

Let us pray: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Heavenly Father we pray for the gift of the Spirit. We ask you to give us inner peace and calm so that we can contemplate the wonders of your creation and also the wonders that you have placed within ourselves, wonders that are yet to be made manifest to us. We ask you to give us courage. We ask you to give us trust. We ask you to give us patience in dealing with ourselves and one another. And we ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

I am going to zip through a short resume of last week and then proceed. Okay? You are welcome to take notes if you want to, but I don't think it's really necessary.

First of all, I talked about how **as we grow and develop in our world we look at life through our senses and this gives us a partially true but very limited view of reality.** I also mentioned that **modern science and our religious faith, rather than being in opposition, are actually in agreement on several major issues.** Number one, **the universe cannot be explained; it is actually a miracle.** All right, that agrees with our faith. The latest probe out in the solar system has come back with information saying that we are exactly 13.7 billion years old as a universe and we will last for approximately another 13 billion years. However, as we age we are expanding as a universe and each galaxy is moving away from the others. Eventually we will not see any other galaxies but our own, and eventually our own suns will die out. So it is a terminal universe.

This also **agrees with Scripture** that says, number one, God created everything out of nothing and, number two, it will all disappear at some point. What science has done is create a timetable. Now what you might say is that the coincidence is that we are living right in the mid-point of the development of the universe. And it may be that that's the only period where human beings can live—during the mid-point—because human life has only been around for a few—maybe 30,000 years—in the present human form with creativity and freedom, although there are pre-human forms that go back perhaps several million years. Anyway, so there we are. This is what both science and our faith tell us. So it's better if we start to realize that our normal perceptions are too narrow and we need to expand them. So this is both **spiritually and psychologically healthy to expand our perceptions of life and to get into a more realistic view of reality.**

Science gives us data. Science yet doesn't know much about the universe. It only knows what it can measure. But what our faith tells us is that **what is really real**, the foundation of everything, is something immeasurable. They can't even measure the time because it doesn't have any time; **it is the eternal reality we call "God."** God has no beginning. God has no end. God is not measurable in any form whatsoever. God does not inhabit any space. On the other hand, God is all-present. God is eternal and God does not exist in time. But throughout all time God is. So this is the paradoxical reality that our faith reveals to us.

Now the fundamental nature of God is **God is love**, and love as the basis of all reality—if you want to call it that—is the only explanation of why we exist. **We exist because love has created us and we exist to love.**

Now as we grow and live in our normal world, our fallen world, our broken world, our sinful world, **this love is obscured**. Children are born into the world with certain **fundamental needs**. I didn't mention this last week; I will mention it this week because it segues into my next part. Certain fundamental needs—obviously what do children need, Sarah? Food and water and—just that? You would be satisfied with just food and water? And **love, affection—being held**, actually. Children who are not held actually become totally listless and vacant; their faces become vacant, and they just withdraw and they actually can die. Children without affection physically communicated by touch can die. So this is a fundamental need. But no child could possibly live in an environment where all his or her needs would be met—it's impossible! For one reason is that **our needs are actually infinite**. We have a soul that is created in order to want and desire God. But God is infinite, so therefore it follows that our desires are infinite.

No parents, no matter how great they are, could satisfy those infinite desires in a child, even as they manifest themselves in a very simple way. Physically alone, no parents, not any group of parents, could always be physically present to a child. **So our environment, our holding pattern, is going to be somewhat marred**, somewhat marred by nature—for two reasons. Metaphysically, **parents are not God**. Physically, they **can't be always present, and they don't have all resources at their disposal**. So that's just part of the limitations of life. So our holding pattern then is flawed. If it's so terribly flawed to the point where as I say a child be left without any affection at all, that child would simply die. But even if we don't die and we survive, nonetheless, we do have a certain **sense of something missing**. So as we grow in life we also **need healing** because that sense of something missing will actually induce, will create patterns of, misperception and eventually misbehavior. Keep this in mind: **misperception always leads to misbehavior**. You understand this? Why do people act out in very negative and destructive ways? Because they misperceive the conditions of the world, of life.

