

The Review of Life: Choosing, Preparing, and Presenting “The Fact”

- I. Importance of “The Review of Life”
 - a. It is one of the things that makes JC unique (along with ordained priesthood)
 - i. Makes JC different from “prayer groups” or “support group”
 - ii. Because ROL is so central to our identity...it needs constant renewal
 - b. The ROL is a MEANS to an END
 - i. The END – is to know and follow Jesus better (nothing unique about this)
 1. To give ourselves totally to the Father in a spirit of abandonment to His will
 2. To be brothers to all people – especially the poor and oppressed
 - ii. The MEANS
 1. Individual means – (following the spirit of Charles de Foucauld) meditating on the Gospel, Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, meeting Jesus in solitude (prayer, desert day)
 2. Fraternal means – to join in local and stable fraternities, and the Review of Life
 - iii. The ROL is what makes JC unique
- II. Two Responsibilities for the ROL
 - a. Individual’s Responsibilities (the morning’s talk)
 - i. All the preparation that **MUST** happen before the ROL can take place
 - ii. Each member engages in this on their own
 - iii. Centers around “the fact”
 1. Choosing it...preparing it...and presenting it
 - b. Fraternal Responsibilities (the afternoon talk)
 - i. What the rest of the fraternity does when a fact is presented?
- III. The Individual Phase
 - a. How and individual member chooses, prepares, and presents his “fact”
 - b. This is **CRITICAL** – this process **MUST** happen in order for an authentic ROL to take place
 - i. Analogy – “The fact” is to “the ROL” as “food” is to “cooking”
 - ii. Ever try to cook without food? Not very satisfying. Ever been through a ROL that feels like that?
 - iii. If members do not take the time and care to prepare a fact – it’s like showing up to a potluck without a casserole
- IV. Choosing The Fact

- a. Can be from the everyday events of our lives as diocesan priests
- b. Connection with Jesus of Nazareth
 - i. The “hidden years” of Jesus in Nazareth – prior to his public ministry
 - 1. Not recorded – but very full
 - 2. Growing in union with the Father – receiving his identity – understanding the Father’s will
 - ii. Like Jesus, we meet the Father in the ordinariness everything that makes up our days
- c. The American Experience document says, “Every event in our lives is potentially religious in importance”
 - i. Means that every event can lead us into deeper union with God
 - ii. St. Ignatius of Loyola’s *Principle and Foundation*
 - iii. Different from morality – there are amoral events (eating cereal), but there are no godless events (there are God moments while eating cereal)
- d. This can be very freeing – but also very intimidating...how to choose from the 2.6 million seconds in every month
 - i. The fact emerges from your prayer – your contemplative prayer
 - 1. The fact doesn’t have to happen during your prayer
 - 2. but if you are praying – then you are paying attention to the important events of your life
 - 3. because you are bringing those events into your prayer – and you are listening to how God is responding to them – how God is speaking to you
 - ii. Journaling is important (During my prayer...What was I thinking? What was I feeling?)
- e. Can be positive or negative
 - i. Look for the most “affective movement of the Spirit”
 - ii. Might be a desolation
- f. Fact should be concrete
 - i. Specific event is better than a general pattern
 - ii. Depth is better than breadth (see example from St. Therese)
- g. Something that you believe God can reveal Himself to you (perhaps in a new way) with the help of the fraternity (i.e., must be willing to share)

V. Preparing the Fact

- a. Agree with the American Experience document, this is best done on the desert day

- b. Fact could (should?) be chosen before the desert day – at least some candidates
- c. An act of “Ignatian repetition”
 - i. Deliberate focus on the spiritual (filtering out the physical or psychological)
 - ii. Go back to the points where our spiritual sense were most stimulated
 - iii. Could be a consolation or desolation
 - iv. Invite the Lord into those places of spiritual sensitivity
 - v. Primary mission is to NOTICE
 - vi. Not trying to “solve the problem”, “find the meaning”, or “discover something new”
- d. Purpose is to have a depth of experience that you are able to share with the fraternity
- e. Definitely should journal this

VI. Presenting the Fact (initially)

- a. Our group breaks this into two parts – initial presentation and deeper reflection
- b. The fact is very briefly described
- c. Also included is the brother’s desire to go deeper into the fact and what the brother needs from the fraternity

