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When I Am Lifted Up New Life in the Spirit Seminar Carmelite Spiritual Center,
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Well, good evening. An older priest once told me that for many people the greatest distance in the world is from here to here (from head to heart). And I think that's true. The purpose of a Life in the Spirit Seminar is to make that journey from here where we know things, where we have facts and beliefs, and bring them into our heart.

Now the heart in the Bible is the center of our awareness, and that means that's the place where we really understand and really choose. So our goal, **our goal in the Church really, is that we will internally understand and choose a relationship with God.** That is really the point of all the Scripture, but if we are brought up in a culture where we assume that we have already done certain things, we don't actually go out of our way to do them. We imagine that we already have this. So I am going to ask you tonight to just forget about all your assumptions and pretend that you never heard anything before. So you are going to listen with a new mind. Einstein once said that the reason he was able to do what he did was that he looked at life through a child's mind. So I am going to ask you tonight to **become a child in your own mind and just listen afresh.**

We begin on Chapter 12 of John. It says, **“Now has judgment come upon this world; Now will this world's prince be driven out. And I, once am lifted up from the earth, will draw all to myself.”**

Now this is an allusion as is frequently the case in the New Testament, it's an **allusion to a story in the Old Testament.** The story is about the people of God wandering in the desert and they ran across seraph serpents, and the seraph serpents bit them, and they started to suffer and die. Now according to the story, and I am not telling you the story is literally true, I don't know, but the story has a very powerful point to it. It says **Moses fashioned a bronze serpent and held it up on a pole and whoever looked at that was healed.**

Now spiritually what does this story mean? You could say, well, that happened and that's it. But that's not getting to the meaning of it. I'm not actually sure it happened, at least in that way, because I don't know how Moses was able to actually fashion something out of bronze in the middle of the desert; that would seem to be a little bit beyond normal human ability. But the point is that this **bronze serpent became a symbol of the very things that were plaguing the people.** But when they looked at this they were healed. This indicates to us, suggests to us, that one of the great issues in our lives is **how we look at what is besetting us,** how we look at what is attacking us, how we look at what is hostile to us—**has a great deal to do with its power to be hostile and to besiege and to beset us.** The whole point of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, the Word of God made flesh in the person of Jesus Christ, is that **God has come to live with us so that nothing would be able to despoil us or destroy us and most especially death itself.**

Now the Letter to the Hebrews has a very important point. It says that the devil kept the world in bondage by the fear of death. If we don't understand the fear of death, we really don't understand what sin is. Some people think sin is disobeying a law. That's a very childish idea. It's not wrong, but it isn't really very deep. Sin is much more than simply disobeying a law. **Sin is living in bondage. And bondage comes from the fear of death.**

I want you to think about what the fear of death is. **The fear of death is the fear of being alone.** The fear of death is the fear of being totally all by oneself, **having to take care of oneself, and not being able to do it.**

Now when we are born physically into this world we are cast into a world all by ourselves. Now of course we have a mother and we have a father, hopefully. Sometimes parents give up their children. Most of the time our parents keep us, but we are still separate. **As little children we start to interpret the world and live the world really independently of our parents. And this is traumatic.** They are not always there when we need them. And we start to taste the fear of death, because **the fear of death is also the fear of helplessness.**

And that **motivates something within us to be independent and to be powerful and most of all to be separate and to be over everybody else.** Of course the desire, which I don't call a natural desire, naturally occurs to us because of sin. Sin is a violation really of our unity with God. **Sin is our being cut off from communion with God.** Since the world is sinful and **we are born into a sinful world** and we see the examples of sin and the symptoms of sin all around us and we feel those very things within us, **since we are all so well connected to everything, we grow up following to some degree into this sinful situation.**

Now the Word of God became flesh to come into our life and to help us see that **we are not alone** and never have been and never will be, that death is really the beginning of something, not the end of something. **In death, yes, we go into a new phase of life, but we do not really lose anything.** But we can lose everything if we allow ourselves to be separated from God, and that is possible because God has endowed us with freedom. He has endowed us with freedom because God is looking for love in return, and **the only way God can get any love at all is by endowing his creatures with freedom to reject him.** The freedom to reject him is also the freedom to love him, and you can't have one without the other.

