

Holy Longing Book Study
Chapters 1-3
(Green is my soul speaking to me)

I was recently at my semi-annual diaconate interview with my wife, Debbie. We were sitting across the table from two permanent deacons who were asking the questions. They looked at me and asked if I was maturing in my faith. I set back and thought for a moment. Of everything I said in answering that question, what stands out for me related to this study is the following: I have a greater desire to better understand my relationship with Christ and a greater desire to learn more about my catholic faith and what it means to me and for me in my life. And as it turns out, this is exactly how Ronald Rolheiser defines spirituality – It is ultimately about what we do with our desire – both in terms of handling the pain and the hope they bring us.

In many ways, this reminds me of the first talk in Cursillo, which is a 3 ½ day retreat. The first talk is on Ideals. It talks about where I put my energy, my efforts, my desire if you will, is where I will find my Ideal. Where or how do I channel that fire each one of us has deep in our soul? **Did you mention me?** Who are you? **I'm your soul.** Did you say my soul? **Yes, I am your soul.** Okay...anyway, our desires shape our actions and our actions shape our spirituality. When we have a strong spirituality, we have a healthy soul. But what is the soul? **Let me help with that. I am not something you have, I am something you are! I am the life-pulse within you and I give you energy and I keep you glued together.** Okay, okay but let's look at this more deeply though.

Energy means we must be vibrant, living with zest, and full hope as we sense that ultimately life is beautiful and worth living. When things break down our souls feel that pain sometimes resulting in bitterness, despair or depression. **Let me make this simple for you. I am responsible for keeping you fixed together, helping you know who you truly are...I help you make sense of the things that happen in your life.** So in many ways our soul is the principle of both chaos and order giving us a creative tension.

It is funny that Rolheiser mentions this because I included this in a talk I recently did at Cursillo on obstacles to grace. We find ourselves in tension when our desires draw us to those things that separate us from God. We are born in the image of God and our souls are oriented towards him. **Yes, God created me and I long and desire to be close to him.** When our energy is mis-directed to our own agenda, we feel that tension, the tug of God pulling us back. **Boy have you created some tension for me with some of the things you have done in your life.**

Think about your own life. When have you felt that tension? Did you know where it was coming from? In realizing the all-powerful, ever-living God, the great "I AM" is the one pulling us, we are most likely to draw ourselves back to the Father. **(Play Burn Bright by Natalie Grant)** But we must be careful.

There are many struggles in our spirituality...naiveté, busyness, distraction, restlessness, and balance. We are naïve about the nature of energy and how strong it can be...we think we can manage it all on our own. In fact, we may often be resistant to any external force, religious or otherwise, that tries to restrict our freedom. When our naiveté leads us to poor decision making, the energy surrounding this can be very strong! Very strong! **Let me give you an example of THIS. Remember when you were in college...how you stopped going to church, started staying out late, not going to class.** But I had a really good time and was doing all kinds of cool stuff. **And how did that work out for us?** What do you mean? **You know what I mean...don't you remember being depressed and sleeping for an entire week because you had failed all your classes and did not know what to do?** I guess you are right. I was using a lot of energy and having a good time but it was focused on all the wrong things. **I did not enjoy it either...it was exhausting and God had not left the building, but you sure did! It is important to remember that part of growing our spirituality is staying in touch with our church community. God does not intend for you to do things on your own.**

The divine energy can also be very strong as well. Exodus chapter 3 tells us about the burning bush where Moses takes off his sandals. We must approach God's life giving energy with reverence and respect. Notice when our soul is taken in the wrong direction, the world tends to consume us, whatever that vice may be, consuming our time, our energy, our focus, and everything it can. But when our soul is aligned with God, it is like the burning bush, which was not consumed, but magnified, illuminated, and transfigured. **Ahh, I like being aligned with God. Let me share a story about how your decisions magnified me and filled me with positive energy.** Sure, go ahead...after all you are my soul. **Remember when you decided to start taking**

