

Smart® Retreat – Finding Your Story in God’s Story

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You can’t know Your Story in God’s Story until you know God’s Story. You can understand God’s story in the Bible and find it summarized in this document.

Colossians 3:23-24

“Whatever your work is, put your heart into it as if it were for the Lord and not for men, knowing that the Lord will repay you by making you his heirs. It is Christ the Lord that you are serving.”

Human dignity comes from being born in the image and likeness of God, Genesis 1:27. Human dignity is for all mankind. Therefore, we must respect every man. Any thing that comes between us and God is a false idol. When Adam and Eve chose to eat the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge they turned on God in original sin, and their offspring turned on each other.

Every action we take brings us closer to God and to our true self, or further from God and away from our true self. God gave us free will so that we can be and become whatever we choose. The more actions we take that bring us closer to God, the more dignity we feel. Dignity means feeling good about our self, and about our fellow man. It is God centeredness that brings dignity.

The Power of Satan is Vulnerable

The Old Testament shows that every action obeying God is good and brings us dignity, and disobeying God has a consequence too. Disobeying God is sin. Sin is knowing God’s will for us and not choosing it, for example choosing some thing of this world that harms our fellow man. But the power of Satan is vulnerable due to its misalignment with God. For example, God’s people were in slavery in Egypt and were called out of slavery by God to go into the Promised Land, Numbers 27:12.

The Power of God is Greater Than the Power of Satan

God’s people asked permission of Pharaoh to leave, Genesis 12:7; Exodus 6:4. Pharaoh did not listen and plagues were sent, then notably the first born was killed except in homes where the sign of God was written from blood of a lamb (Passover), Exodus 12:3-13. God showed His people a way to escape. Even Pharaoh could not stop them as the seas parted to let God’s people cross but then the seas closed and Pharaoh’s army was thwarted, Exodus 14:21.

God led His people to the Promised Land. In those days, people took land away from other people depending on who was the strongest. God promised his people that those in the Promised Land would flee them like men flee bees, not because of their swords, Joshua 24:11-12. Rahab, the Canaanite at Jericho who hid Israel’s spies, said everyone was afraid of Israel, Joshua 2:11. They had heard of God’s people leaving slavery in Egypt and what happened to the Egyptians.

Force is Not the Answer. Submitting to the Will of God like Mary (New Testament), Mother of Jesus, Did, is the Answer

God is not unpredictable. God is just. For example, rejecting God is the reason Jericho was destroyed. Jericho had human sacrifice. God takes no pleasure in holocaust. Yet God will not be put in a box. Before the Israelites attacked Jericho the people of Jericho saw a river part its waters, Joshua 3:16-17. Trust rests on God’s actions in history.

God is nothing but good. Those who followed God’s plan were held up. God is righteous, just and holy, Isaiah 5:16. When people’s lives please God, even their enemies are at peace with them, Proverbs 16-7.

One who takes a sword in the name of God better be certain that it is God calling him. Before entering the Promised Land, God called the people before them in the Promised Land to join his people or fight.

Avoid evil, do good: seek peace and follow it, Psalm 33. And even those Israelites who were on the inside with God could become on the outside with God. The consequences of leaving God were exile, Kings 1; Kings 2. We are punished by the very things with which we have sinned, Wisdom 11:16. “My flesh trembles with fear of you; I am in fear of your judgments,” Psalm 119.

And after Jerusalem became the Israelites’ home, God’s plan of mercy for all may be seen in Psalm 86 (87) “Jerusalem, mother of all nations I look to you, Lord, for help: come and save me, Lord, for I seek refuge in you. Its foundations are set on the sacred mountains – the Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the tents of Jacob. Glorious things are said of you, city of God! I shall count Rahab and Babylon among those who acknowledge me. The Philistines, Tyrians, Ethiopians – all have their birthplace here. Of Zion it will be said ‘Here is the birthplace of all people: the Most High himself has set it firm.’ ”

Summary of the Old Testament

From the beginning we see examples of man using free will to sin, and other men using free will to get closer to God and to grow in dignity. Leaving God is sin that results in punishment ultimately in Hell, but not if we choose God’s mercy.

To be God’s people means we must be faithful. Our story in God’s story is like a house of our own inside of God’s house. We are always to try to build our house inside God’s house. If we are not faithful we will go to the outside of God’s house. If we are on the outside and hear the word of God we can get on the inside.

The New Testament Informs the Old Testament

It was impossible for man to fulfill all 613 commandments of the Old Testament, except by Jesus “who spoke with authority,” Matthew 7:29. “To fulfill the law,” Matthew 5:17, Jesus “was handed over for our transgressions,” Romans 5:25, “for he will save his people from their sins,” Matthew 1:21. “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved,” Romans 10:9. “So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead,” James 2:17. Moreover, the power of God in the sacraments including the Eucharist is associated with us receiving the Holy Spirit, Acts 19:6. “For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power,” 1 Corinthians 4:20. The power of God to love all is awesome. “By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth,” Psalms 150:1. Nothing withstands God’s will.