So this is what this text means when it says, "This world's prince will be driven out." This world's prince is the evil one whose whole purpose in life is to convince us of the lie that we are all alone and we have to depend upon ourselves. And that lie keeps us in bondage to the fear of death. And **because of the fear of death we will do almost anything**—we will do almost anything—we will sell ourselves in order to feel some kind of power or some kind of relief from this fear of death. It may be that we conform ourselves to a very evil family because, after all, it's our family, a very dysfunctional family. We become dysfunctional. We cut off our own healthiness because, well, that's the family we have, and that's better than nothing. **It's the fear of death that motivates**

us to conform to what is not good and wholesome. And in some way we all do this, if not in our families, in our society at large, or when we get a job and start working. Well, now here is a question: Do I keep my job and do what my boss wants, or do I do what's right? Have you ever had that little dilemma? The fear of death will say, well, you better do what the boss says because if you don't, then where is your next meal going to come from? That's also the fear of death.

But when Moses made this bronze serpent and the people looked at it, they didn't just look at it; they were looking at it with some kind of faith, some expectation. That's why it had some effect upon them. That's why it healed them. It wasn't the bronze itself. **It was their expectant faith looking at this bronze serpent that brought healing to their bodies.**

This is not simply a story from the past. It is a story of the present; it is how we also are healed. **When we look with faith at what ails us, what ails us loses its power to ail us.** And what ails us most of all is this fear of death. So **when we look at the cross of Christ, Jesus dying on the cross, that death loses its power to frighten us and to control us and to keep us in bondage, and so we are free.**

But the faith I am speaking of is not simply the faith of saying, yes, I believe. It's a belief in the heart. It's a belief that is personally chosen. It's a belief that is really a trust in God himself and in God's ways—not only in God as some sort of idea, but the way in which God wants to work in my personal life, which I do not understand or know about. So in that way, **belief is accepting something we don't understand and trusting in the ways of God because we have the example of Jesus and the saints who have shown us the way. And the way is really through the cross of Christ.** So St. Paul says in Galatians, "We should glory in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, for he is our salvation, our life and our resurrection," because he didn't remain dead. He died on the cross—true; he didn't remain dead; he was raised up, and it's in his resurrection that we have power to live and freedom from all bondage.

Every habitual sin in our life is a form of bondage. Whether this habitual sin is fully voluntary or whether it's a habit that has come to dominate us, an addiction of some kind, whether it is more of a physical nature or more of a psychological nature or more of a mental nature or more of an emotional nature, **whatever it is, we have freedom in Christ. But we have to actually want this freedom and choose it.**

So there are four things then that we need for this faith to become really operative in our lives. The first is **we have to learn**, and sometimes that means **learning over again what we thought we knew: reading the Bible, as I said today, with the eyes of a child.**

Number two, we have to learn how to **sacrifice**, which means to **let go of certain things.** Here sacrifice doesn't mean something we give to God because we think God wants it, which some people used to think. The sacrifice at the temple—"Oh, isn't that great; look what we are giving to God." Well, what's he going to do with them? That's why the prophets complained about the sacrifices in the temple. "Do you think I eat that

meat?” God says. “Do you think I drink that blood?” God didn’t need it. **He wanted people to sacrifice for their good so they would become more generous.** It’s by being generous that we become rich. That’s what he was looking at.

But there is another way we have to sacrifice: **getting rid of things that we don’t really need and are not good for us.** So it’s not just a matter of becoming generous. It’s a matter of letting go of what is not good. And **this requires discrimination and surrrnder.** So we learn; we have to learn, and that’s the life of a disciple. Two, we have to discriminate, sacrifice what isn’t good, let go of it. You could think of life as a ladder. If you want to climb up a ladder, you have to leave one of the rungs to get to the next rung. So even if your life is full of goodness, you still have to let go of that goodness to move up to a greater goodness. So sacrifice has these different meanings. It means **being generous and sharing. It means letting go of what isn’t good. And it means simply not staying where you are—moving up, moving on.**

Third, **struggle**—struggle is a very important part of life. A lot of Christians never get this. They think their struggles are all of a physical nature or a financial nature. “Oh, I have to struggle to balance my checkbook. Oh, I have to struggle to get up in the morning and go to work.” Well, that may be true. But **our whole life has to be a struggle, pursuing a goal that we choose: in this case, to believe in God and to persist in believing in God.** Not to say, well, I did, I did that before; I did that; I already did; I made an act of faith. No, **every day has to be a new act of faith and we have to persist in doing this.** That’s struggle. And even if for a while everything seems really easy and good, I can tell you sooner or later there will be hard times. It is the nature of life. It is so willed by God; I can say that for sure, that life has struggle in it. And that’s part of our way.

