

SIX STEPS TO HOLINESS

by

Ronda Chervin, Ph.D.

(This booklet is a version of an on-line course taught on Educadium in 2009. Please feel free to make copies for any good purpose. I can be contacted for questions, advice, or prayer at chervinronda@gmail.com)

About the Author:

Ronda Chervin received a Ph.D. in Philosophy from Fordham University and an MA in Religious Studies from Notre Dame Apostolic Institute. She is a dedicated widow, mother, and grandmother.

Ronda converted to the Catholic Faith from a Jewish, though atheistic, background and has been a Professor of Philosophy and Theology at Loyola Marymount University, the Seminary of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, and Franciscan University of Steubenville. She is an international speaker and author of some fifty books about Catholic thought, practice and spirituality.)

Course Description:

Six Steps to Holiness is a 6 week interactive enrichment course designed to help Christians advance in their spirituality. The goal is that participants will attain a better grasp of some of the steps we need to take to be closer to God and more open to His love. It is hoped that each of us, including the teacher, will also grow, as a result, in love of neighbor in our thoughts, words and deeds

The six steps are as follows:

Step 1: Answering the universal call to holiness, and begging Jesus to make us more holy.

Step 2: Admitting the obstacles in our characters to being more loving.

Step 3: Understanding the nature of the virtues opposed to the obstacles in our characters.

Step 4: Asking forgiveness, whenever possible, of those we hurt because of our sins and defects.

Step 5: Forgiving all whose sins and defects hurt us.

Step 6: Committing to grow in holiness through the sacraments, individual and group prayer, spiritual reading and love of neighbor.

Each step takes a week. There will be readings divided into the days of the week. Participants may simply read and prayer on an individual basis, or write responses in a journal to share with others at weekly sessions.

INTRODUCTION

The title of my little course, *6 Steps to Holiness*, may strike you as both daunting and silly at the same time. “Are you kidding? It only takes 6 steps to be holy?”

An explanation of the origins of 6 Steps to Holiness will help you understand my goal. A few months ago I was invited to be on the board of directors of a Christian half-way house for recovering alcoholics and drug addicts. Since my Ph.D. is not in psychotherapy or counseling but in philosophy, I wondered why I was asked to serve. It seemed as if the head of the board was impressed by my list of publications. Most of these are in the area of spirituality. A recent book, *Taming the Lion Within: 5 Steps from Anger to Peace* was the basis of a course I offered to the men at the house.

To familiarize myself better with the problems of recovering addicts I attended an open 12 Step AA meeting mostly attended by men. I was flabbergasted by what I observed. Here were thirty or so “tough guys,” many arriving on motor-cycles, embracing each other with love and sharing with each other from the heart.

Afterwards I asked the pastor of my church, “why can’t our share groups in the parish have this degree of openness?” My pastor’s wry response was that people in 12 Step are desperate. Only desperate people are willing to be that open.

Maybe my pastor will prove right, but I want to take a chance that ardent Christians care so much about trying to do God’s will that we are “desperate” enough to help each other reach that goal.

You may hesitate. You may ask: “Certainly all Christians are called to try to do God’s will, but is that the same as holiness? Isn’t it presumptuous and proud to imagine that I can do miracles?”

Yet we read these words in sacred Scripture: “This is the will of God, your sanctification.” (1 Th. 4:3) And in the documents of the Second Vatican Council called by the Catholic Church we read that “All are called to holiness.” (Lumen Gentium #39)

Based on the commandments, “Love God with your whole heart, your whole mind, and your whole strength, and your neighbor as yourself,” (Luke 10:27), my definition of holiness is having nothing but love in one’s heart: grateful love of God, happy love, compassionate love, helping love, or sorrowing love. The opposite of love, emotions that need to be banished, would be hate, disgust, contempt, despair or indifference.

The 6 Steps I have devised roughly correspond to the famous 12 Steps of AA. They are designed for all Christians, but have special reference points for Catholic Christians.

The term 12 Step Program does not mean that in 12 weeks everyone has completed the program, but that the 12 steps are a life-long pursuit. In a similar way, 6 Steps to Holiness is not meant as a crash-course resulting in a group of canonizable saints, but rather the steps are a start for a life-long pursuit.

An important addition: I am a Doctor of Philosophy, not a medical doctor or a professional counselor. None of the advice given in writing or during phone calls is to be considered as anything other than my best opinion based on my knowledge of human nature and spiritual principles.

Here is the format we will use:

**Short Teaching
Questions for Personal Reflection and Group Sharing
Readings for each day of the week**

Step 1: Answering the universal call to holiness, and begging Jesus to make us more holy.

Day 1: Teaching:

Why would anyone want to be holy? If you saw the film *The Passion*, holiness certainly doesn't look inviting. If you read about the tortures of the martyrs throughout the century, holiness certainly doesn't seem inviting. If you think of the hermits in the desert, holiness certainly doesn't seem inviting. If you think of the sacrifices any Christian has to make to avoid breaking the commandments, holiness doesn't seem inviting.

But, then, think of the merciful love in the face of Jesus as He looked upon sinners. Don't you wish your face was full of such merciful love? Think of the forgiving love of the martyrs for their killers. Don't you wish you could forgive everyone who hurt you? Think of the loving compassion in the face of Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Don't you wish that you cared that much for the needy? Think of the purity revealed in Mary, Mother of Jesus, as it shines forth in the apparitions. Don't you wish that you were free of the consequences of lust? Think of the joy in total poverty of St. Francis of Assisi. Don't you wish you were rid of the burden of some of your unnecessary possessions?

The saints just described didn't get that way from infatuation with an impossible ideal. They fell in love with the Jesus who loved them first (1 John 4:19) Filled with His love they were willing to make every sacrifice to share it with others.

"But, I'm nothing like them," you may think ruefully. No, you're not. God doesn't call you to be holy in the same way someone else was. He wants to make you holy in terms of your own personality, character, and life-story. Did you know there were saints who were former criminals, battered daughters, alcoholics? Did you know there were saints who were cooks, farmers, hospital orderlies, financiers, and even kings and queens?

If you continue 6 Steps to Holiness you will be surprised at what you learn not only about the saints, but about what God wants for you.

How about your teacher Ronda's personal steps on the road to holiness? I was brought up as a total atheist. Even though most of my relatives came from Jewish backgrounds they had no use for any religion. I don't think I ever even heard of holiness until I started moving toward the Catholic Church when I was twenty-one. (See www.rondachervin.com E-books and leaflets Ronda's Conversion Story)

Everything labeled holy was a total surprise to me, from Jesus, Mary, the Holy Spirit, the Holy Angels, to the Holy Saints. Mostly I was enthralled with the quality of supernatural love displayed in the holy ones. The circle of Catholics who brought

me into the Church were all bent on holiness. In love with their virtues at first, very soon I started noticing small defects. I was relieved. If they weren't canonizable, I didn't have to worry so much about my own sins and failures. Years later I realized that most of them certainly were holy in spite of those defects and indeed over the years with grace many of them overcame those defects. They were surely holier than I am now.

When I was a newly baptized Catholic there entered into my life a mystic Jew, Charles Rich, who had become a Catholic at age thirty-three. I met him when he was almost sixty. At our first encounter, with intense fire in his eyes, he asked me this question: "Do you want to be a saint?" I didn't know what to say. Then, he added these astounding words: "I don't want to be friends with anyone who isn't going to heaven. Why bother? If you don't want to be a saint, I have no time for you!"

Charles Rich proceeded to have me read book after book about or by the saints. I got hooked. It was painful to have to see the gulf that separated them from myself, but at the same time they filled me with desire to be more like them. Didn't I also long to experience the love of God so deeply that it would overflow from my heart into my relationships with others? Of course I would be happy to have supernatural graces of healing and miracles. I did receive many graces. But more than these, I wished to reach the heroic virtue that the Church uses as its main criteria for holiness. [Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) #828]

Over time I found that the main obstacles to holiness in me were these: anger at everyone and everything that frustrated my will, hatred of sacrifice, and too much psychological insecurity to trust in the Lord. More about these struggles as we go through the steps.

Just the same, I expressed my love of holiness and the saints by giving talks about them and writing books describing them. (See www.rondachervin.com Books.) And all along, I never gave up begging Jesus to make me holy, not so much in the sense of canonizable, but in the sense mentioned in the introduction of having nothing but love in my heart.

Now at age seventy-one I am still able to commit sins of anger. I am still negligent in sacrificing for others. I still fall into doubt that God will save me from my psychological tangles. And, even though my family thinks I have made lots of progress toward my goal, I am still begging Jesus to make me holy, and hoping that 6 Steps to Holiness will help me as well as you.

Here is my prayer for us as we continue: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, guardian angel, Mary and all the saints, walk with us as we open ourselves to the graces of love you wish us to receive and pass on.

Questions for Personal Reflection and/or for Group Sharing

(If you are doing 6 Steps as a personal journey, you may want to keep a journal of responses to these questions and to anything you read. If you are doing the 6 Steps in a group, it would be best to jot down at least outlines of answers to these questions for sharing at your group session.)

- 1. Why are you taking this course?**
- 2. Who are saints or heroes you admire?**
- 3. Have you ever wanted to be holy? If so, describe the history of your attempts and failures.**
- 4. If you have never wanted to be holy, explain why.**
- 5. What is your prayer as you proceed on 6 Steps to Holiness?**

Days 2 – 6 Readings for Step 1: Answering the universal call to holiness, and begging Jesus to make us more holy.

Day 2: Readings from Scripture and Tradition

(As you read check those passages that stood out for you. If you are in a group you may want to tell the others taking this course why you resonate with a certain reading during your group session.)

(Note that the word holy is used in the Old Testament primarily to describe God, the temple, and other consecrated objects, not human beings. In the New Testament there are more passages about the Holy Spirit as the source of holiness and about the personal holiness of saintly Christians.)

**As you read these passages try putting your own name into it as in the first one:
“Ronda, you shall be holy, for I am holy.”**

“You shall be holy, for I am holy” (Leviticus 11:45)

**“You shall remember and do all my commandments, and be holy to your God.”
(Numbers 15:40)**

“For you are a people holy to the Lord your God; the Lord our God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession.” (Deuteronomy 7:6)

“Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matthew 5:48)

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.” (Ephesians 1: 3-4)

“(A bishop must be) hospitable, a lover of goodness, master of himself, upright, holy and self-controlled.(Titus 1:8)

“But as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in your conduct.” (1 Peter 1:15)

“All Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to this perfection of charity. In order to reach the perfection the faithful should use the strength dealt out to them by Christ’s gift, so that...doing the will of the Father in everything, they may wholeheartedly devote themselves to the glory of God and to the service of their neighbor. Thus the holiness of the People of God will grow in fruitful abundance, as is clearly shown in the history of the Church through the lives of so many saints.” (Vatican II Lumen Gentium: #40, 2)

“From the Church (the Christian) learns the example of holiness and recognizes its model and source in the all-holy Virgin Mary; he discerns it in the authentic witness of those who live it; he discovers it in the spiritual tradition and long history of the saints who have gone before him and whom the liturgy celebrates...” (Catechism of the Catholic Church: #2030)

Day 3

Jesus to His People (from *The Spiritual Transition* – a set of locutions received by a Lutheran woman. I am inserting them here in 6 Steps to Holiness because I think they provide refreshing new images of our goal. If you doubt that there is any supernatural origin to the messages, don’t go away. You can skip ahead or read them just as ideas that could be of help in themselves.)

“My people, My children, one of the things that must change is the state of consciousness in the mind of humanity. How often have I been with you and you have not seen Me? How often have you cried and didn’t ask for help? Your state of consciousness is not centered on God... What did I teach you when I was there (on earth)? I taught you about love. What have I taught you since then? I have taught you about love... Is it so impossible that the God who made you, who loves you, doesn’t want to be with you, close to you; to see you return to a state of oneness?”...

“When I was with you, I could feel My clothes on My body, I could taste, see and hear. The senses are means of gathering information...in other words, the senses are not an end to themselves. For the humans to be more effective during their lives they must be aware of the senses but not consumed by them. When they are consumed they can not love as I love. So we must change their consciousness. Love, love, love: not in thought or in emotion but in perfection; in totality. This is a type of consciousness that only comes from God.”

Mother Mary to us:

“We embark on a journey to experience many things together...It is time for the mind of the humans to open. It is time for our light to shine in their hearts once again. It is our intention that this work be like sowing flowers in the garden of men. This work in consciousness must first begin with an understanding of compassion. Do you know that compassion is a powerful flow of love? Do you know that love comes through the Father and that it can come through you?...”

“Many and most of God’s children have forgotten how to tend their garden. Now we remind you of the basics. Every human has been given the tools he needs to grow in his garden and each person comes to grow their own crop. Not all will grow the same but all will use the same tools...”

“Think of it this way: What do you want to grow in your garden? What would you like to see on this planet? What do you hold and nurture in your heart to be most dear? In this way each one will grow his crop and each crop will be useful to the whole. No man is truly separate from another...

“So, by analogy, if you want to grow roses in your garden you have been given the gift of joy to like such a thing and you delight in this and give thanks to God. Next to you, another has been given the gift to plant corn and likewise he is delighted and gives thanks to God. That is what is in his heart. So both profit by sharing their gifts; their light. The corn feeds; the rose provides beauty. Both nourish the gifts of the other.

