

## **Meditation 1, Thursday Evening**

### **Know Yourself**

#### **Purpose and Setting**

*This meditation begins the process of preparing the participants to let go of their anxiety so they can listen to and accept the message that will be proclaimed on the weekend. It does this by encouraging the participants to be more aware of who they are, why they are here, and to be honest about their potentialities and limitations. They are invited to look inside the self and see what God already sees. This truth and self-knowledge will set them free to respond to God. It should be stressed that each person's situation is unique, and that there is no "expected response" to the Via de Cristo experience. Do some centering exercises to prepare for listening to this meditation.*

#### **Meditation**

Please relax, and think along with me. This is the first of several meditations we will share with you this weekend. A meditation is a sharing of some thoughts (usually from the scriptures) for your personal, and prayerful, reflection. Please, if at all possible, try to un-cloud your mind of other thoughts while you are here with us, so that you can use this time apart to talk these things over with God.

Some of the things that can get in the way of clearing our minds and relaxing include anxiety, worry, apprehension. You are probably wondering what this weekend is all about. You may even be wondering if we are going to ask you to do something you don't want to do. If we do ask, you will not be forced to do it. You can always say "No, thank you." So you can relax about that. You just may be wondering if our intentions are honorable - rest assured they are. And if you are wondering if one or more of us will back you into a corner and "convert" you or something, don't worry, nothing could be farther from the truth. We're not going to crowd you for anything - we just want you to relax, to listen, to ponder, to think. Along that vein, I would like to share this meditation based on Matthew 6:26-34

#### **READ MATTHEW 6:26-34**

These words follow the beatitudes, the first words that Jesus spoke to his brand-new bunch of disciples, the twelve. This was something new to them, too. They didn't quite know what to think about all this. Here's this guy from Nazareth, of all places. Jesus, the carpenter's son (pretty common lot), who just comes up to them and says, "Follow me." Sort of like the person who asked you to attend this Via de Cristo. So here they are. Unsure. Wondering what it's all about. Anxious. Nervous. Biting their nails. Looking around at the rest of the group. What a strange bunch they were, too. Mostly fishermen, one a loudmouth named Pete, two brother's people called "Sons of Thunder," a hated tax collector - all kinds. That made them more nervous. And now this Jesus was speaking about peace and piety and showing love and praying, and they just weren't too sure that they wanted to stick around.

Jesus tries to soothe their troubled minds by assuring them that worrying isn't necessary. God will provide for them everything they need, especially for their spiritual needs. What he asks of us at this Via de Cristo, is to trust him. He wants us to put aside all our cares and worries and, maybe for the first time in our lives, seek his kingdom alone. Letting thoughts and worries crowd out time alone with God, as in a meditation like this, is for people who have not allowed Christ into their lives. As Jesus puts it in Matthew 6:32-33

#### **READ MATTHEW 6:32-33**

We need these quiet times for reflection just as Jesus needed time occasionally to withdraw to a quiet place by himself or with his disciples. We need to confront the fundamental questions of life, such as: Who am I? Where am I going? What are my priorities in life? What has meaning for me? Without some structure in our lives, it's like trying to assemble a jigsaw puzzle on a shag carpet - there's

nothing solid to lay the pieces on to fit them together, and some get lost in the pile of the carpeting. Life is like that for many today. Nothing solid in their lives on which to hang meaning and structure for all the many activities. They are bored, frustrated, often to the point of suicide. We fill our minds with so many different things, we crowd out time for serious reflection. We must ask, "Am I too busy for reflection? Can I afford to follow the crowd?" Our Lord's words to his friend, Martha, are important to us, too:

READ LUKE 0:41-42

We can never allow activity, no matter how good it is, to crowd out serious reflection. Life is too fragile to let it fall apart that way.

We can begin tonight to put our lives in order by asking ourselves some fundamental questions. We can begin to establish priorities for living. We do not want to be like the foolish man in the gospel who began to build a castle without checking to see if he had enough funds for materials to complete it - he went bankrupt and was laughed at by everyone. Maybe we are building dream castles we were never intended to build. If we are unhappy, maybe it is because we have not established priorities and a sense of direction in our lives. Purpose and peace go hand-in-hand.