And the fourth is help. **We need help.** We cannot do this ourselves. This is really **the work of God.** Jesus says, “We work while the light lasts.” The work he is talking about is really God’s work in us, but God will not work in us unless we say, “God, please work in me. **You have my permission.** I invite you in.”

So **we need salvation and we need healing, but they are not the same thing.** Don’t forget the story of the ten lepers. They were all healed, but only one was saved: the one at the end who came back with gratitude and Jesus said, “Your faith has been your salvation.” He didn’t say that to the others. They were healed. Some people are happy enough just to be healed, and they don’t want any more. That’s too bad. We need more. We need to be saved. **Salvation is a gift that we only have when we are really in God.** But I don’t believe that God makes us wait till we die to be in God. It is true that when we accept Christ we have to accept the cross. And when we accept the cross we are baptized into his death—that’s true. And we will only be fully united to him in our own death—that’s true. But meanwhile **we are really and substantially united to him through his abiding grace and especially in the Eucharist,** where he is substantially present and substantially feeds us, our bodies and our souls. Again, we can go through the motions as Catholics because we have this beautiful sacramental life; we can go through it physically, participating physically in it, while not really willing it. So what I am encouraging you to do is **when you come to the Eucharist, to make a very special act**

of openness to the graces God is giving you in that particular Eucharist at that particular time.

And **every morning** open your eyes and thank God for a new day and ask God for what you need this day, and don't worry about tomorrow. That's why Jesus says, "Give us this day our daily bread." He meant **give us what we need today**. And let's not worry about tomorrow because **worrying about tomorrow is part of the fear of death**.

Anxiety is connected to fear—fear and anxiety. And everyone experiences this in some way. Maybe we are all different, but we all have some fear and we all have some anxiety and often we experience anxiety and fear in terms of anger, anger at the way life is, anger at other people that didn't really do what they should do for us, or anger at our circumstances, or anger at our employers, or anger at our government, or anger at God, or anger at anybody. It's true the world is disordered, but anger will not heal the disorder. **The only thing that heals the disorder of the world is love. There is no room for love in a heart that is full of anxiety and fear and anger. So we have to choose.**

Now very often fear and anxiety and anger have deep roots in us. So this is not a simple thing; it's not a superficial thing. You say, okay, that's it. It's almost like let's say if a person is very overweight and they really have to lose weight because the doctor says, "Look, you have a bad heart, and if you don't lose weight, I give you about a year and you will be dead. If you want to live, lose ten pounds, twenty pounds, whatever." That's not easy. If you are real skinny, you might say, "Well, what's the big deal?" but if you have weight, it's hard to lose it because your body is so used to it. And so it is with also all of our habits, whether they are physical habits like eating or emotional habits of feeling in certain ways, reacting in certain ways to situations, that is ingrained in us. But **the power of God is greater than our habits and our dispositions. And bringing new habits is the very work of grace, and it's both healing and salvation.**

We have to remember to whom we are praying when we pray. **Jesus says don't forget to whom you are praying. You are praying to your heavenly Father, in fact, Abba**, he said. It means Daddy. Now maybe you didn't have a really good Daddy. Maybe your daddy left or maybe your daddy died when you were very young and you don't know what it's like. Well, you can figure out what a really good father is like. Whatever you figure out and whatever you can imagine, God is far beyond that—and he is your Father; he is your Daddy. And he will care for you. **And God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—loves you totally and unconditionally, not because of anything you do, but rather because you are his.** You are his creature. You are created in the image and likeness of God, and **in Christ he has redeemed you; he has given you new life**. So as we look at our humanity we see that it's made in God's image and it's very good, but it's very frail; it's very prone to evil, which is really rooted in this fear of dying.

Now the quality that describes sin best, I believe, is called self-centeredness or selfishness or egoism. Now where does that come from? **It comes from the fear of death.** If I believe myself to be cut off and I believe everything depends on me, well, then I have to take care of myself first and foremost. If I really do a good job, then I can maybe take care of one other person, but I have to really work on me first. Have you ever

been on an airplane and they have the announcements? They say, well, now in case that the cabin pressure drops you are going to have these little masks drop down and if you have children, take care of yourself first. Well, that's logical on an airplane. But it becomes an embedded reaction in our lives where **we are always worried about self. In God we don't have to do that. God helps us beyond all that.**