“Compassion protects them from being separated. Compassion yields understanding. Compassion is what allows you to exist with differences, corn being different from roses.

“So, what do you need? You need to know your heart’s desire; the desire that comes from God in you as a part of His image. It gives you your dimension. Then you need the opportunity and that is now – your lifetime on this planet. Here is your opportunity. You could also think of it as a place to use your gift.

“Then you need joy; joy of service, joy of participation. This tills the earth for the seed to be put in.. Have you not noticed that when you are joyful about God’s love manual labor feels like nothing? It is when you forget God and the light He has put in you, when you forget that he never leaves you that work becomes a burden.

“So, joy, dear ones. Feel the joy and as my Son said, the yoke will be light... Think of compassion like you think of light. When the sun is up, light goes to everything. It touches all things. Compassion flows like this, too. It is a form of love so that you don’t even have to be in the same place to feel the same compassion because it connects you all together just like the light.

“Don’t assume that your heart’s desire sent by God is so insignificant. All plants have their place. All people have their purpose. If you want to prune your garden to weed out the darkness, use what we have told you: compassion and light. These powers of God can not be defeated. They never have! ...

“Compassion has an immense amount of power in the hands of those who have free will. What more could God delight in than when compassion is given willingly? You must feel this in yourself before the words will carry this energy. God’s light will take care of the rest to send light to other hearts.

Ponder any images in these readings that speak to your heart Note them in your journal if you are keeping one. If you are in a group You may want to share your response at your meeting.

Day 4

More from The Spiritual Transition

Jesus to His People:

“Too often people will see the horror around them and assume they can not contribute to it either for good or bad, but this is impossible, for you are all one. You will affect either in good or bad ways what you see in the world.

“Have we not said that prayer works. Why does it work? Because you allow your light to combine with mine and thereby love flows. Compassion flows and you affect what you see. This is what I want for you, little ones. I want you to be good creators. Create joy, create light and bring Me with you.

“As fish are caught up in a net, I have you in the net and I use those willing to be the knots in the string that holds the net together. Now imagine that at each knot there is a person and the string that unites them to the next knot or person is light, compassion; the desire for God’s plan. All around the globe there is a net, a net of light. Not all knots are the same but the light is the same; the light that comes from Source; from God. So you are protected and loved ...

“Let’s talk a little bit about light... You might think of consciousness as the light in your mind. For a long time now, humans have craved, needed and wanted Me to shine light into their minds, as if they didn’t have anything to do with this exchange. They merely waited. They didn’t progress into understanding how I can exist within them and they in Me.

“So now is the time for growth; a growth of the mind in sharing light not just being given light. Do I not say that those who have will be given to? In order to receive, you must give. So let us first start practicing with giving.

“The first goal of this practice is that you become aware of the light; aware of the imago Dei that is already in your mind. The second goal once you are aware of this, is to learn to greet Me with it and greet others with it. This will facilitate compassion.

“So when you shake someone’s hand, how do you do it? They reach out; you reach out. You meet equally between you. Greet Me, reach out to Me with the light inside of you. Sharing of light is important in opening you up to greater works for which you were intended. Rise above your egoistic thoughts and be present with My light in you...The light that comes from the mind in the instance of theology works the most powerfully when directed through the heart. We will build from this place.”

Mother Mary to us:

You have a wall across your path and because of the weariness you feel from all that is occurring in your lives personally and in the world, instead of examining the wall, you are beating your head against the wall thinking by sheer luck it will fall ...

“It is important that you run your hands across the wall, feel its texture, how rough, how hard, but impassive it feels. See how it was made of individual bricks. What do you think we want you to do with this wall? Do you think you are supposed to go around it? Do you think you are supposed to go over it? Do you think you are supposed to go through it? ...

“Now let me make a distinction for the readers. This is important in calling forth new thought processes. Some obstacles you just step over, like house cleaning. You just do it. No worries, problem solved. This is not the kind of obstacle that you fear, but there is a spiritual obstacle and for ages humans have not gotten past it...

“This is your solution. If your consciousness is open and aligned to the Christ consciousness, then there was never a wall in the first place...

(The walls are) illusions to distract you from truth... the spark of God (you). It is when you acknowledge and allow this spark to be fully present in you that the wall will disappear. The ego façade will crumble. You must learn to silence this inner chattering. It is a matter of trust for you.”

Jesus to His People:

“I want you to navigate the darkness within you. You will not be doing this alone. For the amount of time that human beings have been in total darkness, the healing must occur by reversing the pain that was given in that first place. A little bit like turning a balloon inside out.

“This is serious work for a human. It is one undertaken only by those who truly wish to be at peace with the God that loves them. How long do you wish to hide within a balloon that’s suffocating you? You don’t have much air left to breathe in the world as you know it. The cocoon of chaos that has enveloped you; that you have allowed to persist, must be cracked. It must be flooded with new air; with new space, and with the truth about the world around you.

“It’s scary to look at who you are, to look at what you have done, but if you make a mistake in a paper do you leave it or do you go back and correct it? You can put off this healing for only so long. I want you to face this and I want you to know that I am with you. We are all with you. Don’t be afraid. Don’t fidget.

“Where in the past we might have blindfolded you to carry you through certain places because there are things the humans have not the ability to handle, here is a truth you can handle because we are with you and are your family and it is the way home. When the blindfold is removed, you can help us remove the darkness in your life and the others will see what you have done as an example and will feel brave to do it themselves.”

What came to you from the Holy Spirit as you read the passages for today? Do you wish to write in your journal and share with your group if you are in one?

Day 5

(More from the Spiritual Transition)

Jesus to His People:

“In each of your hearts there is a place where you must learn to traverse. It is the inner pathway to God. Here even the blackest of black can not ultimately blind you. Here the white of whites cannot unbalance you. When you are (in) God nothing can be an extreme except for His unconditional love, so not one thing can be in any imbalance.

“Don’t you realize there is nowhere that you can be without us. We are one. Release your concept of separateness. You are never separated from the love of God, not when you carry him within you.

“Believe in the ecstatic union and sacred communion of God. You don’t have terms for this yet, but in time as more of you transition, new words will be created, others adopted, as they are sent to you in a language that better expresses the Divine oneness of which you were created.

Mother Mary to us:

“Allow us to be so close that you can feel our touch. Allow us to be so close that you can not forego the thing that makes you reach for us. What we ask of you is part of your path; a part of why you are here and that is all it needs to be.

“Come out! Come out!

“We want your soul to awaken on a level where you totally surrender to what Jesus is offering you.

“We have taught the mystics in the past how to walk in both worlds, but now we are merging these worlds so you must be more integrated. You are not alone in these

experiences. You are not alone in your yearning. We just are leading you into a new paradigm for which new understandings must be had.”

Did you feel called to respond in your mind, heart and soul to any of these descriptions of the spiritual life? Anything to put in your journal or to share with the group?

Day 6: Quotations from the saints and other spiritual writers:

“The honors of this world, what are they but puff, and emptiness and peril of falling?” St. Augustine

Do you ever try for honors, fame and fortune in place of goodness?

“If you embrace all things in life as coming from the hands of God, and even embrace death to fulfill his holy, will, assuredly you will die a saint.” St. Alphonsus Liguori

Do you see life as coming to you from the hands of God? If so, give examples. If not, explain why not?

(from Ronda Chervin’s Journal Face to Face) There is a saying of St. Bernard, repeated by other saints: Love is not loved. Pondering this thought led me to write these words in my spiritual journal).

“I could produce many reasons why I don’t love Love enough:

- is it easier for me to love You as truth
because truth is strong and love is vulnerable?
- is it easier for me to love You as beauty
because beauty is sublime and love is ridiculous?
- is it easier for me to love You as mercy
because mercy is balm and love is strenuous?

When I look into your tragic eyes, my Jesus, I think the reason might be deeper still. Terror of surrender to your Divine heart whose beat is so loud I could no longer hear my own? Fear that after diving into the waves you might cast me out on the shore even more helpless to survive?

Or, still more simply, that I could refuse You nothing, no matter how painful, if I was close enough to know You wanted it!

I hear you telling me that I cannot experience the fullness of Your love for me if I am afraid to come closer. ‘Perfect love casts out fear.’ Surrender!

Yet a perfect unison of heartbeat with Jesus would render me more like You, Mother Mary. She certainly She certainly did not emerge from her surrender to the Holy Spirit as a dead fish. No! Rather as Queen of Apostles!” (from Face to Face: the Journals of Ronda Chervin. See www.rondachervin.com free e-books).

Do you put love of God and neighbor first all the time? If not, what do you often prefer to love?

If you are in a group to prepare for the weekly session go back to answers you may have given to these questions given under Day 1:

- 1. Why are you taking this course?**
- 2. Who are saints or heroes you admire?**
- 3. Have you ever wanted to be holy? If so, describe the history of your attempts and failures.**
- 4. If you have never wanted to be holy, explain why.**
- 5. What is your prayer as you proceed on 6 Steps to Holiness?**

Also think about what stood out for you from the readings of Days 2-6 and your answers to the questions. You can also plan to ask anything you might wish of the teacher and the other students who will be at the Forum tomorrow.

Group Session on Step 1

(Include introductions of each participant, answers to sharing questions from Day 1 above, and what stood out from readings, free questions. End with requests for prayers.)

Step 2: Admitting the Obstacles in our Characters to being more Loving.

Day 1: Teaching

Sometimes we think of others and even ourselves as snake pits of vices. Let us avoid such a depressing viewpoint and think instead that all of us have obstacles in our characters to being more loving. If we are really serious about seeking holiness, of course, we have to allow God to help us with such faults and defects.

We can start with characteristics that lead to sins. Considering the so-called seven deadly sins can quickly tweak our consciences: greed, pride, lust, gluttony (over-eating) envy, anger and sloth (laziness).

Let us look at each of these as obstacles to being loving. (I am using the word “we” throughout even though I am only guilty myself of half of these, just so you don’t feel too depressed thinking you might be the only one with a particular sin.)

Greed:

Those of us who are consumed with desire for wealth typically have little time to spend with family and friends. Our minds usually seethe with schemes for making or getting more money and what we can buy with it. Even when we have more than the necessities of life we feel poor and deprived if we don’t have everything we want or that others have. If we are greedy but really poor, we may blame God and try to punish Him by bad behavior. Often we will be unjust to others not just by callous harmful acts but also by indifference.

Pride:

In our society we use the word pride often in a positive way. We feel we should be proud of our own talents and accomplishments and those of our family members. The word pride in Christian moral theology has a somewhat different meaning. The proud are those who fail to recognize that their talents are gifts of God and their accomplishments come with the help of God. Such pride is contrary to the loving gratitude we owe our creator. Proud people can be boastful or arrogant and often judging of others as lower because less talented or accomplished. These characteristics are unloving because they are demeaning to the less fortunate. A especially difficult type of pride to eradicate is self-righteousness. It involves being right and then hurling denunciations at those who are in the wrong. It is contrary to loving compassion and mercifulness.

Lust:

Lust is a favorite vice in our contemporary world. Lust means using others for our sexual pleasure. Pleasure in sex within married love is a good thing. But lust is defined as seeking pleasure in an unloving way because it treats another as a mere source of pleasure with no interest in his or her whole personhood. For example, even in marriage it is lustful if a husband insists on sex immediately after the birth of a child when his wife is still in pain. Outside of marriage, sometimes a lustful man or woman doesn't even care to learn the name of the partner. When we love God we want to use the sexual powers He has given us as He directs through Scripture and Church teaching. Lust is also unloving in having little concern about such consequences to the other such as sexually transmitted disease or an unwanted pregnancy. Surely the baby so often aborted is hardly being treated with love.

Gluttony:

Gluttony is not a matter of enjoying good and delicious food. Food is a gift of God to be grateful for. Gluttony is a sin because the desire for this pleasure and comfort overrides every other value. Eating should lead to health and strength, but when we are addicted to over-eating we care not if we destroy our health or if we become too sluggish from eating too much to accomplish our duties. In this way gluttony puts love of self above love of serving God and others.

Envy:

A loving Christian ought to be delighted by the beauty, intelligence and skills of others. Hating those more gifted in one or another sphere is evil. An opposite to envy would be loving appreciation combined with trust that God will use whatever gifts He has given me to build his kingdom. Envy is contrary to love of God because it entails anger at God for not giving me as much of some quality as others have. The greatest gift is love and that is available to any of us even if we are not beautiful, not unusually bright, or skillful.

Anger:

Angry people experience above average displeasure whenever we are frustrated or hurt. The feeling of anger is not a sin. It is what we do with it that becomes sinful as when we become harsh, uncontrolled, vengeful and non-forgiving. Hot anger involves yelling, hitting, and worse violence. Cold anger is often expressed in the form of pouting, resentment and non-forgiveness over long periods of time. Our lives are filled with inevitable frustrations of life. In the last analysis excessive blame of others tells God we reject the suffering of having to live in a fallen world and His heaven isn't enough of a compensation for us. We should try to change unjust circumstances, however, we who love God, accept what we cannot change with

resignation. We try to excuse the faults of others out of compassion for their weaknesses.

Sloth:

Laziness can seem like a very minor fault. Consider, however, the importance of hard work both for earning a living and in serving family, friends and the church. Typically a lazy person makes excuses to do the least possible. This means either that others have to do our work or that necessary tasks don't get done at all. A loving person is cooperative, not lazy. Being lazy is contrary to love of God in this sense: sloth says that I don't have to use the strength and skills that God gave me for His purposes. I can just "do my own thing," instead.