How do we begin? Socrates suggested, "Know yourself." We begin by taking a very honest look at ourselves, allowing the Holy Spirit to reveal our strengths and our weaknesses. Each one of us is unique (God broke the mold after each one of us). We each have our own particular set of potentialities and limitations. We need to know just what they are if we are to put our lives in order.

If we are honest with ourselves, we will find many good qualities. It's OK to have good qualities. We should be happy about them and give thanks to God for them, for they are a gift from him. Of course, we'll also discover some qualities we would rather not admit. Yet, it is important that we accept ourselves as we are, including our limitations. The first step toward overcoming our weaknesses is to admit that they exist.

It is necessary that we know our condition if we hope to benefit from this Via de Cristo. This means being humble. "Humble" is a word that comes from the Latin "HUMUS" which means "earth." Humility has that quality, like the earth, of being open and receptive to the seed. Let us employ our humility and be open and receptive to the seed of the Word of God and his grace in our world.

The Via de Cristo can build for the future if: We are open and receptive to God's grace. We make the best use of this opportunity. We do not prejudge the Via de Cristo. There is no "expected" or forced response. Relax and enjoy. Take time to know yourself.

## Meditation 2, Thursday Evening

### The Prodigal Son

#### Purpose and Setting

*The Prodigal Son really is a story of the Forgiving Father. It should not give importance to one's misery, but to God's mercy. It ought to be a freeing expression of leaving our brokenness and finding healing in the forgiveness and love of God. The meditation highlights the goodness and mercy of God and God's relationship to sinful humanity. If the first meditation has been effective, many will see themselves to be like the prodigal son OR the older brother. Some meditations include all three characters in the parable as prodigals. For instance, the father was prodigious in his love for his sons. The theme of being lost is carried by focusing on the younger son and the father. A good meditation could also include the same theme portrayed differently between the older son and the father. Recommended reading is *The Lost Sheep* by Diane Jackson. The parable should be shared rather than talked about. As it is shared, the participants will identify the story as theirs, since it is everyone's story.*

#### Meditation

How many times do we grapple with our knowledge of Christ? What was Christ like? How did he speak? How did he think? How did he feel? How did he react to the brokenness of people? Christ pictured himself in the parable of the Prodigal Son - - or should we say, "The Patient Father"? Let us look at it considering the brokenness of a young man and also on the feelings of Christ in the face of the situation. Let us follow the story in Luke 15:11-24:

"There was a man who had two sons; and the younger of them said to his father, 'Give me the share of property that belongs to me.'" [That is to say, "Please give me the share that would be mine if you had died."] The old father looked into his son's eyes and saw that they spoke volumes. His eyes said, "Father, my life is complete boredom. I can never be fulfilled as long as I remain here. I have to find meaning for my life. I think the cause of my frustration is you - your rules, your regulations, your limitations. I have to find myself." The father thought, "He can never be my son by force. A forced son is no son at all. He prefers THINGS to me. He feels they will make him the man he wants to be, so he should have the things." With tears running down his cheeks, he gave the young man his share.

The young man was excited. "The future holds tremendous possibilities for me. Life is going to be different! I am going to be a fulfilled man! I am going to be free!" So a few days later he gathered up everything and went to a far country. The distance was not far in miles, but far in relationship. The son had decided that the father was good as dead, and treated him that way. He wanted to live his life completely apart from the father, enjoying himself, his gifts, his money. So, he began living and searching for meaning. "I am going to get it this time," he said happily. But, somehow life refused to be exactly what he wanted it to be. So he started using props. He used money as a prop. He used music as a prop. He used friendship as a prop. And he found he needed these props more and more all the time.

Increasingly, he felt that life was a little empty. So he had to seek means and ways of filling it. That is why he over spent money. He was not seeking to be bad. All he wanted was life full of meaning and reality and joy. Therefore, he was going to use everything he had in order to get what he wanted.