I mentioned last week the parable of the Prodigal Son, which has two misperceptions in it. Number one, the first son, the younger son, **does not perceive his father's care and love for him**, and he reacts in a negative way toward his father. He says, "I'm out of here! I want what is coming to me." He leaves and he wastes everything. It says in the King James Version that he "wastes his substance." Now one's substance is very much related to one's sexuality because sexuality is a power we have to love others. However, we pervert it when we turn it into merely a source of pleasure for ourselves. That's not its spiritual purpose. So then I mentioned that the deadly sin of lust is a perversion of this great power, this substance within us, to be able to love others, to form a commitment with another person and to live in this commitment in a lifelong union, which reflects the relationship between Christ and his Church. That's the teachings of the Scriptures. Marriage reflects the relationship between Christ and the Church. **Lust** evades all that. It takes away the treasure of sex and turns it into simply a matter of pleasure for me. So we have to keep in mind why that's a deadly sin.

Then we have to look over at the elder brother who had a different deadly sin but who was just as distant from the father. Here this is the son who was obedient and faithful and did his job and was in every way outwardly correct, but inwardly his heart was far from his father. He said, “You never gave me a kid to share with my friends.” So he did not really appreciate his father’s company. He wanted the company **of someone else**. So there was **a rivalry in his heart** even though it didn’t express itself outwardly. And he had the deadly sin of **resentment**. When people live in resentment they are always **feeling cheated**. Okay? And feeling cheated is the beginning of a very serious flaw in a person because if you are going to resent things, you are going to become more and more negative. And that is also a very deadly sin.

Now it happens to be that a lot of religious people are like this. Religious people are like this. That’s why Jesus told that story. He was really aiming at the elder brother in the religious congregation he was addressing, because there are ways in which we can be religious outwardly without our heart being in it. But true love of God has to be coming from the heart. It has to be a true communication and acceptance, and **the only way we can really relate to God is truthfully**. And the only way that can be is for us to be in submission to God, because God is our source and our foundation. We didn’t invent God. God creates us. There is no other way to relate to God except as the foundation, as the source, of who we are. Anything else would be not truthful. So resentments are misperceptions, actually, of the way things really are; and they are very common.

I might have mentioned for a moment another sin which is against the virtue of love, which is the sin of **sloth**. Now sloth, as I mentioned, is not laziness; I think I did bring that up. It’s not laziness; it’s indifference, indifference to what is truly worthy, truly good, what is true love. Now sloth usually shows itself as **a sort of passive aggression**. “I don’t care,” is the way you could describe a slothful person—“Well, I don’t care! No big deal!” Sloth expresses itself in a sort of negative attitude and a desire not to expend oneself, so it’s **laziness in an emotional sense**. It’s laziness in the sense of sloth doesn’t want to do anything for oneself or anyone else. Now sometimes people admire sloth in another person. They say, “You know, nothing ever bothers that guy. Isn’t that great?” Well, no, not if the reason nothing ever bothers him is that he doesn’t care about anything! Then that is not great! It’s actually very bad. So that’s another way in which we negate love.

Now it happens to be—and this is the good side of everything—that sometimes the greatest saints were actually people who were originally indifferent altogether. So the good news is that **in every flaw there is a hidden virtue**. So you never have to say, “Well, gee, I notice this flaw in myself—therefore I’m doomed.” No, you are never doomed because **God’s transforming love can heal and correct all faults**, all flaws; and **that’s exactly what salvation is about**.

Okay, so that’s basically a summary of last week with the addition of the need for affection. And that I added because it’s important we understand the next section on faith.