Of the seven deadly sins, my worst has been anger. From a little child I would throw fits whenever anything stood in my way. It was only in 1995 that I finally started improving. This was due to a psychological program called Recovery, Inc. for Will-Training. Combined with professional counseling I now am peaceful most of the time and only angry "when all my buttons are pushed" at once. Essentially I had to realize that even though I was such a devout Christian, my anger came from a self-centered approach to life. Somehow I never accepted the idea that God was the center of reality and I had to serve Him and others no matter what the cost. Instead I wanted to be the heroine of life with everyone else making each of my days come out well.

Questions to Prepare for Journal and/or Group Sharing

1. Check those of the seven deadly sins that you are most prone to commit.
2. Pick out one of them and prepare to share in the group how you have fallen into this sin and why it leads to unloving thoughts, words and deeds.
3. If you have none of the seven deadly sins, what would you say is your other greatest obstacle to having nothing but love in your life such as fear, despair, coldness, drunkenness, or criticalness? If you are not sure ask those closest to you and you may be surprised about how quickly they will agree on what your obstacle is!

An important note:

In books of mine, such as *Living in Love: About Christian Ethics*, I write about major sins of our times such as abortion, illegitimate types of violence in war, exploitation of workers, sex outside of marriage of a woman and a man, euthanasia, masturbation, the occult, and contraception. Here in this course I will sometimes mention such sins, but not focus on them. This is not because they aren't important, but because I am assuming that the participants have confessed such sins, realizing the Jesus is eager to forgive sins and wants to fill you with his loving compassion for

your falls. But He cannot do this if you are in denial and living in a habitual state of unconfessed sin. For example, if you continue to exploit workers by way of severely unjust policies. If you have not confessed such sins or think that they are not sins but acceptable choices, you should probably postpone working on this course until you have resolved these issues. Because of weakness every one of us commits sins, but we can't begin to grow in holiness if we insist that the Church's teachings about sin are wrong. You can study my way of explaining why these teachings are the Lord's will by reading *Living in Love* on my web site www.rondachervin.com under free e-books and then ask me as many questions as you like on my e-mail chervinronda@gmail.com. They are also well-explained online in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. If this statement makes you angry, please bring the matter to prayer. If this paragraph does not apply to you praise the Lord for liberating you from such temptations.

Day 2-6 Readings on Step 2: Admitting the obstacles in our characters to being more loving.

Day 2 from Scripture and Tradition

As you read check any of these Scripture that challenge you? You may put them in your journal and/or share with group.

“It is better to give to the poor than to store up gold.” (Tobit 12:9)

“He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city.” (Proverbs 16:32)

“Slothfulness casts into a deep sleep” (Proverbs 19:15)

“Learn of Me, because I am meek and humble of heart and you will find rest for your souls.” (Matthew 11:29)

“Out of the heart of man come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.” (Mark 7: 21-22)

“Let us then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.” (Romans 13:12-14)

“Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, and make holiness perfect in the fear of God.” (2 Corinthians 7:1)

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from immorality; that each one of you know how to take a wife for himself in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like heathen who do not know God.” “1 Thessalonians 4:3)

“For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world passes away, and the lust of it, but he who does the will of God abides forever.” (1 John 16-17)

Day 3 Readings

(The readings from Day 3-6 come from a series I wrote in 2007-2008 called “Give Us a Break.” The whole series can be read at www.rondachervin.com under Books, free e-books)

(An Aspect of Pride):

Acceptance of Limitations vs. Perfectionism

“I’m a failure.” How often do we hear these words from the mouths of people who are doing okay, but want to attain greater heights of success? An average passing student feels like a failure. A worker earning enough for basic needs can feel like a failure for not having desired luxuries. Parents sometimes feel like failures if their children aren’t exceptional in worldly terms. A dinner party is deemed a failure because of one missing ingredient in the main dish.

Perfectionism is a good word for the way some of us build up expectations for ourselves and others that are almost impossible to attain. Some counselors help their clients to lower their expectations so they can accept more realistic levels of success. After all, in baseball if a player got a base-hit even half of the time, he would have a .500 batting average. It is never achieved! So being an average student, worker, or parent should not lead to a sense of overwhelming failure, but a satisfying sense of accomplishment.

In Christian spirituality, there is an intriguing expression: humility of reality. What it means is not mediocrity, but acceptance of limitations. The goal of our lives should be growth in love, which is limitless, given God’s grace. All other goals need to be subordinate to that one. It is part of trying to be loving to go to school to gain knowledge of useful subjects, but that does not require an “A” average. It is part of trying to be loving to earn money to support oneself and/or your family, but that does not require becoming rich. It is loving to bring up your children well, but that does not mean that they will become important in the world. It is loving to share specially cooked food with family and friends, but that doesn’t require a perfect dinner. An astonishing true story tells of a Hollywood camera

crew going of the studio in Los Angeles to interview the people who live on the streets. They came upon a battered old man curled up on the pavement. When they questioned him about how he had arrived at this point in his life, he sang out these words: “His blood never failed me.” They were so amazed at such an answer that they made the taped sung words into a repeated saying with music in the background and it became a best-seller!

Here is another bad side of perfectionism. Because we know we can’t do something perfectly or even very well, we fail to even try. Some couples live together in immoral sex for years for fear their marriage would not be ideal. G. K. Chesterton taught “if anything is worth doing it is worth doing badly.” Another useful adage is “the perfect is the enemy of the good.” Instead of doing good things fairly well, in some areas we do nothing, since we can’t do it perfectly!

Creator God, You willed to bring small beings into the world with lesser intelligence and ability than You have. You want us to prepare for an eternity of love by valuing service above fame and/or fortune. Help us to be able to laugh at the unrealistic standards of the world and rejoice, instead, in little deeds of love accomplished with Your help.

Can you detect perfectionism in your estimates of failure about any parts of your life? How would a greater emphasis on the Christian value of love above worldly success change your attitude toward yourself and others? Think about what you need to put in your journal and/or to share with your group.

Here is a passage about perfectionism from the writings of Dr. Abraham Low, the psychiatrist who founded Recovery, Inc. for anger, fear and depression – a group I have belonged to for 15 years.

“You want to be superior. This means you depend on others to either recognize you, to give you credit as being not just average, to give you the honor of constantly catering to you, perhaps do you the favor of constantly flattering you. And if you don't get credit and if you don't get honor and if you don't get flattery, then you become tense, because you expect it and you don't get it. And therefore vanity and the striving for perfection is harmful ... Being vain you don't get people to give you the due credit and flattery and honor, therefore you become tense. (from *Manage your Fears; Manage Your Anger*)

Day 4: Readings

(Ideas that can be related to Lust and Gluttony from “Give us a Break!”)

Balanced vs. Addictive

“But I will not be enslaved to anything.” (1 Corinthians 6: 12)

In times past the word “addict” was used exclusively for enslavement to illegal drugs. Nowadays the concept of addiction has been broadened to include a spectrum including alcoholism, nicotine addiction, workaholism, porn, gambling, over-eating, sexaholism, shopping addiction, co-dependency, and computer game mania. The dictionary definition of addiction corresponds to this range: to devote or to surrender oneself to something habitually or obsessively. By contrast, a balanced person enjoys whatever pleasures life affords, within moral boundaries; not to an extreme or in such a way as to hurt self or others.

The word “surrender” distinguishes addictive enslavement from simple interest or enjoyment. We do not consider ourselves or others to be addicts because we enjoy a drink every day, smoke a few cigarettes, eat with greater gusto than others, work hard, play cards, enjoy sexual pleasure in a moral manner, or play games on the computer an hour a day.

Many psychologists point to one single factor underlying all addictions: pain in the heart so hard to bear that we flee, trying to find solace in the pleasurable or numbing effects of the addiction. How so? Drugs and drink are sought by many for a state of relative oblivion. Over-eating gives a physical sensation of abundant well-being, Nicotine and casual compulsive sex provide pleasure and also a momentary release from tension. The risks of gambling can be an escape into fantasies of wealth without the usual hum-drum work required to earn money. Besides the enjoyment of each purchase, acquiring many possessions gives an illusion of success. Games can distract the mind from dealing with the causes of suffering. Filling every waking moment with work leaves no time to go under because of the tragedies of life.

Trying to achieve balance through will-power can be surprisingly ineffective when it comes to obsessive habits. Some Christian therapists try to bring addicts back to the original pain from which they are fleeing. They help us to find Jesus right in the midst of that wound. Twelve step programs help addicts to surrender their enslavements to God. Through deep prayer we can then cling to the love of God precisely when the temptation of the addiction seems overwhelming. Even a few moments of postponement of the habitual addiction can be the first step in a growing ability to make balanced choices.

Father God, see me, your child, a slave to addiction. Hold me close. Pour Your love into my wounds. As I reach out to grasp the pseudo-salvation of my preferred addictions, pry open my fingers, and give me trust that you will fill my hands with what is truly good for me.

Do you rate any of your behavior as manifesting addiction? If so, did any of the ideas in this reading seem worth pursuing? Jot down insights in your journal. Are you willing to share about these sometimes embarrassing addictions with the group for the sake of their prayers and advice?

(Ideas about Envy)

Self-Confidence vs. Envy

“Let us have no...envy of one another.” (Galatians 5: 26)

Envy is one of the seven deadly sins. Why? Think, for a minute, about the feeling of envy. It is a kind of leaden weight of self-pity mingled, usually, with animosity toward the envied one. Another person has qualities I wish I had: beauty, brilliance, physical strength and agility, fame, fortune, or power. By contrast I may feel ugly, stupid, physically weak, ordinary, poor, or powerless in the game of life.

Even more deeply, an envious person feels unlovable because she or he can't match up to those glittering qualities. A person we wish loved us more seems to prefer another with a surplus of those attractive features. Naturally, the envious person feels inferior. There may also be anger at God. Why couldn't You have given me more of those gifts? It's not fair!

You might think that those who have many gifts feel self-confident. Rarely is that the case. The one who comes in second in the beauty contest can feel envious. The smart kid with IQ ten points lower than his brother can feel inferior. One who doesn't quite make the team in spite of ability and practice can feel finished. A famous person can notice his or her ratings dwindling. A person who made millions on the stock market can worry about a depression. The all powerful manager can be envious of a younger associate climbing up the ladder right behind.

Who have you been most envious of among those in your family, school, work, or public figures?

If envy is the wrong response, what might be the right Christian way to think about oneself? Pride in one's gifts and accomplishments is not Christian. We should realize that life itself and every talent, and even the energy for working hard for goals, is a gift from God. True, the popularity and success that can come from our talents and efforts can be good if used to build the kingdom of love. We can be grateful for them. But those qualities others envy are often negative if used for vanity, luxurious living, or the enjoyment of power. Most of the saints were not beautiful, brilliant, strong, famous, rich or powerful in their life-times. Compare Hitler, at the zenith of his power, to Jesus on the cross! Or the attractiveness of Marilyn Monroe to that of Mother Teresa of Calcutta!

The right kind of self-confidence could be expressed in this prayer: “Father, God, You created me to use my gifts in loving service. I am content with the way I look even if I am not beautiful by media standards, for you can use that to make me approachable. I am content with the mind you gave me since knowing You is the summit of all wisdom. I am thankful for everything my body can do even if it is

much less than that of an athlete. Even if You allowed me to suffer with disabilities, my heart is not disabled, but able to love as much as any more agile person can. If I am not famous, I am known to You, whose “eye is on the sparrow.” If I am not rich or powerful, if I follow You, I will one day have all of heaven and the power of immortality in eternal life. With confidence in Your personal love for me, and Your promises, I can admire the gifts others have in profusion. I can pray that those beneficiaries of natural gifts don’t lose the greater supernatural gifts of faith, hope and love.

Did any ideas about envy in this reading help you? Any insights for your journal and/or group sharing?

Day 5: Readings

(Ideas related to Anger)

Patient vs. Impatient

“Bring forth fruit with patience.”(Luke 8:15)

“I hate to wait” could be a motto of many of us. The virtue of patience and the flaw of impatience have to do with our relationship to time. In God’s eternal “now” all is simultaneous; that is, there is no waiting because all is there in one timeless present. We find this hard, if not impossible to understand, because we live in time.

We are human creatures, made at a specific moment in history by our God. We live in time, moment by moment moving from past, to present, to future. That often means waiting for what we want. Only if we reach heaven will there be no waiting.

In our broken, sinful, world we often have to wait because of the inefficiency, disorderliness, and sins of others. “They said that they would send the package Fed Ex One Day on Monday. Now it’s Thursday!” “The kids were supposed to clean their rooms before Grandpa came; now he’s at the airport and they’ll never get back from the baseball field in time to fix the place up.” “You said you were going to stop eating sweets, so why are you hiding bags of candy in the basement?”

The impatient person is either irritated or resentful of delays. The patient person realizes that having to wait is often inevitable. Getting what you want is rarely immediate. If others are going to improve, it will not likely be quickly. Patient people endure the discomfort of delay, especially about relatively trivial matters, offering up the annoyance in words such as these: “Jesus, you bore much more horrible crosses than mine. I offer you this little one that you may send down graces on _____.” (name of person you wish to receive graces.)

