

St. Leo Abbey
Benedictine Circle

The Road to Eternal Life by Michael Casey

Chapter 24

Tent of Meeting – The tent is not for humanity but rather the tent is for God's journey with humanity. He is in all our lives calling and waiting. We need not search for Him because He is already there with us waiting in His tent that He brought with Him to stay with us while we are searching through the desert of the world. He resides in our being and as we travel from place to place God brings His tent so that He may always reside with us no matter where we are. He is always there on our way to the Promised Land. **Where is God's tent in your life right now, waiting for you to realize He is already there with you? When will you enter this tent?**

Searching for God – We need not search, rather we are the ones that need to be found, for God is already there waiting for us, but in our belief that we are not with God we get distracted by the things of the world in our very search for our belonging with Him. We are lost in the desert, lost in the dunes, getting lost in a world we do not know. We are the sheep, and our shepherd, Jesus Christ, searches the desert for us. But because of our distractions we continue wandering further and further away from our shepherd as He seeks us in the world. We need only to be still and sit in the dunes and He will find us. And putting our existence on His shoulders Jesus will bring us back to the Tent of Meeting and the creature will be with its Maker. **Where are you in the vast world of lost dunes leading our shepherd further into the void to bring you to God?**

Prayer – It is by prayer that we call out to Christ from our lost location of being that He will be able to find us and bring us to God. In prayer we do not ask for changes to others or to the world, rather we ask for changes to be made to us. Prayer is what settles our soul, it is what brings us to our center so that we may be still interiorly, for it is impossible to be still in the physical sense. While praying we get to taste the presence of God in our lives and this brings us to the desire to be with Him always. Through prayer we are nourished by the presence of God and like a beacon this draws Christ to us so that He may share the way to God. **Do you call to Christ to bring you to the Father, and when He does come to you do you have the faith/trust to let Him carry you instead of you following Him and getting distracted again?**

God's Garment – As we reach out and touch the being that is God we find that as we reach His outer garment through our prayer through our calling out to Him, we sense His great peace and immense love. It brings us to wanting more, but the more we receive of God the more unsatisfied we become because only in death can one truly be with God. God's realm is not here in this life, hence the tent He travels with us in. However, the more we desire to be with God, so to by the ways of love, God desires the more to be with us, for this is the unconditional love of our Creator for all His creatures. **How does your experience of God bring you to wanting to be with Him all the more?**

To God by Christ – St. Benedict is very clear that it is by the Son that we are brought to the Father. Jesus is the way to God, He is the truth of God and Jesus is the light by which God illuminates the world. Jesus brought to God, through His very life, the knowledge by experience of what it is like to be human. Therefore, by Christ, God too knows through experience our troubles of life as humans. Through the divinity of God, God became human, and we all became reconciled to God by God. Through God's humanity, humanity may become divine. But Christ is the mediator between God and men, we need Him. In the life and teachings of the Word made Flesh we have our way to God and we have our being worthy of God. In God's mind we are worthy, all humanity is worthy, of His immense love and being, that His why He sent His only Son, that is why He desires our salvation through the life of Christ and our union with Him. **How is it that in your life God makes you feel worthy of His love?**

Chapter 25

Fight the Good Fight – Perseverance through living a good life is the sure way to God's heart. But what is the good life and how do we live it. The Good Life as defined by Christ is to love as He loves. Sure, many say they do this but too few actually do. To love as Christ did is to have unconditional love for all things made, not just the things that are convenient or easy but most importantly the things that are difficult to love is where we perfect our love. It is a battle of the self to live this kind of love. Humanity only loves what is in close proximity forgetting what is beyond one's self, but Christ loves beyond the self. Example – what do you think when someone driving in front of you cuts you off or is going too slow. What should one think in this situation. LOVE. It is hard to love in this situation, it is a battle against what one wills for themselves. Loving as Christ loves is a battle against humanity, our own humanity, because humanity wants to divide where love, and Christ too, desires to unite. Instead of always looking for differences in people and situations try finding the similarities. This reconciling union of love should be a fight of nonviolence, not a hostile takeover. Over time this practice of unconditional love will bring us closer to God's will and that, as Christians, is the goal of being in union with God. It takes time and everyday is just practice. Practice doesn't make perfect, perfect practice makes perfect. **What are some situations where you think Christ might act differently than your first impulses and next time can you have the patience to act differently?**

Purity – True purity is not possible for humans in this life because of original sin. Instead we have God that purifies us through our experiences. As gold is purified by fire, so too the human is purified by tribulations. Our purity is not the result of anything we do. Our purity is a result of God's work in us, however we need to allow this work to take place. I suppose that is what we need to do to attain purity in this life, allow God to work in our lives. Only by His grace can anyone become pure once again. Purity is not only a union with God but an aligning of one's

will with the will of God, to desire as God desires. **Where do you stray from God's will in your life?**

