

Finding Strength for Your Journey through Scripture Wednesday, January 7, 2009
9:15 AM Morning Enrichment COR Center

First of all, I want to preface everything I say with if it doesn't suit you, forget about it, because there is something about interpreting things. It has to come in in the right way so you can use it. So **part of what you have to do is filter things, and that will be part of your work as a spiritual person.**

Now the topic is finding strength from Scripture for our journey. The first question would be: **What do we mean by "journey"?** That's a term that is used very often. It is very fitting. It has been used from the early days of the Church by the Fathers. And yet, it can be very confusing because **it's used in many different ways by many different traditions.**

Now one of the things the Fathers said was that Christians had a right to despoil the pagans, meaning borrow anything they could from them. However, not all the pagans, so to speak, non-Christians, non-biblical people, have the same point of view. They are not pursuing the same goal. For example, I just happened to be reading about Magi recently. The Magi had a clear idea of what the journey was, but it is not something we would be interested in. For the Magi, the journey was rooted in a particular world view. The ancient world in various places, including the East, in general, and Mid East, in particular, had this idea that the soul was made of the same stuff as the stars. Even Plato and Aristotle thought the stars were eternal, therefore, divine, so there was a divine spark in the soul of the human person, and the journey was going back to this source in the stars.

Now toward that end there are **two basic strategies**, which have affected our Christian ideas as well. The first is the strategy of withdrawal, and this you find throughout the world's spirituality. You find it in Buddhism, gnosticism. You see it in Stoicism, and you see it even in Christian monasticism to some degree: the idea of **withdrawing from life.**

Now when Christians, especially in the West, encountered this they said, well, that's not right. Our faith is about being **involved in life.** We believe the Word of God became incarnate in the human nature, so how can we be withdrawn, except temporarily, from life? So one of the first developments that took place within Christianity was **borrowing from the pagans, but then altering it to suit the faith of the Church, which is incarnational.** Now not all forms of Christianity carry on the incarnational theme; especially gnosticism did not. So you see, there are alternate views. This is all part of our background in talking about the journey.

What is the journey? Well, for us—maybe we need to keep an open mind to answer that question later—what is the journey? Or to where is the journey? Or what does it consist of?—until we study a little bit of what Scripture says.

I will add, for example, that St. Benedict was a very great spiritual genius. He saw the need for withdrawal. He saw the importance of the monastic idea, which is really pre-Christian, goes way back to six centuries before Christ in India. He saw the good of that. But he knew that if you are going to have a Christian monastery it had to be a microcosm of the greater world, and it had to be productive. So Benedictine monasteries became vast farms, vineyards, bakeries, scriptoria, libraries, and places of education. By way of note, you have never heard of a Buddhist liqueur or a Buddhist wine, because they don't make anything in those monasteries. They are really and truly withdrawn from activity. So that is a fundamental difference in mindset.

I am only going to use three basic texts. That's why Sister brought Bibles for you. The first text—open up the **Book of Genesis, Chapter 3**.

Now in ancient literature there is a particular form of writing called "myth." We often use the word today, myth, meaning something that is not true or not reliable, but that's not exactly a description of what a myth is. **A myth is a dramatic presentation of the human situation through the use of various beings, natural and supernatural, human and superhuman.** So it's really telling the story of humanity in terms of a drama. There are various myths. The Bible uses the mythic format in its beginning and casts the story of creation. The part I want to look at is Chapter 3: 1-13.

Now the serpent was the most cunning of all the animals that the LORD God had made. The serpent asked the woman, "Did God really tell you not to eat from any of the trees in the garden?" 2 The woman answered the serpent: "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; 3 it is only about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said, 'You shall not eat it or even touch it, lest you die.'" 4 But the serpent said to the woman: "You certainly will not die! 5 No, God knows well that the moment you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods who know what is good and what is bad." 6 The woman saw that the tree was good for food, pleasing to the eyes, and desirable for gaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. 7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves. 8 When they heard the sound of the LORD God moving about in the garden at the breezy time of the day, the man and his wife hid themselves from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. 9 The LORD God then called to the man and asked him, "Where are you?" 10 He answered, "I heard you in the garden; but I was afraid, because I was naked, so I hid myself." 11 Then he asked, "Who told you that you were naked? You have eaten, then, from the tree of which I had forbidden you to eat!" 12 The man replied, "The woman whom you put here with me--she gave me fruit from the tree, so I ate it." 13 The LORD God then asked the woman, "Why did you do such a thing?" The woman answered, "The serpent tricked me into it, so I ate it."