So there are three virtues that St. Paul says will last forever. “All things will pass away, but three remain: faith, hope, and love; and the greatest of these is love.” We began with love. **Love is the foundation of everything, but faith is the perception that the world actually works on love.** Now that is not a perception that comes from our senses. And that is not a perception that comes via our ordinary experience. However, **you do have to have some experience of being loved as a basis for trust.** What I’m trying to say is that if you grow up in an affective pattern, which is so sorely defective, so sorely awful—and you do see this—you see children grow up with no care, no parental supervision. Their physical needs aren’t cared for. Their emotional needs are not cared for, and so on. Well, then it is almost impossible for these people to come and understand and to perceive that the world actually rests on love. So it’s a matter of degree. Some people will have an enormous trouble seeing this. Some people will have a little trouble seeing it, but everyone has some trouble because of the flaws I mentioned earlier, the flaws in our upbringing. So **we have a sense of neediness.** We may blame other people or just feel that there is something inadequate about us. Well, that is actually a misperception, and it relates to the virtue of faith; faith is a gift like love itself. Love is a personal participation in the love which is God; faith is a personal perception of the reality of God underpinning everything.

Now Jesus says, **“Fear is useless. What is needed is trust.”** If you ever notice in the world one of the most common emotions and instincts is that of fear. Fear is very common. Fear drives wars. Fear drives all kinds of things. Right now how many people are worried about poison gas or something—bombs? Well, it’s the way it works—that’s life. We have to come to know who we are. St. Teresa of Avila said, **“We cannot know God without knowing ourselves.”** So this is actually a work at hand, and then we have to come to know who we are.

I mentioned last week that Adam and Eve represent the beginning of a **great delusion that we are all individuals separate from each other.** The serpent said to Eve, “Oh, if you disregard God, you’ll be equal to God.” Well, that desire to be equal to God is the original temptation; and the original sin is swallowing it. And that’s why the actual story is put in the context of actually eating fruit. It is, of course, not the fruit of a normal tree; it’s the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but it’s still eating it. Why? Because **we swallow lies.** That’s an expression. It is a correct one. We swallow lies.

So what I’m suggesting is we need not to swallow but to **chew and to spit out lies.** Okay? Even when you are given the truth, you still have to chew it. You don’t swallow anything whole. If you do you’re going to get sick. You chew things and **you digest what you hear.** So everything has to be now digested in your own way of living, **in your own personal nature and experience. What I’m giving you is what I’ve digested.** If somebody else would give you the same talk, it would sound very different because they would have digested it differently. Now you have to each digest it yourself. That’s part of what St. Teresa means when she talks about self-knowledge, coming to know yourself. You have to digest everything for yourself. **You have to start seeing who you are and understanding yourself in a personal way, and that leads to understanding God in a personal way.**

But we have to be aware of our great delusions, especially this separation idea. Again, John tells us we are simply branches on a vine. St. Paul says we're simply members—"member" is a word like a limb, a limb, a finger is a member. A hand is a member of a body.

Again, I want to make it clear that **no one has grown up in a perfect affective environment except Christ**. And that's the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Mother. That means sin never touched her, so she provided for Jesus a perfect emotional environment, but the rest of us don't have that experience.

Now we block ourselves—we **block ourselves from experiencing God as love when we compare ourselves to each other**. You are you and your neighbor is who she or he is, and when you compare yourselves you are doing an injustice to both. A judgement—we make judgments about things. And we say, "Well, you know, God is good and this is good, but that is bad." Well, there is a way in which there may be some truth in that, but we can fall too much into that—judging everything. Everybody has good in them and everything is a creature of God, so don't be so quick to say things are bad. The real problem is **we tend to bring to our experience a faulty judgment about what is good and bad**—what's good and bad for us at this particular moment. Well, that is irrelevant. Good or bad for me isn't that important right now or at any other time. So we have to be careful about how we can actually block our own perceptions.

