

Mother of God Community  
Sunday Night Prayer Meeting  
April 24, 2016  
*33 Days to Merciful Love* by Fr. Michael Gaitley  
Nancy McCambridge

This is a time of great mercy for the whole church. Why? Because the times are so evil. Where sin increases, grace, abounds all the more (Rom 5:20) Pope Francis said “listen to the voice of the Spirit that speaks to the whole Church in this our time, which is, in fact, the time of mercy. This is a gift from God himself to the whole church.” We are part of this greater work of the Spirit that is going on right now, in our day. It puts the focus where it belongs, namely on trusting God and believing in His unfathomable, merciful love. (pp. 61-62)\*\* ***All page references are found in 33 Days to Merciful Love.***

I have been reading “33 Days to Merciful Love” by Fr. Michael Gaitley which has been highly recommended by Fr. Joe Rogers, pastor of St. John Neumann parish. Fr. Gaitley starts off in the book talking about the faith of Abraham and the Blessed Mother at the foot of the cross: hoping against hope, they believed in God’s words and promises even when it seemed impossible. He then goes on and shares about St Therese of Lisieux’s life and backstory to her teaching.

Therese Martin grew up in France that was deeply affected by the Jansenist heresy, a heresy that teaches a joyless, moral rigorism, emphasizing fear and justice, punishment and severity, judgment and condemnation. It proclaims not the Good News of God’s mercy for sinners but its own bad news of God’s consuming wrath for whoever dares to commit the slightest infraction against what it sees as his many oppressive rules. It teaches that few are saved, that you have to be perfect to go to Jesus and that you must earn his love, especially by multiplying great works and painful sacrifices. (pp. 47-48)

Jansenism poisoned Therese’s early religious life not only by creating in her an excessive fear of offending God but also by causing her to develop an unhealthy preoccupation with suffering. Therese’s lowliness is also the result of her simply being a very fragile and broken little girl. Having lost her biological mother to cancer at the age of 3 and her “adopted” mother to Carmel at the age of 9, she became an emotional mess who would cry at the slightest provocation. Because of Therese’s deep emotional fragility which led to a debilitating psychological breakdown at age 10, her sisters sheltered her and doted on her so much that she became socially awkward and was made fun at school. (pp. 48-49)

Mother of God Community  
Sunday Night Prayer Meeting  
April 24, 2016  
*33 Days to Merciful Love* by Fr. Michael Gaitley  
Nancy McCambridge

In the midst of her extreme loneliness and sensitivity, Therese deeply longed to be loved. In fact, hers was so great a longing that, she admitted, given the opportunity, she basically would have thrown herself into the arms of the first creature who came along. As she herself put it “With a heart such as mine. I would have allowed myself to be taken and my wings to be clipped.... I know that without Him, I could have fallen as low as St. Mary Magdalen.” But she knew God showed amazing mercy on her life by preserving her ahead of time from a life of grave sin by removing the obstacles that would have caused her to fall. (p. 49)

However, despite her weaknesses, from the time of her youth, she had bold desires: she wanted to become a saint, and not just any saint, but a great saint. “In spite of my extreme littleness I still dare to gaze upon the Lord and my heart feels within it all the aspiration of an Eagle. Because I was little and weak He lowered Himself to me, and He instructed me secretly in the things of His love.” (p. 51)

She saw herself as a weak little bird without strength and unable to fly compared to Theresa of Avila whom she saw to be like an eagle soaring on the heights of holiness. She rediscovered the very heart of the Gospel, the Good News that God lifts up the lowly. She searched the scriptures to capture her little way where Jesus says “whoever is a little one, let him come to me.” (Mt. 19:14) She had succeeded in finding what she was looking for. “The elevator which must raise me to heaven is Your arms, O Jesus. And for this I had no need to grow up, but rather I had to remain little and become this more and more”. (pp. 50, 52)

St. Faustina said that the way you live a life of trust is by praising and thanksgiving, to praise and thank God in all things. This was St. Therese of Lisieux’s Little Way of surrender, acceptance and childlike trust. “Jesus does not demand great actions from us but to simply surrender and be grateful. Has he not said offer to God the sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving” (Ps. 49:14)

