

Talk 3: Here I am, Lord!

Recap from Previous Talks

These Talks are all about giving God your time – we give our time to the people we love. Let God speak to you, challenge you and change you. These talks are all about finding the meaning to our lives again – becoming more aware of the meaning to life. What is the meaning of life? To know, love, and serve God in this world and to be happy with him in the next.

Do we really know God? Do we really know Jesus Christ? Chatting to teenagers – Prove that Jesus is God for you? Miracles, the Bible, he died for us? And then they get close – he rose from the dead? Jesus is God because I know him, I have experienced him in my life. He is a real person. If someone said to me my dad didn't exist, I would find that laughable – it is the same with God. We have a real relationship with him – we know he exists. We know him

We can know a lot about Jesus, but not know Jesus. We can go to Church, we can be brought up in a Catholic School and not know Jesus.

We must be formed in the faith so that we can know Jesus better – establishing and deepening a personal relationship with him in order to be his follower and his friend.

How do we come to know Jesus? Be becoming people of prayer. People who listen. People who say: “Speak Lord, I am listening”, and not “Shut up Lord, I'm talking”. If we listen, we hear God speaking to us and showing us his will in providence.

Do you know the words “do not be afraid” appear 365 times in the bible – once for every day of the year.

When we know God, we start to love him. We love him when we experienced how much he loves us, when we allow ourselves to be held by God.

Helen Keller: the only thing that matters on our deathbed is relationships, love and service given and shared with others.

Prayer is not asking God to jump through our hoops. St Paul called himself “vinctus Christi” – slave of Jesus Christ.

Jesus cannot be your Saviour if he is not your Lord. He is in charge of everything, or he is in charge of nothing.

He needs to be in charge of your time. Daily prayer. “Father, I didn’t have time to pray today”. Well, did you have something to eat? Did you watch TV?

We strive to build our day around God, not build God around our day. You love what you give your time to Francis de Sales one said: “You need to give God 30 minuets of your time every day, except when you are busy, then you should give him an hour”. Is God worth your time? Prove it!

He needs to be in charge of your family. Prayer with the children. Our job is to get our kids to heaven, get our spouse to heaven. You have parties together? Why don’t you pray together? If he is not Lord of your family, he is not Lord of anything.

He needs to be in charge of your money. How much of your money belongs to God? All of it. In the Old Testament – 10th. In the New Testament – God wants everything. So he says to you: “Let’s make a deal – you give me 10% and you keep 90%. We need to take care of the poor. If he is not Lord of your money, he is not Lord of anything.

Is he Lord of your sexual life? The first commandment in Genesis: “Increase and multiply”. God invented sex. He knows all about it. He told us it is not just a sharing of the body, it is a sharing of the soul. How many people say: “Lord, you are Lord in everything else, but not when and how we have children.” Why do we play games with God?

To be a follower of Jesus means: he is in charge. God whatever you want, I will do? Ask yourself the question: is there anything in your life that you don’t want to give up? Remember Jesus gave his life for you and me. We need to commit our lives to him again. Is there anything that you are afraid of? Jesus, you can ask anything of me – but not this! Be honest with the God of your life.

Introduction

Cardinal John Henry Newman once said in a sermon: Everyone who breathes, high and low, educated and ignorant, young and old, man and woman, has a mission, has a work. We are not sent into this world for nothing; we are not born at random; we are not here, that we may go to bed at night, and get up in the morning, toil for our bread, eat and drink, laugh and joke, sin when we have a mind, and reform when we are tired of sinning, rear a family and die. God sees every one of us; He creates every soul, . . . for a purpose. He needs, He deigns to need, every one of us. He has an end for each of us; we are all equal in His sight, and we are placed in our different ranks and stations, not to get what we can out of them for ourselves, but to labour in them for Him. As Christ has His work, we too have ours; as He rejoiced to do His work, we must rejoice in ours also. (Sermon: "God's Will the End of Life," from Discourses Addressed to Mixed Congregations, 1849, in Daniel M. O'Connell, Favourite Newman Sermons, NY: The America Press, 2nd ed., 1940, pp. 177–178}

Do you realise what a revolution Jesus Christ is? Do you realise how his message can change your life?

The revolutionary in the message of Jesus is the God cares for each and every person on this planet. He cares about who I am, what I am doing, how I feel, he cares about my personal destiny, my personal needs and worries. This is the specific about the Christian message: God cares and is interested in everything about me.

Just look at what Jesus actually says about this:

Matthew 10:29

“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father”.