Now when we do block our perceptions of God as being love what results in us is often **a sense of inferiority**. Sometimes kids think they are no good. They look in the mirror; they don't like what they see. Not only physically, they don't like what they see inside. Well, you have to remember that **God affirms totally every being just as that being is, which doesn't mean that that person or that being is supposed to stay exactly that way**. It means that for now, today, at this moment, it's perfectly fine the way it is. The very nature of the universe is that it is growing and developing. The nature of ourselves is that we are **growing and developing**. We're not supposed to stay put, but for now, for today, at this moment, it's perfect just the way it is. So when we have a child baptized we say that child is a perfect saint. Now the kid can be crying and screaming; that's all right because it's perfectly appropriate for a child who is six months old to scream and cry. Now if you start screaming and crying like that, you'd say, "Well, gee, there must be something wrong." But if you start having pimples on your face that is perfectly all right because it's natural when certain glands develop, that's what happens. You have to realize that is simply part of nature, which God affirms totally. And so the same with feelings and emotions which you might be unfamiliar with or think are strange or perhaps you don't like, and you have to say they are perfectly fine because this is what is appropriate for a child who is fourteen becoming an adult. Thirteen, fourteen, is that more or less what you are?

There is no objective evil in the world. There is no objective evil in this sense: something existing independently and evil in itself. There is no such thing as evil in itself. Everything is created by God including the devil, and therefore **evil is simply a privation of the good that belongs there**. What's missing in the devil is a willingness

to serve God with his wisdom and his cleverness and his intelligence. If a person is blind, what's missing is sight. See, it's a privation of something that belongs there. There is nothing evil in itself. So we have to keep that in mind about ourselves and about everything about us.

**So if we have feelings of inferiority or worthlessness, that's a misperception.** We're not living in the real world then; we have started to move into a world of illusion and darkness. And it would be very wise to hold ourselves back from that world and perhaps seek help in getting out of that world, if we need to.

Sometimes boredom, simple boredom, is often actually due to the fact we're disconnected from a proper perception of reality, because actually **reality is exciting**. Sometimes boredom is the result of a waste of our excitement, which goes back to the idea of lust. Lust usually leads to boredom. **Wasting anything**, wasting our substance whether sexual or otherwise, **leads to boredom**.

**There is nothing fundamentally wrong with any of us—nothing!** And I have to say that includes those people who are in prison. There is nothing fundamentally wrong with them. There is something wrong with them, but it's in their perceptions, it's in their behavior. It is not more fundamental than that; therefore, it's always **correctable**. Don't forget, on the cross Jesus was—what? Next to the good robber. Remember the good robber said—what did he say? Right. He said, "I know we did a lot wrong, but he [Jesus] didn't do anything." So all of a sudden he started having a right perception. And Jesus said, "You will be with me this day in paradise." **It's never too late; but it does require change.**

Some people fall asleep, and this is especially true of **sloth**; it creates a sort of sleepiness. By that I don't mean literally closing your eyes, but I mean living without any connection or awareness of anything. People go through life, you know, in a kind of daze; this is **a kind of disengagement**. St. Teresa of Avila said, "If ever we saw our own soul in the state of grace, we would be so overwhelmed, we could never sin again." But, of course, we don't see that. So we have to be aware of how **our own way of living really can prevent our own thriving**. St. Irenaeus said, "The glory of God is a human person fully alive." So what is God's will for us? **That we be fully alive**. Now very often our idea of fully alive and God's idea of fully alive are not the same; then we are the ones who have to change.

So when we get now into faith, which is a gift, a virtue, it has to do with perceiving love as part of everything; therefore, it leads right to **courage**. Faith is very connected to courage—faith as a virtue. It's not just a matter of, oh, well, I believe. Anybody can say, "I believe." But courage is to surrender oneself to God. And that is what in today's gospel reading Jesus says: "If anyone wants to be my disciple, he must deny his very self"—that means his sense of isolation and separation from others—**"and take up his cross,"** which is a means of—what? What's the cross a means of? Paul, the cross is a means of—what is the cross a means of—what was it used for? In Roman times people were put on the cross to—execution—means of execution! So when he says, "Take up

your cross,” he is talking about taking up your death! He means death to the illusions I have been talking about. Death to the sense of separation. **Death to you being a person you created, and then it leads to your new life, which is a person God creates.** And that’s the whole idea of the new birth, which comes in Baptism, at least the power comes in Baptism.

