

Year of Faith Retreat

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Opening: This is Holy Cross Father Ronald Raab. Thank you for joining me as we celebrate this Year of Faith with a monthly retreat on prayer, sacraments and service. I invite you into daily reflection as we celebrate our faith, give witness to the Church and celebrate the 50th Anniversary of Vatican II.

Closing: To listen to these monthly segments online go to www.ronaldraab.com. Please know of my prayer for all of you during this year of prayer, renewal and celebration.

Optional Prayer for the promotion of the Year of Faith

Gracious God,
During this Year of Faith,
Give us the richness of your Holy Spirit.

Instill within us a greater love for the Church.
Grant us your wisdom in times of trial and anxiety.

We are already alert to your presence in prayer.
So help us go deeper in our commitment to worship you.

We are already believers in your Holy Word.
So encourage us to live the Gospel among the needs of all people.

We are already followers of Christ Jesus.
So enable us to be agents of healing amid life's hurts.

We are already believers in the healing you offer us.
So send us among the many pains of loneliness, addictions and loss.

We are already members of your Body, the Church.
So grant us the wisdom to welcome the weary and the lost.

God, you constantly renew your Church.
So grant us your loving Spirit, your Holy Word and your healing power.
Open our hearts to be instruments of your peace.

We ask this in the name of Christ our Savior, who lives now and forever.

Amen

Retreat Session #1 - October 2012: Desire for God

From Psalm 63 we hear: "O God, you are my God whom I seek; for you my flesh pines and my soul thirsts like the earth, parched, lifeless and without water."

We begin our retreat in prayer admitting our desire for God. This desire comes from the fact that we cannot always find our own way in life. We come up against our selfishness, our lack of charity, our hidden anger and uncertainty about our place in life and in our relationships. We often feel lifeless and alone.

I invite you to begin this retreat by simply allowing silence and prayer back into your life. Take the time you need to be with God in order to make sense out of your life. Learn once again to listen, to breathe deeply and to admit that your heart needs something more than your self.

We begin to rediscover our relationship with God and those we love by acknowledging the desire for love that God has planted within our hearts.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: "Prayer is the life of the new heart. It ought to animate us at every moment. But we tend to forget him who is our life and our all."

Let us pray:

God of our longing,
I so often feel worn out and exhausted.
I go through the motions of my life and find nothing for me.

I finally admit that I cannot live without your presence.
My decisions have taken me nowhere.
My commitments have become fragile.
Fear has replaced joy in living daily life.

Love me and soften my hardened heart.
I desire to learn a new path of prayer.
Place within me new attitudes and a new purpose for my life.

I thirst for your goodness.
I ask this in the name of Christ our Lord.

Amen

Retreat Session #2 - November 2012: God's love for us

From Psalm 145 we hear: "Every day will I bless you, and I will praise your name forever and ever... The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness... The Lord is near to all who call upon him."

We continue in this second month of retreat realizing God's love for us. God initiates our prayer because God first loves us. We respond to this love through a daily exercise of silence, examining our conscience and offering God gratitude. When we bring to God our honest feelings, our complete suffering and the grief of our past, God gifts us with a love that is rooted deep within our hearts. The peace we long for comes from our daily experience of prayer and fidelity to God's grace.

I ask you this month to be faithful to a daily practice of prayer and examination of conscience. You may wish to write down your thoughts, your prayers and your troubles in life. However you pray, know that you are never out of the bounds of God's love for you.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: "The Lord leads all persons by paths of and in ways pleasing to him, and each believer responds according to his heart's resolve and the personal expressions of his prayer."

Let us pray:

God of all faithfulness,
I struggle to keep my heart open and centered on you.
I often feel lost and out of the bounds of your love.

I pray today and recommit my life to you.
I sort out the ways I have shunned you and ignored your bounty.
Give me a place where I can listen, a few moments of solitude.

