Talk 2

A Pear in the Desert

Ephesians 1:7

Let’s begin with prayer this is buy Clara Maria Martini, to God the father of mercies light of source and all good, lord of history and of the universe, goal of the entire human journey we lift our praise. To you father we praise in the church and in the world, in earthly history and in heaven. May heavenly mother of Jesus praise you. May the angels praise you. May the thrown and dominions praise you. May the saints praise you. May our deceased praise you. May everyone we meet praise you. That we all will be able to unite “in him” acknowledging the fullness of your glory which your son communicates to us. In the grace of the spirts who animates our hearts.

We spoke in our first talk about taking rest, as this retreat begins as it unfolds, Sister Pushfa’s constant encouragement to me is my invitation to you. So please take rest as much as possible dwell in Psalms 46 and 47, be still and patient and in doing so know that God is near. Now also that God has been near. If you want some other text to pray with you might go to the gospels and see Jesus taking rest. Watch Jesus slip away from the crowd, the busy craziness of life, to pray quietly God his father. See Jesus take rest in the gospel of Mark at chapter 1 verse 35, right before that, Jesus has been busy healing others and he’s leaving on town and going out to a quiet place. In the gospel of Luke chapter 6 verse 12, Jesus has missioned 12 of his friends and he is discerning and then he takes rest. And again in the same gospel at Luke chapter 9:28 see Jesus on a hill side, he is in a quiet place and he has just a few friends beside him. Something else in the package happens that is very interesting, the transfiguration. See Jesus the son God being still and know that God the father is near.

The stories I tell in this retreat has two themes, one of that is the spiritual exercise, the exercises, these spiritual exercises were written by Saint Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit order the Society of Jesus. It is a book of meditations, like a workbook in many ways to which to work through prayers and suggested readings and ways of thinking about our life and guide for which to make good decisions. The exercises in their traditional form, can be experienced and enjoyed over the course of 30 days of silence, the time period of around a month. And the exercises are structured in four different weeks. The first week helps to dispose us and it helps to assess out internal lives, our interiors and name the ways God is and isn’t present with us, the ways we except goo in our lives or resist God. The second and third weeks offer away to know Jesus intimately and personally and profoundly. We begin with the nativity of Jesus. We move through life and then his fee. And then we experience in a very close way the passion of Jesus, his death, his resurrection. And then in the fourth week we experience the invitation to move forward in life. I provide a description of these exercises which is a bit simplistic, there’s certainly more sophisticated ways of talking about these different weeks and movements. But you’ll recognize these at work and at play in these talks offered here in this retreat.

The second theme is that of being on pilgrimage. Throughout the course of the weekend I will ask you about you own pilgrim journey. Pilgrimage is an important aspect of Jesuit spirituality. And to the men of the Jesuit order, whoever and wherever they are, it is a dynamitic of formation and training from day number one. Jesuits around the world live differently form one other. And do ministries that span across an incredibly wide spectrum. Long time veterans of recruits like this or even more recent returnees, know from the cast of Jesuit characters who come here to be with you, the differences of the ministries and the personalities of the Jesuits are important factors for the different styles of retreats. Yet in the very first year of Jesuit life, from here in St. Paul or down in Sau Paulo Brazil or anywhere and as men who are social workers or grade school teachers, professors, perished priest, medical doctors, lawyers, day laborers, and so much more, all participate in the three same formative aspects of Jesuit basic training, the spiritual exercises, the hospital experiment, and the pilgrimage.

The spiritual exercises of Saint Ignatius, we’ve just looked at those briefly, is the one of the three which is the most significant. Jesuits spend over a month in silence discerning personal and powerful ways God has been present in their individual lives. Through the experience Jesuits each and all befriend to Christ. In the course of the month they watch him from different angles, healing other and teaching and instructing. They walk with him from one town to another to shore lines, into city centers, into temples and markets. And they talk with him, asking Jesus about his life and work, his teaching, and they each tell him what they have been up to themselves.