So therefore all things work out, as St. Paul tells us, “All things work out for those who trust in God.” It may not work out the way you want it. For example, you may think you want to be an Olympic champion, but that may not work out. But that doesn’t mean that it won’t work out—don’t forget Cain—remember Cain murdered Able? And then God came and he was rather upset about it, right? And God said, “Now I’m going to drive you out of the garden.” And Cain said, “Oh, if you drive me away, I’ll be killed!” And God said, “No, no, you won’t be killed. In fact, I’m going to protect you.” And he said, “Furthermore, you have to realize something. You actually can do what you want. You can prosper,” he said. Now Cain experienced his life as not—he felt that God preferred his brother, Able, so he was very envious of him. But God said, “No, you can prosper. You can do it.” And everyone has to believe that. You may feel that you’re not what you want to be, but you can still prosper. It’s just you have to find what way you can prosper as opposed to what way you might want to choose. So that’s what St. Paul means when he says, “All things work out for those who love God.” Why? Because love is the foundation, the beginning and the end of all things.

Now **faith** also besides giving us energy, **the energy of courage which eventually should lead to the willingness to offer our lives**, which is where the importance of martyrdom came in the early Church. Martyrs were people who said, “Okay, I will give up my life because I believe in love. I believe love is the foundation of everything. I believe that there is nothing that can take me away from love, so go ahead and kill me!” Why? “Because the real me isn’t the body. The real me is something more profound; it transcends the body, so go ahead and kill me.” So that’s the courage that is really the virtue of faith.

Now no one is going to kill you, probably—maybe, but not probably. But how do you allow people to kill you? Well, how do you allow the culture to kill you? By making you cynical. Cynicism, which is looking down on everybody, which is looking at people from the worst point of view—for example, I heard a very cynical remark recently. I won’t tell you where, but it was around here, and somebody was discussing some very wonderful, charitable deeds that some of the parents here were doing for one of the women who is sick, taking food over, and someone said, “Oh, that’s because everyone knows they are doing it.” That’s cynical—thinking that people are cooking meals and taking them over to this house not for love of the person but so that everyone will think well of them. To think that is cynical. **You understand what cynicism is? It’s not looking at someone for their goodness, but it’s trying to find some ulterior motive.** And it also is very passive because a cynical person will say, “Well, I’m not going to vote because, after all, it doesn’t matter—they are all crooks. All politicians are crooks, so I don’t have to vote.” That’s cynicism. Do you understand? Now, unfortunately, there is

a lot of truth in it. There are a lot of crooked politicians, but that doesn't justify cynicism. Do you understand?

**Faith is beyond cynicism and beyond cowardliness because these vices really don't see what is positive in other people.** And as I said, I remember visiting jail once, going to the Wheaton jail, and I met with this guy and he had a list of, what do you call it, "rap sheet"? And the guy broke lots of laws, and yet there was something that was extremely good about him. He was on drugs. He did all kinds of bad things. But there was something very good about this person. And I don't think there are probably too many people who don't have something really good about them. It's all relative in the sense that people can get themselves mixed up with evil and become so taken over with evil that their goodness gets more and more diminished, and pretty soon it's almost impossible to see. So faith is this willingness to look and to see that love is the objective reality within everything and it's everywhere and if we're not going to see it, then we really don't have faith.

Now how does **faith** affect us emotionally? It **gives us a sense of being supported**, which is the opposite of feeling cheated. If I have faith—as a virtue now, and not just say, "I believe"—you understand?—and say, "I have the gift of faith," then I've nurtured the gift of faith, then I feel supported, or I come to feel supported. Now this doesn't mean every single day you feel like you have no problems. This is not the idea because life has problems by necessity, but in our problems we are supported; we have friends, **friends in high places. Number one, God. Number two, the saints**, who are our friends, who intercede for us. This is not for nothing! **We have a certain confidence and we have an ability to relax.** There is a sense of spiritual relaxation that comes from faith. Why? Because it all doesn't depend upon you because you see that things are actually very good even though at the present moment there are clouds, but beyond the clouds you know very well there's the sun. That's a kind of secular form of faith; it's a simplistic form of faith. You go out on a cloudy day and you say, "I know there is a sun even though I don't see it." At night you know we are going to move toward the sun by morning. That's a kind of a faith that's based on your experience. Well, **faith is to some degree based on our experience of God**; and therefore we just can't have every aspect of it at once. We learn; we grow toward it. But then we have to pay attention to it. **When God is touching us we need to pay attention to that and realize it.**

