

# Forty Weeks ~ Sacred Story



## Week Forty Encouragements & Wisdom

*E & W reflections are additional helps for your Sacred Story prayer journey. Reflect on them ahead of your prayer exercises for the week or outside of your fifteen-minute prayer windows during the week.*

### *Revisiting Ignatian Discernment in Light of Human Nature as Body and Spirit*

Spiritual discernment is challenging for one major reason: due to original sin, we have lost our capacity to distinguish truth from falsehood. The classic name for the enemy of human nature as the *father of lies* is justified. Because God made human nature as a fusion of body and spirit, we are subject to error in judgment on both the physical and spiritual level of human nature. The bodily realm creates confusion of right from wrong on the level of sense experience. The spiritual realm creates confusion of right from wrong on the intellectual level of experience. Our capacity for being *deceived* and *self-deceived* is remarkable, as Ignatius discovered.

Ignatian Discernment provides rules for both levels of human nature. The *Guidelines for Foundational Healing and Spiritual Growth* assists us as we try to learn truth and falsehood in the life of the senses. The *Guidelines for Integrated Healing and Spiritual Growth* assists us as we try to learn truth from falsehood in our intellectual life. Both sensual and intellectual dimensions of human nature are interwoven into a seamless unity. *Deceptions* and *self-deceptions* are thus interwoven between both dimensions of human nature. Let me review with you an example from Week Twenty-Nine Encouragements and Wisdom.

Here we examined two fictional characters with one named of Barbara. We looked at how the circumstances of original sin and early life issues shaped an *aggressively narcissistic* personality (as opposed to *passively narcissistic*) with specific sinful traits.

## ORIGINAL SINS

### The Roots or Foundations

*Ancient, Originating Events that Rooted the Patterns of Disobedience and Narcissism along with its Fear, Anger, Grief*

Barbara's mother and dad were both exceptionally gifted and driven. As an only child, Barbara internalized her mom's anxiety about her looks and self-worth and her dad's aggressiveness and *win at all costs* mentality. She was spoiled if she performed to meet the demanding standards of both parents. She was snubbed if she failed to live up to those standards. Her self-worth was tied to tasks perfectly executed. As a result, she was constantly anxious to please and fearful of failure.

## CORE SINS

### The Trunk or Superstructure

*Disobedience and Narcissism, along with its Fear, Anger, and Grief, that Forms the Trunk or Superstructure of Your Daily Life, Feeding on Originating Sins and Event*

Barbara was very bright. She was highly competitive in everything she did and driven to beat both the boys and girls in every test of academic achievement. She was an aggressive narcissist who stirred both fear and envy in others. Terribly self-conscious about her looks, she was determined to make her mark by graduating at the top of every class. Her barometer for right and wrong tended to be linked to what served her purpose in staying on top.

## MANIFEST SINS

### The Fruit or Ornamentation

*Manifest Fear, Anger, and Grief, moral weaknesses, vices, addictions, and sinful habits that are the most visible to you*

Barbara gossiped about girls she considered overweight. She also had a binge-and-purge eating disorder. Being self-conscious about her looks, she alternated between shunning boys and being a tease. She was usually too obsessed with her school work to go to Mass regularly. Much of her self-worth was attached to academic success. So she not only became a workaholic with academics, but also cheated occasionally if a class grade was threatening her overall GPA. She had a sharp tongue and was cynical judgmental about the *lazy people* who wanted *everything for free*.

If Barbara were to have a conversion experience, it might be initiated by someone pointing out her extreme cynicism and judgmental attitude towards others. Because her cynicism and judgmental attitudes are false intellectual convictions about other people, they are more rooted in the spiritual dimension of her human nature. The *thoughts, words and deeds* that result from this false intellectual conviction (harsh words, angry thoughts and possibly refusing to help people she deemed *lazy*) are sinful. But because she feels justified in her intellectual opinions, she might

not think there is anything at all wrong with her thinking, speaking and acting the way she does.

But let us assume it struck a nerve when she was confronted about her negativity. Let us imagine it made her self-conscious enough to go to Sunday Mass at her (infrequently-visited) home parish. At Mass, she is reading the parish bulletin which contains an examination of conscience and the announcement that there would be an all-parish Reconciliation Service for Advent the following Wednesday.

She had not really paid attention to the fact that missing Sunday Mass (for no good reason) is grave sin. She always justified her laziness in not going by saying she was “too busy” studying to attend. She was troubled to read that because her eating disorder ruins the body, it is a psychological problem that can be sinful if a person does not seek help to remedy it. The examination of conscience made her look at her cheating on tests and her sexually teasing boys. She is given the insight to see that there is *much to ponder* in the way she has been behaving. When she gets home from Mass she cries, and decides to go to the Advent Reconciliation Service. She makes a good confession and resolves to get help with the eating disorder, go to Mass and stop cheating on schoolwork. She had previously justified all these behaviors (false reasoning) but now sees they are wrong.

Her counselor, who helps her with the eating disorder, points out her biting sarcasm towards other girls who are overweight. She eventually is able to make the connection between her cynical sarcasm towards “fat girls” and her own bad body image. She starts to see that the cheating, spiritual laziness and binge-and-purge habits are all ways to manage her lack of self-worth that she has hid from herself for years. The *tough-girl, get-ahead-at-any-cost, step-on-others* behaviors are the result of the anger and hurt of pleasing demanding parents when she was young. Her self-identity that which demanded success-at-any-price (a spiritual trait), and her bad behaviors (physical habits) are intimately connected. To pull at one is to pull at the others.

Ultimately she is faced with only two options: either change for the better, or stay the way she is. To change will mean confronting her self-definition of success and the behaviors that pacified her pain. If she sticks to the path of change, it will ultimately mean forgiving those who hurt her and seeking forgiveness for those she hurt. If she can't bring herself to face her “core issues,” she may be temporarily stuck in a “failed” conversion process. This could easily lead her to go back to all her negative ways of thinking, talking and behaving. If this happens, she will have to slip back into a *self-deception* mode about both her eating, sexual and lax faith behaviors (bodily dimension of human nature) and her aggressive, “win-at-all-costs” cynicism (spiritual dimension of human nature) to justify herself.

Spiritual discernment can help her know the true from the false at both levels of human nature connected to her specific matrix of life issues. But Barbara will ultimately have to allow the *truth* of those discernment principles to break through her defenses so God can work to bring her to happiness, health, and holiness.