When the months is over and the exercises end, Jesuits then go out and get their hands dirty. Each Jesuit is asked to spend a couple of months, in a hospital for instance, or community of disabled, physically caring for those who need help. I was sent to Spokane, Washington where I lived for some time with a group of individuals with Down syndrome in a large community. Such communities were found by “7:00”, and our very well respected and honored by the writer and theologian on “Ray Newton”. Thirdly the Jesuits goes on Pilgrimage. As the experience of the exercises was so important and the hospital experience so appropriate, this experience the pilgrimage was the most exciting, as least for me. And I would like us to focus on it for a few minutes. I think you’ll see how this fundamental Jesuit boot camp represents an aspect of daily life for any of us, except for its rules however. I need to explain some of the stipulations of the Jesuit version, each individual is sent away from the program to travel away for six weeks, it’s no vacation though.

Each Jesuit is given the need here some of 35 dollars and a one way bus ticket. 35 bucks and a one way ticket on the greyhound. In those days we had playing cards, we weren’t allowed to take them with us. I suppose novices today might have cell phones. We left behind our credit card if we had them and we boarded the bus with some destination. As we prepared ourselves for the experience, we noticed rather pronounced feelings. Many of us were thrilled and excited. As excellent and as meaningful and Jesuit “8:25” program is it is about the closest thing contemporary Jesuits have which is similar to the monastic life, and Jesuits are not Monks. We were brisling to be out and about, to breathe more freely after our months together in the “8:39”. We even started to notice how closely we had been living with one another. Community life is one of our best assets. It keeps us connected, supportive of each other, resourceful in talents and accountable. But you might rightfully imagine the conflicts which a rise, moments when tempers flare.

My group of classmates was particularly friendly and the longer we lived close together in community the more we began to see particular traits and corks of character emerging. And when we saw these we ceased the moment to tease on another with pranks. I’m almost embarrassed to do this but allow me if you will to digress in the truly mundane for just a few minutes. The pranks were rather insubstantial; one guy could barely save his life to make it on time to Morning Prayer. He has to seek into the chapel late and try not to be noticed. We began changing the book marks in his breviary or misplacing it to other pews in hope that his page turning or searching might get him noticed by the staff and in trouble. Another told the same jokes over and again. Eventually with a signal we would all laugh before the punchline came. I myself was not spared. In many number of ways I was vulnerable to the scrutiny of community to life. My classmates saw that I like pares. Apparently with a little ceremony, I suppose, I would have one every night after dinner. This was dually noted, so pares began to show up in strange places, in my coat pockets, in my mail box, under my pillow. The pare prank was harmless but if anything it shows you that we were ready to get out of town.

We were ready to board pilgrim bus, destine for pilgrim places. We also noticed that the pilgrimage caused a lot of anxiety. What would happen? In the raining weeks before the pilgrim goodbye, each of us was called into the director’s office for a conference with the staff. One of my classmates wanted to work with Haitian refugees. It was 1995 and the republic of Haiti and the Caribbean was unstable and desperate, the recent 2010 earthquake places 1995 on a shallower context of course. Haitians even then were risking their lives to be in new ones on the shores of Miami. That’s where Eric went, to poor Haitian settlements in Miami. Another wanted firsthand experience of ruler poverty in America. He was sent to Appalachia he hiked the Appalachian trial and entered some communities of local people, learning about their lives and helping with daily task. Some guys went to Catholic shrines in the countryside or inner-city parishes.

When it came time for my conference the director said “So what on you mind, what are you thinking about, imagining, praying with?” I explained that I wasn’t at all sure that I about going to a specific place or working with a particular group of people or even doing a certain job. Doing something certain like this didn’t seem attractive. After the meeting without determining the destination, one of the priests on the staff, the minister, he said “Daniel why you just go out and bring back some good stories.” I still needed a bus ticket to go somewhere. So he gave me one destine for San Francisco. After a number of days on the bus stopping in Laramie, Salt Lake City and Sacramento looking for places to stay overnight. I arrived on the west coast and I volunteered my time at St. Anthony’s dining room in San Francisco’s raw inner-city district the Tenderloin. Rightly named it is a third world quadrat within a great first world city, run by Franciscans. The daily work of the foundation is inspiring to anyone. After almost two weeks I felt like it was time to move on. And for the time had volunteered at their place, the people of Saint Anthony’s foundation bought me my next bus ticket; I boarded a bus heading to Phoenix.