**The absence of faith**—what is that like? Suspicion. I don't know if you have ever seen this; it's a very sad thing. It actually can become a mental illness—people who are suspicious—suspicious. Now there may be forms of mental illness that may have nothing to do with a lack of faith, but **a lack of faith will lead to being suspicious, meaning that you're always thinking the worst.** See? It's like cynicism; it's related. **Hopelessness!** See, faith leads to hope, but lack of faith leads to hopelessness. It's actually logical—and **despair and frustration and insecurity.** Insecurity. A lot of people's real problems are a fundamental, profound sense of insecurity rooted in the fact that they don't have any real faith—not any operative faith. That's when we say for the virtue of faith we mean a faith that's in operation, that's actually working. You get it so far? So all of these things influence our thinking, our attitudes, and our feelings. So it's

not a matter of simply a head-trip. We're not talking about a head-trip. We're talking about a total experience of life. Okay, now take a moment, and you can think about this and breathe a little bit.

When dealing with the issue of the virtue of faith, I want to talk about two deadly sins that are a denial of faith. The first is gluttony. Now a lot of people have the idea of gluttony—do you have a vague idea of what gluttony is? Not at all! Laura, do you have any idea at all what gluttony means? Any idea? Kathryn? Nobody does? Oh, yes, Pat? Yes, it's taking more than you need; that's a pretty good idea. **Gluttony has to do with filling the emptiness inside you**, usually associated with food. But it isn't only food. It could be drink. It could be drugs. It could be **any substance whatsoever**. All right? Now we live in a society where gluttony is a real problem. Well, lust is a real problem, too, but so is gluttony. Gluttony has to do with this constantly looking for more and filling oneself up. So we have tremendous problems with overweight. What is it—the United States has the biggest overweight problem in the world! Now that may not be gluttony, but it tends to be **an attitude toward what I need, which is excessive**. So what I'm trying to get at is that why do people always go after things? Why do they fill their lives up with so much stuff, so much food, so much drink, drugs, etc.? Well, because of an inner emptiness. Now **this emptiness is not evil**. It's not a sin. It's actually a natural quality that belongs to us. Well, **we are empty, and God is supposed to fill us!** But when we substitute other people or things or substances or food for God, then this is gluttony. So that's what we call a deadly sin.

Another one is **greed**. Greed is related to gluttony as well. And it's also—what? It's **looking for security**. I said that a lack of faith will lead to insecurity. Well, greed is all about finding security **in money or things and holding on**. Greed is all about holding on. Those are two more deadly sins. I relate them to a lack of faith.

So when we talk about the three virtues we talk all the time about love and we talk about faith, but hardly ever about **hope**, but it's a mistake; we need to be attentive to that also. St. Paul says, "It's the first fruit given to those who believe." I mentioned before a **lack of faith leads to hopelessness, and faith leads to hope**. Now, again, hope has the same basic origin as the other two virtues I mentioned, the belief in the total goodness and rightness of creation, its perfection and its harmony. However, here is the main difference: **in hope we recognize that everything is perfect at this moment, while at the same time it needs to grow and develop**. So when we accept things in holy hope we are not saying that they ought to remain the way that they are. That includes ourselves; that includes others; that includes the world. So sometimes there are all kinds of people who are demonstrating, reforming, because actually they hate the way things are or they hate the system or they hate politics or they hate the economic situation. But that's a mistake. If we work hopefully, we accept the way things are, but we move on to something else. **Hate is a negative energy and its expense is always wasteful**. Hope helps us garner everything together and recognize that although **God is asking every one of us to make a contribution, it doesn't depend upon any one of us**. The outcome of the world will not depend on us alone—even the outcome of our own lives does not totally depend upon us!

