:42-43***

One of the most powerful scenes in Jesus' passion and death comes when He is hanging on the cross on Calvary. On either side of Him, there are two men, also on their own crosses. One was on His right side, and the other was on His "wrong" side. The one on Christ's wrong side is called this due to his entirely wrong attitude about his suffering. He blamed Christ, blasphemed Him and cursed Christ for his cross. He asked to be taken down immediately, and immediately is when his spirit went down.

On the other hand, however, the thief on Jesus' right side had the right attitude and approach. He not only looked up to Jesus, but he also offered up his own suffering to Him. He prayed to Jesus that

he would be lifted up to Him and remembered with Him in paradise. Jesus promised him, "On this very day, you will be with me in paradise." We call that man the good thief, because he stole his way into heaven.

Every time we face our own suffering, difficulty, or pain, we, too, are at a crossroads to take either the right or the wrong approach or attitude. If we reject our cross, reject our problems, reject the challenge, we will only become bitter. But, if we accept our cross, accept the difficulty, and accept the challenge, we will only become better.

Bitter or better? It's up to you. Choose that right attitude and be on the right side of Jesus. Look up to Christ and offer up your suffering to Him. And Christ will lift you up to be with Him in paradise. He will give you peace that is truly heavenly.

May you always be on the right side of the Lord.



FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

Was there ever a time when you reacted to a situation with bitterness? How did that make you feel?

When was a time you opted to become better during a trying situation? How did that make you feel?

SEEDS OF HOPE - STORY 25

A MOTHER'S LOVE



*"Seeing his mother there with the disciple whom he loved,
Jesus said to his mother, 'Woman, there is your son.'
In turn, he said to his disciple, 'There is your mother.'"*

John 19:26-27

Is there any love greater than a mother's love?

I realized when I was at my parent's home convalescing after my surgery, how much, how great, was my mother's love. Of course, my Father's love inspired me as well, for he was especially good at doing little favors for me. But my mom was especially good at just sitting by my side, praying for me and encouraging me.

In fact, my mother and I had a little signal worked out. If the door was closed, she knew I was wanting my privacy. But, if I left the door open, that was my invitation for her to come, if she cared to come, and just sit with me and pray with me. I can't tell you the number of times I was feeling alone—and those who suffer know sometimes the hardest part

of suffering is the loneliness, especially during the night. But if Mom would see the door open, she would always come to me. And there she would sit with me and pray with me. I felt such tremendous strength and consolation in her prayer, as I felt her suffering right along with me.

We all have such a mother in our Mother Mary in heaven. All we have to do is leave that door open, for she desperately wants to come in and be with us, especially when we are suffering or hurting. She will come to us and pray with us her special prayer, the Rosary. I encourage each of us to pray the Rosary daily. This is our way of joining with our Mother Mary. And I promise you, as she promises you, that she will be with us and give us the consolation, encouragement, and spiritual strength that we so need.

What a difference it makes! Ask our Mother Mary to come into your life and pray with you and bless you. All you need to do is leave the door to your heart open.



FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

Was there ever a time when you felt you shut the door of communication on someone? When was this and how did you feel?

Who in your life do you leave the door open to when you want to talk? What is special about them?

SEEDS OF HOPE - STORY 26

THY WILL BE DONE



*"For whom the Lord loves, he corrects, as a father corrects the son in whom he delights." **Proverbs 3:12***

All good parents want what is best for their children. They want their children to be happy, healthy and holy. With this in mind, parents set certain rules for their children pertaining to mealtime, bedtime and other times that are important to follow. These are the rules of the house and their lives. They are there to guide the children.

The problem is that the children usually have a whole other idea of what they want and what they think is best. Of course, most times, the parent knows better, but the children do not know or appreciate that fact, so they may insist on what they want. This is the reason parents must train their children to, more than anything, listen and obey.

The same is true with God and with us. God is our Father and we are His children. God knows what is best for us and wants what is best for us. He sets down certain commands, rules and regulations that we are to follow. However, we all have our own ideas about what we think will make us happy and sometimes, even subconsciously, we disobey His ways. So, the important thing we need to learn is to always listen and obey our Father. In fact, in Latin, the very word "obey" means to listen.

I grant that this is not always easy. To obey God means to listen to God. In order for us to listen, we need to be quiet and ask what it is He wants. If we only ask that question, God will always answer. He answers through His Word, the Sacred Scripture, and through the quiet voice of the Spirit that speaks to us and guides us. And through many other natural ways, God will guide us!