Who is worried about sparrows. We see them all the time. They are worthless. But God cares for them and knows that not one falls without his knowledge and his say-so. Won't he care much more for you and me?

Matthew 10:30–40

“And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered”.

They are numbered? The Good Lord must be doing a lot of counting! What is this all about? Jesus is telling us that God cares about us. He

knows about our lives, our feelings, our achievements and failures. He knows everything.

Matthew 6: 25–27

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?"

Jesus talks about birds, and lilies and he hairs on your head. He is trying to hammer home the same point that he always brought: The special Providence of God for each and every human being.

Remember three parables from Luke's Gospel: The lost coin, the lost sheep, the lost son (see Luke 15). What have they all in common? There are all about the individual, not the crowd.

Many Christians don't really believe this. Or at least, it has no impact on their life. They know that God calls each one of us by name, but it doesn't touch them inwardly. It is not a truth that is life-transforming for them.

We need to know that God is closer to us than we imagine. Why is it that today's Christians have very little resistance against evil, or why is it that we struggle so much to be really enthusiastic in doing good and changing things; why is it that we have no strength to reach for the stars, to go beyond the mediocre and become a hero or heroin?

We hear the message about a practical faith in Divine Providence, but we really don't take in the special Providence of God in my own life. Providence is always general, global – that's ok, but providence just for me – nah!

Ok, why is it so hard to believe in God's special Providence for me? Why do we struggle to believe it and make it a cornerstone of our spiritual journey?

The main reason is that we have the wrong image of God. We don't see God as he is – we are missing something. God is a Father. His care for

us is a gentle and tender care, he really pays attention to what is happening in our lives

Do not worry anxiously

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?” And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own”. (Matthew 6:25–34)

Jesus is not advocating a shiftless, thriftless, thoughtless, improvident attitude to life; he is asking us to avoid a worried fear, which takes all the joy out of life.

The word which is used here is that word “merimnan” -- which means to worry anxiously. Jesus is here teaching a lesson which the people knew well -- the lesson of prudence on the one hand, and serenity and trust on the other.

Worry amounts to distrust of God. It is the attitude of a person who thinks that God will not fulfill the responsibilities He has as Creator toward His creation. It is a denial of God’s character, as if God would have created a world of men, in order to, sadistically, enjoy seeing them die. Distrust of God means attributing to Him characteristics that are more cruel than those we assign to men.

The two typical diseases of modern life are the stomach ulcer and the coronary thrombosis, and in many cases both are the result of worry. It

is a medical fact that those who laugh most live longest. The worry which we wears out the mind wears out the body along with it. Worry affects our judgement, lessons are a personal decision and renders us progressively incapable of dealing with life. Let each of us give our best to every situation -- we cannot give more -- and let us leave the rest to God.

Jesus goes on to advance to ways in which to defeat worry. The first is to seek first, to concentrate upon, the kingdom of God. We have seen that to be in the kingdom and to do the will of God is one and the same thing. To concentrate on the doing of, and the acceptance of, God's will is the way to defeat worry. It was Jesus's conviction that widely is banished when God becomes the dominating power of our lives.

Jesus also says that while he can be defeated when we acquire the art of living one day at a time. If each day is lived as it comes, if each task is done as it appears, then the sum of all the days is bound to be good. It is Jesus's advice that we should handle the demands of each day as it comes, without worrying about the unknown future and the things which may never happen.

Our faith in Divine Providence helps us, in the midst of so many insecurities and uncertainties, that we needn't worry anxiously about ourselves, about people, about things or the future. Why does God allow so much to change or allow many open questions to arise? Perhaps, he just wants to remind us, that he is still there, but he is still active in our lives, and that he will have the last word no matter what.

God will not take away all our worries. Why does he not take away all our worries? The reason can be hard to understand for us. He wants to make sure that we don't forget him. Through worries and troubles, he asks us to jump into his heart and find refuge and shelter there. He also wants to have a word in our lives.

Jesus asks us not to worry. What he means here precisely is that we should not worry anxiously. What do we usually worry about? We usually worry about how to make ends meet, about our health, about our loved ones, about finances. We need to have enough to eat, enough to drink, enough clothes to wear. All of this seems reasonable enough, however, Jesus asks us not to worry anxiously about these things.

We can also express it positively: “Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you besides” (Matthew 6:33). Jesus says clearly “all these things” -- what we need to live, what we need to make us happy, etc. Naturally, we have two widely about our human lives in a healthy way. If we feel secure in all these things, then we probably have more energy and more time to dedicate ourselves to God and to feel that we belong to God and also to be available for the mission that he gives us.