After a long ride to Los Angeles and a connection for the next bus, that I nearly missed, I settled into a relatively empty bus that was headed east from the coast to a hot desert. I wasn’t certain about what will happen in Phoenix and where I would stay so I was anxious and preoccupied. I was also low on funds. The 35 buck had long expired and whatever money I came across in San Francisco was almost spent. Also on the cramped, long, and loud commute to LA I was tired and crabby. Just as this next bus was pulling out of the terminal, another bus driver boarded. He was being transported for as different depo on different bus. There were all sorts of empty seats everywhere but he sat next to me and he wanted to talk. I tried to burry myself into my window but he persisted. Eventually I resolved to set aside my irritation and I gave this guy a few minutes of my attention. The conversation that unfolded was just remarkable. This man had an important stuff on his mind. He wanted to error some struggles and of anything wanted to think out load about his life. He wanted someone to listen. I remember feeling so privileged to hear about such meaningful things in his life. He was grateful that I keep listening and so was I. Eventually he asked, what’s up with you? What’s your story? I told him about the Jesuits and the Pilgrimage and the time at Saint Anthony’s, what I learned from people who live on the streets, what learned about a very special aspect of a very special ministry. I told him I regretted leaving Saint Anthony’s. I was going to Phoenix. I was scared about it and anxious and uncertain. He wanted to know about the Pilgrimage so I told him about the crazy rules. After a couple minutes he looked up at me and said I want to help, “I want to help you on your Pilgrimage and be part of it in some way. I want to give you something.” I was embarrassed I protested this awkward moment insisting that I was fine. He shook his head adamantly. He said “I don’t have much to offer but I can give you something.” He reached down to his knees, he lifted his briefcase to his lap, he unlatched it and he reached in for what would be my gift. Throughout the entire Pilgrimage so many people helped me in so many ways. Generosity was bold and unreserved but this man’s gift was so simple and so small. But I think it was the most significant of those pilgrim weeks. There was something so personal about it as if this guy knew me. From his briefcase on a bus in a hot windy desert he handed me a pear. Know there’s no way in the world that my classmates from the “16:01” could have orchestrated this or maybe they could have. With this pear I stunned but I the courage to name it as a grace. And to say God knows me and is with me.

I repeat with how we started taking rest is the most important thing to do. If that’s happening if rest does indeed begin to quite your life, I encourage you to think of your life as a pilgrim journey. If anything think of this place this holy retreat place as a stop along the way. For some of you it is an annual stop along the way and a place to refuel you soul. As you are able to think about your life as your pilgrim journey, one of search and quest for God, I invite you to look at the ways God has indeed been present in the past year or throughout the course of many years. How and where is God present in you? Think of the small ways god reaches out, the personal gestures trough which God seems to know you, who you are and what you need, in the wilderness of life, what does God offer? If you want to stay with the Psalm that we considered earlier or the moments finds quite place to be alone with his father, by all means do so. If you are ready for some new verses I invite you to pray with Ephesians at chapter 1 verse 3 to 13. And in particular keep an eye open for the middle verses, verses 7 and 8 and find Saint Paul’s admission that God gives each of us so much. Paul will ask the question, can I count the gifts of grace God has been giving me? A reflection question you can ask yourself likewise as this what does God give me along the way? It is the same question Paul is asking. In your pilgrim journey how is God present? In the pilgrim journey of life, what is God offering? How does God know you and what you need? Ephesian Chapter 1 verses 3 to 13 might be a good place to start. Here are some other passages you might pray with Psalm 139 is a classic golden oldie of the Jesuit retreat. At Psalms 139 be reminded how good made you uniquely and specially and that the word of Psalm as your own. God you made me in my mother womb, you create my in most self. At Isaiah Chapter 43 verse 4, listen to God tell you are precious in my eyes and I love you. At Jeremiah 31 verse 4, hear God say I have loved you with an every lasting love. I have continued to be with you in faithfulness. New and short passages for your prayerful rest Psalm 139, the question from Ephesians, and two beautiful gestures from two great profit Isaiah and Jeremiah.

Let me conclude with another poem. This one is by another one of my favorites. Maria Rainer Rilke, a German existential poet. It tells us about being created by God and bout being on a pilgrim journey accompanied by God. God speakers to each of us as he makes us and walks with us silently out the night, these are the words we dimly hear. You send out beyond your recall. Go to the limits of you longing. Body me flare up like flames and make big shadows I can move in. Just let everything happen to you beauty and terror. Just keep going no feeling is final. Don’t let yourself lose me. Nearby is the country the call life. You will know it by its seriousness. Give me your hand.