The Review of Life: Fraternal Discernment of Spirits

- I. To Listen (see QUOTE 1)
 - a. Our END is to know and follow Jesus better – conversion of heart – *metanoia*
 - i. Each one of us is looking for conversion as well
 - b. As a brother, my primary purpose is to encourage the brother in his attention to God and to help him notice and deepen his own personal experience of God in prayerful reflection of his “fact”
 - i. The primary interaction during the ROL should be between the brother who is sharing his fact and God
 - c. This is not to say that the Spirit can’t or won’t speak to you during the presentation
 - i. But this is material for another time – your own “fact”
 - ii. Quietly ask the Spirit to let you return to it during you next prayer time
- II. What are We Listening For? “Spiritual Movements of the Heart” (from Fr. John Horn, S.J.)
 - a. The Heart
 - i. Following the Biblical notion of heart – see QUOTE 2 & 3
 - b. Level I – The Surface
 - i. Feelings here are very transient and superficial
 - ii. Change rapidly – easily swayed by external stimuli such as the weather, the tone of other’s opinions, bad drivers, etc.
 - iii. Also easily affected by the body’s dependence on the quantity and quality of sleep, feed, sunlight, etc.
 - iv. God’s voice does not live here and is not heard here
 - c. Level II – The Psychological
 - i. Feelings at this level – with their accompanying thoughts and desires – are much more complex
 - ii. Many factors influence our heart at this level
 1. Family relationships
 2. Ethnic temperaments
 3. DNA or genetic makeup
 4. Sexual desires
 5. Cultural assumptions regarding beauty, economics, success
 - iii. These factors dramatic influence what we are hearing and carrying in our hearts

- iv. These feelings and thoughts are general governed by the “pleasure/pain principle”
 - 1. Self-preservation leads us to continually make choices
 - 2. Try to keep a “healthy balance” of tasting pleasures while living with (or enduring) daily pains
 - 3. Individuals differ greatly in our distinctive thresholds for pain and of our “comfort zones” in this level
- d. Level III – The Spiritual
 - i. At the center of the human heart is spiritual being – the spiritual realities of the Evil One’s temptations that can bind us AND the Holy Spirit’s allurements in love are both tasted here
 - ii. The level where the Indwelling Holy Spirit is readily accessible and can be heard in an everyday living at the Cross with Jesus
 - iii. It is here, through Baptism, that God’s voice abides with us – and is presently speaking – addressing us with love (see Jn. 14:18-31)
 - iv. Three Biblical truths to remember and to apply at Level III
 - 1. Affective movements (thoughts, feelings, and desires) are equated with “spirits”
 - 2. Spirits include our human spirit, the evil spirit, and the Holy Spirit
 - 3. The Holy Spirit is identifiable with heartfelt consolations in contrast to desolations so long as the person is seeking after God
 - v. We have “spiritual senses” that can detect, discern, and relate (with consolations or desolations) these spiritual movements (thoughts, feelings, desires) addressing our souls for ill to bind us or for good to heal us, setting us free for loving service of neighbor
 - vi. In prayer – as a heart-to-Heart conversation with God – we must acknowledge and relate anything and everything we are carrying interiorly
 - 1. This opens us to receive the Holy Spirit’s Word – which actively pursues us to spiritually comfort and to console us, making us one with Him
 - vii. If we know how to listen at this level – listening for God as Indwelling Word
 - 1. We can taste the transforming power of the Holy Spirit’s love amid our everyday activities
 - 2. We can receive His love continually
 - viii. Spiritual Desolations
 - 1. Anxiety, loneliness, loss of hope, sadness, boredom, restlessness, fear, discouragement

2. Points to a part of our heart that is lovesick – sick to receive and absorb more love from God (“Those who are well do not need a physician – but the sick do.” Matt. 9:12)

ix. Spiritual Consolations

1. Peace, a sense of being loved, hope, joy, zeal, contentment, trustfulness, sadness for sin, courage
2. Points to a part of our heart that receptive of God’s Holy Spirit – the Comforter – the Consoler

III. Fraternity should look for evidence of spiritual movements

- a. Questions can be asked that might lead the brother to deeper levels
- b. Asking the brother to describe concrete spiritual thoughts, feelings, and desires can be helpful
 - i. Focus should be on the relationship between the brother and God (see QUOTE 4)
- c. Might also lead to revelation that “the event” has not been prepared by the brother (at least on spiritual level)
 - i. Trying to cook without food
 - ii. If this becomes obvious, the brother could be invited to carry this back into his prayer and next desert day and return it to the group at the next meeting
- d. Example with Brother Charles

IV. Prayer During the Review of Life

- a. While the brother is describing spiritual movements present in “the fact”
 - i. In describing a consolation, the brother will be drawn into a present intimacy with God
 1. This is the work of the Holy Spirit, who is always present
 2. An act of making present again – *anamnesis*
 - ii. Prayer will happen right in front of us - spontaneously
- b. Always be comfortable with the silence – especially if it is “full”
- c. Can help to draw the person deeper into the union
 - i. Ask them to notice the peace
 - ii. Ask them to relate the how God is “acting” (images, words)
 - iii. Ask them to notice how hope, faith, or love is growing in them
 - iv. How is this communion inviting you to change your behavior?