This is a myth, that is, it's a dramatic story explaining something or trying to relate something, namely, the **fundamentally human issue or human problem, which is really the point of departure for our journey**, so to speak. **The tree of the knowledge of good and evil.**

Now, of course, in one sense it's pictured as a fruit tree, but in another sense it's not really a true fruit tree; it's a tree of knowledge. We have used that idea in our language. People talk about a tree of knowledge. If you go to the doctor's office—if he is an old fashioned doctor and he has his degree on the wall—you can see the tree of knowledge and a snake, too. So this symbol is the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The doctor is supposed to know the difference between good and bad medicine.

But what is the knowledge of good? Well, what the Scripture has already said is that **God created everything and everything was good.** So what's evil? There is nothing evil. That's part of the first dilemma. **There is no evil that God created.** So evil doesn't come from God at all. Evil comes from something else. **It comes from the misuse of something that's good,** since everything is fundamentally good. Now **who can know what the proper use is?** Well, obviously, **the Creator.** And the whole problem is that the whole story is set up where God walks with his creatures in the garden in the breezy time of day. There is an intimacy there and, therefore, there is a docility and a teaching atmosphere.

What happens, of course, is that the first couple here in this story are **not particularly willing to let God teach them. They want to learn on their own;** therefore, they decide what is good and what is evil. Their decision is what creates evil. **They are overriding the intention of the Creator.** The serpent tricks them by saying, well, you know, God doesn't really want the best for you. You really can't trust God. He tells you that he cares for you, but he really doesn't. He knows that if you violate his command, you will be equal to him, and that's what he doesn't want.

Now there is a great irony here, because human beings are created in the image and the likeness of God, so they are like God already. So the serpent is really very deceitful because he is saying, well, you will become, but actually they already are. By tricking them, they make a decision that in fact **deprives them of the God likeness because it makes them rivals.** So this is the beginning of rivalry between God and his creation. It's called here "grasping equality." You will be like God knowing good and evil. You will not die—you will not die. That was the warning, don't you remember, that if you eat this fruit, "you will die"; it will kill you; it's poison. But the serpent said: "You will not die."

So the eating of the tree to make one wise creates a rivalry with God who is distrusted, and this creates self-reliance that substitutes discernment for decision. **Instead of discerning what is good, with God's direction, we decide what is good without any direction.** We take it upon ourselves.

You can see why the term “eating” is used—eating, swallowing, making part of yourself. When you eat something it becomes part of you. Now good and evil becomes really just part of us. It’s what we are. It’s what we decide, how we use things. So we don’t need God anymore. In a sense we have become god in our own mind, but only there, by giving up the godliness that was offered—an ambiguous situation at best.

Now biblical faith differs very much from, for example, Buddhism in this regard, that Buddhism also sees a very tragic situation: that human beings live with a sense of falsity. The ego is a sense of falsity. But for the Buddhists and for the Hindus as well this is maya, that means it’s just an illusion; it’s not really real. But from the biblical point of view it is really real because the image of God is creative and has, therefore, really created a self, and it’s a false one. **So we have created a false self, and this alters the creation.** It affects the whole, since the human part of the creation is unfinished, since the human beings were created to be gardeners in the garden to tend and to till the earth, to keep the nature. Now with this false selfhood, this false idea of who we are, everything changes because, after all, **God has already given the human nature dominion.** So the earth does belong to humanity whether you like it or not; it is the way it is now that **humanity is now responsible for whatever happens to the earth.**

The nature of the image of God comes to completion through its choices. The first choice in this myth is **the creation of an ego or a false self or a separate self.** The falsity is the sense of being separate from the rest, as if the good of any individual could be separated from the good of all the others or the whole of creation itself. It’s, in fact, created as a whole, and that wholeness cannot be severed except in our minds. But if it is severed in our minds, that becomes a factor to deal with because we have this creative power to do so. **So the ego is not simply something imaginary;** it is not simply maya, as the Buddhists would like to think. **It is an actual creation, but not of God.**