RCIA classes? Yes, I do, back in 1994 I believe. **Correct. One of the best decisions you ever made. You started making God a priority in your life. You learned about the Catholic faith and received the sacraments of reconciliation, confirmation, and Eucharist!** Yes, the sacraments...an outward sign, instituted by Christ, entrusted to the Church, to give grace. **Look at you! God is always pouring grace down on you...and I love grace. Grace makes me feel GREAT! But we must be careful when we receive and use grace.** What do you mean? **Remember when you were planning a retreat for the youth group and it got cancelled?** Yes, I do. I was pretty hot! **Remember what Father Mike McCarron said to you.** Very well...he said maybe you are too close to this. Now that made me really mad. **Now, tell them the rest of the story.** Okay...I realized about 15 years later (I am a slow learner) while attending a retreat that I had made the youth group retreat about what I wanted instead of what God wanted. I forgot that all the success we had doing youth group was not because of anything I had did but because of God's grace. **You have to watch out for that pesky devil because he knows that if you think you are doing all the work then pride creeps in and I don't like pride...deadly, deadly sin.**

Seems like we have been covering the good and the bad of my spirituality. But what are the absolute essentials for Christian spirituality. Rolheiser outlines four (4) pillars: private prayer and private morality (**check**), social justice (**check**), mellowness of heart and spirit (**check**) and community as an element of true worship (**check, check**). Thanks...It IS important to remember that if one of the pillars is missing, the we have an unstable structure, or in this case, an unstable spirituality.

So what exactly do we mean by private prayer and private morality. The first thing jumps in my mind about private morality is what we do when no one is looking (**except for God of course**). Private prayer and morality gets down to having a personal relationship with Christ. The question is, how do we do this. We must encounter Jesus in a real way and recognize that it is Him. **We encounter Christ in the scriptures, the sacraments, prayer, and one another.** I agree and our baseline for how we should live our lives is found in the ten commandments. **You are right, but from a soul perspective we must follow the ten commandments with love in your heart.** What do you mean? **Earlier, you talked about desire shaping action and action shaping spirituality, right?** You are correct. **This is true but it must be fueled by love which is received through grace. A grace that is found in a personal relationship with Jesus....yes, found in personal prayer, participating in the sacraments, and reading the scriptures. When you do these things you grow in holiness, which makes me very happy as your soul.**

The second pillar is social justice. **Do me a favor and read the Beatitudes.** Where is that? **In the Bible.** I know THAT, but where? **Matthew Chapter 5.** Okay (**Read Matthew 5**). Very interesting, but I am not sure what it means. **It really talks about our inward spirituality, you know me, your soul.** Okay, I need to depend on God, be meek, thirst for righteousness, be merciful, clean of heart, and peaceful, and this helps you. **Correct!**

Now, read Matthew 25:31-46. What is this, bible study or something? **Just read it please.** Okay (**Read Matthew 25:31-46**). Wow...you mean Jesus is in the least of us. **That's right...how you treat them is how you treat God and how you treat me too.** So, to grow in spirituality, I need to pray and follow the ten commandments and help take care of the poor and needy? **Yes, grasshopper, you are starting to learn!**

Rolheiser talks about the third pillar to our spirituality being mellowness of heart and spirit. What he really means is we must have a grateful heart, because only people who have a grateful heart can transform the world with love and justice. There are so many things in this world that can leave us wounded, angry or bitter. **Story time.** Here we go again. **Read Luke 15:11-32 for me please** (Read Luke 15:11-32). **So what did you think?** That we can be away from the Father's house either through infidelity and weakness like the younger brother or bitter and angry like the older brother. **This is good, but we are talking mellowness of heart and spirit here.** Ahh, I see...we should all have the compassion of the Father no matter what the situation. **Very good. You just never know why someone is acting the way they are or what is going on in their life. When you meet them with mellowness of heart and spirit, it makes me very happy.**

Rolheiser talks about the final pillar being community as an element of worship. **Yep, this is very important. God said it himself. You love God but you also love your neighbor as yourself.** Rolheiser says anyone who claims to love God who is invisible but refuses to deal with a visible neighbor is a liar, for one can only really love a God who is love if one is concretely involved with a real community on earth. Spirituality is about the communal search for the face of God.

We sure have covered a lot of ground tonight. **Yes, we have.** Well, I really appreciate your unexpected help tonight and I am glad you are my soul! **You're welcome :o)...**

So, here are some questions for small group reflection: **(Play Hallelujah by Dave Pettigrew (Piano Version))**

How do you direct the energy in your soul?

What tensions do you have in your life? What is God calling you to do?

How is your private prayer and morality?

How can you make a difference in social justice?

Do you meet all situations with mellowness of heart and spirit?

How is your relationship with God? With the Church?