Why else do you suppose Jesus taught us to pray, "Thy will be done"?

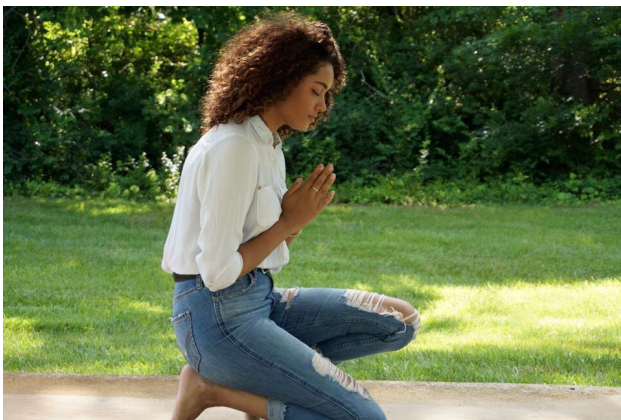


FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

When you were a child, on what issues did you and your parents most disagree?

Can you recall a time when you felt God directly answering your prayer? Remember it.

SEEDS OF HOPE - STORY 27
THE SECRET TO SANCTITY



"If you, with all your sins, know how to give your children good things, how much more will the Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?"

Luke 11:13

Cardinal Mercier once shared what he considered to be the secret of happiness and holiness. This secret is to just take five minutes every day to close our eyes as a way of shutting out distractions; close our ears to sounds and noise around us; and enter deeply into the sanctuary of our soul. Then we will discover the presence of the Holy Spirit within us. As we enter into that presence of the Holy Spirit, Cardinal Mercier suggests we should pray a prayer like this:

"Holy Spirit, soul of my soul, enlighten me, guide me, strengthen me and help me. Tell me what I need to do and help me to do it. I promise to be submissive to you in everything that you permit to

happen to me. Only, show me what is Your will."

He said if we pray this way the Spirit will answer our prayer, come to show us what we need to see and know, and help us to do what we need to do. And grace will be with us all day long! This submission to the Holy Spirit, Cardinal Mercier tells us, is the secret to sanctity.

Today, may we take the time to pray in such a way that would invite the Spirit, who is deep within our souls, to guide us, to help us, to strengthen us, and to do in us what it is God wants us to achieve. It is then, I believe, we will truly have found the secret of happiness and holiness.

Isn't that worth five minutes a day?



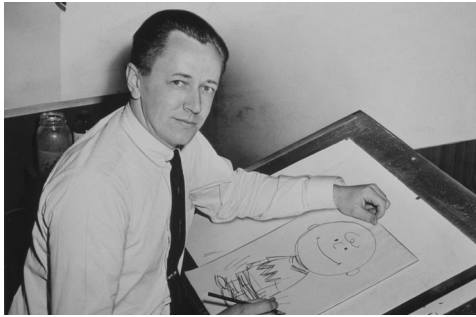
FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

Recite the prayer and shut your eyes for a few minutes. What distractions did you have to force out of your mind?

What peaceful, spiritual thoughts filled your mind?

SEEDS OF HOPE - STORY 28

THE MOST WIDELY READ AUTHOR IN HISTORY



*"Whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child, will not enter into it." **Mark 10:15***

Charles Schulz, the creator and illustrator of "Peanuts," was the most beloved and successful cartoonist of the 20th century. In fact, someone said that Mr. Schulz was the most widely read author in history. He created more than 18,000 daily comic strips over a period of fifty years. His strip appeared daily in 2,600 newspapers, reaching an estimated 355 million readers in 75 countries. "Peanuts" also spawned an industry of more than \$1 billion annually in retail sales. But the cartoonist's most enduring legacy comes from his lovable, little characters.

Charlie Brown was, of course, one of these lovable, little characters. He never pitched a winning game. He never was able to kick the football. He never got the right advice from Lucy. He never out-smarted his little sister, Sally. He never could control his dog Snoopy. And he never won the heart of the pretty little redheaded girl. But Charlie Brown was able to

win our hearts because he helped us to accept the joys and pain of being human.

Charlie Brown showed us what it means to be little. And to be little is to be simple and humble. Jesus wants us to know that being simple and humble is to be beautiful.