Now by ego is not meant the feeling of “I.” The feeling of “I”—which if you reflect for just a moment—**the feeling of “I” is the image of God itself.** The fact that we can be aware is fundamentally our godliness. When Moses asked God at the time of the burning bush, “Well, whom shall I say sent me?” God says, “Just say I AM WHO AM.” God identifies himself as the ground of self-awareness. **Our awareness of self is the feeling of “I.”** This is not our ego, however. **The ego is what we do with it, how we connect things with it.** God just said, “I AM.” He didn’t say I am something! But we always do. We start connecting something. I am great, or I am pitiful, or I am hungry, or I am smart, or I am dumb, or whatever it is. We connect something and start enclosing this potential, and thus we become our own creation. But we imagine life has forced itself upon us.

Be aware, again, of the idea of eating. In Gestalt therapy there is a therapeutic approach which is called “chewing.” You see, **we need to chew the impressions we take in.** The impressions are food. The most important food is the impression we have of who we are. Now we have to chew them all. And if there is something that doesn’t taste right or **if it doesn’t seem right, we should spit it out. To come to true self-knowledge there has to be a lot of chewing and a lot of spitting.** But often we don’t!

So take a moment now just to reflect on yourself. **Who told you who you are?** As it says here, “Who told you that you were naked?” **Someone has.** Be with that for a minute. We take in all kinds of information: our mothers, our fathers, our families. “Who told you that you were naked?” When children are naked—real tiny children—they don’t even know they are. There is no embarrassment or anything. At a certain point this changes. What makes that change? That’s coming to a kind of self-awareness, but it is frequently framed in a rather negative way. Just think about that for a minute, and think of any possible negative experience you had in your own childhood.

So **coming into self-awareness itself can be a painful situation,** and it was in this story. So they knew they were naked. They started taking in information that wasn’t given by God. One of the results of that, one of the consequences of that, was this **uncomfortable feeling about themselves, which they then tried to cover up.** And so it says, “they sewed fig leaves.” That itself is a figure of the ego. The ego is a kind of a fig leaf. It covers us. It hides what we want to hide, although it also can express what we want to express. That’s what the ego does. **The ego expresses what we want to express for ourselves, but hides what we want to hide from ourselves.**

It is actually an absolutely **necessary** accouterment in modern life—well, **in life!** It’s absolutely necessary that we have this. So we can’t say we want to shatter the ego and get rid of it. That would lead to mental illness. **We want to redeem the ego. So the journey is the journey of the self to truth, to redemption, to real life.**

And even though we need an ego and have to have one to live, we have to keep in mind that we are choosing it. Now this we often do not see because **a lot of our choices happen very early.** They weren’t necessarily conscious choices in the modern sense of, well, I reflected on this and now I chose it. No, but they were choices. As we were little infants we had a good life or a bad life or something in between. We were cared for or not. Probably most of us here were cared for rather well. But at some point there was a breakdown because no possible adult can take care of all the child’s needs. It’s impossible. So sooner or later we were in desperate need. We were crying, and no one was answering us. And we made some choices.

Now **the ego that we formed has a great power over our feelings because it acts as a filter.** So we can feel only and we can experience only what the ego allows us to. Even though we have chosen this form of separation, it becomes in a sense a kind of constraint or even, we might say, prison or barrier. As we go through life now we will experience some things very, very clearly and not other things. We may even be in the company of someone else and the same thing happens, but there are two different experiences. Partly that's due to the fact that we can only experience certain things due to what we have chosen to be, who we have chosen to be. **The ego will filter out anything that doesn't suit its sense of itself.** We could call this a “**dominant perception.**” So just take a moment now to consider: **Who perhaps helped you form your dominant perception of yourself,** for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, as we say?

The answer is coming to some realization that **people have given you all these ideas,** but then you have to **realize how much you actually swallowed them,** that is, you didn't necessarily chew your impressions, reflectively, consciously, because you couldn't. You were too young. These things happened before you were of age. So by the time you reached the age of reason you already had a very well run machine that is called the “mind.” It is our own creation. We didn't create our bodies, and we didn't create our mental potential, but **we do create how we perceive life and what we perceive**—it's a product of that.

