

Spirituality and Moral Theology – Implications for Spiritual Direction

Let me start by saying that we cannot do this subject justice in the time we have. We are only going to touch the tip of a very large iceberg.

What is spirituality? (Ask each person to share a brief definition)

- Essentially, it is the deepening of our relationship with Jesus Christ – God Incarnate

What is morality? (Ask each person to share a brief definition)

- In many ways, understanding the many forms of human dignity. Talk about John Paul the II and the image of Christ on the Cross as having His arms open to embrace us...wow!

What are the common elements necessary to increase spirituality and moral life?

- Free Will & Grace (We must accept it!)
 - Spirituality, in many ways, is directly related to our grateful response to Grace
 - Implication for Spiritual Direction
 - Through Baptism and Faith, we are all moral mystics – but do we see/know/recognize that God IS working in/through our lives
 - 1st Example – Your Own Spiritual Autobiography that you did for this class – did that open any eyes when you went back and traced through your life? **Encourage your directees to do the same and to journal! Yes, we find God in the ordinary, but our relationship with Him grows exponentially when we understand how extraordinarily He is working in our lives! This brings me to the Paschal Mystery...which is critically central to our Spirituality...**
 - Paschal Mystery - How would you define this?
 - Life, Death & Resurrection of Jesus Christ
 - Life is Greater than Death
 - Light is Greater than Darkness
 - Forgiveness is Greater than Sin
 - Our belief and hope in the Paschal Mystery is central to our faith and thus central to the strength of our spirituality.
 - Talk about how I wrote a talk on the Paschal Mystery in my life...my dad, grannie, wife, diaconate. – Share story of my diaconate call – a mystic experience.
 - Recognizing the real workings of God's paschal mystery in our life increases our spirituality
 - It is also fuel for our morality...we are the hands and feet of Christ
 - Life is Greater than Death – Abortion, euthanasia
 - Being a light to the homeless or aged is greater than loneliness
 - Any other thoughts or examples?
 - 2nd Example –Because of Free Will, We Have a Choice to Accept God's Grace. We miss much of God's Grace because we are wrapped in a rain coat of "Self" – often filled with emotion and hanging on to the past or worrying about the future – **Screw tape makes a point of this in Letters 5/6 to Wormwood. The devil wants us to keep our troubles – past, present, and future – all intact. God wants us to rely on His grace which in itself is sufficient for today.** The past is gone and the future has not happen. Share a simple example of this – Sean Fisher story. **Help directees to see things from God's**

perspective, especially through the life of Jesus Christ, versus their own perspective. Help them see the divide that is created when we don't.

- 3rd Example – Sometimes our Free Will or just Life in general leads us into dry and dark periods of our life. We all experience them. These are often opportunities for us to look more towards God and to CHOOSE His Grace because our resistance to temptation is low. **In Letters 8/9, Screwtape tells Wormwood to get the Patient to believe that the trough will be forever, to accept this new lowly standard of life, to maybe even leave religion all together** – the sad thing is the prevalence of this in society today...so many people leaving the church. **Help directees to see the grace in the difficulties of life...to see how God really loves them**– Tell Story of Kevin Directing me About Grannie and how I did not speak at her funeral and he asked me to list all the things I did good for Grannie
- Scriptures – We must see reality via the scriptures instead of the scriptures through our reality
 - Any thoughts on what that means to you?
 - The scriptures challenge us to the true meaning of life...to conversion
 - Matthew Kelly gave a challenge to people at one of his talks – read the Gospel 10 minutes every day!
 - We must measure our experiences against the Word of God and the Word made Flesh
 - We must break open the scriptures to break open the meaning of life
 - Morality is directly related to our relationship with Christ, therefore, we MUST know HIM and one of the best ways to do this is through the scriptures
 - A couple of scriptural references that have had significant meaning in my life
 - Philippians Chapter 2
 - The Vine and the Branches
 - The Washing of the Feet
 - Our Conscience is FORMED when we delve into the Scriptures – a perfect example awaits in the Gospels!
 - **Encourage your directees to read the Gospels – to know the living God through His Scriptures. BIBLE – Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth. Maybe share your perspective on Gospel passages that relate to their current concerns.**
- Sacraments – They are all important! But let us focus on two (2) of them
 - Baptism (Trinity) – How does Baptism or the reminder of Baptism increase spirituality and morality? What do we do to remind ourselves of our Baptism?
 - Through Baptism, we receive the virtues of faith, hope, and charity
 - By faith, we believe in everything God has revealed
 - By hope, we believe that God's Grace is sufficient, if we cooperate with it
 - By charity, to love others more than ourselves. **In Letter 26 from Screwtape to Wormwood, he encourages confusing the Patient between unselfishness and charity (love).** Charity is an unlimited loving-kindness showed towards all others whereas unselfishness is simply the act of not putting yourself first. This can create conflict when selflessness replaces honesty. There is a lack of genuine generosity. There is also the potential for resentment and putting expectations on your perceived generosity. **Help your directees to see the whole concept of loving others translates into a greater sense of morality**
 - Eucharist – the summit of our spirituality. Share with me the first word that comes to mind when you think of the Eucharist?
 - Intimate
 - Adoration