If you look at the bottom line, impatience is a kind of rebellion against being a creature living in time instead of a God who is timeless. Why couldn’t God have at

least made us angels who can fly about quicker than the speed of light? It is as if a pet cat or dog would be irritated and resentful because he or she can't talk in human language.

Prayer: Father God, how patient You are with the whole human race. If you were as impatient as we are You probably would have let Noah's ark and its cargo capsize in shipwreck. As we beg you to be patient with us struggling so slowly with our faults, give us patience with all the crosses, small and large, we have to endure on our journey, hopefully to a better place!

What are you most impatient about in your life? When have you gotten the grace to be patient in spite of frustration? Insights for journal and/or group sharing?

(Ideas about Sloth)

Energetic vs. Lazy:

“Whatever you do, work at it with your whole being. Do it for the Lord rather than for men, since you know full well you will receive an inheritance from Him as your reward.” (Colossians 3: 17)

In our culture, playing games often takes precedence over necessary good things that help others. We are full of excuses for letting others carry our burdens.

An energetic person, by contrast, is eager to contribute to all good efforts. Sometimes lazy people excuse themselves by talking about the tense compulsive habits of what are called workaholics. Instead we should be asking the Holy Spirit to show us what is really needed and to give us the grace to overcome the desire to indulge only in easy pleasurable activities.

You might make a list of obligatory things for each day and good for each day. Then see where you can put in times for relaxation and recreation.

Do you think of yourself as a lazy person? If so, what do you think you should do to change? Are you willing to ask for advice from your group?

Day 6: Readings from the Saints and other Spiritual Writers

About Pride:

“A humble man is never hurried, hasty or perturbed, never has any hot or flitting thoughts, but at all times remains calm. Nothing can ever surprise, disturb or

dismay him, for he suffers neither fear nor change in tribulations...all his joy and gladness are in what is pleasing to the Lord.” St. Isaak of Syria.

“The gate of Heaven is very low; only the humble can enter it.” St. Elizabeth Seton

“Above all let us try to lay aside our own ego, for this is what ruins everything.”
Venerable Thecla Merlo.

“Prayer, which is the acknowledgement of a poverty which expects everything from God, is the most beautiful expression of humility. God wills that man, who is a mere creature, and moreover a fallen creature, should confess his own insufficiency and implore aid from on high.” James Cardinal Gibbon

About Greed:

“Be not anxious about what you have, but about what you are.” St. Gregory the Great.

“You, who have the kingdom of heaven, are not a poor little woman, but a queen.”
Blessed Jordan of Saxony

“Never did material things satisfy my heart. I felt something else, very great in the depths of my heart.” Venerable Concepcion Cabrera de Armida

About Envy:

“For our leader, the Divine Word, does not demand a strong body and beautiful countenance, or high and noble birth, but a pure soul, well-grounded in holiness.”
St. Justin Martyr

“It is ours to offer what we can, His to supply what we cannot.” St. Jerome

“Do not desire not to be what you are, but desire to be very well what you are.” St. Francis de Sales

About Gluttony:

“(From Lat. *gluttire*, to swallow, to gulp down), the excessive indulgence in food and drink ... Clearly one who uses food or drink in such a way as to injure his health or impair the **mental** equipment needed for the discharge of his **duties**, is guilty of the **sin** of gluttony. Gluttony is in general a venial **sin** in so far forth as it is an undue indulgence in a thing which is in itself neither good nor bad. Of course it is obvious that a different estimate would have to be given of one so wedded to the pleasures of the table as to absolutely and without qualification live merely to eat and drink, so minded as to be of the number of those, described by the **Apostle St. Paul**, "whose god is their belly" (Phil., iii, 19). Such a one would be guilty of mortal **sin**. Likewise

a **person** who, by excesses in eating and drinking, would have greatly impaired his health, or unfitted himself for **duties** for the performance of which he has a grave **obligation**, would be justly chargeable with mortal **sin**” From the Catholic Encyclopedia

When attacked by gluttony he would say: I call to mind the vinegar and gall which were offered to Our Savior on the cross, and shall I not blush if I do not deny my appetite or endure something for the expiation of my sins? ... Gluttony urges: God created all these things for us, and he who refuses them despises the benefits of God. Temperance answers: True, God created these things for our maintenance, but He willed that we should use them with moderation, for He has also imposed upon us the duty of sobriety and temperance. (Cf. Ezekiel. 16:49). (from Ven. Louis de Grenada: *The Sinner's Guide*)

From Protestant Christian Writers:

“Most of us have a tendency to overindulge in the food which God has so graciously provided for us. We allow the sensual part of our God-given appetite to range out of control and lead us into sin. We need to remember that even our eating and drinking is to be done to the glory of God (I Corinthians 10:31). (Jerry Bridges *The Practice of Godliness*)

Modern Christians, especially those in the Western world, have generally been found wanting in the area of holiness of body. Gluttony and laziness, for example, were regarded by earlier Christians as sin. Today we may look on these as weaknesses of the will but certainly not sin. We even joke about our overeating and other indulgences instead of crying out to God in confession and repentance. (Jerry Bridges: *The Pursuit of Holiness* by Jerry Bridges, © 1996)

Excess in meat and drink clouds the mind, chokes good affections, and provokes lust. Many a man digs his own grave with his teeth. (Thomas Manton *A Puritan Golden Treasury*)

This...principle applies to any good thing that God has created. Surely we are to enjoy them (this is no call to rigid self-denial), but we are not to consume them with ravenous gluttony, demanding more from these simple pleasures than Spirit-filled prudence allows. (Chris Donato, *Gluttony and Temperance*, *Tabletalk*)

“...Rodger Bufford, who teaches psychology at George Fox University, a Quaker institution in Oregon writes of gluttony: "I think it affects our relationship with God." Whatever we focus on obsessively, he says, in a sense, " is a false god for us. At some level or other we're saying, 'This is the most important thing in the world to me.'

About Lust:

“Lust served became custom; and custom not resisted became necessity.” St. Augustine

“When sin is understood by the soul, it is hated by it like a foul-smelling beast. But when it is not understood it is loved by him who does not understand it and, enslaving its lover, keeps him in captivity. And the poor miserable man does not see what can save him, and does not even think about it; but thinking that sin adorns him, he welcomes him gladly.” St. Anthony the Great

“As soon as lust assails us, let us instantly say: “Lord assist me, do not permit me to offend you.” St. Jerome

“Humility is the safeguard of chastity. In the matter of purity, there is no greater danger than not fearing danger. When a person puts himself in an occasion, saying ‘I shall not fall’ – it is an almost infallible sign that he will fall, and with great injury to his soul.” St. Philip Neri.

About Anger:

“Hate the sin, love the sinners.” St. Augustine

“If a man cannot bear being reviled, he will not see glory. If he is not cleansed of gall, he will not savor sweetness.” St. Barsanuphius

“In order to avoid discord, never contradict anyone except in case of sin or some danger to a neighbor.” St. Louis of France

“There is no sin nor wrong that gives a man such a foretaste of hell in this life as anger and impatience.” St. Catherine of Siena

“All the days of their lives angry people are unhappy for they are always in a tempest.” St. Alphonsus Liguori

“Two evil passions trouble the soul – lust and irritability...If we do not give in to lust, the devil hastens to incite us to anger, and gathers round us a quantity of irritating things. Those who fail to discern the devil’s wiles allow themselves to become annoyed at everything, permitting anger to master them....Anger gives place to the devil as soon as it is regarded as something just and its satisfaction is felt to be lawful. ...We start to be aflame with anger as though we were on fire. This is the fire of hell; but the poor person thinks that he or she is burning with zeal for righteousness, whereas there is never any righteousness in wrath. This is the form of illusion peculiar to wrath, just as there is another form of illusion peculiar to lust. Whoever speedily overcomes wrath disperses this illusion and thus repels the devil as though by a strong blow to the chest.” Theophane the Recluse

About Laziness:

“The more we indulge ourselves in soft living and pamper our bodies, the more rebellious they will become against the spirit.” St. Rita of Cascia

“The soul...should love her neighbor with such devotion that she would lay down a thousand times, if it were possible, the life of her body for the salvation of souls, enduring pains and torments so that her neighbor may have the life of grace, and give her temporal substance for the profit and relief of his body.” St. Catherine of Siena.

“Never say to God: ‘Enough’” simply say, “I am ready.” Blessed Sebastian Valfre

Did any of these quotations from the saints give you new insight?

Do you know any sayings from other writers about character you would like to insert in your journal or share with the group?

To prepare for the group meeting tomorrow check off what stood out for you in the readings of Days 2-6. Write a prayer for help in overcoming your worst obstacle to holiness.

Day 7 Group sharing: give your answers to questions for reflection throughout days 1-6, especially from the teaching on day 1:

- 1. Check those of the seven deadly sins that you are most prone to commit.**
- 2. Pick out one of them and prepare to share in the group how you have fallen into this sin and why it leads to unloving thoughts, words and deeds.**
- 3. If you have none of the seven deadly sins, what would you say is your other greatest obstacle to having nothing but love in your life such as fear, despair, coldness, drunkenness, or criticalness?**

Sharings on the readings, questions and requests for prayers.

Step 3: Understanding the Nature of the Virtues Opposed to the Obstacles in our Characters.

Day 1: Teaching

You have already become acquainted with the opposites of the seven daily sins: humble vs. proud; pure vs. lustful; generous vs. greedy; appreciative vs. envious, moderate vs. over-eating, peaceful vs. angry, energetic vs. lazy.

Let's enter more into the general nature of virtue. The best definition I know of virtue is from the Ethics of the great Christian philosopher Dietrich Von Hildebrand. Virtue is a loving response to the needs of others. Let's take the example of generosity vs. greed. It is said that in our country the food thrown away as garbage could feed all the starving of the world! Often this greed comes from a desire to have a lot on one's plate even though we are not likely to finish it and being too lazy to turn those leftovers into a second meal.

You may immediately bridle. "I work long hours. I can't fuss with cooking leftovers." But a generous person might think of it this way: by eating smaller servings that I can finish or by making leftovers into another meal I can save money that I can send to those who work with the starving such as Mother Teresa's nuns and brothers. In other words, generosity is a loving response to the neediness of the starving. Of course, even better than sending money to help the poor, would be hands-on helping the poor. Not everyone is called to this as their primary vocation, but usually there are opportunities on a volunteer basis or in ones own home by taking care of the needs of others generously without complaint.

In the readings for this week from "Give us a Break!," you will see the contrast between virtues and faults described in terms of loving response to others vs. indifference or violation of others.

Let me describe my worst trait, anger, in terms of understanding the opposite: peacefulness. Before I got my anger-management training, I described in the teaching on Step 1, I used to think, "I'm angry because people are obnoxious and machines are too complicated and faulty." I thought those who handled every day frustrations with serenity were just born with a mild character.

After analyzing anger in depth I came to see that peacefulness comes from accepting the average traits and rhythms of others and the frustrations that always exist in an imperfect, fallen, world. Examples: some family and friends are always late. Before admitting that my anger was a grave obstacle to holiness, I used to get upset every time. Now, for the most part, I expect them to come late and I organize my time accordingly, with small things to do while waiting. I am surprised if they happen to come on time. This makes me much more peaceful. I used to have a fit a day over computer glitches. Now I call an expert or slowly work my way through. I accept the fact that instructions for computers are not perfectly written so that I could

understand them, and more importantly that if I am not willing to pay for computer courses I will always have frustrations. I see that peacefulness is good for me and also good for those around me who don't have to hear me shrieking all day.

How does such an understanding relate to Christian living? We read in Scripture that Adam and Eve lost paradise. After their original sin, there is no way until heaven that our lives will not be full of aggravating incidents. Out of gratitude for all the good gifts of life I enjoy, I have to humbly accept the crosses. Out of love of neighbor I need to avoid making life worse for others by my grave faults of anger.

For more on the principles and foundations of ethics see my book *Living in Love: About Christian Ethics*, out of print but available as a free e-book on www.rondachervin.com.

For Personal Reflection, Journal Keeping and Group Sharing:

Think about your worst obstacle to being holy. Can you analyze how the opposite virtue involves a loving response to others?

If you have trouble answering the first question bring it to the Forum for insight from the teacher and the other students.

Write a prayer for the virtue you need to have more of.

Day 2-6 Readings

Day 2 from Scripture and Tradition

Ponder these Scriptures and if any made you think consider telling us about it at the Forum on Day 7.

“Then you will understand righteousness and justice and preserving the way of his saints.” (Proverbs 2: 9)

“Trust in the Lord and do not rely on your own insight.” (Proverbs 3: 5)

“Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it.” (Proverbs 3: 27)

“Do not plan evil against your neighbor who dwells trustingly beside you.” (Proverbs 3: 29)

“Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise ... she prepares her food in summer and gathers her sustenance in harvest.” (Proverbs 6: 6)

“Pride and arrogance ... I hate. I have counsel and sound wisdom, I have insight, I have strength.” (Proverbs 8: 13-14)

‘Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses.’ (Proverbs 10: 12)

“A man of quick temper acts foolishly, but a man of discretion is patient.” (Proverbs 14:17)

“Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a fatted ox and hatred with it.” (Proverbs 15: 17)

“Let not your heart envy sinners but continue in the fear of the Lord all the day. Surely there is a future, and your hope will not be cut off.” (Proverbs 23: 17-18)

“When the Son of man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations ... Then the King will say to those on his right hand, “Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me. I was in prison and you came to me.’... ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.” (Matthew 25: 31-40)

“Make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, ... for whoever lacks these things is blind and shortsighted and has forgotten that who was cleansed from his old sins.” (2 Peter 1: 5-9)

Day 3: Readings

(Here are some more readings from Give us a Break! – the whole of this Chervin manuscript you can find on the web www.rondachervin.com under e – books. Each selection contrasts a negative trait with its opposite.)