V. Direction

- a. The goal of the review is not to “solve” our brother’s problem or to “proclaim” the will of God for them
- b. To help our brother recognize the spiritual movements they are experiencing
 - i. To embrace those which are from God
 - ii. To reject those which are not

VI. Vocational Awareness

- a. JC is more than merely a prayer group
- b. JC is a fraternal grouping of ordained priests
- c. As a fraternity, we are “to help each brother live faithfully his commitments as a priest” (American Experience)
- d. We can be certain that God is calling us towards what He has already ordained us to be
 - i. Help each brother to live out his commitment to love

From Fr. David Fleming, S.J., "St. Ignatius of Loyola's First Principle and Foundation"

The Goal of our life is to live with God forever.
God, who loves us, gave us life.
Our own response of love allows God's life
to flow into us without limit.

**All the things in this world are gifts from God,
Presented to us so that we can know God more easily
and make a return of love more readily.
As a result, we appreciate and use all these gifts of God
Insofar as they help us to develop as loving persons.**
But if any of these gifts become the center of our lives,
They displace God
And so hinder our growth toward our goal.

In everyday life, then, we must hold ourselves in balance
Before all of these created gifts insofar as we have a choice
And are not bound by some obligation.
**We should not fix our desires on health or sickness,
Wealth or poverty, success or failure, a long life or a short one.
For everything has the potential of calling forth in us
A deeper response to our life in God.**

**Our only desire and our one choice should be this:
I want and I choose what better leads
To God's deepening his life in me.**

From Catechism of the Catholic Church #2563 (On Contemplative Prayer)

The choice of the *time and duration of the prayer* arises from a determined will, **revealing the secrets of the heart**. One does not undertake contemplative prayer only when one has the time: one makes time for the Lord, with the firm determination not to give up, no matter what trials and dryness one may encounter. One cannot always meditate, but **one can always enter into inner prayer**, independently of the conditions of health, work, or emotional state. **the heart is the place of this quest and encounter, in poverty and in faith.**

"The Holy Spirit, the principle of a new *life* is consequently the principle of a new *prayer*. Among the good works that redeemed man can do, so as to grow in grace, prayer is unique in that it is "good for everything" (cf. 1 Tm 4:8). It is the indispensable tool for advancement in all the virtues. – Raniero Cantalamessa, O.F.M.Cap.

"The most fruitful human activity is to receive God." – Jean Corbon, O.P.

From Jean-Jacques Antier, "Charles de Foucauld"

Priest, basically (Charles) thought only of converting, like other missionaries. Strong through his learning, his experience, and, most important, his Christ, Charles has come there as a conqueror. Of course he sought only the good of the tribes, but he was acting like a conqueror...

Yes, therein lay the cause of his failure. **Deep down, he knew very well that "to love is enough". To love is not to convert; it is first of all to listen**, to learn to know these men and women from a different civilization and different religion, as he had done in Morocco.

Now he realized the importance of the work on the dictionary and the anthology of poetry. Not only for translating the Gospels and paving the way for future missionaries, but above **all for listening, the first step in sharing**. (Antier, 226)

From Catechism of the Catholic Church #2563 (What is the heart that prays?)

The heart is the dwelling-place where I am, where I live; according to the Semitic or Biblical expression, the heart is the place "to which I withdraw." The heart is our hidden center, beyond the grasp of our reason and of others; only the Spirit of God can fathom the human heart and know it fully. The heart is the place of decision, deeper than our psychic drives. It is the place of truth, where we choose life or death. It is the place of encounter, because as image of God we live in relation: it is the place of covenant.