The question is, what is the cure for worry? It seems to be the inclination of the human heart that is most difficult to evade. Our makeup is such that our spirit must be kept occupied. The solution must be sought, not in ceasing to worry, but in directing our energy to something else. Jesus advises: “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness.” Worry is the result of wrong priorities in life.

We all know that sometimes terrible and incomprehensible things happen to us. It seems that God allows injustices, atrocities and suffering to happen.

Why does he allow this to happen? If we are honest, one of the things we all treasure so much is our personal freedom -- and we don't take it lightly, but someone limits that freedom. The amazing thing is, God himself respects our freedom to a level that we can practically not imagine. He even seems to take the risk of people going to hell for eternity because he respects our personal freedom.

A powerful example of this, is the story of the rich young man who comes to Jesus and wants to follow him (Matthew 19:16-22). This young man wants to follow Jesus and asks him what he needs to do. Towards the end of the conversation Jesus simply says to him: “if you wish to be perfect, give what you have to the poor, and follow me!” Jesus says to him: “if you wish”. In other words he respects the freedom of the individual. And you will notice, throughout the stories and episodes of the new Testament, Jesus always tries to win the freedom of the individual, and to awaken in them a desire to strive for ideals, and a desire to be generous and go beyond mediocrity. And he does all this out of love -- never put any other reason.

God has created our world and ordered our world according to freedom. Freedom is the key to understanding why God works the way

he does. For example, he respects the freedom of the angels, and even when some of them turned against him, and decided not to obey; he respects the freedom of Adam and Eve, when they desired their own independence more than the desired God. Again and again, God gives the gift of freedom, but the perfection of his gifts requires our free decision, and a free choice.

The Reasons not to worry

Why does God ask us not to worry? What is his reasoning? I think we could look at three reasons.

Firstly, Jesus wants to tell us that the things of this world, in spite of being so necessary, they are not eternal, they will pass, “rust and moths” will eat them away (Matthew 6:19.20). He warns us not to become slaves to material things. These words of Jesus applied to us perhaps today more than ever, because we are living in a world which is through and through dependent on materialism and consumerism. We have to organise these things in our lives, we have to plan for them -- however, our Lord asks us not to worry about them in an anxious way. They should never become our priority. They are not the most important things in our lives. We have to be aware of the hierarchy of values in our lives and applied this hierarchy whenever we can.

Secondly, Jesus also gives us another reason: we cannot serve two masters (Matthew 6:24). As human beings, we are limited in our ability to love. If our love is divided, then something or someone has to lose out at the end of the day. We have to be careful that the power of our love is not divided or a limited in different directions. If we do this, we will definitely run the risk that God will come to short. If we try and serve two masters, it seems that God, at the end of the day will always lose out.

And thirdly, Jesus gives us another reason not to worry anxiously about material things. Perhaps this is the hardest to accept and understand. God the Father, through our daily worries and needs, wants to actually draw attention to himself. He wants to remind us that he is also present in our lives. That is a great wisdom here. We all know, that when everything is going well, when we have no worries, and no difficulties, and no one needs, then we always run the risk of forgetting God. This is why God allows us to have worries -- so that we remember that we are, at the end of the day, dependent on him.

He wants us to place our worries into his hands -- if it is worries about finances, about health, about faith, or about family.

Whatever it is, we should not worry anxiously. God allows our experience of helplessness, saw that he can be active in removing our helplessness. He wants us to be independent, he wants us to decide for ourselves, he wants us to make our own choices, however, there will always be times when we feel we cannot do this on our own. These are the times, that God uses so that we can draw him into our lives and ask him for help. When we feel helpless, we are dependent on his help and his grace -- his help.

In other words, he wants to tell us that the greatest "insurance" that we could ever have is simply to trust him and to trust in his fatherly love and care for each one of us. Seek first the Kingdom of God, seek God in your life, seek to do the works of God first, then everything else will be given to you besides -- everything else. Is this not a tremendous programme for our lives faith?

God cares for each one of us individually

In Luke's gospel, in the 15th chapter, Jesus brings three parables to explain how God works and what his "method" is. Jesus makes us aware off how God works, so that we can do the same, and so that we can apply the same method.

The three parables are: the parable of the lost coin, the lost sheep, and the lost son, or as it is better known, the story of the prodigal son. All these stories, told by Jesus, have the aim to impress on his listeners that God is interested not only in the lost, but he cares for each and every individual.