Warm vs. Cold

“Love one another, even as I have loved you.” (John 13:34)

Can you imagine anyone in Nazareth finding Jesus, or Mary, or Joseph cold? Why people pushed their way through crowds to touch Jesus; judging from her apparitions Mary, refuge of sinners, must have been encircled by townsfolk looking for love and guidance. And are the artists not right in picturing St. Joseph so often holding the boy Jesus on his shoulders?

Very outward-going people sometimes think of anyone who is quiet as cold. That is not fair. A smile, affection when needed, and little deeds of love prove the warmth of many an inward person. Background also has to be taken into consideration when making judgments about warm vs. cold. In some cultures warmth is shown by ready hugging; in others that would be taboo.

Yet, whether extrovert or introvert, we are sometimes accused of being cold, at least to some people, at some times, and even to spouses, family members, or other parishioners. Reasons for seeming cold could vary from legitimate grievances all the way down to just indifference.

Psychologists would think first of role-modeling in the family of our birth: a cold father or mother or both. Selfish reasons might be as simple as trying to be inapproachable to avoid getting involved in the knotty problems of others or being asked to perform annoying chores.

Feeling courageous? How about asking the people who have to be with you a lot whether you ever seem cold to them and in what way. You might be surprised. A dedicated very sacrificial priest once read in an evaluation: “you seem cold to us because the door to your office is always closed.” Once aware, he changed that quickly. A grown daughter charged her mother with being a little cold because her Mom’s hugs were so quick. That changed fast!

Prayer: Dear Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, we want to be like you. Please grace us with the warmth of your hearts; heal us of any coldness from others in the past that closed us up; let us be a warm haven for all who need our love.

Trust vs. Fear

“Perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 4:18)

When we read accounts in the New Testament of disciples going to martyrdom, we marvel at their fearlessness. Surely imagining being eaten by lions or crucified would justify fear. Yet the martyrs were full of trust that Jesus would help them in their torments and bring them to eternal happiness.

Many are our fears. They range from fear of being late for an appointment, fear of failing examinations, fear for our loved ones in trouble or danger, all the way to fear of terminal illness or fear of violence including, sometimes, that of members of our own households; finally, to fear of eternal punishment.

We are taught that “fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”(Psalm 111:10) Since we are weak, sinful, creatures subject to all kinds of evils and sufferings, we are called to work out our salvation “in fear and trembling.” (Psalm 2:11) Even small threats to our security or welfare can trigger an immediate sense of fear. This

fear can be positive when it causes us to be careful, plan well, and do whatever we can to avoid failure. Trusting in God in such situations helps, but may not remove a certain tremulous weakness.

Just the same, we need to avoid sinking into a quicksand of fear when challenged by situations we cannot control. We need to beg God to give us trust in His perfect love; in His provident care, even when results are disappointing or tragic. In the end, even if the worst things happen on earth, what matters most is our salvation and the salvation of those we love. We believe that God loves us and them even more than we do. When our fear becomes tortuous, we need to cast ourselves in prayer into His loving heart.

Even if it is painful, make a list of your worst fears. Then bring each one of them to Jesus and ask Him to quiet your soul.

Prayer: Jesus I believe You are my Savior. Let me know more of Your perfect love that my trust may be greater than my fears.

What insights did you get from the above readings? Do you want to put insights into your journal and/or share examples at the group meeting at the end of the week?

Day 4 – Readings

(Again from Give us a Break!)

Forgiving vs. Unforgiving

“Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” (Matthew 6:12)

All Christians know that Jesus has obliged us with the above words to forgive everyone who has hurt us, no matter how badly. Many a time we think we have forgiven others but when we have to come into contact with them again we realize our hearts are closed in bitterness or hate. Perhaps you have noticed that our own sins seem minor to us and forgivable compared to the sins of others. Easy to understand really! When I am the victim of someone else’s sins, it stings. When I hurt someone else they feel the sting, but I don’t!

If you have the courage, make a list in writing or in your mind of all those you have hurt from childhood to the present whether purposely or by omission, such as not obeying parents when they had a right to ask you to help in the house, or not giving all you could to the needy. Now make a list of wrongs of others that have hurt you. If you are like me, the lists are about equal!

If your list of wounds is greater than the list of your own sins you are in good

company in your forgiveness. Jesus, Mary, Joseph, the other saints through the ages certainly sinned never or less and were certainly sinned against more! Would they have been saints if they “couldn’t” forgive?

Meditate on these lines of Pope Benedict XVI (*Jesus of Nazareth* p. 158-159)
“Forgiveness exacts a price – first of all from the person who forgives. He must overcome within himself the evil done to him; he must, as it were, burn it interiorly and in so doing renew himself...in communion with the One who bore the burdens of us all.” Other images that help would be letting go or dropping the anger into the ocean.

Oh my Jesus, forgive me my sins. I try to forgive but often I fail. I need a big infusion of love from Your heart if I am to be free of the anger of non-forgiveness. Make my heart like unto Yours. May my forgiveness release my victimizers. May the forgiveness my victims offer to me release me that all of us may be more loving in the future.

Praising vs. Critical

“But who are you that you judge your neighbor?” (James 4:12)

Many of us cringe when we are criticized and beam with joy when we are praised, yet pride ourselves on our critical abilities. How come? Some distinctions are necessary to understand this seeming paradox.

The word “critical” is often used in the positive to mean the ability to discriminate between truth and error, excellent and poor literary style, or to detect phoniness and deception. All of us hope to be considered critical in those ways. We hope that by means of our critical abilities we will be able to improve things.

In the negative, though, a person deemed critical is judged as always finding fault; nit-picking, using the mind as a knife to cut the words or actions of others to pieces.

Such criticalness is associated with coldness, harshness, and arrogance. ‘But, but, but,’...a reader might bridle, ‘there is so much in the world that is shoddy, careless, stupid, and evil. How could I not be critical? Wouldn’t it be phony to go around smiling and nodding as if everything were wonderful? And isn’t lots of praise manipulative flattery?’

Granted there is much we cannot praise and that some affirmers are flatterers, but is that a reason to practically ignore all the good and speak only in carping criticism of others?

By contrast, praising others is rightly considered to be a positive trait. How good others feel to be praised for virtues, work well-done, and loving deeds. How good

we, ourselves, feel when we affirm others! In praising we dwell in the good. We might be said to be joining in God's delight in that good.

Besides critical words or affirmations, there are also disparaging thoughts and affirming thoughts. These can fill our minds with discouragement or with gratitude. And, of course, the one we may be most critical of is ourselves, leading to such low feelings we feel sapped of energy for doing good.

Try going through a day and making a tally of your praise vs. criticism in words and thoughts. If the critical list is longer, ponder this prayer:

Dear God, when I become aware of all that is deficient and evil in the world, I want to criticize those responsible. Help me to use the critical faculties You have given me in tandem with plans for bettering things. Never let me concentrate so much on the bad that I cannot joyfully praise everything worthy, thereby encouraging others to persevere in their good works.

Ideas that stood out for your journal? "Confessions" for the group?

Day 5: Readings

(from Give us a Break!)

RELEASING vs. CONTROLLING

"...that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own free will."
(Philemon: 14)

Parenting, managing a work place, teaching or policing, are examples of necessary control. Micro-managing or trying to fix everyone, however, is excessive and inappropriate. Why is it wrong to try to straighten people out? Isn't loving concern a virtue? Yes and no. Wishing others to do what is good is right. The fault lies in trying to override their right to make free decisions.

God, whose judgment is perfect, rarely coerces us. When Eve ate the apple and Adam followed suit, God did not blast the apple out of their hands or reduce the serpent to ashes. At the Passion, God did not annihilate His son's torturers. So why do *we* think that we have the right to badger others? "Let go, let God," is a phrase we need to tell ourselves frequently, so that we can release others into the hands of the Lord.

Prayer: Father God, you are the Lord of our lives. I want to release to you each person I try to control. (List each person) I release (name) _____ into Your heart and hands. Forgive me for my controlling habit. If you want to use me to help them, show me a way to plant seeds, not to command but to suggest in a gentle and

loving way, usually only when someone asks for advice. Please pour out Your graces on them that they may be ultimately saved.

“Into Your hands I commend my spirit and the spirit of (name)_____

Respectful vs. Ridiculing

“...whoever says ‘you fool’ shall be liable to the hell of fire.” (Matthew5:22)

For many years when I read or heard the above words of Jesus I would think to myself, “He’s gotta be kidding! Maybe the word that is translated “fool” is something much worse in Aramaic”? Surely yapping at someone, especially in the family, with a phrase such as “don’t be such an idiot,” couldn’t be a sin!

Spiritual masters claim that when we are free of mortal sin or even temptations to it, then the conscience begins to upbraid us for lesser sins. The analogy is often made to first washing the big stains off a window but then noticing smaller smears.

Right now think of people you would describe as respectful or reverent toward others. Isn’t it relaxing to be with family or friends who never ridicule others, especially not the all important ME. Our defense mechanisms can take a vacation, and we feel open to sharing problems we would never tell someone whose response to our narrative might be sarcastic blame.

Some psychologists analyze respect vs. ridicule and sarcasm in this challenging way. A person with good self-esteem and humble acceptance of his/her own limitations, looks for the good in others and draws it out. A person who feels inferior and insecure likes to shift attention from his or her failings by pointing fingers at others. If others are fools then I am smart. If others are beneath contempt then I am on a pedestal. I may be unsuccessful in reaching many of my goals, but when I ridicule others I am admired for my witty remarks.

Try tracking impulses to ridicule and sarcasm and catching yourself before you sin in this way. Can you bring yourself to show respect for the virtues of others even when they are exhibiting their worst qualities? When her husband was making a fool of himself in public, a loving wife I knew used to take his hand. The love conveyed in this gentle touch would often change his mood for the better.

Jesus, given that the Scriptures show You sometimes using sarcasm toward Your enemies, we know that this can sometimes be right. But usually you are depicted as gentle, compassionate and respectful even to public sinners. Help us to know that we are worthy of respect as the sons and daughters of the Divine King. Basking in the glory of Your love, may we turn to others with true respect.

Again, think of what ideas in these readings could be messages to you from the Holy Spirit. If so, you might want to write them in your journal or confirm them by telling us about them at our upcoming group meeting..

Day 6: from the Saints and other Spiritual Writers

“Let us not esteem worldly prosperity or adversity as things real or of any moment, but let us live elsewhere, and raise all our attention to Heaven’ esteeming sin as the only true evil, and nothing truly good but virtue which unites us to God.” St.

Gregory Nazianzen

“If everyone would take only according to his needs and would leave the surplus to the needy, no one would be rich, no one poor, no one in misery.’ St. Basil

“The soul is the user, the body for use; hence the one is master, the other servant.” St. Ambrose

**“Let nothing disturb thee,
nothing affright thee;
all things are passing.
God never changes;
Patient endurance
attains to all things;
who God possesses
in nothing is wanting
alone God suffices.**

St. Teresa of Avila

“Hell is full of the talented, but Heaven of the energetic.” St. Jane of Chantal

“What avails melancholy forebodings, and indulgence of feelings which can never alter the event of things? One would, rather, look at life’s realities as they are guided by a just and merciful Protector who orders every occurrence in its time and place.” St. Elizabeth Seton

“Laugh and play and dash about as much as you like, only be careful not to say or do anything that would be displeasing to God.” St. Mary Mazzarello.

“When tempted, invoke your angel. Ignore the devil and do not be afraid of him: he trembles and flees at your guardian angel’s sight.” St. John Bosco

“I worry until midnight and from then on, I let God worry.” Blessed Louis Guanella

“Give me a heart as big as the universe.” St. Francis Cabrini

“Where there is no obedience, there is no virtue; where there is no virtue, there is no goodness, no love; and where there is no love there is no God: without God we do not go to Paradise.” St. Padre Pio

“We are not necessarily doubting that God’s will is the best for us. We are wondering how painful the best will turn out to be.” C.S. Lewis

“In the moment of temptation think of the Love that awaits you in heaven: foster the virtue of hope.” St. Jose Escriva

Copy out any quotation you know you need to remember. Proclaim it to us at the group tomorrow!

Day 7: Group: shared responses to main questions after teaching of Day 1 of Step 3:

Think about your worst obstacle to being holy. Can you analyze how the opposite virtue involves a loving response to others?

If you have trouble answering the first question bring it to the Forum for insight from the teacher and the other students.

Write a prayer for the virtue you need to have more of.

Follow by sharing of responses to the readings, questions and prayers for one another.

Step 4: Asking forgiveness, whenever possible, of those we hurt because of our sins and defects.

Day 1: Teaching

Offering forgiveness is hard enough, but asking forgiveness is harder still. Why? Because we offer forgiveness from a superior position of generosity: “You hurt me and even ‘ruined my life’ but out of the largeness of my heart I am willing to forgive.” Isn’t it much harder to have to say: “I hurt you and even ‘ruined your life,’ please forgive me?”

