

Catholic Women's League - Montreal - 10.03.2004

Annual Diocesan CWL Twilight Retreat – Lent 2004

Twilight is that time of evening when it is still light, yet dark enough to see the stars.

A retreat is a refuge in time. We leave behind for a little while the cares and burdens of the day. We seek a moment of respite, in stillness and silence, where we might be visited by the living God.

This is an annual gathering of members of the CWL in and around Montreal, because we have many things in common: our womanhood, our faith, our membership in the Church and in the CWL, our common call to holiness, and what Pope John Paul II calls the “genius of woman”.

Signs of the Times

Jesus said that the Father is always working, and that He himself would be with us all days until the end of time. In the past, God's work took the form of revelation to the Chosen People and salvation in the Person of Jesus, and it has come to us through the ongoing gathering of people Jesus called his Church. In the future, God's plan will reach its fulfillment in the Parousia, the final unfolding of his transforming grace that will make all things new for all eternity. In the present, we can read the signs of the times to discover what God is doing and saying to us.

*What is God doing in the Church? In the world? In my family? In my life?
What is God saying to his Church? To the world? To the CWL? To our Council? To us? To me?
How can we/I better love: God? Spouse and/or Family? Other CWL members? Other Catholic women? Women in general? The men in our world? The children and youth in our world?*

Grace of the Retreat

What grace am I asking of the Lord during this brief retreat? (Pause.)

What is my heart crying out to God tonight, or these days, or this past while? (Pause.)

What is my soul yearning for? (Pause.)

Just a Fresh Beginning....

A brief retreat moment like this could seem too short to accomplish anything, and yet we have all tasted how good a “minute vacation” can be when we just stop in our tracks for a few brief seconds to observe a child at play or sleep, listen to a bird singing, soak up the deep beauty of a flower, delight in the fragrance coming to us from a food, flower, garden, person, or place. The loving decision to receive such moments is itself a grace from God, who opens up inside us – for that moment – a glimpse of eternity. These “minute vacations” when sprinkled generously through our day, are so charged with God's life and love that they change the course of our days and lives. This is the perspective to adopt for this Twilight Retreat.

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Spiritual Exercise 1 *Accepting to live life as God's personal gift to me*

We are to accept all that happens, knowing that the Father's loving glance is upon us, and choose with all the freedom we can muster to live our lives with all the love within us we receive from Him.

We are called to receive with trust a divine harmony that is the work of the Holy Spirit within us, bringing into balance God's action and our participation.

We are the work of the Father's hands – as He continually uses all that happens in our lives to fashion us more and more into living images of his Divine Son – unfolding within us more and more the person He has made us to be and our soul deeply yearns to become.

The Bible is God's sacred history with his people on Earth. Our life is our sacred history of God's presence and action within us, from even before we were conceived, through the present and into the unending eternity He so desires to share with us.

Our life weaves together our freedom and limitations, grace and sin, joy and pain, and the full range of living – both human and divine – into the inseparable realms of relatedness with God, with others in family bonds, with others in bonds of faith, with others in a variety of bonds, and with our self.

We don't have a spiritual life separate from the rest of our life – every moment of every day and night is spiritual – whether by God's grace or its absence and by my participation or rebellion – becoming a garden swelling with fruit and flowers, or a wasteland of troubled emptiness.

We are all caught up into a pilgrimage of change – at times in growth and progress, at times in sinfulness and regression, at times in trouble and paralysis, at times in repentance and renewal – and our life weaves in and out of various stages or phases:

Purification – Enlightenment – Union

Purification is God's grace detaching us from preoccupation with the things and satisfactions of the flesh, which is passing away, and frees our spirit to look "up" to the things of the spirit and eternity.

Enlightenment is God's grace lifting us up into the things of the spirit and eternity, and through them introducing us more directly and personally into a living and reciprocal relationship with the Unknowable as Father, as Son and Saviour – Jesus, and as Holy Spirit, Lord and Giver of Life.