Let us look at the story of the lost coin (Luke 15:8-10). A lady loses a coin, she leaves all the other coins and turns the house upside down to find this lost coin. Every businessman would tell us very quickly that the story doesn't make economic sense. The time she uses to search for a little coin should you be using in a more profitable way. It says she spent the whole day searching for the coin -- in other words -- around 12 hours. Just consider what she could have done, and what she could have achieved in 12 hours? It doesn't seem to make sense. What does this parable want to tell us? It wants to tell us that God looks after each individual was so much individual care and love, that

he constantly runs the risk of appealing nonsensical. He wants to impress upon us that he loves us individually and unconditionally. He loves us so much, it is as if no one else in the whole world exists.

Let's now look at the story of the lost sheep. The Shepherd loses one sheep and he decides to leave the other 99 alone in the desert so that he can go off and find the lost sheep. Again, the same message comes across so strongly. God cares for each and every one of us. The individual means everything to God -- almost as if the others didn't exist at all. His love, his care is focused so completely and totally on each and every individual with all the small and big needs.

Then we have the third parable -- the story of the lost son. This story brings to mind the same message as the others, but that also includes something else which is equally important: the prodigal son experiences a great deal of human insecurity. He moves away to a foreign country, he leaves his home and what he knows. He then quite soon after runs out of money and resources, and basically loses all of his friends. He then experiences a great insecurity and an uncertain future. However, the experience of this insecurity is the driving force to find a deeper and more lasting security in God himself. God uses anything and everything as a ladder, as a way, so that we can find our way home to his heart, and then in his heart find our refuge and place of rest.

The story of the prodigal son, which has come to be known as the "Gospel within the Gospel" brings home the message of God the Father cares for each one of us: it is a care that looks for us when we are lost, it is a care that is merciful, and it is a care that makes us rejoice. In this parable, we can recognise the inner structures of the human condition from the perspective of security and insecurity.

At very end of the day, the prodigal son is looking for security in his life, he is looking for an anchor that will keep him secure. All human securities have been taken from him: a home, friends and acquaintances, money, a job and even food. This experience of insecurity and uncertainty about the future becomes the driving force to search for a greater and lasting security that can only be found in God himself. at the end of the day, what is the purpose of the experience of insecurity, also in our faith? God wants nothing more than to become the "magnet" that will draw us completely to him.

A “Pumpkin Faith”

Practical faith in Divine Providence wants to show us the way how we, through any darkness of our times, can hold on to the hand of God our Father. We must be aware, however, that this always includes taking a risk. This is self understood for those who daily live out of the reality of the supernatural world. The question is, where are the people who live completely out of this world?

Here, we can bring to mind again the image of “pumpkin faith”. The verse comes from Angelus Silesius:

A mustard seed of faith
can hurl mountains into the sea;
imagine what our faith could do
if it pumpkin-size would be?

Training in Divine Providence

How do we train ourselves in a practical faith in Divine Providence?

The most important thing, is that we develop in ourselves and authentic dialogue of love with God, and authentic “Love connection” with God. It is important to stress and emphasise that we have to do something about this. We have to roll up our sleeves and put some effort into this, otherwise it simply won’t work. How can we develop this “Love connection”? In three ways:

Discover God in everyone and in everything

Talk to God everyday

Make a sacrifice for God every day.

If we ask ourselves these three questions, we can test regularly the quality and the measure of our “Love connection” with God. This is the best and the easiest way to come to an accurate diagnosis of our relationship with God. Sometimes the first aspect is lacking in us, sometimes the second, sometimes the third; perhaps there are even signs that all three are quite missing in our lives. All three naturally belong together in one unity; they are like three sides of the same process of life. However, it is often necessary to emphasise the one or the other, and could do one or the other in the foreground. If you want to have an accurate diagnosis of your personal spiritual life then simply ask yourself how these three aspects are doing in your life.

If any of these aspects are going to take all in our lives saw that this “Love connection” with God becomes strong and vibrant, then we have to remind ourselves of the foundation -- we had to remind ourselves of the solid truths that make up the foundation.

Firstly, God is a reality. He is not a bland idea that we have somehow made up together. He is a reality.

Secondly, God is a person.

Thirdly, we cannot escape from God.

