

HEADING HOME

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In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. My Lord and my God, I firmly believe that you are here, that you see me, that you hear me. I adore you with profound reverence; I ask your pardon for my sins and the grace to make this time of prayer fruitful. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.

This life of ours is a journey back home, a journey that is filled with challenges. The Lord gave his Apostles clear instructions for their journeys, so that they would be well prepared to handle the difficulties they would inevitably face. How important it is for us to be ready to handle life's challenges in a deeply Christian way.

More specifically, we need to integrate our intellect, our will, and our heart in such a way that we not only see clearly the goal of the journey, but that we desire it intensely. And we learn to put our whole heart and soul into the daily effort to get there. We need to consciously work at this, it is not automatic. Let us ask Jesus for the desire for continual conversion. For the grace to resist complacency.

St. Bernard wrote 1000 years ago, "Whoever does not aspire to be better, does not deserve the name 'good.'" The moment a person no longer desires to be better, that person stops being good. Centuries before that, St. Augustine in the fourth century, he wrote, "Always aspire to go higher, to keep improving. The day that you say, 'that's enough, I've reached the pinnacle. No more need to improve,' that day is when you are lost, because you will start going down." And so the need for this constant conversion.

With regard to our journey back home, that is to Heaven, we need to work hard on a daily, very conscious basis, on the three players, so to speak: our intellect, our will, and our heart. All three need to be formed, they need to be working in synchronization in order for us to truly flourish. Let's take in the first place our intellect.

St. Paul urged the Ephesians "to attain to the deep knowledge of the Son of God, to perfect adulthood, to the full measure of the fullness of Christ, that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro, and carried about by every wind of doctrine." He's talking about this ongoing formation of the intellect to attain to the deep knowledge of the Son of God to continue to grow in our knowledge of Jesus Christ, to perfect adulthood, to the mature measure of the fullness of Christ, to such an extent that as we go about our daily life, we can have before our mind's eye, the example of Jesus who came here in order to save us and in order to show us what it means to be fully human.

Furthermore, we need so badly a solid doctrine. Otherwise, as St. Paul puts it, we run the risk of being children tossed all over the place carried about by every wind of doctrine. We know instinctively that our intellect craves knowledge. The more we know something the more we can want it.

The more we know about the purpose of life and the ingredients of a life well lived, the more focused we can become in pursuing that style of life. And thus, the importance of our intellectual formation, including the cultural formation that helps us to become “experts in humanity,” to use that phrase from St. John Paul II, “experts in humanity.”

What happens when there is a lack of intellectual formation? Well, case in point, let us take the lack of culture afflicting the younger generations. Hours spent on screens instead of reading classical literature has taken its toll. A commentator recently bemoaned, “No young person should go without learning about Odysseus and the sirens, about Richard III’s maniacal eloquence, and Ana Karenina’s errant love.”

These stories and characters would have become for the young ones, equipment for handling the trials of adulthood, stretching the horizons of their experience, and giving them better role models. In terms of the faith, it makes no sense to be content with an eighth grader’s knowledge of the teachings of the Church.

And in how many people we know, fully formed adults are going about their faith, or lack thereof, because they haven’t graduated beyond eighth grade in terms of their knowledge of the faith. Far too many people blithely write off millennia of wisdom, saying that they simply don’t accept it. Recently, a well-known clinical psychologist based in Toronto, pointed out how illogically that position is.

He imagined a conversation with someone who says, “Well, I just- I don’t buy any of it. I said, “Okay, fine.” So, you’re taking some of the smartest people who’ve ever lived. We can add as examples, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. John Paul II, Pope Benedict, Francis, and a lot of people in between: centuries of wisdom. Furthermore, you take centuries of tradition. And you place yourself above all that and say, “I’m sorry, but I just don’t buy it.”

And this psychologist, well known author goes on to say, “Well, basically, who do you think you are that you think you’re that much more intelligent than all those people?” That’s a great point. Well, let us renew our determination to feed our intellect and our interior life with study. Let us take our spiritual reading really seriously. And while we’re on that topic, the history of the Church. How important it is for us to go deeper and deeper into what really took place down through the centuries so that we not fall victim of black legends.

Who knows how many times we’ve been confronted by someone saying, “Well Galileo, the Crusades.” We have to be ready to answer and to help them to have a more nuanced vision of what really happened. Well, that is the formation of the will, excuse me, the intellect. Then there comes the will. It is not enough to know about our destination, Heaven, we have to seriously want to get there. This requires mental toughness,

the strength of will to follow through with our resolutions. It requires self-dominion, to get out of bed in the morning and stick to our schedule.

A few minutes ago, we mentioned Odysseus and the sirens. That episode in Greek mythology can help us to confront a new menace to our journey. You will recall from your reading of Homer's *Odyssey*, that Odysseus, or the Latin version of his name, Ulysses, well he who was the king of Ithaca, was desperate to get back home to Ithaca, to his wife Penelope, after an absence of twenty years.

He was sailing back along with his crew. He was the king of Ithaca. And he knew that one of the challenges that he had to get past were the sirens. They were a deadly menace. The sirens were human-like creatures with an absolutely irresistible song. So, any sailors who went anywhere near them are drawn to them like a magnet and then ended up shipwrecked.