And yet, if we are trying to be Christians, no less holy Christians, we are obliged to ask for forgiveness. And that forgiveness is not only what we must ask from God but also what we must ask of those we hurt.

Asking forgiveness of God:

“Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy steadfast love; according to thy abundant mercy blot out my transgression.” (Psalm 51 01)

Some think that David must have written that Psalm after Nathan, the Prophet, upbraided him for committing adultery with the wife of Uriah the Hittite and then having him slain to cover up the pregnancy. (2 Samuel 11-12)

Asking forgiveness of others:

Think of the Prodigal Son coming back to beg this father’s forgiveness: “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.” (Luke 15: 21)

Sometimes we can be in denial for years, even decades, about the way our sins have hurt others! You might think of Joseph’s brothers in the Old Testament. Joseph was the youngest brother and apple of his eye of their father. Out of jealousy, one day they threw him into a well to die, but then because one of the brothers felt guilty, they agreed to sell him into slavery instead. Only many years later after Joseph had become the administrator in Egypt over the grain needed to feed their starving families were these guilty brothers forced to ask for forgiveness!

Right now, ask the Holy Spirit and your guardian angel to help you make a list of all the sins of your life since childhood. You don’t have to write down details but whatever words will help you remember them. Here is some samplings from my list:

- **tried to get my sister into trouble at school because I was jealous of her.**
- **with a little gang of other 10 year olds circled a girl who was strange and seemed crazy to beat her up.**
- **stole small objects from neighborhood stores – harming the store owners of their legitimate profits and lessening their trust in children.**
- **talked about the faults of others all my life up until 60 years old. This was to relish feeling superior to them. I have harmed them in spreading information about them that would make others dislike them.**
- **fits of anger against everyone and everything that ever frustrated me. This has made every place I lived or worked or ministered less peaceful. Some have copied by anger patterns. Others have felt demeaned by them.**
- **engaged in pre-marital sex (at this time I was not a believer in God but I certainly hurt myself and some of the boys I dated when we hurt each other through rejection after getting so close. I also tried to convince “good girls” to follow my example.**

- considered having an abortion when I thought I was pregnant out of wedlock. The “emergency” passed because I wasn’t pregnant but I would have done it if I was. Bad example to others.

After becoming a Catholic at 21 years of age

- Fits of anger against everyone and everything that ever frustrated me.
- used contraception for one year thinking the Church might change the teaching against it. This hurt my marriage.
- engaged in relationships with men not my husband in an inappropriately close way even though it was not sexual. Even though my husband and children didn’t know that much about these bonds I believe they felt insecure because of them.
- harsh judgments about the motives of anyone who disagreed with me about anything or who were sinful, including my husband and adult children. These people, at times, felt criticized, demeaned, and condemned rather than forgiven.
- one incident of adultery, thirty or more years ago, with fantasies of leaving my husband.
 - lack of trust in the Lord leading to much needless worry and anxiety.

In making this list I am following the method used in 12 Step that everyone needs to make a fearless inventory of their sins to share with at least their sponsor and God, and then make amends wherever this would be of benefit. I believe that in the sacrament of confession I have fulfilled this obligation and that in my life as a Catholic I have asked forgiveness and made amends to everyone I have hurt by my sins. In the case of those who I can not find or who have died, I have done so in prayer or other healing exercises.

Now it is your turn. Either on paper, or in your own heart, make such a list and consider confessing any you have not yet confessed to God and to a priest if you are a Catholic. Also consider asking forgiveness of those you have hurt by your sins. If you are not sure how a particular sin that comes to mind can hurt someone ask us at the group meeting or e-mail me at chervinronda@gmail.com for insights

This is a very heavy exercise. You may not want to do it all at once. There will be opportunities in our Stage 2 follow up for more work on asking for forgiveness.

Totally Optional: You might want to share with the group anything you wish, questions you have, or something you put in your list that others might not have thought of as sinful.

Days 2-6 Readings

Day 2 from Scripture and Tradition

“If they sin against Thee – for there is no man who does not sin ... if they repent with all their mind and with all their heart ... then hear Thou in heaven Thy dwelling place their prayer and their supplication ...and forgive Thy people who have sinned against Thee...and grant them compassion...” (Solomon’s prayer: 1 Kings 8:46)

“Repent and turn away from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit.” (Ezekiel 18: 30-31)

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Matthew 3:02)

“The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all men everywhere to repent.” (Acts 17: 30)

Tradition:

“It is not as if a good life of some sort came first, and that thereupon God showed his love and esteem for it from on high, saying: “let us come to the aid of these men and assist them quickly because they are living a good life.; No, our life was displeasing to him; whatever we did by ourselves was displeasing to him; but what he did in us was not displeasing to him. He will, therefore, condemn what we have done, but he will save what he himself has done in us. We were not good, but God had pity on us and sent his Son to die, not for good men but for bad ones, not for the just but for the wicked.” (St. Augustine)

from the Catechism of the Catholic Church

“Christ has willed that in her prayer and life and action his whole Church should be the sign and instrument of the forgiveness and reconciliation that he acquired for us at the price of his blood. But he entrusted the exercise of the power of absolution to the apostolic ministry which he charged with the ‘ministry of reconciliation.’ - 2 Corinthians 5:18.” (#1442)

“The confession of sins, even from a simply human point of view, frees us and facilitates our reconciliation with others. Through such an admission man looks squarely at the sins he is guilty of, takes responsibility for them, and thereby opens himself again to God and to the community of the Church in order to make a new future possible.” (#1455)

“Many sins wrong our neighbor. One must do what is possible in order to repair the harm...Absolution (in the sacrament of penance) takes away sin, but it does not remedy all the disorders sin has caused. Raised up from sin, the sinner must still recover his full spiritual health by doing something more to make amends for the sin.” (#1459)

Did any of these Scriptures or writings from the Catechism have a message for you? One you want to put in your journal or share with the group?

Day 3: Readings

(These readings are from the set of locutions called God Alone.)

Light and Darkness

Holy Spirit:

When you become more silent you can see in yourself and in others the twisted rays of light and dark in ways of life and character. You feel frightened, as you would say, alienated, from others and from yourself.

When you feel alienated from others, you want to hide in yourself, but then when you feel alienated from yourself, where do you go?

You have to run past any limiting images of us, to the real God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and Mary, to our real presences so that you can hide in us and become more like us to get light and love for others with less darkness and fear (defensiveness).

This process of transforming you, doesn't take place in a way that is clear to you. That is why trust is so important.

Often what you consider darkness is shadow and what you run to as light is glitter.

But we don't sit on high laughing at your struggles. We are cheering you on for each tiny victory when you see goodness where previously you were too defensive to notice or where someone you think is critical and unappreciative ratifies what you are doing.

The closer you come to us, the Light, the greater will be your yearning that others and you, yourself, can be only light. This is the Cross of those who are given more of a foretaste of heaven. Don't "kick against the goad." Trust.

The Promised Land

Holy Spirit:

The promised land is a prophecy, a dream, a rest stop, a foretaste, and finally your eternal home.

Above all it is Our gift and you open the gift and enjoy it when you are willing to dwell in the land. To dwell is to enjoy the milk and honey in company with other pilgrims.

How can you enjoy the promised land if you are more like a looter rushing through the land, dragging on your back more than you can carry?

In the Eucharist, Mother Church gives you the bread from heaven, a miniature form for the Eternal who entered time. In Confession, the priest, your travel agent, so to speak, rids you of the excess baggage you took on in fear and greed.

In each moment, through the lesser gifts of life on earth, We want to expand your hearts. Please notice.

"That your joy may be full." (John 15:11)

Pride of Life

("For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eye and the pride of life, is not of the Father but of the world." 1 John 2)

Holy Spirit:

You like to see energy in people: in sport, dance, building, climbing, bringing powerful music out of an organ. In nature you like to see the power of the ocean or in a tiger. Adam and Eve were full of such life.

Then you see the bad side of power: arrogance, dominance, cruelty: Cain killing Abel.

In every situation after the fall there are the two sides: the happy joy of life and the bad pride of life of feeling superior. That pride must be crushed before We can make the "new man in Christ." One must lose the bad pride of life, for instance,

because of ill-fortune or the grim consequences of sin, before one can be molded as soft dough into a person who can love and show the need for being loved.

To pray is to acknowledge that your life-force was not and is not enough to bring the happiness you crave. Through your surrender to Us in prayers, we can transform the bad pride of life into energy for building the kingdom of God, on earth as it is in heaven.

Day 4: Readings

(Locutions from God Alone)

Moral Law

St. Paul:

“Straight is the gate and narrow the way....” (Matthew 7:14)

Sin seems like liberation but turns to dust. You experienced this. In these times on the globe there is a clearer understanding of this because of the publicly viewed excesses and catastrophic penalties in the flesh. The hope of joy in procreative marital sex has been veiled because of divorce where the children can become pawns. So, the young people don't feel the secure nest.

There is need for strong open witness about the brambles on the strayed path and the goodness of the straight path. This is being done in some contemporary Christian teaching on chastity where the witnesses are open about their experience.

You need freedom in the Spirit to be honest... for the sake of liberation from a society as crazed on this as the pagan societies I preached to.

To be chaste, people have to cleave to Jesus as I did with passionate constant prayer.

More About the Moral Law

Holy Spirit:

We need the moral law because humans are so greedy about trying for heaven on earth in following their illusions that worldly goods will make them happy, such as stolen possessions or the pride of fame.

Just the same, it is not as if once someone sins we give up on them and totally reject them. No. We let them live in the consequences of their wrong choices.

The “righteous” want to see a clearer punishment, such as the immediate destruction of the body of the sinner. This is because the “righteous” are tempted and jealous of the seeming good the sinner got by breaking the code. The “righteous” then feel frightened that the other sinners “got away with it.”

In this way, concupiscence (greed for bodily satisfactions such as lust, gluttony, possessions) and pride make a vicious circle.

Both the concupiscent and the proud are motivated by fear: fear of not having enough, leads to covetousness. The fear of being a wretched coveter instead of a proud Stoic (self-sufficient person) leads to sins of anger and desire for vengeance, and trying to be victorious through denunciation.

Do you see how Jesus tried to unmask these double evils by condemning greed and lust but also condemning self-righteousness?

What is the way out of the circle? “Perfect love casts out fear.” (1 John 4:18) By offering you the perfect love of the Trinity and, through the centuries, the comfort of the love of your spiritual mother, Mary, and the model of so many saints and Holy Communion (communion with us) we try to reach in to you to open the knots of fear.

As our love finds a place in you, we build a well in the depth of you in which to gradually pour in grace which over time overflows so you can love your neighbor as yourself.

You see? When your well of love is fuller you can love yourself and reach out to your neighbor with loving concern as you see them grabbing out of fear and judging out of fear.

This takes a long time to work out. The process is called “life.”

It is our “job” and our joy to see how to overcome the obstacles in you that come from original sin, childhood wounds, social formation, and your “fright-ful” choices.

“But, be of good cheer for I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

from Charles Rich: Give Me your Heart: Preparing for Eternal Life – Excerpts from the Writings of a Lay Contemplative (see www.friendsofcharlesrich.com for the whole booklet.)

“We hug our sins and our miseries and we refuse to give them to God who alone knows what to do with them, and so it’s in vain that He came down from heaven to take these sins and these miseries upon Himself. ‘You have not yet given me your sins,’ our Lord said to a saint, and He says the same thing to us because we don’t

want to give them to Him, and we keep them for ourselves. He does not want us to carry our sins on our poor, weak and small mortal shoulders.”

“Great sinners are afraid to trust God. It takes great sanctity to trust Him. So if great sinners trust God they become saints on account of their trust.”

Day 5: Readings

While I was working on 6 Steps to Holiness I came upon this story from the legends of the holy rabbis of Europe during the 19th century. A man came to the rabbi for advice. “I have been married 18 years and my wife never conceives. What can I do?” The rabbi prayed long and responded in this surprising way. He asked the husband how much money he and his wife had. They came up with a figure of about 10,000 rubles. The rabbi told him to ask his wife if she would give up this money in exchange for a child. The wife agreed.

Then the rabbi reminded the man that 20 years ago he broke his engagement to a young girl. She had suffered terribly as a result of heartbreak. The rabbi insisted that the man go with the money and search for his former fiancé to make amends. The man traveled for many months in all the towns and cities where his former fiancé might have gone. On the last day, when he had to return, he suddenly saw the woman, as beautiful as she had been as a young woman. The fiancé told him that she had died of heartbreak but returned to earth to tell him the only way he and his wife could have a child would be if he would take that money and use it for a dowry for her poverty stricken niece. This he did and he and his wife conceived a child.

(You may find this story a little harsh, implying that God would directly punish a couple in this way. Jewish stories are famous for exaggeration in order to make a point – the point being that it has consequences when we hurt others and try to ignore the sin.)

(Note: I, Ronda Chervin, the teacher of 6 Steps to Holiness am a Dedicated Widows. for more about what a Dedicated Widow is go to www.rondachervin.com and click on options for widows and then scroll down to this one. Here I am excerpting from a locution given to this group of widows because I think it is relevant to the lives of everyone seeking holiness.)

Jesus:

“To modern people choosing voluntary suffering for your own sins ... can seem crazy, useless or just not understandable.

What do you want to do, instead, when you have to confront your own sins? ... You can try to justify your sins. You can try to deny them. You can hide from them. If you look at your lives you will be able to find examples of many of those attitudes towards sin.