“At the cross God broke the power of sin and pronounced sentence on it,” Romans 8:3. Suffering as Mary did in full contemplation of what would happen to her Son, (and then living thru that suffering) to the degree that she had to be assumed into heaven, tells us about suffering. Mary kept her innocence. If she could, we can. Praying as Mary did is an essential way to come to God.

Mary Intercedes for Us

Mary was holy and blessed. The Virgin Mary was the ark of the new covenant. Christ, the living God was in her womb, then crucified, Luke 1:30-38. No wonder Mary intercedes for us when we suffer. No wonder before Christ’s coming we were kept out of the Kingdom by violence (because we did not have the Word made flesh). No wonder that after Christ’s coming, people were entering the kingdom by violence. They (our brothers) do violence to others. (Those) others suffer (willingly accepting their cross). They (our brothers) become a receiver(s) in light and in truth in love and in certainty.”

That We Might Profit From Suffering in the Image of Christ

Jesus bore his cross. “Shall I not drink the cup that the Father gave me?” John 18:11, Ephesians 2:4-7. Every person is given their cross to bear, Luke 14:27, 9:23; Matthew 16:24,10:24; Acts 17:11. Humans can cooperate with God, Rev. 1:5–6; 1 Pet. 2:5,9. We do this thru our cross by sharing in Christ’s sufferings, Matt. 16:24; 1 Pet. 4:13. Paul calls himself a “co-worker with Christ,” 1 Cor. 3:9, and says part of this is that he is crucified with Christ and shares in Christ’s sufferings, 2 Cor. 1:5; Phil. 3:10.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God, Matthew 5:9. God has vowed to change the world thru His suffering little ones. Paul declares the power of salvific suffering: “In my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church,” Colossians 1:24; Galatians 2:20. By our suffering at the hands of evil men we draw them to God in us. Mystery of the Sacred Heart. By the cross we empty ourselves, Philipians 2:7, from things that keep us from God. We will know we have suffered enough when we suffer no more.

Conclusion – God’s Plan for Us

Each of us has a gift from God as a manifestation of God, 1 Corinthians 12:7 7:12-14. God talks to us thru that still, small voice within, to give to us our own unique area of meaningful expansion for ourselves that we might find our story in God’s story. No one else has our work to do. Each of us has work that only we can do. We may know our story is in God’s story, because of our joy. A great adventure is to find our story in God’s story. We can do that by accepting our cross, Luke 9:23.

To stay on track we can be in a small group that stays together. God will be present in every small group gathered in God’s name, Matthew 18:20. Our cross, our weakness, becomes charismatic thru a manifestation of God’s power, Romans 8:26-27. We are invited to be church in Christ, 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, to finish the work of Christ thru our hands, Matt. 16:24; 1 Pet. 4:13.

Those communities that formed in the early church knew Christ. This knowing Christ made them endure all for each other. For no man has greater love for his fellow man than to lay down his life for another, John 15:13. Being in community with those who believe it is important to stay on track in facing our concerns about our handling of something coming to God is to be in a charismatic cross community.

Christ has a Monopoly as Messiah

Christ, the new Paschal lamb, died at a time of a feast of Passover. The Old Testament has 44¹ prophecies about the messiah (most notably Isaiah 53:1-9 written 700 BC) and 53² fulfillments in the New Testament prophecies.

¹ Prophecies: Genesis 3:15; Micah 5:2; Isaiah 7:14;Genesis 12:3;Genesis 22:18;Genesis 17:19;Genesis 21:12; Numbers 24:17;Genesis 49:10; 2 Samuel 7:12-13;Isaiah 9:7; Psalm 45:6-7;Daniel 2:44; Isaiah 7:14; Hosea 11:1; Jeremiah 31:15; Isaiah 40:3-5; Psalm 69:8;Isaiah 53:3;Deuteronomy18:15; Malachi 4:5-6; Psalm 2:7; Isaiah 11:1;Isaiah 9:1-2;Psalm 78:2-4;Isaiah 6:9-10; Isaiah 61:1-2;Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 5:5-6;Psalm 2:6;Zechariah 9:9;Psalm 8:2; Psalm 41:9;Zechariah 11:12-13; Psalm 35:11; Isaiah 53:7;Isaiah 50:6;Psalm 35:19;Psalm 69:4;Isaiah 53:12;Psalm 69:21;Psalm 22:16; Zechariah 12:10;Psalm 22:7-8;Psalm 22:18;Exodus 12:46;Psalm 34:20;Psalm 22:1;Psalm 109:4; Zechariah 12:10;Isaiah 53:9;Psalm 16:10;Psalm 49:15;Psalm 24:7-10;Psalm 68:18;Psalm 110:1;Isaiah 53:5