Purity of Heart - is what comes from our pure intentions of our actions in a world of good intentions. Intentions are only as good as the actions we take on those intentions. A pure heart will do what one intends to do. A pure heart is one that loves. A pure heart is what Christ meant when He said, "they will know you are mine by your love." It is our love that unifies our being, that makes each person one whole person, not divided by pretenses of lust and greed but a unified whole by love of Christ. Again, Benedictine spirituality is centered on Christ. If Christ could be described in a single word it would be love. **Where can you practice purity of heart more earnestly in your life?**

Love – The guide to obedience is love. In love there is trust and in trust there is faith, and neither can be had in their fullest capacity without love. With love, we take a leap of faith and then comes trust, we can only come to trust through our faith and the acting on the experiences of that faith playing out positively. As we see these positive outcomes more consistently then love can grow based on faith and trust. We become obedient to God because we love Him through our faith in Him and through our trust in His goodwill. In our love for Him we find love for all creation, and in time this shapes our obedience to the will of God. In love we come across truth by Wisdom, this is a result of our union with God. With love we are honest, and this brings clarity, this removes the stain from our being and our eyes begin to see without the filth of humanity's ego. Here is where we align our will with God's will. **In God's love for you where can you find His will in your life?**

Wisdom by Ben Sira 24:3-7 – "From the mouth of the Most High I came forth, and covered the Earth like a mist. In the heights of Heaven I dwelt, and my throne was in a pillar of cloud. The vault of Heaven I compassed alone, and walked through the deep abyss. Over waves of the sea, over all the land, over every people and nation I held sway. Among all these I sought a resting place. In whose inheritance should I abide?" **Where has the being that is Wisdom covered you in your life?**

Chapter 26

Morality – Our actions are a result of our thoughts, but sometimes our actions can sell us out of what our thoughts really are. But one on the path to God is unified in thought and action, the two no longer oppose each other but come into union with our interior being and desires for life. Some have moral actions but are betrayed by their thoughts, this is not as evident as the reciprocal but the one who sees all, that is God Almighty sees the truth in one's being. Our minds become impure with the rationalizing of all our faults into being something acceptable. If one must reason with themselves that they are right chances are they are not right. The heart remains the undisturbed phone line with God, however this too can become tainted by obscurity if we are not honest with ourselves over a period of time. The heart does not do the

thinking, it is unbiased as to what is right. Our minds have a tendency to betray us through murmuring and if our minds betray us then it is possible that our actions will too. The summary of morality is whether or not we sin and we all sin, therefore no one is perfectly moral. **Where in your life can you sin less and thereby align your will more closely to God's will?**

Discerning of self – What Casey calls self-knowledge comes from a discerning of the self. Discernment is not limited to those taking religious vows. We too take vows with God pertaining to who it is that we are, all people do. This is how we identify our self, by our relationship with God. We are a result of the things we see in others that we dislike and that we like. If we don't like a quality in another person, chances are we won't take those actions our self. And vice versa. But beyond this we make our self according to the way we see the world and based on our interpretations of our experiences. This creates our biases and perceptions of reality. It is a human response to evaluate the world, if only on a subconscious level, and begin to base our lives on what we perceive through our hearts and minds. Based on this we come to know who it is we are. Most people see the world through the view of what they want it to be, of forcing their ego on what is in front of them. With God we allow the world to imprint itself on our being, not the world of humanity, for that is fabricated by the wills of men and women, but rather the world created by God. This is the self in purity when we allow God's world to imprint itself on us, for we too are created by God and not the wills of men and women. Pray to God to show you your self the way He sees you. When you stand in front of the mirror imagine that the mirror is the mind of God projecting what it is He sees back to you. **Where in your life can you be more honest with yourself and thus with God?**

Overcoming fantasies of self – Our imaginations run rampant. It is important that we perceive our self as a cumulation of what others see us as, as God sees us, as what we want to be, and of what it is our conscious tells us we are. The conscious is the voice of God. Other's interpretation of us is legitimate but may or may not be accurate. When I was in art school my paintings always looked different to the viewer that what I thought it was. They did not see what I saw and I did not see what they saw. As the painter, as with our self, I saw the painting from the very beginning, I saw its entire development. My painting teacher always said try to see your paintings as if you have never seen them before. I could not see the final image, all I saw was layers of paint, or characteristics/personality traits/memories/experiences. Now, if our imagination runs rampant we will not see the layers accurately much less the final picture coming together as a unified whole. The view others have of us may be able to aid us in the final picture of who our self really is. Then again it may not. I am sure we all have illusions of who we are, that is the job of the ego. If we can lose the ego, then maybe we can see the final image of our self accurately without the assistance of others. Until then the aid of others to discern our self is not always a bad idea. Hence spiritual directors. **Who is it that you imagine your self to be and who is it that God knows your self to be and how can you reconcile the two?**