Immediately, we can think of the beautiful Psalm 139:

“Where can I hide from your spirit?
From your presence, where can I flee?
If I ascend to the heavens, you are there;
if I lie down in Sheol, you are there too.
If I fly with the wings of dawn
and alight beyond the sea.
Even there your hand will guide me,
and your right hand hold me fast. (Psalm 139)

The Psalm reminds us that God is everywhere. We cannot escape from God -- he is omnipresent. In every situation, we will encounter him, and he encounters us in every moment of every day. We can understand this if we understand the dynamics of love. Love moves us to be together -- love once union. We cannot escape from God, because he always wants to be with us, and in love we try always to be with him. Basically, this is the foundation of our “Love connection” with God.

Discover God in everyone and in everything

The first thing we need to do, to train ourselves in a practical faith in Divine Providence, is to discover God everywhere. God is real, and he is not a fictional character. If God is with me the whole day, and he is present and active in my life, then it makes sense that I try and look upon him in faith. God looks at me every moment of every day, and I try to look back at him; God is with me every moment of every day, and I try to be close to him. It is very important, that we are talking here about “looking” at God -- not thinking about God. This is very

important, because thinking about God all the time, just like thinking about anything all the time, simply makes us tired and we're as is out. However, looking at God and faith is something quite different. It presupposes, that there is a quality in my soul that is strongly drawn to him.

An example of this, it is the truth that each and every one of us are "temples of the holy spirit -- in other words, we are all like churches dedicated to the Blessed Trinity. God lives in me and he also lives in all the people around me. Just as we should never defile a church, we should never defile a human being -- who is God's temple.

Father Kentenich used to like to compare the sanctuary lamp that always burns in the church, indicating the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, to people's eyes. The sanctuary lamp indicates the presence of God, and the eyes of another human being as a reminder that God is present in them. They remind us of the presence of the living God in human soul.

We can look upon God in the soul of the people around us, in the Eucharist, or in the other sacraments, however, we can also look upon God in his interventions. God is behind everything that happens, behind every happening and event, even behind tragedies and suffering, even behind the confusion of our times -- be it in our personal lives, and in the life of society.

Father Kentenich once used the following image: imagine it is in the middle of winter and there is lots and lots of snow and I am going for a walk in the snow, and suddenly from nowhere, a snowball lands right at the back of my neck. I am taken by surprise and I feel the ice-cold snow running down my back. I turn round in anger to confront the person who has thrown the snowball. And then, I realise, it is my best friend that through the snowball at me, with the best of intentions. What happens then? We usually make a bittersweet face. We realise that no malice was intended -- after all -- it was thrown by my best friend.

Behind everything that happens to us in our lives, every event be it a happy one or a difficult one, we can discover the hand of our heavenly Father. If we have achieved this, we have achieved this, we have achieved a great maturity in faith. However, we have two train

ourselves and this. We have to train ourselves every day to look upon God and faith, and to see God behind the things that happen.

As Christians today, we have sometimes lost the “crispiness” of faith, or the “freshness” of faith. We need a faith today that smells like “freshly baked bread”. There is no smell like it, that works so attractively. To a great extent, we have all lost this “freshness”. If we look into the souls of the people around us, then we notice that the human soul seems to have shrunk a great deal.

We know so much about so many things. Particularly young people, regarding the media, communication technology, nor much more than we do. Sometimes I think, if we did an exam between us and our young people, they would win hands down. All we know so much, we know so little about the supernatural reality, and we apply it so little in our daily lives. It seems that we have swept away a whole dimension of the essential knowledge. And what dimension is that? It is knowledge about God, and about the supernatural, invisible world. We need again the courage to rediscover this world and to conquer that again for ourselves.

Talk to God everyday

This simply means, that we need short moments in our days where we simply say a little prayer to God. If we love God, and in the measure that we do love him, we want to be with him and , and we want to be in communion with him. This is the philosophy of love: Love is that unites us, and makes us the same. For this reason, love always wants to draw us together. Jesus often spoke about “abiding” in him -- in other words, finding our rest in him, simply being with God. Normally, we can achieve this in two distinct ways:

We can talk to God in prayer using a thought or an idea, we can be with God in prayer using an emotion, the feeling. Using a thought or an idea usually means that we choose a special truth and simply go through it again with God -- we talk to God about it and we listen to what God has to say. If we abide with God through a feeling, then we allow our emotions and other emotional life to kick in.

This can also include a special or favourite situation or experience, that we would like to go over with God again. For example, when St Francis of Assisi used to pray, he would often pray with feelings and through emotions. He would he would pray “my Lord and my God” and

just let a feeling of love, of warmth and dedication to God fill him completely. It is important that we take this on board, so that we don't think that praying to God every day often means that we have to develop some kind of "brain gymnastics".