And that is what Jesus wants us to be. We must be simple and humble, like a child, if we are to enter into the kingdom of God. This may sound easy, but it's not. To be little and humble is often a struggle. To accept our limitations and weaknesses is a challenge.

But Charles Schulz, who died the very night before his last original cartoon was published, brought this challenge to the funny papers. And by sharing his cartoon children with the rest of us children, we are all in some way better able to understand ourselves...and each other.

And that's all thanks to a man who spent his life working for "Peanuts."



FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

In what areas of your life is it hardest for you to be little and humble?

What can you ask God to help you with to enable you to be more like a child?

SEEDS OF HOPE - STORY 29

ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI



*"You are no longer strangers ...but members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Jesus Christ, Himself, as the cornerstone." **Ephesians 2:19-20***

Saint Francis of Assisi is one of the most popular saints of all time. In spite of the fact that he lived centuries ago, we can still learn so much from his life.

It was during a period of intense suffering when he had a total change of heart in the direction of his life. As we know, suffering does tend to make us rethink the meaning and direction of our lives. For this reason, St. Francis spent a lot of time in prayer.

One day, he went off to pray in an abandoned church, kneeling before a crucifix, perhaps identifying with the suffering of Christ on the cross. It is here Christ spoke to Francis these words, "Francis, go and rebuild my church which

is falling into ruin." Francis, being a humble and simple man, took those words to heart and began to rebuild that church—the little chapel of San Damiano—stone by stone, day by day. Faithfully, he rebuilt that church until he finally understood how God was really calling him to build the bigger Church—brother by brother and sister by sister. Little by little, God taught St. Francis how to build a community of love. Within five years, 5000 Friars had joined Francis in his humble effort to rebuild the Church.

Today, God wants to rebuild the Church. Today, the Lord is looking for people who will come in their suffering, in their "littleness," in their weakness, before the cross of Christ. He invites us to pray and to listen to what is our specific mission and our very own part of rebuilding the Church. It always begins right at home, in a small chapel, in a small way. May St. Francis bless us and lead us to rebuild God's Church today—brother by brother and sister by sister.

Let's do it for the Father.



FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

When has suffering led you to change the direction of your life?

What can you do today to aid in rebuilding God's church?

SEEDS OF HOPE - STORY 30

JUGGLING IS A LOT LIKE LIVING



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"If possible, on your part, live at peace with all."
Romans 12:18

I believe that life is a constant juggling of so many responsibilities to family, church, and community that we must learn how to juggle our schedules, appointments, and commitments here and there and everywhere. We also have to learn how to juggle our own responsibilities to ourselves in terms of our body, mind, and spirit, so much so that we can, indeed, say living is a lot like juggling. So, how do we juggle all these things all the time and not "lose it all"? Here is a lesson about the art of juggling that is analogous to the art of living:

1. Learn to handle only one ball at a time. In other words, do one task at a time. Most of us can only do one thing well at any given moment.
2. When you do take on more balls, or responsibilities, don't take on more than you can

handle. We need to know our limits as to what we can do and what we cannot do.

3. Don't go either too fast or too slow. Pacing is vital to juggling as well as life.
4. If you do drop the ball, that is, if you fail in some way, just pick up and go on. This is the way we learn from our mistakes.
5. Keep your eye on the ball at all times. You must stay focused and pay attention. Put all distractions aside. Both juggling and living require attention and concentration to what's at hand.
6. Juggling, as well as living, is learning to follow a certain pattern, or developing certain habits in our life. Successful juggling is learning to maintain a specific balance in life. Following that pattern creates the balance that creates happiness and rhythm.

And finally, understand that it can be very challenging, but it can also be very rewarding if we just remember we are all constantly learning the art of living. Try to enjoy the lesson.



FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

What are some of the things in your life that you are juggling?

What are you juggling that actually brings you closer to God?

SEEDS OF HOPE - STORY 31

A "LITTLE WAY" TO GREAT HOLINESS



"Whoever is a little child, let them come to me."

Proverbs 9:4

One of the greatest saints of our modern times is St. Therese of Lisieux who lived 100 years ago in France. From the time she was a small child, she had an incredible desire to be a great saint, but she always imagined that holiness was far beyond her. She likened herself to a tiny infant trying to climb a steep staircase. For, as she attempted to climb her staircase of sanctity, she felt she could hardly get to the first level before she would fall back again due to her weakness.