Msgr. Charles Pope, "The Biblical Notion of the Heart", June 2010

While not wholly excluding feelings, the 'Heart' in the scriptures is the deepest part of us where we 'live.' It is where we deliberate, where our memories and thoughts are. It is where we process feelings and events. It is where we ponder what to do and decide. It is where we reflect and consider the direction of our life and most deeply understand who we are and how we are related to God and others. It is the place of our decisions and where we set priorities. In short is it the place where 'I am' in the deepest sense. Most moderns locate this in the brain (or mind, a word that the Scriptures often use for a similar understanding) but the ancients located all this in the heart.

From C. S. Lewis, "The Screwtape Letters", chapter 16

It is pointless to discuss whether 'Love', or patriotism, or celibacy, or candles on altars, or teetotalism, or education, are 'good' or 'bad'. Can't you see there's no answer? **Nothing matters at all except the tendency of a given state of mind, in given circumstances, to move a particular (person) at a particular moment nearer to (God) or to (the evil one)...**

Like most of the other things which humans are excited about, such as health and sickness, age and youth, or war and peace, it is, **from the point of view of the spiritual life, mainly raw material.**

Christian Anthropology of the Heart
Father Charles de Foucauld
(adapted from biography by Jean-Jacques Antier)

I remember two Christmases ago, in 1906, I had the opportunity to celebrate Midnight Mass for one hundred French soldiers assisted my first (and only) “little brother” postulate, Brother Michel. It was deeply moving. Afterward, we decided to spend the night in prayer. To economize, we blew out the candles. Brother Michel only held out an hour before falling asleep. In the morning, when he realized that I had stayed awake all night praying, he asked me, how I could stay awake so long in the darkness. I answered him, “One does not need to see to speak to him who is the sun of justice and the light of the world!”

We set out after Christmas and, so after, Brother Michel’s enthusiasm waned. He grew sick and unfit for travel and I had to dismiss him in March. I continued on, alone.

By July 6th, I was back at Tamanrasset. I was in a state of “terrible misery and famine, result of the extended drought.” Even worse, I learned that Rome would not grant me a dispensation to celebrate Mass without a server. I had been counting on one of the young White Fathers to join me – but either changed his mind or his superiors forbade his coming. I attributed my failures to my unworthiness and I vow to continue to follow my rule.

I wrote in my diary, “No Mass, for I am alone.”

In the Fall, I received an order from the Vatican not to keep the consecrated Host in the tabernacle as long as I remain without a server. I started to wonder what the point of staying was since I could no longer celebrate Mass or now even adore. However, I decided to stay with “the poorest, the most neglected”. I stayed “so that between Timbuktu and El Golea there would be at least one soul who adored Jesus and prayed to him.”

However, I began to eat even less, sleep less and grow weaker.

On November 22nd I received permission from Rome to say Mass without a server, but only on the condition there be at least one Christian present. This was not very helpful since there are no other Christians around.

On December 25th, for the first time in twenty-one years, I celebrated Christmas without the Eucharist. I wrote my cousin, Marie, “That night, no Mass. Up to the last minute, I hoped someone would come. But nothing came, no Christian traveler, no soldier, no permission to celebrate alone! For three months, more than three months, I have received no letters. May the will of the Beloved be praised in everything.”

On New Year’s Day, my misery continued. I wrote in my diary, “No Mass, since I am alone. I have almost become an old man. I puff like a broken-winded old horse. My work gets slower and slower. It is the work of a tired man. What a harvest I should have had! Instead of that, misery, destitution, and not the least good toward others. A tree is known by its fruit, and mine shows what I am, a useless servant.”

I grew weaker and weaker. On January 20th, thinking I was going to die soon, I wrote in my notebook, “Am sick, forced to interrupt my work. Jesus, Mary, Joseph, I give you my soul, my spirit, and my life.”

I did nearly die, but I was rescued by the charity of the locals. Having come back to life, I wrote my cousin Marie, "I have been rather ill, something to do with the heart. The slightest motion made me so breathless that I was ready to faint. One or two days, I thought it was the end. But God has not so willed. I am staying completely quiet, total rest, I have to break off my work for a month."

On January 31st, I received the greatest news – news that I may celebrate the Mass alone. I recorded the experience like this: "*Deo gratias!* Today I received a letter...announcing that the pope has granted me authorization to celebrate the Holy Mass completely alone, without a server or an attendee. So tomorrow, I shall be able to celebrate. Christmas! Christmas! Thanks to God!"

A little over a week later, after regaining my strength, I recorded what had happened to my spiritual director: "Great happiness. Every day I say Mass, it is a new life for me and an infinite grace for this poor country...Alone at the foot of the tabernacle with Jesus so near me day and night, and now being able to celebrate each morning. I lack nothing."