Now I mentioned a minute ago, greed. Part of what God wants us to realize is that **everything belongs to God**. Now greed starts when I say, “No, this is mine!” See, the feeling of mine and me—especially mine—for greed. People do not share their wealth even if it’s legitimate wealth that they actually earn. They don’t share that with the poor, with the Church, with the work of God. They are greedy! And **greed is a way of stealing from God in a moral sense**. It’s not legally theft, but it is actually morally stealing.

Well, in a similar way when we recognize that everything—although I am required to do something, but it doesn’t rest on me. That’s hope. Actually **God is at work everywhere right now**. God is working through President Bush; he is trying to work through Saddam Hussein; he is trying to work through Prime Minister Blair; he is trying to work through the president of France and every other country. How open they are is another matter, but be assured God is working. It’s the great law of justice, to eliminate weapons of mass destruction and also unnecessary deaths. **God is on everyone’s side** all at once. Now think about this! It’s a pretty difficult thing because we usually think in terms of this or that, but there is no this or that with God. That’s one thing Christ insisted, that God is Father of all people, not just the Israelites. Now many people in the world don’t get this and don’t want to get it, but it’s one of the things Jesus taught. **Hope is the perception that this is actually true and is an ongoing reality**.

Now if you remember in Scriptures there is the story of Martha. Remember Martha? Jesus comes to visit Mary and Martha. And Mary sits at Jesus’ feet, and that’s very nice, isn’t it? She is very hospitable. She is going to entertain him, right? Don’t you want to be entertained when you visit someone? Martha, of course, doesn’t like this at all. Isn’t that right, Lucie? What does she say to Jesus? She says, “Jesus, tell my sister to help me. Don’t you see that she has left me with all the work?” Kind of bossy, right? Well, **when we don’t have hope, we think of everything in terms of ourselves**. I think everything depends on me just like Martha thought everything depended upon her. She didn’t see, first of all, that Mary was actually doing something very important; mainly, she was being hospitable; she was being a hostess. And Jesus says, “O Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things.” Why? Because **a lack of hope creates anxiety and worries**. “You are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needful—only one thing is needful. Mary has chosen the better part.” Mary here is the symbol of hope. She is listening to Jesus. She is acknowledging his power. At this particular moment Jesus was actually just chatting; he was visiting; he was not actually working. You understand? But she is acknowledging that. She is seeing everything connected, and she wants to be part of his audience. She wants to be his audience.

Martha was stuck on herself, and that made her bossy. Now this is both envy and pride at work. Those are the last two deadly sins. Envy—**envy is comparing others to oneself**. I said earlier that it is a denial of love if you are comparing yourself. You don’t compare yourself! Martha did that. She compared herself to Mary. She said, “Look, I’m the one who has to do all the work.” That’s also **pride, picking oneself out, accentuating one’s own contribution, and one’s own suffering, one’s own troubles**. There are people like this. It’s because they don’t have hope.

The fact is **God is really the one who is doing it.** And each of us are not really doing anything; we only do it because God has enabled us to do it, and we have the talent. I heard a man talk on the radio last night. He is a wealthy businessman. He is now 81 years old. He is suffering from some sort of an ailment whereby he has to have oxygen all the time. But he is really full of joy. And he says, “You know, I’m very wealthy.” But he says, “I have to admit I was very fortunate. God led me to all kinds of different people, and I credit God with the fact that I am successful.” And he says, “In my opinion, every single person who has ever been successful has had a lot of help. It’s been from God originally and through other people.” Now I think this man was a very truthful person. He was living with the sense that God is really doing it. He said, “Now sometimes the way God works may not be what you like. So you get cancer—I am on oxygen all the time, but,” he says, “I am perfectly happy right this way, right now. God has chosen to work in my life in this particular way, it’s fine with me.” He says, “The trouble with a lot of people is they say”—he is talking about believers—“too many believers say they are accepting God, but they’re doing so begrudgingly.” Well, then they don’t have any hope. They aren’t really recognizing God doing it. They say, “Oh, I’ll accept this.” They may think that’s faith. Well, faith—actually true faith leads to hope, but that’s not hope; and, therefore, that’s probably not faith either. They begrudgingly go through life, and in many ways they are probably like the elder son we started with, who is outwardly very faithful, but inwardly not going to fit in at all. I hope you see how these are all connected. **Love and hope and faith—they’re all interconnected. They feed each other. They support each other. We just have to break them apart to talk about them.**