So, she prayed to God that the Lord would show her a shortcut, like an elevator, that would simply lift her up. For she knew she was incapable of reaching that height of holiness that she aspired to without His help. The Lord answered her through the Sacred Scripture. As she was meditating on the words of God, she came to the realization that he who is a little one shall come to God. Or as Jesus

said, "We must become like a child to enter the kingdom of heaven." And there she had the secret of sanctity with Jesus. She called this the "little way" of spiritual childhood. To follow her "little way," there are three things we need to do. First, we need to become like a little child, completely dependent on God the Father. Secondly, we need to realize that we should entrust ourselves entirely to Jesus, literally putting ourselves into His arms. Thirdly, we need to surrender our entire life to Him. It is then that Jesus will lift us up to God and help us in every way a Father can help a child.

Therese later became such an incredible teacher for us through her autobiography entitled *The Story of a Soul* that Pope John Paul II declared her a Doctor of the Church. She is affectionately known as "The Little Flower" for she asked to spend her afterlife doing good on Earth, showering roses of blessings upon us.

So let us together, today, live the "little way" and be lifted up into the waiting arms of God the Father.



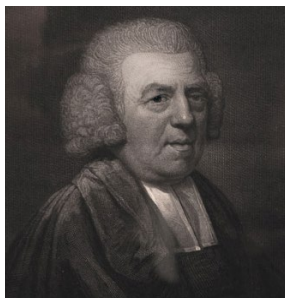
FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

What in your life are you still trying to solve on your own without giving it to God to handle?

In what ways are you like a trusting child, allowing God to take care of you?

SEEDS OF HOPE - STORY 32

GOD SAVED A WRETCH LIKE HIM



"O Lord, Our God, how glorious is your name over all the earth..." Psalm 8:1

Her sails were ripped, and on one side of the ship, the wood had been torn away and splintered. Water was rushing in. The sailors had little hope of survival. Sailor John Newton watched one of his crew members get swept overboard, so he tied himself to the helm of the ship and tried to hold her steady. From one o'clock in the afternoon until midnight he was at the helm in the midst of the storm.

John Newton had been a seaman since age eleven, and he had a reputation for profanity. He was known to his fellow sailors as "The Great Blasphemer." He was not a man of faith. But the fear of death can plant the seeds of faith in the hardest of hearts. And on that day, March 21, 1748, John Newton began to pray for his life. And God heard that prayer.

The cargo shifted—miraculously—to fill that hole in the ship's hull. The water stopped pouring in,

and the ship was saved. Newton took this as a sign from God, and marked it as the beginning of his conversion to Christianity.

It would take many years before he was able to give up his work as a slave trader. Some seeds of faith grow very, very slowly. But once they sprout, they bear much fruit.

Newton became an Anglican priest and he wrote a popular pamphlet renouncing the cruelty of the slave trade. He lived to see the English government outlaw slavery in Great Britain in 1807. But it isn't this pamphlet denouncing slavery for which he is remembered today. Reflecting back on that night when his ship was saved from certain ruin, he wrote the lyrics for one of the most beloved of all Christian hymns. And though many of us don't recognize the name John Newton we all know the words of his song:

"Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see."



FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

Have you ever had a frightening experience that helped you come to a deeper faith?

What's holding you back from a deeper commitment to Christ?

SEEDS OF HOPE - STORY 33
A TESTAMENT TO PERSEVERANCE



*"How blessed are the poor in spirit; the kingdom of God is theirs." **Matthew 5:3***

Did you know that the face on the penny is a face of perseverance? Just take a look at the life of Abraham Lincoln:

1816: Lincoln's family was forced out of their home. He had to go to work to support them.

1818: His mother died.

1831: He failed in business.

1832: Lincoln ran for State Legislature, and lost. That same year he lost his job and decided to go to law school. His application was rejected.

1833: He borrowed money from a friend to start a business. He went bankrupt. It took him 17 years to pay off that debt.

1834: Lincoln ran for State Legislature again. He lost, again.

1835: He was engaged to be married, but his fiancée died.

1836: Lincoln suffered a breakdown and was confined to bed for six months.

1838: He tried to become speaker of the State Legislature. And lost.

1843: He ran for Congress. And lost.

1846: Lincoln ran for Congress again, and won!

1848: He ran for reelection to Congress. And lost.

1854: He ran for U.S. Senate. And lost.