The secret of her littleness was that Therese realized that she could not compete with God. She wanted to be on fire with the love for Him and others but on her own strength

Mother of God Community  
Sunday Night Prayer Meeting  
April 24, 2016  
*33 Days to Merciful Love* by Fr. Michael Gaitley  
Nancy McCambridge

it was impossible. As she herself put it, “compared to God’s love for her, her love for him was not even a drop of dew lost in the ocean”. And the deeper she delved into the mystery of God’s love for her, the more she realized she could not compete. She knew that, compared to God, she would always be a weak, pitiful lover. However, in God’s loving mercy, He fills up the abyss of our wretchedness with his own divine love, and we discover his never ending divine mercy. (P. 98)

His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. II Peter 1:3-4

This rediscovery of divine mercy is at the very heart of the Gospel; and what is the heart of the Gospel? The Catechism says “it’s the revelation in Jesus Christ of God’s mercy to sinners.” It is the Good News that Jesus has the Heart of the Good Shepherd who will even leave behind the 99 to go in search of the one lost sheep. It is the Good News that God does not love us because we are so good but because He is so good, that He gave over for us His very Son to take the punishment of our sin; that he loves us not because we deserve it but because we desperately need it. God is not attracted to our gifts, virtues, and talents though he wants to bless us in this way, but rather to our weakness, brokenness and sin. It is God being moved to compassion at seeing our suffering and then taking action to help alleviate it. It’s about the action of Jesus who reaches down out of pity and picks up trusting little souls to place them on the heights. Therese knew it was her littleness that attracted God’s Merciful Love. And because she was so little and trusted completely in Divine Mercy, she believed that God’s mercy would surely rush to the lowest place – her little soul and fill it to overflowing. (pp. 53-54)

St. Therese goes on to say “and if the good God wants you weak and helpless like a child ... do you believe that you will have less merit? Agree to stumble at every step therefore, even to fail, to carry your cross weakly, to love your helplessness. Your soul will draw more profit from it than if, carried by grace, you would accomplish with enthusiasm

Mother of God Community  
Sunday Night Prayer Meeting  
April 24, 2016  
*33 Days to Merciful Love* by Fr. Michael Gaitley  
Nancy McCambridge

heroic actions that would fill your soul with personal satisfaction and pride.” It is a little way of darkness. It’s about accepting that we are to put up with ourselves – with all the darkness of our weakness, brokenness and sin – without getting discouraged. But it is also about realizing that this does not prevent us from becoming saints. If we keep trying, then there is no end to the Lord’s mercy and we can believe that he can and will satisfy our desires for holiness. It is also being willing to accept the cross of ordinary life and to eat the bread of daily darkness. Of course, most of us, especially in this social media age, long to be known, well liked and praised for being important or attractive. But then, when we have to endure the torture of being quiet and alone in our own rooms, we realize that in the eyes of the world, we are not so important or attractive. You have not attained a destiny of greatness. You are not important. We can never do enough to satisfy our craving for greatness and love and our precious accomplishments fade away like so much dust and vanity. Are we satisfied for just being God’s child? Is His grace enough for us? Pp. 56-57.

However, we are called to live our ordinary lives with extraordinary faith, hope and love. It is to believe in God’s promise and mercy and to hope that he will bring them to the heights of holiness even if neither they nor anyone else sees it in this life. This extraordinary love consists in our efforts to keep trying, to keep striving to love God and neighbor in the little things. In fact to do little things with great love. So don’t believe the lies and voices of the world that says “You are not important. You are not attractive. You are not successful. You are not anything. With the Little Way, the Lord will make us immensely important, incredibly attractive and wildly successful in his eyes. We will have to accept to be in the dark, to live an ordinary life, and to walk by faith. Yes, we will simply need to embrace the promise that God is transforming us by His divine love, His way.