So we need to find lots of little times in our daily life to create a moment like this. Again, it usually kinds of suffering or a worry and in the evening, when our human nature starts to relax and rest, then a religious side starts to break through. As soon as we feel calm and we start to truly relax, the religious person in us starts to make itself known. So we have to be careful, that not a long time passes before we see a "loving hello" to God.

Remember, when we speak to God we should always speak from the heart and we should use the words and feelings that come naturally to us. We don't need some special solemn or theological language. God also speaks Glaswegian. We have to be careful that we don't fall into a cold formalism in our personal lives of prayer.

During the day, we need lots of little "prayer pauses" -- creative pauses. We need to build policies into our work and into a leisure, so that we have real times where we can connect again to God. Prayer should never become them an expression of some kind of performance or achievement -- our prayer should always be an expression of our personal bond of love with God.

It is interesting, that when St Paul talks about prayer, he simply says that we should pray always (Ephesians 6:18). Obviously, St Paul isn't just speaking about oral prayer, we would have to be muttering away constantly during the day. He is also speaking here about what we call "the prayer of the heart". The prayer of the heart is, if you like, a basic attitude of the heart, which includes abandoning and surrendering ourselves to God. It means striving for an undivided heart, it means giving our hearts to God -- to him, to his wishes and to his plans for us. In other words, we don't want to deny God anything. At the end of the day, this type of prayer -- the prayer of the heart -- is the aim of any religious education.

Prayer should always be an expression of our own personal needs, and our own personal longings. It doesn't make much sense just to pray any prayer that comes along, simply for the sake of praying. We need time for this and we need moments of peace and quiet. Living today

means that we have to endure so many impressions in 24 hours. We are confronted with noise, with ideas, with offers, with challenges all day. And very often, we can work through all these impressions very well. So we need to have the courage and the strength to “turn off the tap”. If we are able to do this, we are speaking about a great source of strength in our spiritual life. In this way, we actually help herself to work through the many impressions which confronts us every day.

It is also important in our lives of prayer to remember the period of petition. This prayer is very powerful because we have to learn again to ask God for the things we need. However, we must remember, that when we pray for anything, we pray on the basis that God’s will be done and not I will. Asking for things, does not mean that we want to change God’s mind on making do the things we want. We should have enough trust to bring all our petitions and needs to God but always with the proviso that it is God’s will and plan that matters, and not ours.

The covenant of love with our Lady has four constitutive elements: it is a gift of love, it’s then that of love, a sharing of love and a demand of love. Because of the covenant of love with her lady, we have the right to everything that belongs to her.

Another important kind of prayer is the prayer of gratitude, of thanksgiving. We cannot pray this prayer enough during the day. There is a Russian legend, that tells the story, that God was getting a little bit bored in heaven only wanted something different for a change. So he invited all the virtues to a fantastic meal. All the virtues come together in heaven and the old take their places at the table prepared for them. However, two virtues seem to be a bit lost and walk round the table avoiding each other. Every time they look at each other, they turn away and go in another direction. God is watching this, and he’s having a good laugh at their antics. As they get near to God again, he stops and he invites them to hold each other’s hands. And then God says to everyone at the table, who are wondering what is going on, he says: “Let me introduce you to charity on the right and to gratitude on the left.” And then he adds, “for the first time since the creation of the world, charity and gratitude have found each other”.

In other words, we receive so many graces and gifts of God. Most of the time these gifts come from the people around us. Every day, we

have to stop and thank God for the gift he gives us -- in other words, we have to become more and more, people who are genuinely grateful and express that attitude as much as they can. "Deo Gratias People".

Make a sacrifice for God every day

A practical faith in Divine Providence is only possible if we have a genuine spirit of sacrifice. Very often, the sacrifices that we can make for God, are not the usual range of sacrifices that would immediately coming to mind: like visiting someone, or fasting or saying extra prayers are going to holy mass during the week, etc.

Probably, for us the biggest source of sacrifices, are the sacrifices that involve our understanding. Normally, when we think of sacrifices we firstly think of physical ones. However, sometimes mental sacrifices can demand more of us. To allow ourselves to be guided by God, and to be open for God's will and our life, this very often requires from us that we give up the right to understand or to know why God is asking this from us. Without doubt, this can be a very big sacrifice. This is truly a "leap of faith". Very often, we cannot understand why, we don't see the way forward, or the sense in it.

We like to feel in control, and most of the time we feel in control when we think we have understood what was going on. However, very often the good Lord does a bit of 10 pin bowling in our lives and he makes sure that the skittles are flying everywhere. This is practical faith can Divine Providence -- it means seeing a "yes" from the heart to the dark times when we don't understand.