He spent every asset he had: all the love he had; all the emotions he had; all the friendships he had; everything that made him a man, he spent. He ran through the entire account of his life and emptied his human bank completely. He emptied sex; he emptied desire; he emptied appetite.

When he had spent everything, a great famine arose in that country. "What terrible timing!" he thought. Just when you need to call upon your gifts, find control, you turn around and find there is a famine in every department of your life! Self image? Empty. Desire? Gone. Self control? Run wild. "How did I empty myself?" you ask. "I never intended this!"

The father away the son got from the father, the farther away he got from himself and from meaning. He was confused, hungry, tired, starving, lonely, and shattered. He was naked, very guilty, and the distance from the

father seemed unbridgeable.

The young man thought he could earn a living, so he went and attached himself to one of the landowners. But he lacked qualification, so the man said he didn't need him. Like a drowning man reaching out to grasp anything at all, the young man cried out desperate, "Help me!" "Well then, go down into the valley and look after my swine," said the landowner. So there he stood, the once-respectable young man, by the pigs. They were wallowing in the mud and enjoying it, eating pods to the fill. All around is utter silence. No music. No comfort. No friends. No prosperity. No home. No father. No life. He left home to enjoy life, but now life is enjoying him! He left to find freedom, but now he is an absolute slave of circumstances.

The swine were having a feast: worms, pods, and all. And all the while hunger was really biting him. He was almost fainting. He began to hate the fact that he was a human being and not a hog! What remains? Just rags and tatters, dirt and loneliness.

Of course, you know the Jesus who gave us this story of the Prodigal Son, it is the same Jesus who said, "He who loves his life (like this young man), loses it." (John 12:25-RSV) At that point, Jesus tells us, the young man "came to himself" It was not simply that he came to his senses. There was something more that drew him. It was the memory of love. A father's love. It was love that brought hope in a hopeless situation. And it was this love that impelled the son to take a very simple step. He said, "I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned.'" That was all. He planned to explain to his father that he didn't deserve to be a son, just a field-worker, a slave, for even that would be better, he knew, than dying in the far country.

Have you thought how hard that journey back was for the son? Every step was heavy. "How am I going to appear?" he asked himself. "I went away rich and here I am, broken and starving." A voice inside him probably kept saying, "Don't go! You are no good, stay here and die!" But it was a devilish voice, and he tried to get it out of his mind. Another voice, the voice of love, kept saying, "Come."

"While he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him." He threw his arms around the young waster with his marks of dissipation, his wounds and his filth! And the wanderer, in the arms of love, began his confession ~[this is the real place of repentance] in God's aims: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son."

But the father was hardly listening to the confession. It was not the words; it was the son he was interested in! Already the father was addressing the servants: "Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet; and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost and is found."

The father in this story is God. He waits to welcome you home.

## **Meditation 3, Friday Morning**

### **The Three Glances of Christ**

#### **Purpose and Setting**

*This is the morning meditation of the first day. The candidates have spent the night in silence and introspection and have, perhaps, felt the “eyes of God” watching them, seeing and reading everything that is going on inside ourselves. The purpose of this meditation is to show that even the Apostles had difficulty with the glance of Christ, but most of them learned that His glance was not condemning, but loving. Some could not see that fact, while others, such as Peter, found it out the hard way. The presenter should help the candidates see the One who “looks upon the heart” as one who understands what we are going through because he’s been there (here) with us.*

#### **Meditation**

The eyes. Instruments of communication. Just with the eyes alone, we can express wonder, awe, fear, amusement, disdain, anger, lust, understanding, curiosity, boredom, sleepiness, love, and forgiveness. In a glance there is often more information communicated and picked up than in a steady gaze. We move our eyes to search and to communicate. There are three occasions in the Bible in which the glance of Christ was experienced by people. As we look at them and their responses, perhaps we’ll see a bit of ourselves.