1856: He sought his party's vice presidential nomination. And lost.

1858: He ran again for U.S. Senate. And lost.

1860: Lincoln looked back on his track record and somehow decided to run for President of the United States. And he won! Lincoln went on to become one of the greatest presidents in history.

So, the next time you don't succeed in something you attempt, take a minute to look at a penny and remember the persistent man honored on this coin. Then, try again. Try again. Who knew a penny could make your life so much richer? It shouldn't surprise us, though. We always knew a penny made ...cents.



FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

How do you react to defeat? How does it affect your life?

Can you recall a time when a defeat later turned into a victory? Remember it.

SEEDS OF HOPE - STORY 34

EMBRACE SPIRITUAL TRAINING



"Train yourself for devotion, for while physical training is of limited value, devotion is valuable in every respect, since it holds a promise of life both for the present and for the future." 1 Timothy 4:7

In his book, *The Rhythm of Life*, Matthew Kelly states there is a definite difference between "trying" and "training". He points out that if most of us tried to run a marathon today, no matter how hard we tried, we would not be able to do it. Yet if we began training for this marathon by running one lap today, two laps tomorrow, three laps the next and building up gradually over a period of time, we would be able to run several miles. Then, if we kept training diligently, day after day, week after week, and month after month, we would eventually be able to run an entire marathon.

He goes on to say that the same can be said about our spiritual lives as well. Many of us try to live a good life, but simply trying won't make it happen. We also have to train for that. We have to train our bodies. We have to train our minds. And most of all, we have to train our souls every day. It is not enough to just go to church on Sunday or pray a minute a day. We have to train ourselves by sacrifice. We need to train ourselves by growing in prayer each day. We must train ourselves by stretching to give more, love more, and forgive more. That is how we actually can stretch ourselves to reach that new level of spiritual life.

Today, let's set for ourselves a great goal. May we begin to train to run the good race which ultimately leads to the Lord Himself.

I guarantee, it will be the race of your life.



FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

What type of spiritual training do you feel you are lacking in your life?

Think of two new training objectives for your spiritual life that you will begin tomorrow?

SEEDS OF HOPE - STORY 35

MAKE SUFFERING A BLESSING IN DISGUISE



MITCH ALBOM

*"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me." **Proverbs 25:32***

The best seller entitled *Tuesdays with Morrie* captured the minds and hearts of many people. It is an account written by award-winning sports writer Mitch Albom who was a student at Brandeis University some decades ago and a student of sociologist Morrie Schwartz. In his book Mitch Albom recounts how, as the old man was dying, he renewed his warm relationship with his revered teacher and mentor. This book is the vivid memory of the teacher's battle with Lou Gehrig's disease. The dying man, largely because of his life-affirming attitude toward his death-dealing illness, became somewhat of a guru, and was the subject of three Ted Koppel interviews on *Nightline*.

That was how Mitch first learned of Morrie's condition. Mitch Albom well fulfilled the age-old obligation to visit the sick. He called his weekly visits to his teacher his "last class" and the book he wrote "a term paper." The subject: The Meaning of Life.

As you read the book, you quickly realize that life itself is a class, and there is so much to learn every single day. If only we can adopt the great attitude of Morrie Schwartz which is to take everything that comes to us as an opportunity of learning and growing, then we will be a great example for many others.

For any of you who may be suffering, seize the moment as a blessing in disguise. Learn all you can and share all you can. In this way, you will find the meaning of life in the lesson of your life.

After all, you never know when Graduation Day may be...



FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

Who do you consider to be a teacher of yours in this "classroom of life"? Why?

Can you recall a time when a past suffering actually did turn into a blessing? Describe it.

SEEDS OF HOPE - STORY 36

OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE

"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God, my Savior, for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant."

Luke 1:46

In 1531, miracles began to happen for Juan Diego. Juan, a 57-year-old Aztec Indian, was walking to Mass at Tepeyac in Mexico City when Our Lady appeared to him and said, "Juanito, humblest of my children, know and understand that I am the ever Virgin Mary, Mother of the true God through whom all things live. It is my ardent desire that a church be erected here, so that in it I can show and bestow my love, compassion, help and protection to all who inhabit this land and to those others who love me, that they might call upon and confide in me. Go to the Bishop of Mexico to make known to him what I greatly desire."

