

Forty Weeks ~ Sacred Story



Week Eight 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.

Diagnosing Spiritual Troubles

People who go to confession worry a lot about their moral misdeeds, especially if they are of a sexual nature. We know that St. Ignatius obsessed about his sexual past misdeeds. He



spent a lot of time in confession trying to exercise those demons—and without much luck. Tormented, Ignatius sought the best spiritual advisor in the region. This Cathedral rector told him to stop confessing his past sins, unless there was something he simply had never before confessed.

Ignatius was unable to hear this wise counsel. He simply was not ready to “take the doctor’s advice.” On one level, *he* knew what his problems were, and *he* was going to do something about it. But Ignatius was in the *grips* of his terrible fears and anxieties. He was paralyzed by the fear. He just could not take his eyes off his sexual misdeeds for which he felt so much shame and embarrassment.

God can shock our conscience to alert us to dangers. But God does not instill panic and fear in our hearts. That is the work of the one Ignatius finally discerned as the source of his terrible anxieties and fears—the one he calls the enemy of human nature. And this enemy was so effective at troubling Ignatius’ conscience over his shameful past, that Ignatius could not see the real problem—his pride—his trying to save himself from his own past misdeeds.

A year ago I was having lots of lower back pain that was bad enough that I had trouble sleeping. Anxieties and fears about deterioration in my vertebrae and chronic problems that might plague me for the rest of my life eroded my peace of heart. I was loading up on ibuprofen, trying to stretch my lower back muscles, but nothing worked. I finally bit the bullet and went first, to a chiropractor. He did thirty minutes of pushing and pulling and then finally shocked me with the diagnosis.

“Your inner thigh muscles are terribly constricted. So much so, that they are pulling your pelvis down and placing tremendous pressure on your lower back muscles causing the pain. I will give you stretching exercises for those muscles. Do them several times a day and that will alleviate the problem.” It worked! In a million years I would have never figured out that my thigh muscles were causing my lower back pain. In a million years, Ignatius would have never discovered that his pride was blinding him. Both the back pain and the sexual shames were real. But both the lower back pain and the shame over sexual sins were *manifestations* of another problem that was beyond sight.

There is a lesson here. First, we can ignore our sinful deeds and pretend they don’t exist, or better, that they are just fine. Our culture helps us do this quite well. Second, we can worry obsessively about them because we know something is wrong and are pained by our shame and embarrassment. Obsessive worry and fear, we learn from Ignatius, is the inspiration of the enemy of human nature.





Third, we can be smart and seek the counsel of the Divine Physician. We can admit to the Lord where we hurt (the behaviours that are causing our shame and anxieties). Then we can ask his advice for *how to get to their source*. We will likely be amazed at what He tells us, and discover that he has been waiting for *quite some time* to help. A life-long healing regimen—spiritual stretching exercises—will include prayer and confession.

Let's not waste time by ignoring problems that can lead to greater problems. Let's also not waste time by obsessive guilt, fear and worry about our problems. Guilt- the gift that keeps on giving (and that blinds us to our *source* problems).

Instead, take your problems to the Divine Physician. He is not ashamed of you or afraid of anything you bring to him. He can help you get to the source of the problems and get you on a healing regimen that works. That regimen will include a lifetime of grace, Sacraments, and prayer to *maintain* healing, balance, peace and freedom.