Today, I ask you to receive my regrets.
Allow me to rant about my past and complain about life.
I know you are near to me even in my emptiness.
I ask this in your Holy Name.

Amen

Retreat Session #3 - December 2012: Seeking the person of Jesus

From John's gospel we hear: "Jesus turned and saw them following him and said to him, 'What are you looking for?' They said to him, 'Rabbi-which is translated, Teacher- 'where are you staying?' He said to them, 'Come and you will see.'"

We begin our third month of retreat reflecting on our relationship with Jesus. He invites us into a profound bond and calls us to leave our sin, our doubt, our failings and our selfishness to follow on a new path. Jesus is beckoning us to live a new, faithful and loving life.

Seek a new connection with the person of Christ Jesus. Read the gospels with a new eye for his loving actions and a new ear for his words of comfort and consolation.

Listen carefully to his message in your daily prayer that compels us to serve beyond our comfort. Jesus invites us to a life that is generative and compassionate.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: "The name of Jesus is at the heart of Christian prayer. All liturgical prayers conclude with the words, 'through Christ our Lord.' The Eastern prayer of the heart, The Jesus Prayer, says: 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God have mercy on me, a sinner.'"

Let us pray:

Jesus,
I do not know how to find you.
I seldom know how to sort out your message in the gospels.
I cannot always hear you amid the clutter of my life.

Help me hear your message of care and consolation.
Help me entrust my life to your presence.
Encourage me when you seem so far from my daily life.

I pray for a new and vital relationship with you.
I want to worship in fidelity to your voice.
Help me in my silence to learn to follow you in my actions.

I pray in your holy name.

Amen

Retreat Session #4 - January 2013: Compelled by the Holy Spirit

From John's gospel we hear: "And when he said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.'"

We begin our fourth month of retreat relying on the Holy Spirit. We entrust each day to the Holy Spirit to give us direction and to show us the way to love. We are more than our own motives, our own decisions, and our own ego. The Spirit is not external to us, but guides us from the depths of our hearts.

Call upon the Holy Spirit in your prayer. Rely each day on the guidance and gift of the Spirit to show you a deep faith, an abundant love and true forgiveness.

In your daily prayer, simply entrust your decisions and your relationships to the presence of the Holy Spirit within you. Sit with an open heart, breathe with a trusting soul and pray with an open mind.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: " 'God is love' and love is the first gift, containing all others. 'God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.' "

Let us pray:

God of each day,
I give you my faltering relationships and awkward decisions.
I step out of my control and I entrust my life to you.

Spirit of the Living God,
Open my future to your consoling presence.
Be with me as I live each day into a more meaningful faith.

Guide my days, my dreams and my prayer.
Come, Holy Spirit, come.

Amen

Retreat Session #5 - February 2013: Our suffering and the Cross of Christ

From John's gospel we hear: "Amen, amen I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains a grain of wheat; but if it dies it produces much fruit."

We begin our fifth month focusing on our suffering and the power of the Cross. Our pain may lead us into despair. Our fragile lives may turn us from God. The Cross of Christ is where we need to rest our suffering, our hurting bodies, our fragile temperaments and our broken relationships. The Cross of Christ is our only hope.

I encourage you not to hide from your pain. We all must touch pain in order to heal it. Give to the Crucified Christ your regrets, failures and disappointments. Invite the Cross of Christ into your hidden anger, your daily rage and even your addictions. New life is possible in your prayer and in your choices to offer Christ your hurtful suffering.

The Cross of Christ is our freedom if we learn to pray through the most fragile aspects of our lives.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: "...faith is often lived in darkness and can be put to the test. The world we live in often seems very far from the one promised us by faith. Our experiences of evil and suffering, injustice and death, seem to contradict the Good News; they can shake our faith and become a temptation against it."

Let us pray:

Jesus,
I do not know where to go with my inner pain.
I cannot let go of my rage and my confusion.
I scurry in my illusions and I think I can heal myself.

Carry my pain on your path to the cross.
Carry me when I cannot find my own way.