Now what can happen in life is **shock or disease or grace can upset this dominant perception.** Hopefully, it does. Hopefully, something does. Grace, we believe, was always pulling us beyond our dominant perceptions. Sometimes we resist grace because of the dominant perception. This is all tied up with guilt and a sense of worthiness or unworthiness or shame. All of these **feelings are so basic to who we believe ourselves to be, which is all basic to our earliest experiences.**

It is the study of some psychologists that some people go through life and the only thing they remember are all the bad things that happen to them. When they are actually questioned they can identify all kinds of good things. It's just that it doesn't mean anything to them. It doesn't touch them, but the bad things do. Or vice versa: some people have just a wonderful idea of life, but yet you talk to them and they went through the war and they had this and they were starving and, yes, but that didn't affect them. It went against their dominant sense of life. So we should welcome any kinds of shocks that dislodge anything that is fundamentally negative or blocking of our experiences.

Now every individual is unique apart from family. Now if you look at children, you can say, well, look at that: she has her father's eyes. Or look at that: he has his mother's smile. Or whatever, nose, or walk, or whatever. You know, we are more or less physically put together genetically from our parents. Then, of course, we live in a family and we absorb all kinds of values and feelings and ways and habits from our families; and then we live in a culture that also affects us. But

each person is unique, even identical twins—completely unique in a certain way. **This is getting in touch with spirituality when we get in touch with the uniqueness.**

There was a great controversy in the Middle Ages: Is there such a thing as the human species? They knew there were canine species and rabbit species and every species. But then one philosopher said, well, actually there aren't. Each human person is unique, so there is really no species. Well, that's true metaphysically; beyond the physical order that's true. We are all unique. But biologically, no, that's not true, otherwise we wouldn't still be here, of course.

So insofar as **we set these boundaries**, then, to ourselves and these boundaries we call ourselves, **we block our own self-knowledge**. We put a limit on it. We become suggestible taking in from the world **whatever fits what we already think**, including false and misleading information about ourselves. And we have to say from a biblical viewpoint that **there is always the serpent suggesting negative, false ideas about who we are**. Jesus calls him the “father of lies.” And that is aided by something in ourselves, you might say, **our inner factory of negativity, that we can produce emotions that express and hold in these negative perceptions**; in fact, they are rooted in them. If the negative perceptions went, so would the emotions. You can't have an emotion if you don't have a perception. **All emotions are rooted in perceptions**. Sometime maybe you got angry at someone and you were justified in this being angry until you realized that you misinterpreted what they did or said and then you weren't angry—all of a sudden—all of a sudden you just couldn't be angry anymore. Why? Well, your perception changed. So our feelings, including fear, are rooted in a perception.

Today in the story of the apostles in the boat, you know, they are terribly afraid. They are afraid of the wind, and they are even more afraid when they see Christ: they think it's a ghost. And Mark says, “They did not understand the meaning of the loaves.” If they had understood the meaning of the loaves, their perceptions would have been changed to the point where they wouldn't have been afraid.

So we go through life then with this self-image that we have created, which may be actually close to the truth or not so close to truth; it's different for everybody. We shouldn't think it's totally false, but it could have false elements to it, and those false elements are the ones that cause us constant trouble. So **if we have habitual problems that keep coming up enough, we need to start looking at how we look at ourselves**: what we expect of ourselves, what we don't expect of ourselves, what we really desire, what we think is feasible.

Requested clarification: There is a factory that produces these negative emotions. It is a very interesting perception. The study of emotions is a great study. Actually we produce them all. So by the time we really reach the age of reason and are able to discern good from evil, we have already created this somewhat fictitious and certainly somewhat flawed self-concept.

Now the result of this is that **our integrity has been compromised, and so we can't see clearly and our consciences are not formed fully and truthfully.** For many people their consciences only reflect their parents' values, what their parents want of them. This is true of children, by and large. Now if what their parents want for them is really good, well, that's good; that's a bridge. But what if parents don't actually teach their children anything? We hear from schoolteachers today that parents are always defending their children like they can do no wrong. Well, the reason for that very simply is that parents have no principles. If the parents have no principles, of course, the children can't do any wrong because there is nothing to judge wrong by. Those children are really in serious trouble. They have to relearn everything at a later age, and it will cause them great suffering. So we need to be very grateful for the fact that we were brought up in families where people took time to teach us, to lead us, to guide us.

