

Care and Feeding of the Soul: How to Nurture the Spirit in this Day

The Reverend Dr. Catharine Randall Christ Church, Middle Haddam Jan. 29, 2012, 1 Cor 8: 1-13

Paul says to us today, "Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies." St. Francis made this teaching his motto, and he phrased it this way: "*Ego dormio, et cor meum vigilat*: Let ego lie down, and let heart be vigilant." In the care and feeding of the soul, the Christian virtue known as spiritual poverty is the one most to be focused on. If we can look our sin in the face and become forgiven sinners, if we can put ourselves on the shelf, then we can learn this last, most important quality: spiritual poverty. This does not mean that we need to be poor. It means that all that is the world must count as nothing in comparison to our love for Christ, our willingness to heed his urgings, our desire to conform our hearts to his.

In days gone by, spiritual poverty was, like chastity and obedience, a *monastic* virtue. One of the greatest contributions of the Reformation to Christian practice was that it opened access to piety to *lay* people. You don't have to be a monk or a priest to have direct access to God: ALL Christians do. And all Christians can coach themselves in the care and feeding of the soul. After all, there are manuals written for everything else: how to change the oil in your car, how to upgrade your computer files, how to apply mascara ... why not a manual for the care and feeding of the soul? So here's a quick list of Ten How-Tos to try:

1. --learn to both love yourself AND deny yourself regularly. Do this for Jesus. That means, be truly at home with yourself as you are. Then use that self for good. Those times when a person

comes into your life and needs something from you, and it's inconvenient or even downright scary and no! you don't want to do it, you just want that person to go away—you know those times?! I do! They happens lots. And I always groan inside but then Jesus tells me to shove myself aside, and stick my self on the shelf and I ask Jesus to do in me and for me what that person needs. THAT is spiritual poverty and I only wish I could practice it more willingly, more often. So love yourself, and then, deny yourself. Do it as to the Lord.

2. --pray without ceasing. At least ten times a day, and then many more, make a reminder to yourself to stop and pray. To not only be “present in the moment”—to truly see the beauty of a sunrise or to hear your child’s laugh—but also, consciously, to thank Jesus for that gift.

3. --be a listening ear. The Gnostic gospels tell us that the Holy Spirit impregnated the Virgin Mary through her ear. The WORD entered into her in this way, and became flesh. Listen to what Jesus is saying, listen to what others are asking of you, listen for the Word that you should give back to them. Be a receptacle for God to dwell in. St. Paul says to us today, “If anyone loves God, he is known by Him.”

4. --Refrain from aspects of this culture that will wound your soul. Notice that I do not say that they MAY wound your soul; I tell you categorically that they WILL wound your soul. Too much violence in films, too much media coverage, too much virtual reality and too little contact eye-to-eye -- incarnational!-- , with your fellow man, these things warp and distort. They wound the Spirit. Jesus tells us in Holy Scripture that there is one sin, one sin only, that will NOT be

forgiven, and that is to quench the Spirit. Keep your temple clean, let the Holy Spirit shine through you. No smut or stains should impede that light.

5. --Abstain from actions or words that may hurt or mislead others. Speak truth in love. St. Paul tells us today that all is permitted us, but *not* all is *healthy* for us. We may not mislead another; we should not sue in court; we must honor the integrity of the Holy Spirit dwelling in ANOTHER'S heart, not just in our own. Jesus is NOT OUR "personal pocket Jesus": he loves us all, and we must learn to SHARE that truth and vision. Do not place temptation in your brother's path, nor should we obstruct his progress with our judgments. St. Paul warns us against causing, "through [our] knowledge, ... [t]he ruin [of] the brother for whose sake Christ died." Do not ever dare believe that you are the only one in possession of truth.

6.-- KNOW that you have the power and the ability to make these choices, these spiritual decisions. We are all creatures of energy. Haloes are just a word for energy vibrational fields. If you don't believe me, try touching me when I am lifted up in the Spirit. You'll feel it. You've seen it. I've seen it in you. TAKE that energy, which is from the Holy Spirit, and direct it, unswervingly, unflinchingly, into every aspect of your life that requires healing and refocusing. This is a gift from God, and by His grace we are able.

7. – NEVER Stop cultivating mystery. Never cease asking for miracles.

8. -- "My me is God, nor do I know my selfhood save in Him," says St. Catherine of Siena. Find a daily time to pray, and a place to which you always go. Read spiritual literature, light a candle, look at an icon, sing a hymn, read your daily office in the Book of Common Prayer: the care and

feeding of the soul requires an intentional and patterned PRACTICE. Make this your custom, so that you cannot greet the day without first having prayed. Make it even more important than my morning pot of coffee is to me!!

8. --“Believe by your very ground,” says Jacob Boehme. Let the earth you stand on be Jesus. Let the self you are aware of be Jesus, Let the sky over your head be Jesus. Let all things be saturated with the Spirit. St. Paul says today, “there is one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him.”How do you do this? Believe it, practice it, and it will become so.

9. -- Conceive of your soul as a very real and precious thing. It is, both real and precious. Work with this notion so that you are gradually able to care for your soul at least as well as you care for your body. Physicians have documented that something—at most, they will call it energy—leaves the body at the moment of death. This soul is our companion through this present life, and it will bear our identity in Christ into the life to come. No journey you take will ever be more significant. Care for, and feed, your soul.

10. –Intentionally, consciously, frequently, offer healing and blessing to others, whether by word or touch or silent prayer. “The lives of mystics are lessons in ... rebirth into a new relationship with power. Through anguish and ecstasy, mystics gain access to the Spirit, access so profound that they are capable of breathing an energy, like a Divine Electricity into ordinary words and acts. They become able to heal others through acts of genuine love, forgiveness and faith” (Carolyn Myss) We are empowered to heal and to bless by Jesus. In fact, he *commands*

us to do so: "Feed my sheep. Tend my flock. Love one another. If you did it for the least of these," Our Lord tells us, 'you did it for Me.'"

-