Juan tried to convince Our Lady to ask someone else for he felt he was not worthy, but she chose Juan to carry out her mission. Juan went to see the Bishop three times. After the second visit, the Bishop informed Juan that in order for him to believe, he would need some sign from the heavenly Lady herself.

On that next day, Juan did not report back to Our Lady. His uncle was dying and Juan decided he must go to get a priest to hear his uncle's last confession. While on his way, Our Lady stopped Juan and told



him his uncle would be okay. Later, Juan learned that his uncle was miraculously cured at that very moment.

After Our Lady heard from Juan what the Bishop had requested, she told Juan to go to the top of the hill where he would find roses blooming. She told him to pick as many of the roses as he could and put them in his tilma (poncho). Now, this was in mid-December and also on a very rocky terrain where flowers had never been seen before. Our Lady touched the roses and then told Juan to take them to the Bishop.

On that third visit to the Bishop, when Juan opened his tilma and the roses came falling out, an imprint of Our Blessed Mother was left on his tilma. At the sight of this, the Bishop fell to his knees in awe. Ten days later, the first adobe church to be built on Tepeyac Hill was started. Within one year, one million Aztecs were converted to Christianity.

May we always remember this is just one of the miracles obtained from Our Lady of Guadalupe—the greatest saint of all.



FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

Why do you think Mary came to Juan Diego with her request instead of going directly to the Bishop?

How does Mary play a special role in the building up of the Church today?

SEEDS OF HOPE - STORY 37

WE ARE LIKE LAZARUS

*"Jesus called loudly, 'Lazarus come out!' The dead man came out bound hand and foot with the linen strips, his face wrapped in a cloth. 'Untie him,' Jesus told them. 'And let him go free.'" **John 11:43-44***



Once, when I was on a three-month sabbatical studying Sacred Scripture in the Holy Land, I resided in a religious home in Bethany, where Martha, Mary and Lazarus had lived. One day I walked to the site that tradition holds to be the ancient tomb of Lazarus—the very place where Jesus raised him from the dead.

The tomb is actually an old cave. Once you enter its small doorway, you climb down approximately 25 steep slippery stone steps that lead to a small room where, in ancient times, corpses were placed. As I sat there to pray, the lights suddenly went out and the room became pitch dark. Then, from the top of the stairs, I heard the door slam shut and become locked.

I was locked inside Lazarus' tomb!

I remember thinking, "Oh, God, I am going to die in Lazarus' tomb!" I prayed, "Please, Jesus, like you did for your friend Lazarus, get me out of here alive...and preferably not FOUR days from now!" When I finally did calm down, I assured myself the doorkeeper must be on a lunch break.

In the totally dark and cold cave, I began to identify, in a small way, with Lazarus. I recalled that the name Lazarus comes from Eleazar, meaning "God to the rescue." That seemed fitting. I also recalled that he lived in Bethany, which means "house of afflictions." Unfortunately, that

too seemed fitting as I began to fear the possible rats and bats of the cave.

And then I realized that there is a little Lazarus in me and, I suppose, in all of us. For in all of us there are hidden talents, secrets, dreams, and fears that we don't know how to express. These represent the beautiful and wonderful inner child, buried deep in each of us, waiting to be set free. Often this child is hidden from our consciousness, waiting to be given a voice—waiting to teach us how to be free, to be our best selves; free to give and to forgive, free to love and be loved, free to pray and play.

Jesus comes to us to set that inner part of us free. Jesus calls to us, "Lazarus, come out!" Jesus calls us out of the darkness of our doubt, discouragement, and despair, into the light of faith, hope and love. Jesus calls us out of living in a small world into a greater life of love.

Now, as for me being locked in the tomb, you might be interested in knowing what happened next. One hour later the doorkeeper returned after his lunch break and unlocked the door. As I bolted out of the cave, I stunned the crowd who thought Lazarus had risen again!

In the Bible, Jesus called, "Lazarus, come out!" Today, if you listen closely, He's calling you, too.



FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

What might your inner child or voice be trying to tell you?

What can you do to listen better to that inner child?