But even if we have the best parents in the world and the wisest parents in the world, we still have to go over the bridge and become our own self as God wants us to be, not just as someone helped us to form some good supports. So as we move through life, **we have to let go of the good things even of the past so that we can grow into something even better.**

We have to admit that sometimes even our best parents can't really see our own needs. And sometimes parents just admit, "I don't understand her. I have three children, and the first two are just wonderful, but I don't know what she needs. I don't know what she is doing. I don't know anything about her. She is a stranger." Well, that's the way it is. Not every two people are equally compatible, and so a lot of parents are just confused by their children. They don't know what they need. You may be one of those children, and so don't blame your poor parents; don't blame yourself either. It's just one of those things. But we can get through everything.

One of the points of Scripture is **there is absolutely nothing that cannot be healed by love—nothing!** That's why the whole New Testament is so totally confident in the salvation that is possible for everyone. That's really why the Church is confident in the possibility of salvation for everyone because love has that power to do that.

Meanwhile we might have grown up in such a way, for example—I'm just using this as an example—maybe we have grown up in such a way our parents liked that we think our role in life is to please everybody. Well, if we grown up in life in such a way that we thought our role is to please everybody, our parents probably did not object. They probably never said, "Would you stop being so pleasing?" No, they wouldn't. They would say, "Isn't that great. Boy, I have the most darling child. She is just so good." See, that's great, but **being a good child is not the same thing as being a fully alive adult.** So sometimes you might have to get to the point of saying, you know, my childhood was good and I enjoyed it, and my parents were good, but **I have to live beyond my boundaries. I have to find a way to get out of the shell I created.** This is one example. There could be lots of them.

In fact, if you look into each of the so-called “**deadly sins,**” **there is a flaw and a virtue playing with each other.** At the very basis of our own self-image there is probably one of them, probably some idea that could be very good, but it could also throw us off. These biases, if you want to call them that, compromise our truth, the truth that each of us is uniquely.

So we swallow without chewing the opinions of others, especially our parents, especially our dominant parent, which sometimes actually could be negative, too. Some people have told me, “You know, my mother really never loved me. She always said I was no good.” Well, that is really bad to grow up with a parent that tells you that you are no good. That creates—and then if you swallow that, of course, you do because you are too young to know better, and so you swallow that, and then you grow up with this terrible idea of yourself, terrible self-image. That one requires a lot of prayer.

So we have to be willing to be very happy and **grateful for parents** who are sober, loving, wise; and we have to be willing to be **forgiving to parents** who are not. Children who are lied to find a great hurdle in finding God because naturally **God is a parental image in the human consciousness.** **So if our families do not love us or do not love us enough,** we either die, or fear death. In China where children whose parents have decided they don’t want them, are just left in a basket, they die all by themselves. If you don’t touch a child, it will die rather soon. It doesn’t die of starvation physically; it dies from emotional starvation. If we don’t simply die, then we live in the fear of death, **meaning fearing rejection, fearing being excluded, fearing not being loved.**

So the journey in the biblical idea is a total makeover, not outwardly but of inward substance, inward being. And that begins with knowledge of who we are. Therefore, salvation is always pictured in the Bible as revelation, knowledge, new knowledge of the most intimate realities of existence.

The second text I would like you to look at is **Philippians, Chapter 2.**

6 Who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. 7 Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, 8 he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. 9 Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Now St. Paul probably did not write this. It is probably a hymn composed in the early Church, and St. Paul is making use of it. What we can see is it is **the creation story in reverse.** Our literary figures, **Adam and Eve, don’t trust God and grasp at equality with God. Jesus does not grasp, but lets go of equality with God.** He empties himself—of what? Human selfhood insofar as that is a product that we create; he lets go

of that. Takes the form of a slave. Ordinary human desires are to become master. He takes the other form of becoming a slave, humbles himself, becomes obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Now death is necessary because **the image of God has created something that has to die**. Don't forget, the serpent said, "And you will not die." God said, "And you will die." Well, what was the result? **Death is ultimately separation from God, and it is something that motivates fear**. Jesus worked against all that and accepted death, which means he trusted God with his life. That is what **trust must include: complete acceptance of death**. If you don't accept death, then you are really not trusting. There are lots of jokes; I'm sure you have heard them. My favorite is the atheist that falls off a cliff and grabs a root. He starts calling out, "God, God, God, help me, help me." And a voice says, "Do you believe." "Yes, yes, I do." "Then let go." "Is there anyone else up there?" **But letting go is the greatest form of trust**. We can see that originally what happened was a lack of trust, which created rivalry between God and humanity. Now **Jesus ends the rivalry by accepting death and obedience**. There is no self-reliance where self is something that Jesus creates by himself, but rather he gives himself totally to the Father. Nothing but reliance on love, recognizing love is a power greater than life itself, at least life as we know it in the human body, although we could say love is life—truly. So that **giving up life in the human body is not giving up life itself**. Different ways of talking about these mysteries.