(Isaiah 53:1-9 Who would believe what we have heard? To whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? He grew up like a sapling before him, like a shoot from the parched earth; He had no majestic bearing to catch our eye, no beauty to draw us to him. He was spurned and avoided by men, a man of suffering, knowing pain, like one from whom you turn your face, spurned, and we held him in no esteem. Yet it was our pain that he bore, our sufferings he endured. We thought of him as stricken, struck down by God and afflicted, but he was pierced for our sins, crushed for our iniquity. He bore the punishment that makes us whole, by his wounds we were healed. We had all gone astray like sheep, all following our own way; but the LORD laid upon him the guilt of us all. Though harshly treated, he submitted and did not open his mouth; like a lamb led to slaughter or a sheep silent before shearers, he did not open his mouth. Seized and condemned, he was taken away. Who would have thought any more of his destiny? For he was cut off from the land of the living, struck for the sins of his people. He was given a grave among the wicked, a burial place with evildoers, though he had done no wrong, nor was deceit found in his mouth.)

² Fulfillments: Matthew 1:20; Galatians 4:4; Matthew 2:1; Luke 2:4-6; Matthew 1:22-23;Luke 1:26-31; Matthew 1:1;Romans 9:5; Luke 3:34; Matthew 1:2; Luke 3:33;Hebrews 7:14; Luke 1:32-33;Romans 1:3; Hebrews 1:8-12; Matthew 2:14-15; Matthew 2:16-18; Luke 3:3-6; John 1:11; John 7:5; Acts 3:20-22; Matthew 11:13-14; Matthew 3:16-17; Matthew 4:13-16; Matthew 13:10-15, 34-35 Luke 4:18-19; Matthew 27:37; Mark 11:7-11; Matthew 21:16; Luke 22:47-48;Matthew 26:14-16; Matthew 27:9-10; Mark 14:57-58; Mark 15:4-5; Matthew 26:67; John 15:24-25; Matthew 27:38;Mark 15:27-28; Matthew 27:34;John 19:28-30; John 20:25-27; Luke 23:35; Luke 23:34;Matthew 27:35-36; John 19:33-36; Matthew 27:46; Matthew 27:57-60; Matthew 28:2-7;Acts 2:22-32; Mark 16:19; Luke 24:51;Matthew 22:44;12 Romans 5:6-8;

Sacraments

The sacraments flow out of salvation history. The word Sacrament came from the Roman word sacramentum meaning a religious oath of sacred loyalty which if not adhered to would put one in divine trouble. For example every Roman soldier gave his oath to his emperor who declared himself divine and specifically the soldier gave his oath to his general, receiving a tattoo on the soldier's arm meaning the soldier had given the oath.

The Catholic Church absorbed the term Sacrament around 200 to 300 AD referring meaningfully to the divinity of Christ, true God and true man, affirming Christ's body, blood, soul and divinity given for all in Christ's death on a cross but risen triumphant from the dead and who instituted the sacraments of the new law. The sacraments are taken in faith, but validated by extreme value of grace for the common good and the good of the one who takes the sacrament.

There are seven sacramental mysteries of grace accepted by the early church tradition as instituted by Christ as extraordinary means to avail ourselves of God's universal love of all mankind. Citations following each brief description are from Catechism of the Catholic Church. "God's love excludes no one." 605

Baptism

– to re-inherit the Garden of Eden I become a new creation overcoming Adam and Eve's original sin by being "raised (again) to the dignity of the royal priesthood by Baptism." 1322

Eucharist

– portable church of Christ within us "by which the Church is kept in being." 1325

Confirmation

– to stir up God the Holy Spirit within one "clothing him with power from on high so that he may be his witness." 1304

Confession

– to overcome moral relativism which falsely, interiorly argues no guilt, then no forgiveness is needed. If no forgiveness is needed, then God is not needed. Overcoming moral relativism, Confession "is called the sacrament of conversion because it makes sacramentally present Jesus' call to conversion." 1423

Matrimony

– to bring familial tenderness into the world. "Although the dignity of this institution is not transparent everywhere with the same clarity, some sense of the greatness of the matrimonial union exists in all cultures. 'The well-being of the individual person and of both human and Christian society is closely bound up with the healthy state of conjugal and family life.'" 1603

The Anointing of the Sick

– to heal us and to prepare us. "Illness becomes a way to conversion." 1502

Holy orders

– to perpetuate the sacraments in the church "until the end of time." 1536

Beginning with the time of Christ, those who avail themselves of the sacraments over long periods of time become interiorly transformed thru relationship with the body, blood, soul and divinity of Christ, in deep God centered sense of community with all groups of which they are a part a manifestation of God's love, thru the living Word in the Bible taken as a whole. "They are made capable of doing so by the grace of Christ and the gifts of his Spirit, which they receive through the sacraments and through prayer." 1692

Imagine if a friend invited you to a vacation and prepared a place for you to stay. Then when you arrive, you say you are staying someplace else. The sacraments were prepared by Christ, your friend, for you, as your place to stay. By choosing the sacraments we affirm our friendship with Christ. We go from the Roman top down model to the Christian bottoms up model of all inclusive love.