

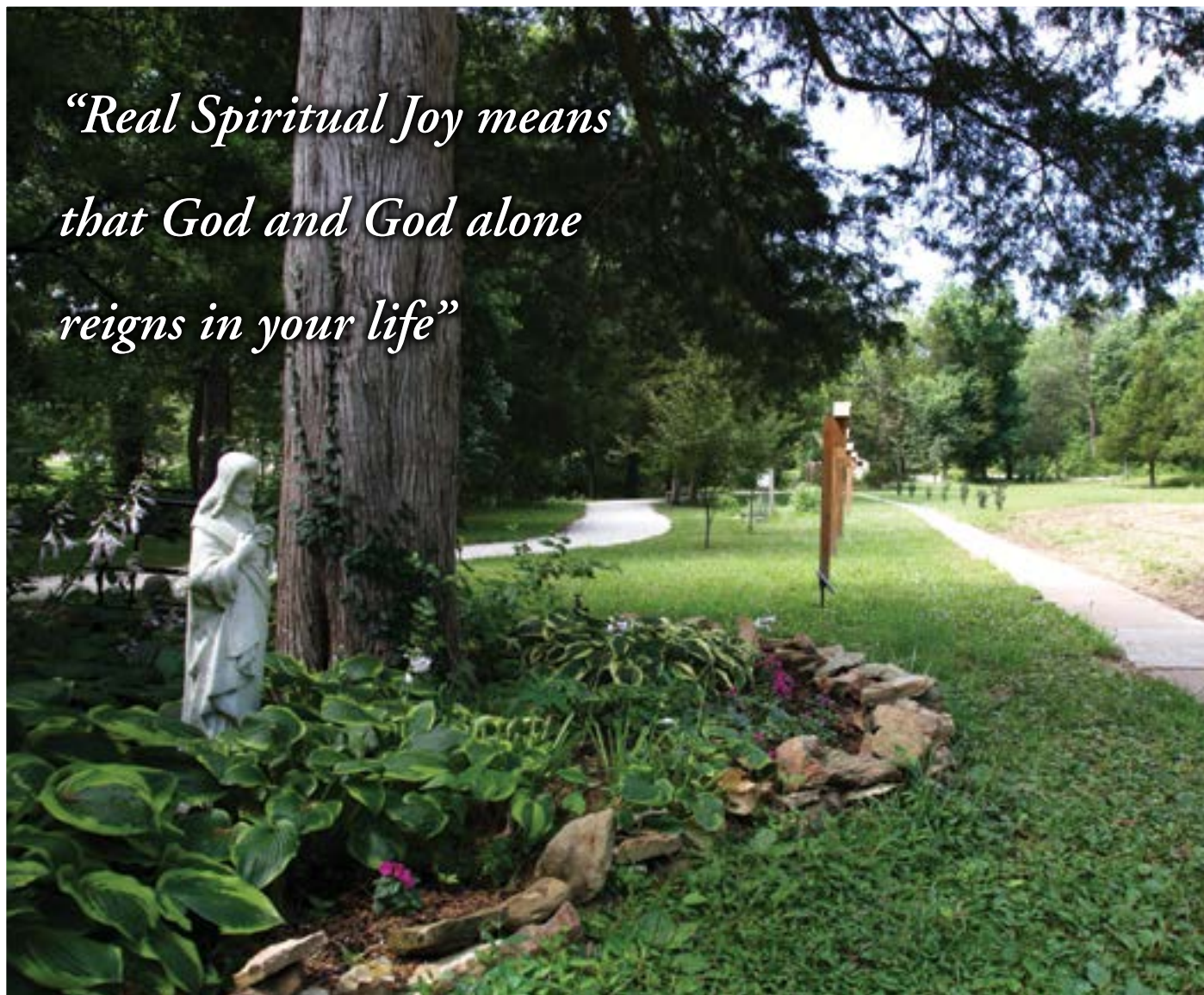


Priestly People

SERVANTS OF THE PARACLETE

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*“Real Spiritual Joy means
that God and God alone
reigns in your life”*



FR. GERALD FITZGERALD SP (FOUNDER)

The Holy Father's Catechesis

Taking up the catechesis on the Eucharistic Celebration, today we reflect, in the context of the rites of introduction, on the penitential act. In its sobriety, it fosters the attitude with which to dispose oneself to celebrate worthily the holy mysteries, namely, acknowledging our sins before God and brethren; acknowledging that we are sinners. In fact, the priest's invitation is addressed to the whole community in prayer, because we are all sinners. What can the Lord give to one whose heart is already full of himself, of his success? Nothing, because one who is presumptuous is incapable of receiving forgiveness, satiated as he is with his presumed justice. We think of the parable of the Pharisee and the publican, where only the latter — the publican — goes home justified, namely, forgiven (Cf. *Luke* 18:9-14). One who is aware of his miseries and lowers his eyes with humility, feels God's merciful look resting on him. We know from experience that only one who is able to acknowledge his mistakes and asks for forgiveness, receives the understanding and forgiveness of others.