What it leads to then is a **truthful self in communion with God**, humbled not deflated. Sometimes people think that we should be deflated, that humility is a matter of being poor and mean and bedraggled. That's not really what humility means. Don't forget the Blessed Mother and the Magnificat. She is the greatest humble person, and yet she says, "All generations will call me blessed." That's actually a boast of sorts, but it's perfectly appropriate because the Lord has done great things for me. Not because I have done great things for the Lord, but the Lord has done great things for me. That's boasting in the Lord. St. Paul talks about that, too. So there is a **right kind of pride**, but it is not founded in me or in what I have done or decided. **It's founded really in the fact that God has created us and elevated us and brought us into his own life**.

The last part I want to take is the beginning of John's Gospel. The first chapter, the so-called "Prologue." Now this Prologue may be from an author different from the rest of the Gospel, or it may be from the editor that put everything together. In general, the Gospel has two parts: the Passion and the Book of Signs. But the Prologue is really separate from those two parts. But what is the **Prologue of John's Gospel**? It's really another creation story. "In the beginning"—see, the story of creation. Now it's both a story of new creation and it's a new story of creation. **It's a new story of creation in a way that no one ever saw it before**.

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be 4 through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; 5 the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. 6 A

man named John was sent from God. 7 He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. 8 He was not the light, but came to testify to the light. 9 The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world came to be through him, but the world did not know him. 11 He came to what was his own, but his own people did not accept him. 12 But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name, 13 who were born not by natural generation nor by human choice nor by a man's decision but of God. 14 And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth. 15 John testified to him and cried out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'The one who is coming after me ranks ahead of me because he existed before me.'" 16 From his fullness we have all received, grace in place of grace, 17 because while the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, who is at the Father's side, has revealed him.

Now this new story of creation is rather remarkable because it has a mystical viewpoint or vision. **It sees life as one single whole.** This particular part does not use the image of the vine and the branches, but if you read the vine and the branches in the context of the Prologue, you will see **the vine is all of creation.** It's not simply the Church or discipleship or something. It's all of creation. All of creation is one vine. Nothing comes to be without the Word. "Without him nothing came to be" is the quotation. **The Word is a way of saying the mind of the universe, the pattern that explains and puts everything in its proper place.**

You know, it's interesting that mathematicians have never claimed to invent mathematics. They say they discover it. Where did it come from? From the Word. There is this remarkable correlation between mathematics as a pure thing, as a pure study, and the actual physical measurements the scientists make of the universe. How can that be? Because "without him nothing came to be." So **everything is all connected to the Word.** In a sense the most basic language of the Word is mathematics. Now this is an impersonal way of looking at it. A lot of people don't find this very attractive, but it's actually true. It doesn't stop there.

So nothing comes to be, nor does it remain in being. You see, a lot of people think that the creation happened a long time ago. St. Thomas Aquinas brings that up back in the thirteenth century. He said it's wrong to think that God created thousands of years ago. Now days it would be thirteen billion years ago. He said, no, **God is now creating everything that is—now!**

Now why don't people see this? Because of Sir Isaac Newton: the Law of Inertia. Isaac Newton said if you send something, you push something, you start something going, it will never stop in space because there is no friction to slow it down. That's inertia. It's true in physics. Now people say, "Oh, well, that's the way creation is. It's

created and it keeps going.” But it can’t. There is no metaphysical inertia. **Once anything is created it has to be created and created and created forever, or it won’t be.** So there were philosophies like Deism, for example, that came in and said, oh, well, yes, God created something a long time ago, but now he has nothing to do with anything. It’s impossible. Such a world can’t exist. **Everything is created through and in the Word and continues in being in and through the Word.** We are in the Word at this time, at every moment. So **God really is at the center of every existent being, including our own; however, because of the ego we formed we don’t sense this.** We have excluded from our consciousness this ever-present reality.