God, the creator of your freedom to choose, sees your bad choices. In the Old Testament you read passage after passage about how sin betrays and offends God. In the New Testament you see something different. You see Me, the Son of God, bleeding for your sins ...

Some saints followed Me in this, even to the voluntary shedding of their own blood in penitential acts. I do not say you are all called to that path. Some may be. To find what you are called to personally you can start with these promises:

- **Instead of denying or excusing them, I will acknowledge each of my sins and bring them to confession for reconciliation.**
- **Instead of denying or excusing the sins of those I love, I will pray for them the more often and the harder.**
- **Instead of just blaming and castigating them in my mind, speech or acts, I will pray against the sins of strangers and enemies.**
- **Throughout the day I will bring my own sinful soul and the sinful souls of others to you, Jesus, as I pray “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us” and bring my own soul and the souls of others to my Mother as I beg over and over again, “pray for us sinners, now and as at the hour of our death.”**
- **In imitation of You on the cross and my Mother standing under the cross, I will offer the sufferings of each day in reparation for my own sins and also pray for blessings for those I love.**

If you live in this way, I will be able to bring you out of denial, excuses, anger and blame into a purified suffering of compassion for yourself and others ...”

Take notes for journal and for sharing with your group.

Day 6: Readings from the saints:

“To him who still remains in this world, no repentance is too late. The approach to God’s mercy is open.” St. Cyprian

“Those who have sinned must not despair. Let that never be. For we are condemned not for the multitude of evils but because we do not want to repent and learn the miracles of Christ.” (St. Mark the Ascetic)

“A first path of repentance is the condemnation of your own sins. Be the first to admit your sins and you will be justified ... for a man who condemns his own sins is slower to commit them again. Rouse your conscience to accuse you within your own

house, lest it become your accuser before the judgment seat of the Lord.” (St. John Chrysostom)

“The sinner is not cast out, he casts himself out. We avoid the eyes of men, and in God’s presence we commit sin.” (St. Ambrose)

“All hope consists in Confession. Believe it firmly. Do not doubt, do not hesitate, never despair of the mercy of God. Hope and have confidence in confession.” (St. Isidore of Seville)

“Hide nothing from our confessor...A sick man can be cured only by revealing his wounds.” (St. Margaret of Cortona)

“To sin is human, but to persist in sin is devilish.” (St. Catherine of Siena)

“No mother could snatch her child from a burning building more swiftly than God is constrained to succor a penitent soul, even though it should have committed every sin in the world a thousand times over.” (Blessed Henry Suso)

“Heaven is filled with converted sinners of all kinds and there is room for more.” (St. Joseph Cafasso)

“Did a Magdalene, a Paul, a Constantine, an Augustine, become mountains of ice after their conversion? Quite the contrary. We should never have had these prodigies of conversion and marvelous holiness if they had not changed the flames of human passion into volcanos of immense love of God. (St. Francis Cabrini)

“With those tears, those burning, manly tears, you can purify your past and supernaturalize your present life.” St. Jose Escriva

If you are keeping a journal put in some of these quotes that you thought particularly important and add others you like. Prepare for your group meeting tomorrow by highlighting anything that stood out for you.

Day 7: Group Meeting:

Sharing of Experiences related to Step 4, starting with the listing of sins, confession and amends. Highlights from the Readings? Questions? Promises to pray for one another.

Step 5: Forgiving all whose sins and defects hurt us.

Day 1 Teaching

“I can forgive many things but not that,” many lament. “I can forgive many people but not him or her,” many lament. “I have forgiven this person over and over again, but still anger churns up in me about the way that person hurt me,” many lament.

Some spiritual analysts insist that forgiveness is not a feeling but, rather, an act of the will. They suggest that we make acts of forgiveness and then let the feelings slowly heal as they will.

This is good for starters, but I am convinced that we also need to beg the very Jesus who insists that we forgive to provide us with healing so that we can one day have enough compassion to forgive others from the heart.

Of great help to me in forgiveness have been methods used by healers. I am now going to describe to you one process of forgiveness including the methods that helped me, in case you want to try similar methods to become more forgiving yourself.

With the help of psychotherapy I was able to forgive the person who hurt me the most in life: my father. My father did love his children but he was not an affectionate person. Because of severe difficulties with the character of my mother, he eventually left us to marry a younger woman with a teen daughter. Even though he remained in the same city for quite a number of years, and saw my sister and myself every Sunday, I felt rejected and replaced.

I hid these feelings from myself rationalizing that since he was not my favorite parent anyhow I didn't miss him. All the rest of my life, however, I sought father figures to replace him, often with bitter rejection as my reward. Psycho-analysis, when I was in my early 60's, finally released me from bondage to that non-forgiveness. I still had the tendency to seek out father-figures, but these relationships became more healing than toxic.

After a separation of some fifteen years, when I was in my forties, I started visiting my father and his wife again, partly because he wanted to know my children who were his grandchildren. Even though we never came to a meeting of the minds about the past, being in his now loving presence was healing.

A healing exercise that helped me along this long process was to write my father an imaginary, never sent, letter asked him about what he was going through when he left our family. In it I asked the Holy Spirit to help me write his presumed answers. He explained - through the answers I felt led to write on the page in his name - about how trapped he felt because of my mother's constant criticisms and how he much he hated leaving us, his children, and always tried to find a way to get close to us again.

Now it's your turn. Make a list of people who have hurt you most in your life. Pick out the one you think hurt you the most. Describe the hurt. Do you feel you have

totally forgiven this person? If not, what methods do you think you might need to do so? If no methods such as professional counseling, spiritual counseling, healing “letters” such as mine to my father, healing services, or 12 step programs have helped you, write a prayer now that Jesus would direct you to what would help. As you seek further you might consider a real letter to the person who hurt you telling them you want to forgive them and see if you get a response.

Consider writing your thoughts about this topic in your journal and also, if you wish, sharing your deepest wishes and experiences concerning a particular need to forgive with the group at the end of the week.

Days 2- 6 Readings

Day 2 from Scripture and Tradition

Check anything *in these readings stood out for you?*

“Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” (Matthew 6:12)

“If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times and says, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive him.” (Luke 17: 3)

“In him we have forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us.” Ephesians 1:7)

“... forgiving each other, as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also should forgive.” (Colossians 3:12)

Tradition; from the Catechism of the Catholic Church

Concerning the lines in the Lord’s Prayer; forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us, we beg for God to pour out mercy on us for our trespasses but,

‘This outpouring of mercy cannot penetrate our hearts as long as we have not forgiven those who have trespassed against us. In refusing to forgive our brothers and sisters, our hearts are closed and their hardness makes them impervious to the Father’s merciful love ... (#2840)

“It is... in the depths of the heart that everything is bound or loosed. It is not in our power not to feel or to forget an offense; but the heart that offers itself to the Holy Spirit turns injury into compassion and purifies the memory in transforming the hurt into intercession.’ (#2843)

“Forgiveness bears witness that ... love is stronger than sin ... Forgiveness is the fundamental condition of the reconciliation of the children of God with their Father and of men with one another.” (#2844)

Day 3: Readings:

(from The Spiritual Transition):

Jesus:

“Do you know that compassion is a powerful flow of love? Do you know that love comes through the Father and that it can come through you?”

Compassion can be like the bark or trunk of the tree where love is the life that comes through it giving it the ability to have leaf and fruit. Part of your experience on earth is to cultivate compassion. Compassion breeds humility which opens for greater love ...

Think of it this way: What do you want to grow in your garden? What would you like to see on this planet? What do you hold and nurture in your heart to be most dear? In this way each one will grow his crop and each crop will be useful to the whole. No man is truly separate from another. It is not possible hold back the light that God has put in him. So why do you separate? It is futile ...

Compassion yields understanding. Compassion is what allows you to exist with differences.

(From Together with the Holy Family):

Jesus;

Do you hear the pain and fear under the rage when people shout in anger?

You can not reason when people are engulfed in that kind of anger. What they need is love. Such love can take many forms including sometimes advocacy, sometimes punishment; sometimes silence, sometimes words of compassion.

Let not your pain and fear express itself in vengeful anger. When you do that you continue a cycle of hate.

Why are the words “I forgive you” and “forgive me” so powerful if not because they break out of the cycle of anger to heal the place of fear and pain?

Feel forgiven, Your Jesus

Day 4: Readings

(From God Alone):

Family Stances

Holy Spirit:

Each child in a family develops defences against being taken over by the other children. The price of love can often be slavery to the other's wishes. Later, some become so defensive that they choose isolation rather than risk being used. Others attract companions, sometimes to replicate power positions of the past.

How tragic! How bleak!

We want to exit such a cycle. We want to help you do this.

In the stories of the saints you see men and women who took in all the genuine love from their childhoods and the love that was there from others in their life as adults. They believed in the ideals of Christian love. Most of all they opened their hearts to Our love: the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit and of Mother Mary, the angels and saints. They were liberated from patterns of power, defensiveness and withdrawal.

It is a never ending battle between many sided evils and victory through the power of love. Over and over in the Old Testament you see defeat if people trust in their own strength and victory when they let themselves be the instruments of God's will.

In the Gospels, overturning the seemingly invincible plots coming out of fear, pride, jealousy and power, you see the triumph of divine love.

You can try to analyze every aspect of psychological and spiritual warfare in life. That can only take you so far. Insight can lead to despair instead of break-throughs.

Pray! Pray! Pray! Not to win others over to your side, but that fresh streams of divine love may bring forgiveness and change.

Persecution

Holy Spirit:

In the academic world you think of positions taken on one side or another of a debate as if the point of view were the important thing, not the persons holding them. In seeking truth, this can be a good way to think.

In the world outside the school, however, differences soon become highly personal as the consequences of ideas mount up.

Those whose ideas are threatened by greater numbers on the other side will sometimes resort to violent retaliation. Think of the leaders who felt threatened by the growing popularity of Jesus and reacted by persecuting Him unto death.

On the verbal level, when you feel you cannot win over the opposition, you may resort to the “violence” of sarcasm or name-calling. If the debate is between people who know each other well, the feeling of being persecuted is especially wounding.

How are you, a follower of Jesus, to conduct yourself under verbal attack? Jesus was not naïve about the motives of those who were against Him. Neither should you be. Yet He accepted seeming defeat in the events leading to His passion and death. He who had the divine power to destroy His enemies, instead chose the way of silence and even of forgiveness.

Should you do less?

Day 5: Reading

*(from Chervin, **Taming the Lion Within; Five Steps from Anger to Peace.**)*

(Note from Ronda; what you will read below is written by me, but is derived from the basic healing of memories methods of other writers as well. Although forgiveness is not always the explicit theme of these spiritual exercises, the result of praying through them is to be more able to forgive. Some of the paragraphs may not fit your life. If so, pray for others who do have need to forgive in those areas.)

Healing of Memories

Birth: Perhaps my mother and father were angry during the pregnancy because I came at an inopportune time, or because they were not married. But in Your providence, You loved my unique self and wanted me to live in the world. Let me experience now that love of yours for me. Show me the love my parents had for me even if it was hidden because of painful circumstances.

Childhood: Thank you, God, for all the good memories of my childhood. Help me know that You were there cherishing me in my little ways and hopes, even when I felt lonely. If I was abused, sexually or emotionally, help me identify with you so unjustly treated in Your life on earth. Banish the demon of envy that still pursues me when I see family members or others like them, seemingly superior or better loved. When others make me feel insecure, please make me secure in the nest of Your heart. Forgive me for any catty, wild, or insensitive ways I treated others at this time.

Teen years; This was a time of awkwardness, longing to be popular at any price, fear of not fitting in with others, taking refuge in cliques, dealing with sexual

feelings I didn't fully understand. You smiled at my gawkiness. I was always popular with You. If I have not confessed sins of that time, please bring me to Confession now so that patterns of evil will not haunt me all my life. Help me to forgive anyone who exploited my inexperience at that time.

Young Adult: Were You there, my Jesus, when I floundered around seeking my identity in the work world and in my vocation/ In the deepest part of my soul I wanted to be what you wanted. Forgive me for any wrong paths taken. Help me to see your smiling compassionate eyes following my memories of that time.

Adult; I call to memory times of trial where I felt disillusioned by the defects of friends, spouse, bosses, pastor. Give me the grace to forgive all these people as you have forgiven me for being a disappointment to them.

Parent: Let me forgive my children for not living up to my standards. Help me to love each one for him/herself and to trust that You will save them even if I can't.

Spouse: Let me join the stream of Your love for the woman or man I married. Give me a spirit of forgiveness for the failings and limitations of that person. Give him or her the grace to forgive me. If our marriage was sad, desperate, or broke up, take away the bitterness.

Worker: Help me forgive anyone who violated my rights or exploited me. Heal my memories of being fired or laid off unjustly. Let me be happy for the times You gave me the grace to be just to others. If I failed in justice, send special recompense to those I hurt.

Parishioner: Let me forgive priests and other religious workers for their failures. I wanted them to completely reflect You, but they could more do that than I am able to do that myself.

You might star portions that directly relate to areas where you need to forgive. If this healing exercise opened up areas where you need to forgive that didn't surface earlier in this step, bring these people to Jesus in forgiveness. Any witness stories of forgiveness you want to write about in your journal or tell us about in the group?