Now we have all kinds of **plans in life.** These plans come from our own imagination, what some psychologists call our “egos.” That’s not necessarily bad; however, if we want to become happy and healthy people, they can’t become the basis of everything. There are a few cases perhaps that some people plan on something and then it all works out. There may be a few cases that have worked that way. Most of the time it doesn’t. **So if you really want to be a healthy, happy person, you have to be flexible.** You have to be willing to drop your plans and find something else at work, always having hope that God is at work all the time bringing about what is best for all those who believe in him.

So as we look at hope, we look at one another and ourselves and we see we are just at a particular stage; we are going to grow beyond it. **The eventual goal is to be full of God and God to be all in all.** So what if today things aren’t perfect in that sense. It just means we’re not at the goal. There’s nothing wrong with that. For example, take a golf game—now I don’t play golf, but I know people who play golf and love it. There are some men I know who play golf every day, if they can. Well, now do you think that the best time of the game is when it’s all over? No, they enjoy the playing. Well, **we have to enjoy life that way—the process.** So everything isn’t great. That’s all right. It’s perfect anyway. **So we have to go beyond our own fixations and habits and perceptions.** We are the ones who have to perhaps look differently.

**Objectively, hope is the harmony and purpose of God at work, and hope is actually the realization of this harmony in our own souls.** So we are not saying that we don't need improvement and the world doesn't need improvement. It sure does, but that's part of its perfection. So we have something to do; we have something to contribute. That's part of why everything is perfect the way it is. **So when we say it's perfect, we don't mean it's statically perfect. We mean it's perfect in a dynamic sense, moving closer.**

Now **without hope** what happens? We start to **feel inadequate, incompetent. We feel we're failures.** The truth is even if we are personal failures, that's no problem; the world will still perfect itself through the grace of God. And usually when we think we're failures it's because we're judging ourselves by artificial standards, not God's standards. But Jesus said, "The road that leads to perfection is winding and narrow—winding and narrow, and few," he says—this is kind of a dire statement—he says, "few choose to follow it. But many choose to follow the road to perdition, which is wide and easy." So **our own agendas are not important. God's agenda is important.**

So one of the emotions also that the lack of hope causes in us is **anxiety.** I mentioned that with Martha. So if you find yourself driven by anxieties, which are sort of indefinite, vague, you don't know what's wrong, you need prayer. Usually it's nothing. The fact is that sometimes what holds us back from hope is nothing other than pride itself, because ultimately our salvation does not come from within ourselves; but some people cannot accept that. So **the greatest anxiety really comes from your own pride,** when we get stuck on our own agenda because of our own pride. It holds us back from letting go. Pride, according to St. John of the Cross, is the worst of all sins because it kind of makes each of us a god unto ourselves. So in a sense, from that viewpoint, **hope might be the greatest example of holiness because we really let go and let God be in charge of our lives.** We have to be **aware of our bossiness and our desire to be controlling.**

At the same time we have to realize that **virtues might seem to us unnatural.** We talk about humility. We might say that's wimpy. No, humility is not wimpy. When we talk about comparing ourselves, accepting each person's uniqueness is not copping out. It's actually an insight into reality. It may seem unnatural. In fact, all of these virtues I'm talking about might seem unnatural. It might seem unnatural to trust even though you don't see something. It may seem unrealistic and unnatural to love what is invisible. But it isn't unnatural; **it's supernatural. It's a gift from above.** And that's what we have to keep in mind that **all this depends upon God, God's unfolding work in our lives.**