Now **the human being has the capacity to become aware of this.** St. Paul, for example, says, “In him we live and move and have our being.” This is not pantheism. Sometimes people complain, especially certain kinds of people, they merely jump to a complaint. They say, “Oh, that’s pantheism. Everything is God.” No, pantheism is just a confusing thought. There is no such thing as pantheism. It’s an idea that God is the creation. No, that’s not really what this Scripture says. “In the beginning was the Word.” The Word was even before the creation. But the creation is in the Word and remains at all times in the Word. But we can’t get away from the Word. So **we have to have this sense of really belonging to God at every moment and, therefore, really belonging to each other at every moment.**

I told the children in second grade the miracle of Holy Communion is not that we can commune with God, but that we can commune with each other. After all, God is always present to us, even though we don’t sense it. But we are not really present to each other. But in Holy Eucharist we really are all brought together and receive each other. Well, I said that to the second graders. But actually that’s not true. I mean, that is true, but it’s not the whole truth. The whole truth is actually **we are part of each other at all times.** I didn’t go into that with second graders. I thought, well, that’s a little over their heads now. But it is true because we are on the vine, we belong to the vine, each of us a little branch. But every branch has to belong to the whole vine and can’t exist apart from the vine. That’s one of the great reasons for suffering in the world because so many parts of the vine, so many branches, are suffering, so the whole vine suffers. **One of the results of sin, of course, is our unawareness of God, our unawareness of this deep connection.** St. Augustine says one of the first results of original sin is the darkness of the mind. Well, you could call it that. It’s just unawareness.

But this idea of the unity with God and our unity with God seems to me to be very vital to **our journey because our journey is a journey to God, a journey of communion with God, and actually we are there already, but we are not aware of it. So our work is to become aware of what we already are and to seek cleansing from any boundaries or obstacles that we have created to that awareness.** If you study the traditional prayers and methods, spiritual methods, of our tradition, that’s what they all try to do. They try to purge us or purify us of our obstacles to vision, to awareness. They try to focus our attention on what is present within us. Our work is to become aware of what we already are: united to God at every moment, living in God, being in God, and

removing, purifying ourselves, of any obstacles to that sight, to that vision, to that sense, to that feeling, of unity, which is called “purgation.”

The saints talk about the different stages of the spiritual life. Purgation is the first one: getting rid of the obstacles. Actually you can't do them separately: **purgation, illumination, and union. The union is already there. It's the very way we are. The illumination comes at different times,** beckons us at a very early stage if we are blessed with it. **The purgation is where the work comes in.** But if you read certain spiritual books, they act as if you get finished with one stage and then go to another stage, and get rid of that stage and then go to another stage. That cannot be. It doesn't work that way. But, you see, for a long time we have used this mechanical image of the universe. We have applied it to everything, including our spiritual life. When I was in seminary, the first little pamphlet was *Meditation Mechanics*—honest to God!

Now when I was in seminary, I remember having this talk with this professor and he said to me, “Well, you know, mysticism isn't for everybody.” Because even at that point I was getting to this idea that we had to have this sense of our unity with God. And he says, “Mysticism isn't for everybody.” But I disagree with that. In this regard, it's for everybody, that **we should all have this sense of being united to God.** And realize what St. Thomas says, which is quite shocking, but true: that God even participates in our crimes and in our sins because nothing can happen without God. Now he says we can take full credit for them, but God has to be part of it. **Nothing can exist without God.** God so much honors our freedom and God so much honors our lives, that he is willing to participate rather than for us not to be, which would be the only alternative. To take away our freedom would take away who we are actually, so we would not be.

Now this is something the Old Testament completely missed. The Old Testament thought that somehow God eliminated the unjust or the wicked in this life. But that's not true. God simply loves the unjust and the wicked and draws them to change, to union, which is change. **The victory can only come through love.** And love is capable of all victory, since **that which we are in union with is love.** The only thing that cannot not be is God—the only necessary Being, God. That is love. The only thing that cannot not be is love. So when we move and have our being in God we move and have our being in love.

So ultimately, **the journey is to a full, real, conscious participation in God, who is love.** Whatever we can do to let God lead us on the journey, let us do it.