- Personal
 - Cleansing
 - Communion and Union with the Entire Body of Christ
 - Life Centering
 - True Sacrifice - Life giving Sacrifice
 - **What does the Eucharist mean to your directee? In what ways does the Eucharist transform?**
- Church (Community) - This is very important. We are not meant to go it alone
 - Look at the cross...we have a vertical relationship with God and a horizontal relationship with the church.
 - **Often times directees may miss this point that a relationship with God entails having a relationship with the Body of Christ. For it is often in one another that we experience Christ!**
 - Within a community, such as this one for example, we are able to share stories of where Christ is in our lives. This is extremely important because we see in one another and through one another that Christ is truly alive and this acts as a springboard in our faith and draws us closer into relationship with God which in turn helps to steady our moral compass in the TRUE direction.
 - There is a song by Matthew West (MJ) called "Do Something". The song is asking God to do something and His response is I already did - I created you! Within our communities, we experience God Doing Something through the lives of those around us - We see that HE is active and present.
 - So often our charity and almsgiving are directly related to things we do within our church community - *any examples?*
 - What does almsgiving and charity do - it gives us PERSPECTIVE! It FORMS our conscience. It is Love rooted in God! It also keeps us active and engaged in works of mercy and love for others.
 - Our acts become self-transcending - but what does this mean?
 - **Well, Screwtape hints at it in Letter 14. He talks about humility and how he wants the patient to believe that humility is thinking less of yourself instead of thinking of yourself less. He also wants the patient to think...hmm, I am being humble, I am doing good at being humble...at this point, the focus is back on self.** God wants us to be humble and just rejoice in our talents! The devil wants us to claim them as our own. **This is very important point towards directees where they get confused about the true self-transcendent nature of humbleness.**
 - We are also encouraged by the acts of others like Pope Francis for example
 - We begin to see and experience Christ incarnate in those around us that resonate the will and love of God.
 - Cursillo is another great example of why community is so important and how God works through us - we hold one another accountable!
 - Our relationship with God is strengthened
- Beatitudes Matthew 5:3-10
- Blessed are the **poor in spirit**: for theirs is the **kingdom of heaven**. (*Verse 3*) Focus here is on full reliance in God
- Blessed are the meek: for they shall possess the land. (*Verse 4*)
- Blessed are they who mourn: for they shall be comforted. (*Verse 5*)
- Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after **justice**: for they shall have their fill. (*Verse 6*) Strong desire for religious and moral perfection
- Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. (*Verse 7*) Speaks to corporeal works of mercy

- Blessed are the clean of heart: for they shall see **God**. (*Verse 8*) Just having a pure heart toward goodness
- Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of **God**. (*Verse 9*) Imitating of God's love for man
- Blessed are they that suffer **persecution** for **justice'** sake, for theirs is the **kingdom of heaven**. (*Verse 10*) We are going to have struggles, especially when following Christ!
- **Encourage your directees to live the beatitudes, to study them, and to understand them**