READ MARK 10:17-22

Now, here’s your better-than-average citizen. Very respected. Went to church every Sabbath, adult class, too. He learned his lessons well, because he passed Jesus’ first “test” with flying colors. But - so long as commitment to God did not cause problems financially, OK, however.... The text says that Jesus looked at him steadily and loved him. I used to know a man who would look at you that way. He seemed to be looking inside, even. It was uncomfortable and also reassuring at the same time. Jesus looked at this young ruler that same way. When Jesus asked him to remove the last obstacle - he could not. How much space do our possessions occupy in our lives? What obstacles do WE have in the way of our giving ourselves totally to God? Jesus looks at us intently. He knows our very thoughts and motives. Why is it so hard to have the courage to trust God for every detail of our life?

READ JOHN 6:66-71

Jesus chose twelve disciples, not eleven and “also Judas.” He chose Judas, too, even though he had premonitions about him.

READ JOHN 13: 10-11.

The disciples were quite aware of what kind of person Judas was - we can see that in

JOHN 12:4-6(read).

JUDAS - the name has come to mean “vile,” “rotten,” “traitorous” in our day and age. Is there a bit of Judas in each of us? No one abandons God in a moment. We gradually fall away. It just sort of happens. A small slip here, a minor error there. Gradually we allow evils of various kinds to build barriers between God and us. When Judas first responded to Jesus’ call, he was as enthusiastic as the others, perhaps more so. He had high hopes of sharing in Jesus’ ministry. He had high hopes that Jesus would be a conquering hero. He never intended to separate himself from Jesus. However, Jesus didn’t “measure up” to Judas’ expectations - he

didn't lead his people in the overthrow of Rome. Judas allowed this vacuum to be filled with gradually-increasing greed, dishonesty, and pride, which began to intervene and blind him to the truth. Judas' barriers were dishonesty, greed and pride. Ours may be different. I'm sure Judas thought he had everybody fooled, and, for the most part he did fool everyone, except Jesus. But, even though Jesus saw through Judas' facade, he still continued to search him out and invite him to return. He washed Judas' feet along with the rest, including him as a member of the family: forgiving him, cleansing him. But he was like one who was possessed.

READ JOHN 13:26-30

Try to picture the scene. Jesus, with the morsel of bread tries one more time to get Judas to look at him. Can't you just see Judas as Jesus hands him the bread- how he must have lowered his eyes with guilt?

READ MATTHEW 26:48-50

It wasn't until he kissed Jesus in the garden, that Judas finally saw Jesus' glance. Jesus was not enraged, he loved Judas. Judas quickly diverted his glance, but he'd seen enough, and the honor of his actions soon led him to despair, as we

READ IN MATTHEW 27:3-5(read).

Has this been our story? Have we been blinded to the truth about Jesus' love and mercy by the cares and sins we have permitted to block our view?

READ MARK 14:27-31

Peter. The rock. Avalanche or rock-slide is more like it. Old foot-in-mouth Peter. You always knew what he was thinking, because he'd blurt it out without thinking. Peter was a very genuine human being. He was really dedicated to Jesus. He felt like Jesus' protector. He had one serious flaw: he was very independent and self-confident. He trusted in his own efforts to live the God-life. So he made rash statements. Hurtful statements. Like, "Even if ALL lose faith, I won't." When his self-reliance and bluster were put to the test in the courtyard of the High Priest's house, we see a different Peter. -

READ LUKE 22:54-62

He had completely disavowed Jesus. Now he was the source of scandal to his brothers. If it hadn't been for the fact that they all ran, too, he'd never have lived it down. Peter did have one important factor in his favor - he was humbled enough to repent, to change. All it took was a glance from Jesus. In that single, fleeting glance, Peter realized two important things: (a) that he had betrayed Jesus after saying loudly that he wouldn't, sinning grievously, and, (b) from the look of love he saw in that glance, he knew he was still loved and forgiven. He had learned that Jesus understands human failings, that it's forgivable to fail, and that Jesus forgives. He discovered that as long as he was loved by Christ he could let his "machismo," his "tough guy" exterior drop, and give himself unreservedly. There was yet another time that Peter experienced the glance of Christ:

READ JOHN 21:15-17

Peter became the leader of that motley bunch because he loved the Lord with all his being. Others in the group had better human qualities, perhaps, but Peter had learned not to rely on his own abilities. Jesus is glancing our way - what does he see in our hearts? What does he see in our minds? What do we see? How do

we react? Do we walk away with sad hearts? Do we let our own sins and cares blind us to Christ's love? Or are we imperfect-but-willing - - - because we love him?\

## Meditation 4, Saturday Morning

### The Figure of Christ

#### Purpose and Setting

*This is the morning meditation of the second day. The candidates are realizing that God loves them and has saved them through Jesus, but they are not sure how to relate to him. How can God possibly understand how we feel? How can he understand our weaknesses? The purpose of this meditation is to help the candidates relate to Jesus as a person, as our brother, as both God and Man, the perfect revelation of the Father's love. The fullness of both his humanity and his divinity should be expressed as united in one person who, because he is human, understands and shares our struggle and who, because he is divine, saves us. Because of the background of the candidates it is usually necessary to dwell more on Jesus' -humanity than his divinity, but care should be taken to balance divinity and humanity in one person. The presenter should express this vision of Jesus in whatever incidents from the Gospels appeal to him, and have an appeal for the candidates. Other scriptures may be substituted for those suggested here. A simple outline and sample meditation follow.*

#### Meditation

READ JOHN 1:1-26.

This morning I'd like to talk to you about the figure of Christ. He is someone we think we know so much about, but knowing him - that's a mystery. In the words Luther wrote in his explanation of the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed, we read, "I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity and true man, born of the virgin, Mary, is my Lord." To talk of him as God is to speak the truth - but only a part of it. To talk of him as a man is to speak the truth - but only a part of the truth. John points out that the one we call Jesus, the Christ, was in existence before the world was made. That he is the word of God, and that that word took on flesh - no, scratch that, became flesh. The "conversion" was complete - the Son of God became a human being -completely! We are told this again by Paul in Philippians 2:6-7. He was subject to all the same frailties, weaknesses, feelings, pains, strengths, emotions, sicknesses - all the same things we experience in life and death. He was born. He grew. He worked with Joseph. He studied. He partied (Cana). He loved, cared. He had the whole range of human experiences:

- we know from the story of the woman at the well that he got tired (John 4:5-6)
  - we know from the storm at sea and from his encounter with Philip, that he knew disappointment: "O ye of little faith;" (Luke 8:22-25) and, "Philip, you've been with me all this time and you still don't get it?" (John 14:9)
  - he got angry: the money-changers in the Temple (John 2:13-17)
  - he could get anxious and worry: Gethsemane (Mark 14:32-42)
  - he knew pain: the lashes left him weak (Matthew 27:26-32)
  - we know that he loved, even "played favorites," in that he seemed to have a special love for certain people, like Lazarus and John
  - he was empathetic to the widow who lost her son (Luke 7:11-17) and to his mother and their host at Cana (John 2:1-11)
  - he was understanding of the woman caught in adultery - and her accusers (John 8:3-11) and of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10)
  - he asked for help in Gethsemane (Mark 14:32-42)
  - and when crucified he bled and gasped for breath, his heart broke and he died. In fact, our Apostles' Creed says he died in four different expressions: "crucified" (no one ever survived one), "died," "buried," "rose from the dead."
  - we know from his appearances after the resurrection that he was still flesh and blood, that his wounds still showed, but that he was (IS) alive! a new body, maybe, but still a human-and alive!
- Jesus: - true God from eternity - true man, alive now and forever. He has not ceased being human -or being



God - completely! Because he is both God and Man he is the one mediator between God and Man, as Paul writes in I Timothy 2:5-6. Because he is human he understands the limits of our existence: our weaknesses and our abilities. Because he is God, he forgives perfectly. Of Christ, Paul writes, in Philippians 2:8-11

READ PHILIPPIANS 2:8-11

That's our brother. I'm proud to know him. I'm glad to be in his family. He knows me, he knows you, because he's one of us. A real human being, that Son of God.