SEEDS OF HOPE - STORY 38

PROBLEMS TO PEARLS



“Bow humbly under God’s mighty hand, so that in due time he may lift you high. Cast all your cares on him because he cares for you.” 1 Peter 5:6-7

The life of a natural pearl begins inside an oyster shell. The oyster shell develops a problem. A grain of sand or a bit of a foreign substance floating around gets between the two shells of the oyster. The washing of the waves does not get rid of the irritating piece of sand or material, so the oyster covers up the intruder with more of its own being. Nacre (known as mother-of-pearl) is the substance making up the oyster’s shell, so the oyster uses layer upon layer of that mineral to cover up the problem material and make it smooth so that it won’t affect the oyster’s organs. That is how the beautiful iridescent pearl is formed.

Well, in studying the Bible, we see people who had serious problems and seemingly no way out of them. The ones held out for us to imitate gave themselves to God in complete surrender, and God saved them. First, though, they had to give of themselves, layer upon layer of themselves. Then, with God’s help, they became beautiful examples of wisdom and grace.

Life always has irritants; life always has problems. We give of ourselves as we try courageously to solve these problems. Sometimes we do not know how the problems

can be solved, or if we are dealing with them the right way. So, we bring them to the Lord. As we do this, our wisdom and grace grow. After a lifetime of giving ourselves to the Lord, after a lifetime of trying to protect our hearts from being torn apart by irritations and serious problems, we become more beautiful in many ways.

We can think of the nacre as the grace of God forming a protective coating around our souls. Each time we give of ourselves in a good way, each time we open ourselves to the working of the Holy Spirit in the Sacraments, grace (nacre) grows within us, layer upon layer, to produce a pearl of great beauty. After all, we are made in the image and likeness of God. So, let us look into the hidden wonder-filled presence of God in the human face of relationships, in the eyes of a child, in creation, in the priceless pearls around us. Let us know that our loving God is working within our souls, too, as we face irritations, sadness, setbacks and the problems of life. At the end of our journey, we become iridescent, reflective images of God, simply by facing what comes and embracing what comes with the smoothing grace of God.



FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

What irritants or even serious problems in your life cause you to reach out to God for help in protecting your heart from harm?

Have you known an older person who has grown strong and reflective of God due to suffering with grace?

SEEDS OF HOPE - STORY 39

HEALING THROUGH GOD'S WORD

*"Consecrate them by means of truth - Your word is truth." **John 17:17***



At a church meeting, the youth group minister wanted to help the teens understand the gift of God's Word found in Scripture. So, he asked the group to sit in a large circle surrounding a chair in the center. Then he handed out Bible verses to each person in the circle. The leader had planned to blindfold the person in the center, have them tell the group about a problem they were experiencing, and then ask those in the surrounding circle to read a Bible verse so that it would be like God answering the one in the center through Scripture.

At first, it did not go well. The kids felt that it was a silly idea, and they started laughing or talking about what was going on at school. God's voice was lost in the giggling.

Soon, though, a girl who was new to the group and had been sitting alone in the outer circle, volunteered to sit in the middle chair. Since no one knew her well, the group grew quieter as they blindfolded her, wondering how she would react. Then she said: "I cannot stand the way my life is going; I don't know if I even want to keep on living." Dead silence prevailed. Many in the circle just looked down, feeling embarrassed and not knowing what to do. But one teen, looking down, saw his Bible verse and read it: "Jesus said: 'I will always be with you.'"

The girl in the center said: "No one cares about me at all." But a girl in the outer circle read, "I have loved you with an everlasting love." This only frustrated the girl in the center who said "No one understands! My mother threw me out of the house today." A voice from the circle came back: "But Jesus says, 'I will never forsake you.'"

At that point the youth minister removed the girl's blindfold, and she asked, "Why doesn't God speak to me the way the kids here just did?" The youth minister went to her, tenderly put a Bible in her hands, and explained to her and to everyone there that because God's Word is inspired, we can be sure He is talking to each of us just the way the group did today using the Scripture passages they had. He put His Word right in the hands of those in the circle! His Word is in our hands through the Bible. We can always read His words and know that God is talking to us personally at that moment.



FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

Can you share a time when you went to the Sacred Scriptures to find a message from God that seemed to speak directly to your heart?

How does prayerful reflection on a particular Scripture passage help you to understand God's inspired message more deeply?

SEEDS OF HOPE - STORY 40

THE POWER OF BLOOD



“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin.” 1 John 1:7-8

Lisa’s five-year-old brother had earlier suffered from the same disease she had, but her brother had recovered miraculously. As a result of his fighting the sickness and surviving, his blood had developed antibodies to the disease, and these antibodies could help save his little sister.