Your cross is my only way into new life.
Your redemption I still feel in my tired soul.

You are my way, my path and my new life.
In your wounds, I discover my freedom.

Amen

Retreat Session #6 - March 2013: The Holy Word of God

From John's gospel we hear: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be."

We begin our sixth month resting in the Word of God. The sacred scriptures give us stories, images, parables and sayings that are rich and fruitful. The Word of God is Christ's real presence, real nourishment for our daily lives. We may hesitate to sit down with the bible and read because we do not fully understand.

I invite you especially during this month to use scripture as the starting point for your daily prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to be with you as you ponder the readings that are designated for daily Mass. Or you may want to begin reading one of the four gospels from beginning to end. Pray with an open heart and allow God to speak to you from these ancient texts. Slow down, ponder a phrase, a word or a sentence. Be at peace among the stories of love.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: "Those who with God's help have welcomed Christ's call and freely responded to it are urged on by love of Christ to proclaim the Good News everywhere in the world."

Let us pray:

God of inspiration,
I turn to your Holy Word for guidance.

Help me pray with the stories of Jesus' miracles.
Give me patience to hear the parables of love.
Allow me to taste the sweetness of your words.

I do not fully comprehend the scriptures.
I also do not know where your inspiration will lead me.

Give me joy to read in faith and the hope that comes among the chapters.

Amen

Retreat Session #7 - April 2013: The Eucharist for our hunger

From John's gospel we hear: "Jesus said to the crowds: 'I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.'"

We begin our seventh month of retreat pondering the mystery of Christ's love in the Eucharist. We may find ourselves living in profound loneliness and isolation. We all desire true communion with God and one another. The Eucharist forms our identity as the family of believers. The Eucharist feeds us in ways we first cannot imagine.

I encourage you to rest in the celebration of the Mass. The Eucharist invites us to participate in the ways God is still feeding us, loving us and showing us how to live. In your personal and quiet prayer, ponder the texts of the Mass and the scriptures. Take some time to dedicate yourself to the Mass once again.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: "At the heart of the Eucharistic celebrations are the bread and wine that, by the words of Christ and the invocation of the Holy Spirit, become Christ's Body and Blood."

Let us pray:

God of my hunger,
I turn to you starving for love and joy.
I do not always trust that you still feed your people.

Engage me in my hunger.
Feed me in my loneliness.
Support me in my searching for you.

Help me recognize your grace in the Mass.
Listen to our prayers, our hymns and our silence.
I long for your presence in Word and Bread and Chalice.

Amen

Retreat Session #8 - May 2013: *Living the Eucharist in the world*

From Mark's gospel we hear: "These signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will drive out demons, they will speak new languages. They will pick up serpents with their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not harm them. They will lay hands on the sick and they will recover."

We begin our eighth month of retreat reflecting on the mission of the Eucharist. The bounty of Christ's presence calls us out into the world to feed people, to care for their needs and to support people in love and forgiveness. The real presence of Christ in the Eucharist is not only to adore, but also to change our lives, confront our attitudes and to break down barriers among us.

In this month, hear the challenges of the scriptures, the call of the liturgical texts and the mission of the Eucharist for the world. In your personal prayer, reflect on how the Eucharist is calling you to heal relationships, serve people in poverty or to offer your gifts in the world.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: "The Eucharist commits us to the poor. To receive in truth the Body and Blood of Christ given up for us, we must recognize Christ in the poorest, his brethren."

Let us pray:

God of our emptiness,
You feed us in ways we least expect.

Help me realize my true identity as a believer.
Encourage me to serve beyond my comfort.
Sustain me when I am starving for connection and communion.

You offer us the true presence of your Son.
Help me to live the Eucharist in the world.
Challenge me to wash feet and sit with the ill.
Call me to feed those who starve for the basics of life.

Open my heart to be with those who are hungry beyond my awareness.