## **Meditation 5, Sunday Morning**

### **Christ's Message to the Participant**

#### **Purpose and Setting**

*This meditation is for the morning of the third day. It is intended to encourage and strengthen the participant in preparation for going back into the community from which s/he came. This meditation also affirms the Via de Cristo method of Christian Community.*

#### **Meditation**

On the first day you heard that it was really God who brought you here. Today I repeat it to you in the words of Christ to his apostles: "You did not choose me; I chose you and appointed you to go and bear much fruit, the kind of fruit that endures." (John 15: 16a)

Christ has chosen you from among many to spend these three days with friends. He brought us to this weekend for a purpose. We have encountered him in a new way. At this moment in this Via de Cristo we are aware that the weekend is nearly over. Like the apostles on the Mount of Transfiguration, we may be tempted to stay on this mountain top forever. It was Simon Peter who said to Jesus, after witnessing the glory of God: "Master, it is well that we are here! If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah (in other words, let us stay up here!)"

Of course it is important to be here, to see the glory of our Lord, but he doesn't want his people to stay on the mountain top forever. The mountain-top experience prepares us for valley duty. At the bottom of that mountain a crowd met him, called to him, requested help from him, and Jesus responded. Just so do we, in like manner, respond.

There are needs in the valley: people hurt and cry and look for a way. One cannot help but think of the story of the Good Samaritan and its lesson: to show love to your neighbor (anyone in need). The result of a mountain-top experience is that we are moved to go back to the valley of human needs. -

Jesus said to his disciples: "I appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, fruit that will last." This Via de Cristo is not for us alone. We do not remain here. We go forth bearing the fruit that Christ expects of us. The love of Christ we have experienced here is now to be shared in the valley. This love is to be lived out in our environments.

Listen to the words of Jesus: "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5)

We'll have nothing to offer in the valley unless we understand that everything, absolutely everything, depends on our contact with Christ. The disciples tried to minister, but they were ineffective until they understood this truth. Let us go forth from this Via de Cristo trusting in the definite power of the Christ who chooses to live within us. It will not be our human means, or our prestige, or our great humanitarian concern, but God's grace that will make our actions effective. When his life flows freely in the branches they bear fruit. In him we have revolutionary power: "I am telling you the truth: whoever believes in me will do what I do - yes, he will do even greater things, because I am going to the Father." (John 14:12)

The mark of a disciple is in bearing fruit: "My Father's glory is shown by your bearing much fruit; and in this way you become my disciples." (John 15:8)

Jesus had only a few followers after three years of ministry. We imagine that the Son of Man ought to have been more successful. What we fail to understand is the strategy Jesus demonstrates for reaching our world - that of building Christian Community. He spent his time forming the twelve into a community. He knew that his work would endure as long as they remained united and filled with his love and power. The night Jesus was betrayed he prayed that all of us would remain committed to the strategy of building Christian Community: "I pray that they may all be one. Father! May they be in us, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they be one, so that the world will believe that you sent me." (John 17:21)

Christ surely knew our tendency toward individualism, yet we are made for each other. We can be strong

only if we are united. United we stand, divided we fall. Christ's Spirit unites us as one. We won't soon forget these three days. We have witnessed a beautiful thing: people from different denominations, and even some who have no church affiliation have all been one in the Spirit, one in the Lord. And they will know, down there in the valley, that we are Christians - by our love. In this time we have spent together we have experienced how one lives in faith and love. To live united in Christ we have forgotten the differences that might separate us. So also, outside this Via de Cristo, we live united; we share our Christianity with other sisters/brothers. Much is yet left to be done. Many still do not know Christ. But there is no room for pessimism in an apostle of living faith. The Lord says, "Have courage, I have overcome the world." Remember how the twelve apostles spread the message? They were unafraid. They had faith and, by God's power, they conquered the world. Today the same Christ repeats to us in the face of the work that awaits us: "Have courage, I have overcome the world." You are being challenged today to recognize the revolutionary power you have at your disposal: you and Christ are an overwhelming majority. The Spirit of Christ is transforming you and your world - "For with God, nothing is impossible!!"