Union is God's grace bringing us to no longer cling to even the satisfactions of the things of the spirit; so that letting go of the gifts of the Giver and the satisfactions they bring, our soul might be unhindered to desire only the Giver himself, bringing us into a way of relating that is do deep and transforming that it cannot be observed by our mind or heart. We only have the intuitions the Beloved is pleased to grant us that He is quietly at work in the "Garden Enclosed" of our soul, where He is delighted to stop and rest.

Read the above statements. Ponder them in prayer. Linger wherever something is happening within. You may use "My Sacred History" exercise as a springboard and follow-up. Take note of what is happening within, and dialogue with the Lord about this in prayer and quiet.

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Spiritual Exercise 2 *Accepting to live time as God's gift to humanity and to me*

How do I feel about time – how am I living in time?

Today, in our culture, we often struggle with time. We often see time as problematic. We talk about time management, because we have trouble finding time for everything. We have allowed ourselves not to make distinctions of values and priorities, with the result that we try to squeeze more and more worthy things into our portion of time, which refuses to stretch or accommodate all that we want to squeeze into it.

We become the servant and slave of all. Are we living this as Jesus intended and as He himself freely chose to live his life – even his passion and death – finding fulfillment, peace, and joy in the giving of ourselves, even when it hurts, or have we allowed ourselves to become unwilling victims, unhappy at being eaten up by all who come to us for nourishment?

The Creator's Operating Principles

The Third Commandment: "Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. For six days you will labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath for Yahweh your God. Do no work that day...."
Ex 20:8-10

The Divine Example: "For in six days Yahweh made the heavens and the earth and the sea and all that is in them, but on the seventh day he rested; that is why Yahweh has blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy." Ex 20:11

Do an Inventory – How am I living time?

What are the moments of my week when I experience time as wholesome and holy? When do I experience time as a miser and/or a fugitive? Can I begin to perceive my soul crying out to my loving Father? Allow your soul ample time to enter deeply into this heartfelt prayer.

Obeying the Father – Allowing Him to Sanctify Time for Us

Read the handout "Sabbath Vigil for a Young Family" – both the home liturgy and the principles on the other side. Go over it to allow the text to bring to light the dark spots in your own experience of time and open up possibilities of little steps you can begin to take to move towards following the Father's teaching and lead others – especially members of your family – with you. Be creative and ask the Father's abundant grace to help you adapt this model for your personal and family situation.

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Spiritual Exercise 3 *Accepting to contemplate God's gifts always and everywhere*

We come to know and love God through creative, abundant, and extravagant manifestations of infinite well springs of life: as Truth, Goodness, Beauty, and Harmony/Order.

God grants us to know Him as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit through Jesus of Nazareth, his Incarnate Word and his Beloved. We can know and love God through the Sacred Scriptures, the Sacraments, prayer and contemplation, sacrifice and almsgiving, and through repentance and works of penance.

We participate in the divine life and come to better know and love our Creator through works of mercy – both corporal and spiritual; through the works of his apparently infinite creation: the stars of the universe, the day and night lights of our sky, the numerous plants that grow and creatures that live and move on our Earth on the ground, underground, in the air, and in the seas; through artistic creation: poetry, prose, painting, music, art, dance, sport, and so on; and through God's directions for living: the Ten Commandments, Jesus' Great Commandment, and the Beatitudes.

Pick one of the attributes and manifestations of God's divinity: Truth, Goodness, Beauty, and Harmony/Order, and contemplate it beginning from a concrete manifestation of it around you.

Get in touch with the goodness and riches of our Creator and Father by giving expression to your gratitude and delight in his creation through some artistic medium.