The second part of Therese’s “little way” was to console Jesus’ heart. She was distressed because she saw that Jesus’ love is unknown, rejected; Jesus’ greatest desire was to lavish his love on his creatures but they ignore it or are indifferent to it. This was the beauty of Therese’s path. It was not a path on which Jesus gives grace and mercy because we deserve it, but because he feels the need to give it. It is hard to believe that Jesus

Mother of God Community  
Sunday Night Prayer Meeting  
April 24, 2016  
*33 Days to Merciful Love* by Fr. Michael Gaitley  
Nancy McCambridge

actually needs us and that we truly can give relief to his Sacred and Merciful heart. "I desire to bestow my graces upon souls, but they do not want to accept them. You, at least come to Me. Oh, how indifferent are souls to so much goodness, to so many proofs of love! My Heart drinks only of the ingratitude and forgetfulness of souls living in the world. They have time for everything, but they have no time to come to Me for graces. The flames of mercy are burning Me. I desire to pour them out upon human souls. Oh, what pain they cause Me when they do not want to accept them. I am looking for souls who would like to receive my grace." P. 74.

We console him by loving and trusting him, letting him love us and by allowing him to have mercy on us and save us. We also console him by stepping out in faith and spreading the love of Jesus to others. Jesus' need is to show mercy and to save us. And when people reject his mercy, when they reject his gift of salvation, it causes him pain. God does not need us, but in Christ Jesus, because of his human and divine heart, he chose to need our love. And he chose to feel that need for the sake of friendship, which is a two-way street. (p. 157)

**I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. John 15:15**

### Recognize

To live the Little Way we need to recognize the darkness of our littleness and our brokenness. "The weaker one is, without desires or virtues, the more suited one is for the workings of this consuming and transforming love. We must consent to remain always poor and without strength and this is the difficulty. Ah! Let us remain then very far from all that sparkles, let us love our littleness. Then we shall be poor in spirit and Jesus will come to look for us. He will transform us into flames of love." (p. 118)

### Trust

The wound in each one of us is that because of original sin we tend to doubt God's goodness. We tend to think in a worldly, Jansenist way that says we must earn God's love by being perfect, strong and without sin. Therese says it is confidence and nothing but

Mother of God Community  
Sunday Night Prayer Meeting  
April 24, 2016  
*33 Days to Merciful Love* by Fr. Michael Gaitley  
Nancy McCambridge

great confidence in God's merciful love that will lead us to love and be merciful to others. Her only treasure was the blind hope that she had in God's mercy. (p. 118)

Try

We must keep trying and doing things with great love. It means not settling for complacency or mediocrity or the attitude that says "well this is just who I am", "I cannot change", to become lukewarm or indifferent, but delving more deeply in experiencing His transforming love. The measure with which we measure will be measured back to us. (Lk 6:38) In other words, it means striving to be faithful to examining our consciences every day and not giving into discouragement or hopelessness. It means trying to remember and to keep before our eyes the infinite mercy of God who never tires of forgiving us. It means striving to never tire of asking God for His forgiveness. (p. 119)

The Unbound model from Neal Lozano, has helped me to identify my enemies in my spiritual life and to be able to take authority over them. The five keys of this model are: Repentance and Faith; Forgiveness; Renunciation; Authority; and the Father's blessing. In reading this book it has helped me to identify my enemies. I repented to God for trying to earn God's love instead of becoming little and childlike. I forgave myself for my pride and failing to accept God's unconditional love for me. I renounced the spirit of pride, perfectionism, spirit of inadequacy, self accusation, unworthiness, doubt, unbelief and self reliance all in the Name of Jesus and now I can take authority over these areas and know the Father's love in a deeper way.

Excerpt from St. Faustina's Diary as quoted in the book:

"I know that I am under Your special gaze, O Lord. I do not examine with fear Your plans regarding me; my task is to accept everything from Your hand. I do not fear anything, although the storm is raging, and frightful bolts strike all around me, and I then feel quite alone. Yet, my heart senses You, and my trust grows and I see all your omnipotence which upholds me. With You, Jesus, I go through life, amid storms and rainbows, with a cry of joy, singing the song of Your mercy. I will not stop singing my song of love until the choir of Angels picks it up. There is no power that can stop me in my flight toward God."  
P. 160

*33 Days to Merciful Love* by Fr. Michael Gaitley, published by Marian Press, 2016