Day 6: Readings: From the Saints and other Spiritual Writers

“Since we think of Christ as our peace, we may call ourselves true Christians only if our lives express Christ by our own peace. We must never allow (enmity) to be rekindled in us in any way but must declare that it is absolutely dead. Gloriously has God slain enmity, in order to save us; may we never risk the life of our souls by being resentful or by bearing grudges. We must not awaken that enmity or call it back to life by our wickedness, for it is better left dead...Now peace is defined as harmony among those who are divided. When, therefore, we end that civil war

within our nature and cultivate peace within ourselves, we become peace.” (St. Gregory of Nyssa)

“... put out of our minds the harm done us by our enemies, in order to master our anger, and to forgive our fellow servants’ sins against us. Then our own sins against the Lord will be forgiven us.” (St. John Chrysostom)

“Forgiveness is giving up on my right to hurt you because you have hurt me.” Jan Karon

“Lord, replace my anger with tears of concern.” (Homily by a new Priest)

**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, others 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. (St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta)

Did any of these quotations challenge you?

Day 7: Group

Share with the group new insights, questions, and prayers you wish others to say for you.

Step 6: Committing to Openness to Greater Holiness through the Sacraments, Individual and Group Prayer and Love of Neighbor.

Day 1: Teaching

For Christians, holiness comes not primarily from our own efforts but from making use of the means Jesus gave us through which the Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier, wishes to help us.

Primary are the seven sacraments, visible signs of invisible grace. Shortly after I became a Catholic in 1959 I fell in love with my husband to be who was an atheist but with an orthodox Jewish background. (For these stories see www.rondachervin.com click on e-books and then scroll to leaflets and read *Saved: Dr. Ronda's Conversion Story*. My husband's story of how he became a Catholic can be found at the same web under books *Bread from Heaven*.) He was mystified by my talk about baptism, confirmation, holy communion, and reconciliation. To help him understand I liked to make an analogy to the way an engaged couple, such as us, expressed our love in visible signs such as embraces and gifts. Those conversations became the basis for my first book *Church of Love* now to be found as a free e-book called *Signs of Love* on my web site.

For a theological the scriptural explanation of the Sacraments you can go to the Catechism of the Catholic Church – free on-line. It is wonderful, easy to read, and full of solid truth. The treatment of the sacraments is much too long to summarize.

Instead, for our purposes, here is a summary of my personal way of explaining the sacraments in *Church of Love*:

Holy Communion: This sacrament where through the words of the priest the bread and wine becomes the Body and Blood of Christ and is offered to us to receive into our own bodies and souls seems to me the most clearly similar to the consummation of spouses in married love. Friends love to see each other but they do not wish to become totally one in physical union. But those in love greatly desire not only conversation and joint activities, but total union. Hearts can be united through conversation, but a total union comes when a man and a woman join together in a bodily self-donation expressive of the love in their hearts. Knowing this, I think Jesus, the Bridegroom of each soul, wanted to express His love for us, His Bride, in an intermingling of His body and blood with ours in Holy Communion. And this frequently.

In a similar vein I think of baptism as the first kiss of Jesus for the new Christian, babe or adult. The objection to the Catholic practice of child baptism that the little infant doesn't understand seems to me no more cogent than if parents withheld their kisses until their baby was old enough to understand.

Confirmation can be seen as teen Christian choosing to let the Holy Spirit join his or her individual spirit for the proclamation of the Gospel and the building of the kingdom. This is similar to the way at marriage that the husband's spirit and that of his wife become one to create the joint spirit of that couple.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession) can also be seen as a supernatural image of the love of the couple: in this case, how they can be joined together after a serious rift. Do you think a couple would do well if when one betrayed the other instead of speaking aloud his or her repentance it was taken for granted that the other would forgive! We do not communicate well by ESP. We need a verbal acknowledgement of sorrow for sin and a way to experience through the priest that God forgives us.

If baptism is the first kiss we could see the anointing of the sick as a last kiss as Jesus takes us through serious illness closer and closer to eternal life.

For this analogy in the case of the sacraments of Marriage and Holy Orders see my leaflet, *Signs of Love*, on my web.

The sacraments, inventions of the Holy Spirit for the transmission of invisible love through visible signs, come from the initiative of Jesus in His Church. Each sacrament is key in leading us away from worldly values into the pursuit of holiness. Our role is not to invent sacraments but to receive them. In the case of growth in prayer our initiative is more in the foreground. Whether we pray with the beautiful, formal words of our Tradition, or in our own words, in group prayer or personal prayer, our aim is to express love and receive love. And if our wish is to become saints, shall we not often ask the saints in heaven to intercede for us?

Over and over again Scripture and Tradition teaches us that we cannot become holy only through sacraments and prayer without a full commitment to love of neighbor. Neighbor means, of course, not just those who live near us or the family, but anyone who needs us even if through donations to people thousands of miles away. Avoiding unloving behavior of the type we renounced in the earlier steps is not enough. Our hearts should be burning with concern for those who are suffering.

For Personal Reflection in your Journal and Group Sharing:

When have you experienced any of the sacraments as visible signs of invisible love?

Is the Holy Spirit leading you to explore any modes of prayer not yet a part of your daily and weekly life?

How do you show love of neighbor most often at present? In what areas might you feel called to expand your love?

Save your answers for your journal and sharing with your group.

Day 2-6 Readings

Day 2: Readings from Scripture and Tradition

(note: these readings are very familiar to us. To avoid just rushing through them, try inserting your name in each as in “Ronda, take, eat...” Also check any passages that meant something important for you to recall.)

“Take, eat; this is my body...Drink of it... for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins!” (Matthew 26:26-28)

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” (Matthew 28: 19-20)

“The love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit,” (Romans 5:5)

“Whose sins you loose are loosed.’ (Matthew 16:19)

‘All those who had any that were sick with various disease brought them to him; and he laid hands on every one of them...’ (Luke 4:40)

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” (2 Tim 4:7)

“Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses (the saints), let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings too closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Hebrews 12:1)

“Spiritual progress tends toward ever more intimate union with Christ. This union is called ‘mystical’ because it participates in the mystery of Christ through the sacraments –‘the holy mysteries’ – and, in him, in the mystery of the Holy Trinity...The way of perfection passes by way of the Cross. There is no holiness without renunciation and spiritual battle ... (leading to) living in the peace and joy of the Beatitudes.: (Catechism of the Catholic Church #2014-2015)

“The saints contemplate God, praise him and constantly care for those whom they have left on earth...we can and should ask them to intercede for us and for the whole world.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church: #2683)

Do you have questions for the Group Sharing?

Day 3: Readings

(from God Alone)

Comfort at the Core

Holy Spirit:

In the body/soul unity of your personhood, you find both physical and emotional comfort through the assuagement of your needs, when you are warm and fed and also feel safe. We usually have you grow in the shelter of the family.

We lead some saints to toss aside such physical comfort to prove to the human race that there is something greater than “bread alone.” But most of you we lead slowly, step by step, to enjoy a sense of well-being in the Spirit through music, art, being surrounded by the arms of the Church building. We bring you into the sacraments where mysteriously through the visible you can be saved and comforted by Our invisible presence.

We wean you from total immersion in physical comforts toward the separation of soul and body at death. Our plan is not for you to feel terrified, but rather by greater and greater union with the Holy Family to be comforted in your souls as you make the transition.

To show you that one day the body will be restored to you transfigured, we give you homey images of Jesus’ resurrected body such as cooking fish for His followers and promising them that one day they will find themselves in mansions prepared for them by Him where there will be no more tears.

Weakness

Holy Spirit:

You honor weakness with your lips but not always with your heart. How is that?

You understand from years of reading the New Testament that Jesus came to overcome the worldly sense of strength as coming from power. Instead He exalted the lowly, the meek. He responded with compassion and mercy to the humble and poor.

On the other hand, in your own weakness you want to lean on those who seem stronger than yourselves; stronger, for example, in intelligence or health, in accomplishments or in virtue.

If you look at the saints, starting with Mary, what do you see? Not worldly strength, usually, but the power of love.

As Christians you are to excel in compassionate love expressed in helping others in their needs. It is right to admire others for the strength of their virtues, and you can look up to them, but you need to lean more on the strength of God than on the strength of any human persons. When you do this, you will be able to draw close to the weak that We send you. Instead of being afraid of their neediness you will be able to prudently give as we show you what will help them.

Day 4: Readings

(From God Alone)

10 Signs of Spiritual Awakening

- 1. The desire for a greater closeness to God even though we know we cannot bring this about by ourselves.**
- 2. We are aware that God wishes to be closer to us in the innermost recesses of our hearts.**
- 3. We sense, see, or hear, God breaking through the barriers in us of sin, routine, and fear.**
- 4. We find the Holy Spirit more strongly reaching out to us in our individual and group prayer; in the liturgy, and in communion and reconciliation; to comfort and guide us.**
- 5. We perceive Jesus, more and more, in the suffering hearts of others: those close to us and those less known. This gives us fresh impetus to try to overcome injustices of small and larger scale.**
- 6. We find mercy in the kindness and goodness in the hearts of others for ourselves.**
- 7. We see God's hand more clearly in the beauty in nature, in human inventiveness, and in the arts.**
- 8. We feel the embrace of Jesus and Mary in our worst physical and emotional pain. This enabled us better to forgive others and ourselves.**
- 9. We believe and hope more strongly, in spite of all our weaknesses and evils, in God's plan of love for the present and for eternity.**
- 10. We experience our beings expanding with greater joy, peace, trust, gratitude and love.**

Day 5 Readings:

(from God Alone)

About Conversation

Holy Spirit:

There is a roughness in your talk, not only as in talk among embattled soldiers full of vulgarity and cursing, but also within your families.

Teasing can be a form of fondness, but I am advising you to avoid harshness or the indifference of not greeting each other with words or gestures or smiles of welcome.

It leads people to become shut up in cold defensiveness and then to seek relief sometimes in the comradeship of shared addictions or in solitary addictions where there is a note of tenderness toward the self: such as “poor me. This drink will make me feel better, or this masturbation, This over-indulgence in food makes me feel good.”

(Note from Ronda: I did not interpret the Holy Spirit to mean ordinary pleasures in life but addictions.)

Politeness is good when it is an expression of respect, but it is even better when it overflows from solidarity and goodness of heart towards others in daily life.

Watch the way genuinely loving people conduct themselves in these small aspects of life such as light humor, affection, affirmation. Don't write this off as convention but learn from it and plunge yourself into the source: God the Father, “from whom comes all good gifts” (James 1:17)

The Family

Holy Spirit:

Out of individualism, you think too much as if each individual has to have every virtue to be complete, whole and perfect. Your critical eye focuses on each one in a family and you think about each ones defects and your mind works on how you would like each one to be. It is the same with your family in the Church.

You have not really understood the mystical body image we gave you in Scripture. (Jesus is the head, you are the body or the idea that a hand is not a leg.)

It would be better if you look at each one and be grateful for every virtue, talent and good personal way each one has, and see how it contributes to the family and others places this person is: school, work, Church. They need the help of the Spirit to perfect those qualities to bring them under the umbrella of love.

In their areas of defect, when some capacity is needed by the Spirit, they need to call for help on those who are better in this area and to seek Divine help.

But they don't need to berate themselves constantly for not being everything. That comes from a proud, competitive, envious, spirit.

This teaching is part of the goal we have for greater appreciation for your own gifts and the gifts of others. It will take away tense striving and make "the burden light." You will be without so much tension to be perfect in a worldly way.

The fierce desire to control others and yourself must give way to giving yourself and others to us in prayer and becoming encouragers and affirmers of the good.

Day 6: Readings from the Saints and other Spiritual Writers:

"The Spirit is truly the dwelling of the saints and the saints are for the Spirit a place where he dwells as in his own home, since they offer themselves as a dwelling place for God and are called his temple." St. Basil

"If God causes you to suffer much, it is a sign that He has great designs for you, and that he certainly intends to make you a saint." St. Ignatius Loyola

"Comfort in tribulation can be secured only on the sure ground of faith holding as true the words of Scripture and the teaching of the Catholic Church." St. Thomas More

"Prayer is nothing but union with God. When one has a heart that is pure and united with God, he is given a kind of serenity and sweetness that makes him ecstatic, a light that surrounds him with marvelous brightness. In this ultimate union, God and the soul are fused together like two bits of wax that no one can ever pull apart. This union with God with a tiny creature is a lovely thing. It is happiness beyond understanding...through prayer we receive a foretaste of heaven and something of paradise comes down upon us. (Some saints) used to see Our Lord and talk to Him just as we talk to one another." (St. John Vianney)

"So you have failed? You cannot fail. You have not failed: you have gained experience. Forward!" St. Jose Escriva

"Thou shalt love thy crooked neighbor with thy crooked heart." Auden the poet.

Day 7: Final Group Meeting

Sharing on questions from Day 1:

When have you experienced any of the sacraments as visible signs of invisible love?

Is the Holy Spirit leading you to explore any modes of prayer not yet a part of your daily and weekly life?

How do you show love of neighbor most often at present? In what areas might you feel called to expand your love?

Questions? Requests for Prayer? The group leader might ask the members what stood out for them most in 6 Steps and also any improvement they might want to send to Ronda at chervinronda@gmail.com

If you feel you benefitted from 6 Steps to Holiness, Ronda has worked out a similar sequence of topics called 6 Steps to Holiness, Stage 2. Write to her at chervinronda@gmail.com for a copy.