This third aspect of making a sacrifice regard every day, and of a genuine spirit of sacrifice in our lives is so important for a living out of Divine Providence. There are three reasons for this:

The first reason can be understood in the nature of love. We are all affected by original sin, and we all live every day the consequences of original sin. This means, that there is no love without sacrifice -- sacrifice simply belongs to any real expression of love. We know what love is -- Love is up over that unites us, and a parrot that makes us the same. In love we make ourselves a gift to another person. However, if we give ourselves to someone else, then we have two good are all needs and their own desires in the background. And this is where sacrifice comes in. The stronger the love, the greater the desire

to give ourselves completely. More than more, we have two become men and women who are able to love in a big way.

A second reason why we cannot live without sacrifice lies in our human nature again. Because of the effects of original sin in our lives, it is as if our human nature has been split. This means we struggle to identify with higher and more noble values in our lives and realise these values, if we don't give up on the lesser values. We experience today the effects of hedonism, materialism and consumerism. Many people organise their lives around pleasure, around appearance and fitness and health, around money and how to get more of it. If we wish to embrace the higher, spiritual values, then we have to let go somehow of the lesser values. And this must necessarily include sacrifice.

And finally, the third reason: we have looked at the nature of love, human nature and now we can look at the nature of grace. The grace that we receive, has been won for us through the cross and passion of Jesus Christ. For this reason, there is no grace without the cross. At the end of every mass, we are blessed in the sign of the cross; we are blessed in this sign because we see the cross as a source of grace. Because of this, we have to include and be aware of sacrifice in our lives.

Let us now look at other kinds of sacrifice briefly.

There are sacrifices which come from our profession; there are also sacrifices which a particular situation demands of us; and that our sacrifices which come from the struggle to overcome our human nature and do something about her limitations.

We change inside

If we grow into a practical faith and Divine Providence, then we start to change inside. We actually become different. This difference shows itself in three ways:

Someone who lives by Divine Providence firstly sees clearer, sees further and sees deeper -- he sees everything with God's eyes, he sees people in a different way, he has a deeper understanding for the values from the "citizenship of heaven" (Philippians 3:20). He has a keen sense for the supernatural world, and becomes "at home" in this world. He sees God everywhere and in everything that happens he can sense the presence of God.

Secondly, the person who strives to live a life in Divine Providence is a courageous person. He or she allows a deep courage to grow in his heart because he never feels separated from God, and because he never feels separated from God, he has never separated from God's strength, help and power.

And thirdly, the person who strives to live a practical faith in Divine Providence is also someone who is confident that God will be victorious, but God's love will triumph, that God will have the last word.

Are You a 3G Catholic?

Are we, in other words, "3G catholics"? I propose that, to get the Gospel message out to a culture that has eclipsed Jesus out of its vision, we need to

Get off the couch and bring souls to Christ
Get reconnected to the mission for all the baptized to spread the Gospel, no matter what our age
Get over ourselves; it is all about God's grace

In 1988, Pope John Paul II wrote a letter called On the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World (Christifideles Laici). In this address to the Church he used Matthew 20 to explain why the lay faithful needed to go out and bring Jesus to the world and souls to Christ. Essentially he is asking us to get off the couch and bring souls to Christ.

The First "G": Get Off the Couch and Bring Souls to Christ!

Jesus says, "You too go into my vineyard" (Mt 20:4).

In the Gospel of Matthew 20:1-16, the "marketplace" is the world, the "vineyard" is the Church where God wants us to bring souls, and the "landowner" is God the Father who hires us "to bring souls into his Kingdom."

Among the many problems facing the world, one stands out from the rest, namely, how few people know Christ on a personal basis. Many people live and die without ever knowing Christ on a personal basis.

“Since the work that awaits everyone in the vineyard of the Lord is so great, there is no place for idleness.”

St. Gregory the Great says, “Each one should examine themselves to see how energetically they are working in the vineyard of the Sower. Perhaps we have not dedicated everything we have to the service of the Lord. The people who really work for him . . . are those who are anxious to win souls and bring others to the vineyard” (St. Gregory the Great, Homilies on the Gospels, 19, 2).

Fr. Leo Trese in his book *17 Steps to Heaven* says, “How many converts did you win to the Faith during the past year? . . . During the past 10 years? . . . During your lifetime? Is there a single person of whom you can truthfully say ‘I am the one who brought the person into the Church?’” In the same book he also writes, “Very few converts were won over exclusively by a priest’s preaching and persuasion . . . in nine out of ten cases, a convert’s initial interest in the Catholic Church was inspired by some Catholic friend or acquaintance” (Leo J. Trese, *Seventeen Steps to Heaven: A Catholic Guide to Salvation*, rev. ed. [Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 1902], 147).

