

2018 ST. STEPHEN THE MARTYR MEN'S RETREAT



1ST PRESENTATION

"The Reality of Discipleship"

November 2-4, 2018

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THE SETTING

- We are living in a world of disbelief. Past assumptions about God and faith can no longer be presumed.
- Our greatest need in the present historical moment is people who make God credible in this world by means of the enlightened faith they live. The negative testimony of Christians who spoke of God but lived in a manner contrary to him has obscured the image of God and has opened the doors to disbelief.

Benedict XVI. (2006). *Christianity and the Crisis of Cultures*. (B. McNeil, Trans.) (p. 52). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

THE SETTING

- We need men who keep their eyes fixed on God, learning from him what true humanity means.
- We need men whose intellect is enlightened by the light of God, men whose hearts are opened by God, so that their intellect can speak to the intellect of others and their hearts can open the hearts of others. It is only by means of men who have been touched by God that God can return to be with mankind.

Benedict XVI. (2006). *Christianity and the Crisis of Cultures*. (B. McNeil, Trans.) (p. 52). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

THE SETTING

- We need men like Benedict of Nursia, who, in an age of dissipation and decadence, immersed himself in the uttermost solitude. Then, after all the purifications he had to undergo, he succeeded in rising again to the light. He returned and made his foundation at Monte Cassino, the "city on the hill" where, in the midst of so many ruins, he assembled the forces from which a new world was formed. In this way, like Abraham, Benedict became the father of many peoples. The recommendations to his monks with which he concludes his Rule show us, too, the path that leads on high, away from the crises and the ruins:

Benedict XVI. (2006). *Christianity and the Crisis of Cultures*. (B. McNeil, Trans.) (pp. 52–53). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

TRUE DISCIPLESHIP

- About a relationship, not just a bunch of rules or regulations. Allowing God to break into our world and surprise us. There is always more!
- This, then, is the meaning of today's Solemnity: looking at the shining example of the Saints to reawaken within us the great longing to be like them; happy to live near God, in his light, in the great family of God's friends. Being a Saint means living close to God, to live in his family. And this is the vocation of us all, vigorously reaffirmed by the Second Vatican Council and solemnly proposed today for our attention. **(Pope Benedict XVI November 1, 2006)**

TRUE DISCIPLESHIP

- But how can we become holy, friends of God? We can first give a negative answer to this question: to be a Saint requires neither extraordinary actions or works nor the possession of exceptional charisms. Then comes the positive reply: it is necessary first of all to listen to Jesus and then to follow him without losing heart when faced by difficulties. "If anyone serves me", he warns us, "he must follow me; and where I am, there shall my servant be also; if any one serves me, the Father will honour him" (Jn 12: 26). (PBXVI November 1, 2018)

DISCIPLESHIP IS.....?

- Living out of our dignity as children of God. (1 John 3)
- Allowing oneself to be overwhelmed by the goodness of God.
- Being docile to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and available at all times to give witness (1 Peter 3:15)
- Not being perfect but being faithful and always having recourse to God's mercy.
- Encouraging others and being helpful to them (Hebrews 3:13)

BASIC STEPS ACTS 2:37-41

- Repent
- Believe
- Be Baptized
- Receive the Holy Spirit
- Become a mature disciple

Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and they asked Peter and the other apostles, “What are we to do, my brothers?” 38 Peter [said] to them, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is made to you and to your children and to all those far off, whomever the Lord our God will call.” 40 He testified with many other arguments, and was exhorting them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” 41 Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand persons were added that day.

New American Bible. (2011). (Revised Edition, Ac 2:37–41). Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

OBSTACLES

- Sacramentalized and not evangelized (Baptized pagans?)
- Lack of emphasis on cooperation with God's grace, especially in the Sacraments.
- Wrong stereotypes about Christianity. Let's examine St. Augustine's conversion.
- Not knowing the role of the Holy Spirit

Extremely agitated, “distressed not only in mind but in appearance,” Augustine turned to the friend with him in the house, Alypius, and cried out: “ ‘What is wrong with us? What is this that you have heard? Uneducated people are rising up and capturing heaven (Matt. 11:12), and we with our high culture without any heart—see where we roll in the mud of flesh and blood.’ ... He contemplated my condition in astonished silence. For I sounded very strange. My uttered words said less about the state of my mind than my forehead, cheeks, eyes, color, and tone of voice.”

Augustine rushed out into the garden of the house with Alypius following, worried, as Augustine “made many physical gestures” as he experienced the “agony of hesitation” and great internal conflict.

Such was my sickness and my torture, as I accused myself even more bitterly than usual. I was twisting and turning in my chain until it would break completely: I was now only a little bit held by it, but I was still held. You, Lord, put pressure on me in my hidden depths with a severe mercy wielding the double whip of fear and shame.... Inwardly I said to myself: Let it be now, let it be now. And by this phrase I was already moving towards a decision; I had almost taken it, and then I did not do so.... The nearer approached the moment of time when I would become different, the greater the horror of it struck me. But it did not thrust me back nor turn me away, but left me in a state of suspense.

Vain trifles and the triviality of the empty-headed, my old loves, held me back. They tugged at the garment of my flesh and whispered: “Are you getting rid of us?” And “from this moment we shall never be with you again, not for ever and ever.” ... What filth, what disgraceful things they were suggesting!... Meanwhile the overwhelming force of habit was saying to me: “Do you think you can live without them?”

Then Augustine remembered the example of the many who had embraced chastity, even celibacy, for the sake of the kingdom, and that gave him strength.

Are you incapable of doing what these men and women have done? Do you think them capable of achieving this by their own resources and not by the Lord their God?... Why are you relying on yourself, only to find yourself unreliable? Cast yourself upon him, do not be afraid. He will not withdraw himself so that you fall. Make the

PERSONAL TESTIMONY

- God has a marvelous plan for each one of us.
- We are all loved and willed by God.
- Redemptive suffering opens us to be more connected and generous.
- We will someday be perfected in God's love and our pilgrimage will come to an end and we see God face to face.

FEEDBACK

- Questions/comments/discussion?

" LIKE A SHEPHERD "

BY DON MOEN

Like a father feeds His children Like a shepherd Leads his flock The Lord will Always guide us Show us where to walk And in times when We have plenty In times when We have not He is our Provider And His mercy Never stops	Like a shepherd He leads us Like a father He feeds us From the morning To the evening Till the sunrise again Like a shepherd He leads us Like a father He feeds us He is the great I AM	As we come Into His presence Confessing Him as Lord His Holy Spirit leads us And He feeds us By His word We're seated at His table Partaking of His love Children of His kingdom Purchased by His blood
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