The doctor came to the little boy and asked him if he would be willing to give his blood to his sister so that she could live. He only hesitated briefly, then took a deep breath and said: “Yes, I will give my blood to Lisa if it will make her better.”

So, the transfusion began. As it continued, the boy was lying in a bed next to his sister Lisa. When he saw her pale cheeks gain some color, he smiled as did everyone else in the room. Then his smile dissolved, and the color drained from his face. His voice quivered as he asked the doctor,

“When will I die? Will it be soon?”

Because he was so young, he did not understand what the transfusion meant. He thought he was in the process of giving ALL his blood to his sister. Yet, he had loved her so much he was willing to give his life for hers.

Jesus gave His Blood for us. He loved us so much he was willing to die for us so that we would not have to suffer the disease of sin. He freed us from sin, but he also brought us close to Him. Just as her brother’s blood was a powerful cure for Lisa and showed the bond between brother and sister in love, so Jesus’ Blood cleanses us of sin and makes us His brothers and sisters in love. Just as there was power in the antibodies of Lisa’s brother’s blood, there is power in the Blood of Christ. Our bond with Jesus makes it possible for us to pour out our hearts to Him, cast our cares on Him, and be sure He will free us from whatever keeps us from being fully alive in Him.



FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

What kind of love would allow you to give your life for someone else? Would it have to be someone who already loved you?

Do you realize on the deepest level of your being the kind of love Jesus had for you in giving you His life? Did he wait until you deserved such love?

ABOUT HEART TO HEART

MISSION

We are a Catholic media ministry sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ through inspirational content:

- ◇ to inspire the Christian faith of believers,
- ◇ to evangelize seekers,
- ◇ to foster growth in Catholic discipleship

FOUNDING

Founded by the late Fr. Jim Willig in 1993, our name was chosen because we believe the "Good News" spreads from one heart, on fire with the love of our Lord Jesus Christ, speaking to another heart.

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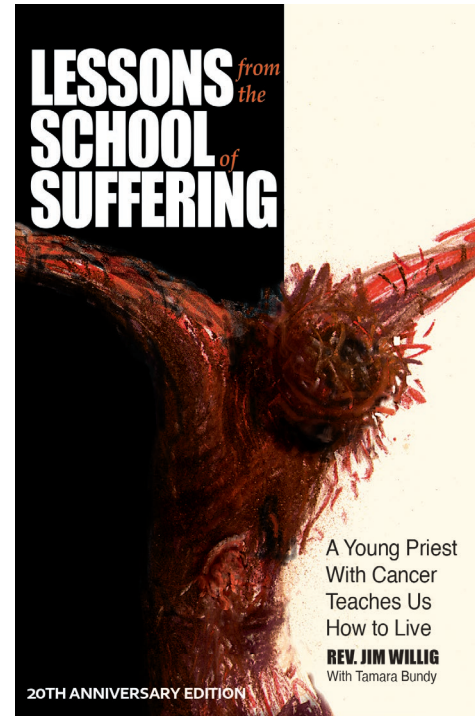
We believe and proclaim to the world that living the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the key to a just, fulfilling, and holy life.

- Mark 16:15 "Go into all the world and proclaim the Good News to all creation."
- John 10:10 "I have come that you may have life to the full."
- John 14:6 "I am the way, the truth, and the life."

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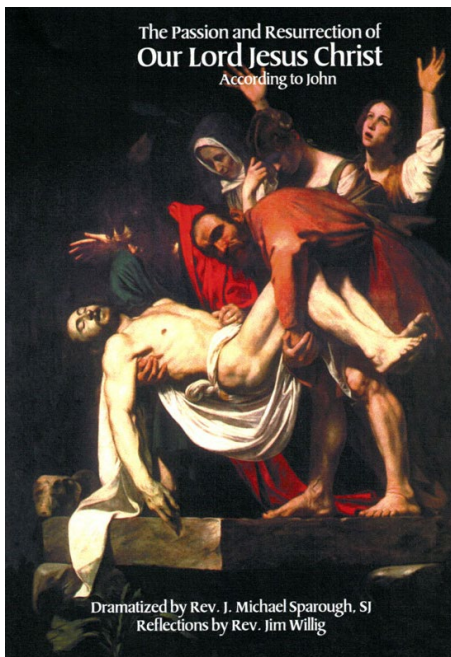


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