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Spiritual Exercise 4 *Accepting to follow Jesus in living my life as a gift of love*

Taking an inventory of my life – designing and updating a rule of life

1. *What is happening in my life?*

☞ *My living situation and living conditions.*

- ☞ *How am I sleeping? Eating? How much water do I drink?*
- ☞ *Am I exercising? Enjoying it? Do I take time to play? Enjoying it?*
- ☞ *How do I allow myself to take satisfaction in taking care of my person and grooming?*

☞ *My work circumstances and working conditions.*

- ! *What can I do to change and improve my working conditions?*
- ? *How can I find the strength to endure peaceably what I cannot change?*
- ? *What help can I find in others at work? Whom can I help at work?*

☞ *My relationships at home, at work, at school, in “church”, and at large.*

- ♥ *Am I making enough room for my primary relationships?*
 - ♥ *How can I improve them?*
- ♥ *Have I ever had a sense of being with God, or God being with me?*
 - ♥ *Am I willing to get closer, or let God get closer to me?*
- ♥ *How can I allow God to make himself more at home in me and in my life?*
 - ♥ *What hesitations or difficulties come to mind?*

☞ *My sense of well being, not without trials – or my sense of poverty.*

- ☞ *Am I primarily well or poor?*
- ☞ *What poverty is at the heart of my well being?*
- ☞ *What well being is hidden at the heart of my poverty?*
 - ☞ *What obstacles to well being come to mind?*
- ☞ *How about bringing them to prayer? To confession?*

2. *Did I ever have a dream for my life, a sense of vocation – of a calling – from God?*

- ♥ *What was my dream?*
- ♥ *What happened to it? How did it change or grow?*
- ♥ *Where is my dream now? How am I still connected to it?*
- ♥ *If I didn't have a dream before, do I have one now? What is it?*

3. *If not, am I willing to ask God to let me see his dream for me now, his call to me?*

I can allow my heart to cry out to Him right here and now.

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4. Seeking a balanced life through a Rule of Life.

- ☞ Making time each day – on rising and before going to bed – to express gratitude to God in a concrete way, in terms of the blessings of the day, and to ask forgiveness and mercy from my Father, in terms of my sins and failings during the day.*
- ☞ Making room for a natural life: little moments throughout the day when I notice the Father drawing my attention to the beauty of his creation in sunrises, sunsets, children at play, creatures doing their creature things, plants growing and blooming, the wind whispering in my ear, the clouds sailing along, the sun shining down on me, and so on.*
- ☞ With every person I face, thanking God for the gift of their life at this moment, and asking Him to show me the hidden treasures in them – all too often hidden under the distressing disguise of their poverty or whatever is happening to them at the moment – and grant me the grace to know them and love them as He does, from the inside.*
- ☞ Including some Sacred Scripture in my daily diet: the daily Mass readings, or reading a little from the Gospels and the Psalms each day, going to the letters of the Apostles, Proverbs, Sirach, and other wisdom books, and other Bible books.*
- ☞ Developing more of a Sunday observance, including the Sabbath principle of a whole day to pray and play in God's loving presence, setting aside cares, sorrows, and fears.*
- ☞ Making the Sunday Mass and worship the highlight of the Lord's Day, either by myself or with my family, and preparing myself for it by glancing at the readings, looking back on the week, looking ahead to the coming week, taking delight in the Father looking on me with mercy and love.*
- ☞ Preparing by the prayer of gratitude and repentance before going to bed at night, make time to celebrate regularly the Sacrament of Reconciliation – not only when I am in mortal sin – but simply to continue entrusting my heart, mind, body, soul, and life to the Father's ongoing work in me, by the loving power of the Holy Spirit, the Consoler.*
- ☞ Make time for my spouse every week, every day, and also for my family, relatives, and friends – accepting to be fully in the moment whenever I am face to face with another person – however short the time that may be available.*
- ☞ Waste no time worrying and fretting, but entrust every situation to the Lord and go on walking with confidence in Him to guide my steps and purposes in every moment in accord with his own perfect and holy will.*
- ☞ Keep working at a balance between caring for my own essential needs and spending my energy and time generously for others – beginning with my daily duty in my life vocation – making necessary adjustments on my own ground without imposing them on others.*
- ☞ Other....*