One of the effects of salt is that it was used and is still used as a preservative to keep something from going bad. We salt meats to keep them from going sour. Catholics must be salt to the world to keep society from going bad. How effective have we been in the last forty years?

Think about it: How many Catholics are not going to Church regularly today? How many Catholics have not used the Sacrament of Reconciliation in many years? How many couples are not getting married in the Church and are living in sin through cohabitation? Many! The world today is very confused about what life is about. They do not know the Ten Commandments and how they can live them through the grace of Christ. I visited a CCD class in my parish and asked the children what the third commandment was. A little boy said, “Be nice.” We have work to do. Who will bring these souls to Christ?

The Church would answer “the laity.” The “average person” who works with the people who have lost touch with their faith; the mother who brings her child every day to school; the High School student who finds out his friend has not been to church. All are called to bring

souls back to Christ. The members of the laity are the ones who have to get off the couch and bring souls back to Christ.

The Second “G”: God Has a Mission for You, No Matter What Your Age
Notice that the landowner in Matthew 20:1–7 calls the workers at different hours of the day: dawn, nine o’clock, noon, three o’clock, and five o’clock. Some of the Fathers of the Church say that this reference represents the different stages of a person’s life. The dawn group includes those who are baptized as babies. The nine o’clock group includes those who receive the faith in their youth. The noon group includes those who come into the faith in adulthood. The three and five o’clock groups refer to those who come into the Church in their more mature years.

So what does this mean for us today? God has a mission for all who come into the Church, no matter how old they are. In *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, Pope Paul VI states, “Children too have have an apostolate of their own. In their own measure they are true living witnesses of Christ among their companions” (no. 13).

Cardinal Francis Arinze said in a speech, “Like converts like.” In other words, doctors convert doctors, firefighters are good at bringing other firefighters to Christ, and mothers are good at bringing other mothers to Christ. The point is, all are called to bring people to Christ!

Today, ask the Holy Spirit to suggest one family member, friend, co-worker, or other person that you might hold in your prayers. Make it your mission to get that person to Church and confession by Easter so that he or she will be singing alleluia with us when we celebrate as we do every Sunday that Christ has risen from the dead!

It does not matter if you are young or old: God has a mission for you to bring souls to Christ!

The Third “G”: Get Over Yourself; It Is All About God’s Grace
Notice at the end of Matthew 20 that all the workers received the same wage, whether they worked all day or just for two hours. Jesus says, “My friend, I am not cheating you. Did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what is yours and go. What if I wish to give this last one the same as you? Or am I not free to do as I wish with my own money? Are you envious because I am generous?” (Mt 20:13–15).

Our Lord is making an important point here. The “day’s wages” for every person is God’s grace. Jesus wants us to understand that his grace is a pure gift. The fact that I am a priest today is a grace. The fact that all of us are here now is a grace!

In the Catechism of the Catholic Church we learn, “Grace is favour, the free and undeserved help that God gives us to respond to his call” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2nd ed. We need to pray that God opens up the hearts of those we are trying to bring back to the Church.

Today Jesus gives each one of us this message: Get off the couch and bring souls to Christ! God has a mission for you, no matter what your age! Get over yourself; it is all about God’s grace!

Be a 3G Catholic!

Conclusion

From October, this year the Church celebrates a “Year of Faith” – two things: Renewal of our own faith and reaching out to those who have received the sacraments, but don’t practice.

We remember that Jesus gave everything for me and you – not it is our chance to give everything back. Give your life to him – make that moment the first day of the rest of your life.

When is a gift yours? When you receive it or when you open it? I think it is when you open it. I could give you a gift of £1000. but if you don’t open it, you could die of hunger. We have received the gift in baptism, but some people have never opened it.

If you are going to take anything away from these Talks about the practical faith in Divine Providence, then I hope that it is this: God wants to do great things through you. I believe that we can have such a revolution in the Church. The Church is going to change through people who put Jesus first. That our hearts seeks his Will above our own.

I hope that you believe it, I hope that you will live it.

Have you every heard of the saying: “If you want to make God have a real good laugh, then tell him your plans!” Remember, holiness and being close to God means that his will and our will become one. Let’s pray that we give God enough time to discover his will and Plan of love for us in our lives.