Amen

Retreat Session #9 - June 2013: Our vocation in Christ's Resurrection

From John's gospel we hear: "Then the other disciple also went in, the who had arrived at the tomb first and he saw and believed. For they did not yet understand the Scripture that he had to rise from the dead."

We begin our ninth month of retreat reflecting on the freedom of Christ's resurrection. This is the central mystery of our faith, the Paschal Mystery, Christ's passion, death and resurrection. We are to be instruments of new life, freedom and peace for people bound in pain, isolation and violence. Christ's love must be discovered and lived in our own prayer and within our hearts and in our relationships.

I invite you to discover within your own prayer, the Good News of Christ's love for you. This generous, life-giving peace is offered us deep within our lives. Our prayer, our silence, our worship and our service come from the richness of Christ's presence. The empty tomb is our home.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: "The empty tomb and the linen cloths lying there signify in themselves that by God's power Christ's body had escaped the bonds of death and corruption. They prepared the disciples to encounter the Risen Lord."

Let us pray:

Gracious God,
Open my heart to your presence among us.
The gift of your Son's resurrection is my forgiveness and my peace.

Help me discover the Good News within my life.
Release me from the darkness of sin and doubt.
Encourage me to live from the emptiness of Christ's tomb.

Help me be new life for those in the chains of poverty.
Send me among the hungry, the isolated and the angry.
Open my heart so that I may learn to offer love to others.

Amen

Retreat Session #10 - July 2013: The sacraments of healing

From Luke's gospel we hear: "As he was entering a village, ten lepers met him. They stood at a distance from him and raised their voices, saying, 'Jesus, Master! Have pity on us!'"

We begin our tenth month of retreat reflecting on the healing love of Christ Jesus. We experience this healing within the Sacrament of Eucharist, in the Anointing of the Sick and in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This healing also takes place within our encounters of Christ in our own personal prayer, in the tender moments of silence. We long for this healing that the world cannot offer.

Spiritual pain can be healed when we invite Christ to the center of our lives. I invite you to reexamine your thoughts and attitudes about the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Perhaps it is time now in your life to celebrate this sacrament with a new understanding of both your life and your relationship with Christ. I invite you into the richness, the abundance of the Lord's healing for you.

Christ Jesus longs to heal your life.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: "The Lord Jesus Christ, physician of our souls and bodies, who forgave the sins of the paralytic and restored him to bodily health, has willed that his Church continue, in the power of the Holy Spirit, his work of healing and salvation, even among her own members."

Let us pray:

God of abundant mercy,
Heal the hurts that I have carried in my past.
I believe that you desire to heal me, to forgive me and to love me.

I have held on to so much hurt from years of blindness.
I long to be free of my regret and stubbornness.
I cannot live with my emotional pain.

Reach out to me as I offer you all that has been.
In your love, have mercy on me, O God of new life.

Amen

Retreat Session #11 - August 2013: Our lives for others

From Matthew's gospel we hear: "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me."

We come to our eleventh month of retreat in this Year of Faith. The world is in need of care and love. All of our relationships, families, neighborhoods and strangers need to live in dignity and respect. So many of our people lack the basics of life.

During this month especially, bring the needs of people around you to your silent prayer and your prayer during Mass. Open up your eyes to see more clearly people's needs. Open up your faith so that you may learn to share more honestly. People need you to be a light of faith and beacon of hope.

Our faith must be lived for others. Our belief in Christ compels us into the dark corners of the world.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: "Love of neighbor is inseparable from love for God."

Let us pray:

God,
I realize this year how shallow my faith has been.
I am ready to deepen my belief that you are always with us.
Help me to let go of my old habits, my previous ways.

God, help me surrender to your loving plan.
I am ready to act differently when I view people who are different than my self.
Give me the joy of putting faith into practice.

God, sustain my heart and encourage the work of my hands.
I desire to find my place of action for the Kingdom of God.

Amen

Retreat Session #12 - September 2013: Living our faith in justice

From Matthew's gospel we hear: "Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of the least brothers of mine, you did for me."