How did Ulysses or Odysseus handle it? He said to his sailors, "Tie me to the mast. And tie me so tightly that I can't move." Then as they got closer and closer to the sirens, Odysseus said to the sailors, "Okay, now, plug your ears with wax, so you can't hear a thing." They all did. Then came the sirens, reaching, calling out to them, singing. Odysseus heard that and he started squirming, doing whatever he could to break free, but he couldn't. He was tied so tightly.

He cried out to the sailors saying, "Let me free!" They couldn't hear him. They couldn't hear the sirens. And thanks to that, Odysseus and his crew sailed past the sirens, on to safety. And you may be thinking, what does that have to do with the will? Well, we are faced by modern day sirens. What a shame it would be to allow our day, our life, to be shipwrecked by the sirens of YouTube, a Netflix series, or Tik Tok.

How many people in the evening say to themselves, "I'm really tired. I'm just going to watch one very brief YouTube video. And I'm going to have a single potato chip." Then an hour later, or more, and one entire bag of potato chips later, they stumble to bed way too late, knowing that the next day they're going to be a shipwreck. All because of a lack of will power.

As one commentator wrote, "Never has it been easier to pick up your phone to text a friend, only to fall into a mindless Internet black hole." Well, we ask Jesus to liberate us from these sirens, these modern day sirens. The third player we have to confront and pray about is the heart. We have to learn how to want with passion.

St. Josemaria says it all in this point of *The Way*: "You tell me yes, that you want to. Very good. But do you want to as a miser longs for gold? As a mother loves her child? As a worldling craves honors? Or as a wretched sensualist seeks his pleasure? No? Well, then you don't want to."

Take the case of Simon Peter. He really wanted to with passion. Not only did he grasp the importance of Jesus for His life, not only did he desire to follow the Lord, but he did so vehemently, which is a very strong English word. It's a word that St. Augustine used to characterize Simon Peter.

We have seen the importance of forming our intellect, our will, and our heart. Dietrich von Hildebrand adds a very important point, "These three players, they should cooperate, but each must respect the specific role and domain of the other. The intellect or the will, should not try to try to supply what only the heart can give. Nor should the heart arrogate the role of the intellect or will.

If, for example, someone wants to ascertain a fact, but does not consult his intellect, but instead claims that his heart tells him with the fact is, he has opened the door to all kinds of illusions. He has pressed his heart into a service that it can never effectively render and has allowed its improper use to stifle his intellect."

Well, that kind of thing happens all the time and the result could be characterized as an emotional mess, someone just being guided by their feelings. As we mentioned at the outset, life is a journey filled with challenges. Let us zero in on two current attitudes that can easily lead to shipwreck. The first is FOBO, F-O-B-O. FOBO, a word you've never heard of, because it's not really a word, it stands for "the fear of better options."

The person who coined this term was observing his classmates not that many years ago. And he came to the conclusion, "These classmates of mine are constantly optimizing. They're waiting to make commitments to anything, because once they make a commitment, all the other possibilities are gone, and so they never choose one thing."

A very superficial example would be someone that you, let's say you make an appointment to have lunch on Friday, and that day, at 11am, you get a text message from that person saying, "I can't make it." The reason that person says I can't make it is because he or she has suddenly come up with a better option. Someone who's going to pay for the lunch, or a better restaurant, more interesting person. With that kind of approach, well, you can imagine. Even more to the point, more deadly, are the big choices.

There are people, young ones these days, who will say, "Well, I've been living with my boyfriend, my girlfriend. We've been together for ten years. But we're still not sure." You're not sure if you want to laugh or cry. You're not sure about what? Pope Francis in recent years has been emphasizing that life becomes truly rich when we make commitments. You have to make a commitment. We can't go forever, leaving all options open.

Well, a related virus is a misguided notion of happiness, one that is radically self-centered. A very wise person recently wrote, explaining, passing on recent conversations with a few college girls at a well-known Catholic university, people from really good families, good formation. And this person writing relates the following, "I have been speaking to a few women who are generally well-formed on dating and marriage.

But I've been taken aback when virtually all of them say that the most important quality they seek in a future husband is, quote, 'someone who will support me emotionally in whatever I want,' end of quote.

And this person who's been married for 50 years goes on to say that what she had expected from these three college girls was that they were looking for fidelity, trustworthiness, or being committed to his God and family. To say, or to look for, someone who will support me emotionally in whatever I want is far too self-centered- is radically self-centered.

The antidote comes along from St. John Paul II way back on the first of June 1980. Early on in his pontificate, he said, "True love is in its essence, to give oneself to others. Far from being an instinctive inclination, love is a conscious decision of the will to draw close to other people. To be able to love truly, it is important to be detached from everything, especially from oneself, to give gratuitously. This detachment from oneself is the source of a balanced personality. It is the secret of happiness."

Well, what a contrast. Detachment from self is the source of a balanced personality, the secret of happiness. Detachment from everything, which allows us then, to make this conscious decision to draw close to other people, ultimately, to make of ourselves a sincere gift. Well, let us finish by turning to Our Lady who is there guiding us, she who is the Star of the Sea, guiding us in this journey of ours, this journey back home. Mary, we ask you to spur us on to seek daily conversion so that we may not only see the goal with greater clarity, but also to desire it with all our heart.

I thank you, my God, for the good resolutions, affections, and inspirations that you have communicated to me in this meditation. I ask your help in putting them into effect. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. God bless you.



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