To listen in silence to the voice of conscience enables us to recognize that our thoughts are far from divine thoughts that our words and our actions are often worldly, guided, that is, by choices that are contrary to the Gospel. Therefore, at the beginning of the Mass, we carry out communally the penitential act through a formula of *general confession*, pronounced in the *first person singular*. Each one confesses to God and to brethren "to have sinned much in thoughts, words, deeds and omissions." Yes, also in omissions, namely, of having neglected to do the good that one could have done. Often we feel we are good because — we say — "I haven't done wrong to anyone." In reality, it's not enough not to have wronged our neighbor, we must choose to do good taking up occasions to give good witness that we are disciples of Jesus. It's good to stress that we confess, *be it to God or to brothers*, that we are sinners: this helps us to understand the dimension of

sin that, while it separates us from God, also divides us from our brethren and vice versa. Sin breaks: it breaks the relationship with God and it breaks the relationship with brethren, the relationship in the family, in society and in the community: Sin always breaks, separates, divides.

The words we say with the mouth are accompanied by the gesture of beating our breast, acknowledging that I have sinned by my own fault, and not that of others. It often happens in fact that, out of fear and shame, we point the finger to accuse others. It costs to admit that we are culpable, but it does us good to confess it sincerely, to confess our sins. I remember a story, which an old missionary told, of a woman who went to confession and began to tell the errors of her husband; then she went on to tell the errors of her mother-in-law and then the sins of neighbors. At a certain point, the confessor said to her: "But, lady, tell me, have you finished? — Very good: you have finished with others' sins. Now begin to tell yours." We must tell our sins!

After the confession of sin, we beseech the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Angels and the Saints to pray to the Lord for us. In this also, the *communion of Saints* is precious: namely, the intercession of these "friends and models of life" sustains us in the journey towards full communion with God, when sin will be definitively annihilated.

Beyond the "I confess," the penitential act can be done with other formulas, for instance: "Have mercy upon us, O Lord / we have sinned against you. / Show us thy steadfast love, O Lord. / and grant us thy salvation" (Cf. *Psalms* 123:3; 85:8; *Jeremiah* 14:20). Especially on Sunday, the blessing and the aspersion of water can be carried out in memory of our Baptism (Cf. *OGMR*, 51), which cancels all sins. And, as part of the penitential act, it's also possible to sing the Kyrie

elision: with the ancient Greek expression, we acclaim the Lord – Kyrios – and implore His mercy (*Ibid.* 52).

Sacred Scripture offers us luminous examples of “penitent” figures that, looking into themselves after having committed a sin, find the courage to take off the mask and open themselves to the grace that renews the heart. We think of King David and of the words attributed to him in the Psalm: “Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy steadfast love; according to thy abundant mercy blot out my transgressions” (51:3). We think of the Prodigal Son who returns to the Father;

or to the publican’s invocation: “God, be merciful to me a sinner” (*Luke* 18:13). We think also of Saint Peter, of Zacchaeus, of the Samaritan woman. To measure oneself with the frailty of the clay of which we are kneaded is an experience that strengthens us: while it makes us deal with our weakness, it opens the heart to invoke the divine mercy, which transforms and converts. And this is what we do in the penitential act at the beginning of the Mass.

POPE FRANCIS MORNING AUDIENCE

The Joy of Repentance

Sin is like old sour wine in a heart that is meant to be filled with the new wine of joy in the Holy Spirit. “People do not pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins burst, the wine spills out, and the skins are ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and in that way both are preserved” (Mt. 9:17).

Each of us has a heart with a capacity for love that God is constantly trying to enlarge and expand. Our hearts are not like rigid glasses that can only hold a certain amount; they are more like the supple wineskins that stretch as they are filled. But these wineskins must be made new, purified from the residue of the sour wine of sin that has infected our lives with its consequential result of blindness and sadness; blindness to the things of God and to faith, sadness because the inner self is depleted of its source of nourishing strength and light.

Repentance is the way to obtain a new wineskin, a new heart that is capable of seeing and understanding

the ways of God. For upon the return of a sinner, God does the most gracious things. He opens the doors to His Treasury and Wisdom herself shall instruct because “wherever a man shall be converted to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away” (2 Cor. 3:16).

True repentance destroys ignorance and lifts the shadows of darkness. It gives the repentant sinner the understanding that it is humility that Our Lord requires, a return to Him as a child with that inner acknowledgement that one has failed and is totally dependent on His Mercy and Compassion. Repentance is not to be a remorseful or self-condemning attitude for having sinned, but rather a desire to be changed to a new manner of living, of attitudes, and ways and actions that are pleasing to the Lord. Thus, there is a great joy in repentance for there is “more joy in heaven over one repentant sinner than over ninety nine righteous people who have no need for repentance” (Lk. 15: 7).

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