Our faith propels us out into the world to give witness to the love we experience. Our faith as a Church is meant to mean something in our daily lives. Jesus lived and taught among people who needed a new message of healing, a new life of freedom from violence and suffering. If we are to follow Christ, follow the path of our own faith, then we are sent into the same world in which Christ first brought the Good News of the Kingdom of God.

In your prayer, ask the Holy Spirit for the new ways you are being called to serve God and dignity of people. Our faith must be shared, lived out and given away to people who most need us.

Social justice is non-negotiable in our commitment to prayer and faith. We are all sent into the world to bring about the Kingdom of God.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: "The duty of making oneself a neighbor to others and actively serving them becomes even more urgent when it involves the disadvantaged, in whatever area this may be."

Let us pray:

God of eternal justice,
Send me out into the world.
Give me the joy of serving you in my brothers and sisters.
Bring about right relationship and help us all breakdown barriers of violence and hatred.

God of lasting peace,
Change my heart.
Offer me serenity.
Help me share my life in faith with the entire world.

Give your Church the Spirit of justice.
Help us all be instruments for the hungry, the sick and homeless.
Help us become one with people in poverty, uncertainty and conflict.
Sustain our lives until at least we see you as you are.

Amen

Retreat Session #13 - October 2013: Providence and persistence in prayer

From John's gospel we hear: "The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you."

In this next month of retreat, we are called to go deeper into trusting that God provides for our lives. If we remain persistent in prayer our lives and the lives of our entire Church will be changed. We will learn a new language of love by our thoughts, our actions and our daily choices. We will all translate that love into action and remain confident that the grace of providence will act in all of our misfortunes, our mistakes and our inadequacies.

I invite you to remain persistent in your daily prayer, not only in the Year of Faith, but also well beyond these months. God is waiting for you, to heal your heart and to remain forever within you as a source of life and inspiration. All will be well in God's providence and loving care.

This holy gift of providence will guide your life and call you further into love and service among the people of God.

Trust in God and live in God's faithfulness.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: "This tireless fervor can come only from love. Against our dullness and laziness, the battle of prayer is that of humble, trusting, and persevering love. This love opens our hearts."

Let us pray:

God of continuing life,
Give us all courage to trust in your love.
Remain faithful to your people.
Sustain us in our trials,
And grant us your love and mercy.

God, you are always
With us in times of loneliness,
When our prayer seems worthless.

Give us the joy of recognizing your providence and care.
Mold us in love and help us live beyond our own needs.

Amen

Retreat Session #14 - November 2013: Our lives of gratitude

From John's gospel we hear: " Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' "

We live our lives of faith in our daily circumstances. Many of these circumstances are beyond our control. Many situations may be changed by our attitudes and by our perseverance. No matter what happens in our lives, gratitude fills us with purpose and a resilient spirit. Faith lived even in suffering can become a life of gratitude, of forgiveness and even lifelong joy.

As we conclude our yearlong retreat on some of the basic notions of our faith, I invite you to take stock of your life and realize even in the hardships, failures and doubts, gratitude is the soil on which love and purpose are planted.

Make the choice to be grateful for your life. See the richness of your life, your voice in the world, your heritage of faith and your actions of service and kindness. Life is pure gift. Our response must be one of openness and acceptance. Gratitude is a deep place in the heart that longs for a consistent life of faith and generative love. Be grateful no matter what happens.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: "The Father who gives us life cannot not but give us the nourishment life requires—all appropriate goods and blessings, both material and spiritual."

Let us pray:

Gracious God,
I stand in gratitude for my faith in your loving Spirit.
Guide my motives, my words and my actions.

I come before you with my life as it is.
I want to live the truth of my being.
When I am dissatisfied with my life, give me courage.
When I am frustrated, give me peace.

I rely on your presence so that I may remain grateful.
With all my heart, I ask that I remain on the holy ground of gratitude.

Amen