

Pembroke Diocesan Council of the Catholic Women's League of Canada
Spring Meeting March 16, 2024 Zoom
Spiritual Advisor Father Michael Coyne

Good morning, ladies. I am glad to be able to speak with you this day as we enter the last weeks of Lent and enter our shared highest liturgical season of Easter week. I can't believe how time has flown by, I feel like we just celebrated last year's Easter week and here we are again. As I get older, I find that truth how time seems to fly by even when I know time is still the same it has always been its me that's changed. Every moment of my life is now a precious one as I know I have more time behind me than in front of me. As such I don't take time as much for granted as I used to when I was younger. I also feel a consequence of getting older is the unfortunate tendency to at times be less willing to listen to others. Maybe its because we intellectual know we have less time, and so we are less inclined to feel that it is being wasted. These last weeks as we come closer to Easter we have been hearing in our daily liturgies, again and again, the conflicts between Jesus and the religious leaders of his time. This drama of "desire" this human disease of desire that grows stronger as we age. We begin to realize more and more that our deepest longings never seem to be truly fully satisfied. We begin to understand that our human condition is one of endlessly being restless who occasionally find rest. Always dissatisfied and occasionally are blessed to find fleeting fulfillment.

The natural default of the human heart seems to be not serenity but the opposite. Why is this the case? Why can we not sit still and be at peace. "What I want when I want it how I want it and I want it now. This is the fire in our hearts the fire of desire. This fire of desire will unfortunately from time to time come into conflict with what God wants for me. This is faith this dance between what I want and what God wants and how they interact with each other. Now I used the term of our desires being a disease, but our desires are not inherently bad in themselves this is our human nature. Our desires our also our choices good and bad. Creativity, love, intimacy, hate, martyrdom. We can think of our desires as energy as well if you don't like disease. Its like the commonly used first reading in funerals Ecclesiastes. In life there is a time for hate and a time for love a time for war and a time for peace the business of our lives.

For us as Christians this restlessness is understood through our faith, as St. Augustine's famous often used quote, "You have made us for yourself, Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." The trick of our spiritual life is to control and guide these desires to channel them, so they become a creative energy that influences our Christian discipleship. The truth is that our level of discipline and self-control over our desires, significantly affects the level of happiness we experience in this life. Mastery of self and happiness are intimately connected. As human beings we are made in the image and likeness of God. We were given the gifts of intelligence and free will, the ability to think and the freedom to choose. We could not love without having the freedom to choose. Love is more than just an attraction based on instinct or biological drives; love involves a decision of the will. God honoured us with free will so that we might experience the dignity of loving and being loved.

Spirituality is not the same as "Christian Spirituality" this is an important distinction to make, and to understand when we are talking about spirituality. Spirituality understood through the modern world's perspective tends towards a more gnostic flavor. Which I mean to say that it is detached from the world a personal religion without time; a faith presented as a personal lifestyle choice worship misconstrued as self-therapy. I sit here with this morning, with you and I recognize that it is not an easy time to be a Catholic especially if you are trying to pass your faith on to your

children and grandchildren. We live in an age of anti-church sentiment within both popular culture and the intellectual world. There is a growing divide between those who see religion in terms of private prayer and piety and those who see it as the quest for justice, and a tiredness in our hearts at this divide. We live in a blessed age which is rich in everything except clarity, and the rampant individualism of our culture which makes family and community life difficult at every level.

So how do we balance our desires and rest in our satisfactions longer. It is no easy task to walk our pilgrim path of faith and find peace.

- Our Catholic Spirituality is ultimately about what we do with our desires. How we balance the pain
- and the hope that are the ingredients of our desires.
- But let us stay with what Catholic spirituality is and is not for a moment. Spirituality must remain grounded in our minds it is not some mystical paranormal, or churchy, holy thing. It is not something on the fringes. It just a facete of life.
- It is not a choice to be spiritual or not to have spiritually in our live or not. Everyone has to have a spirituality, and everyone does have one it might be either life giving or life destroying but we all have one. We all wake up to life on fire with our desires and what we do with those desires is our expression of spirituality.
- All of us religious or not have a spirituality of life, what shapes our actions is our spirituality. Understanding this truth helps us commit to it.
- Desires influence us to acts and when we act what we do or do not do will either lead to a greater integration or disintegration within our personalities minds and bodies and this will influence our relationship with God.
- That's why lent is so important a period of time in our faith to enter into the spiritual habits, disciplines we use to the strengthening of this divine relationship. Our life of faith can ebb and flow. Our faith can be weakened or strengthened. Faith is not a human accomplishment, but rather a divine gift that is welcomed.

To embrace the cross, then is to embrace the logic of salvation as the father defined that logic. This is perhaps the hardest challenge of Lent. But we must remember that God's love is greater than human hatred and has won a victory forever. This is the triumph and the joy of the cross. Evil has been confronted has been allowed to do its worst to God in the humanity of Christ, and God in Christ transforms this evil act into victory through love. When we contemplate Christ in his passion, we do so not simply to recall a historical event now over and done with, but to encounter the living God, the God that enters our darkness, weakness, and sinfulness, who enters our hatred and our despair, and can transform it. It is in our pains that we meet Christ in his passion, know his presence and healing power bringing hope out of our despair.

But we must have the humility in our Lenten prayer to present this suffering to God. I would now like to end my talk with the Lenten prayer to be freed from the seven deadly sins to control our desires and not be controlled by them.