Now we have to recognize the reality of **the possibility that we can lose eternal life.** This is clearly specified in Scripture on many occasions. It never says anyone actually has, but it says we can. If you remember Matthew 25 where it says at the end of time the Son of Man will gather all the sheep and the goats and separate them into two groups. **What determines who is a sheep and who is a goat?** "I was hungry, you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty, you gave me something to drink." That's a sheep. What about the goats? "I was hungry, you didn't give me anything to eat." So it's really an **action proceeding from an intuition**, and it has nothing to do with faith in the ordinary sense of the word. It has to do with going along with God's guidance. It's letting God guide you. That's the kind of faith this is about, and **letting God guide you into action.** That's the faith that is salvific—not saying, oh, I believe this and this and this in the Catechism, or I believe this and this in the Bible. No, it's letting God guide you into proper action, and God will. **That's called "actual grace." But you have to go along with it.**

So we find then—and I am sure you read all your little notes from last week—did you? Did you do your homework? Yes? Then you know that—you read through Matthew 25. You read through Romans 8, and you read through Acts 2. You know, Acts is about how people say, "Well, what can we do; what shall we do?" Believe and receive the Spirit. **It's the Spirit that guides us and directs our lives.**

Now the Church has given us all kinds of help. God gave us all kinds of help. First of all we have Anointing of the Sick for our bodies. **We have the power of joy and rejoicing for our spirits.** You know why these singers come? They are ministers to lift up your spirits. You need to sing, not let them sing to you, but sing with them. That is a healing act. Read Philippians, Chapter 4:4-7. That's what it says.

We have to be aware of institutional evil. Jesus calls the Pharisees "blind guides." Sometimes in our Church we have blind guides. We can't wait around for somebody to come to us and tell us what we need to hear. **We need to go find what we need to hear. We cannot allow, we should not allow, the sins of others or the indifference of others to turn us away from God.** So if other people are bad, if priests are not faithful in their ministry, that should not affect you. You should, in fact, pray for them that they will repent and return to what they are supposed to do. So be aware of institutional evil. It exists: in our government, in our Church, in every church, in every government—it's part of reality. Read again Matthew 23:13-39. That's all part of your assignment from last week I think—wasn't it?

So then those other two texts, John 14 and John 16 talk about how the Spirit guides us in life. We have to take this very literally. **The Spirit really does guide us and does direct us.** That doesn't mean our lives will be simple. It doesn't mean our lives will be

free of trouble. Some people have a lot of trouble, and some people have little trouble. But **everyone has some trouble**. Why do some people have more than others? This is part of the mystery. **We all affect everybody else**. Some of us are born with healthy bodies. And some people are born with healthy minds, and some people are not. We all affect each other. When we live in a family we are affected by each other. All of these factors play into our own individual lives.

Now if you remember in Chapter 19 of Matthew when the rich young man comes to Jesus and he says, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” and Jesus says, “You know what to do. Keep the commandments.” That’s a good start because commandments are a very clear indication of boundaries. You cross over those boundaries, you have become egocentric, you have become egoistic. But that rich young man, his face fell and he went away grieving it says, because at the end Jesus says, “But if you really want to be perfect, sell all you have.” Well, he had a lot, I guess. **But what do we really have? Very often it’s what we have, we think we have, really has us. So we have to reevaluate that too.**

Again, in Matthew it says, “**Seek first the kingdom of God**. Everything else will come to you.” **Don’t be worrying about things**. In this country and in our culture the idea seems to be that we are evaluated by what we own, by what we have. But that’s not true; **we are not what we have. We are what God has made us to be and it’s not measurable.**

In John we read, “**I am the resurrection and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.**” **And that means through the humanity of Jesus**. In the early Church there was a heresy called “Docetism.” You never hear about it anymore. I think it’s rampant. Docetism meant that the humanity of Jesus didn’t mean anything. He really just appeared to be human, but really he wasn’t, and his humanity didn’t mean a thing. He really didn’t die on the cross; it just looked that way. Now you might say that’s goofy. But wait a minute, **how do we regard our own humanity or the humanity of others? Do we see it united to Christ as a means to salvation?** Well, if not, maybe we are a little Docetist. “I am the resurrection and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Then finally before you come back maybe you could read Ephesians, Chapter 1:13-15, where St. Paul talks about the seal of the Spirit. So **God calls us, gives us new life, seals the Spirit so that we will not lose it.**

In conclusion I will read Chapter 16 of John, verse 13: “**When the Spirit of truth comes he will guide you into all the truth**”—**all the truth, all that you need to know**—“for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come”—insofar as you need to know them. “He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine.” That means they are friends. St. Thomas says, “Friendship means what mine is yours, what’s yours is mine.” So Jesus says I’m a friend of my Father. “For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.” **So now Jesus has made us his friends, and we need to accept the invitation.**