

# Formation and Identity Retreat

Session One-Wednesday Afternoon

## Overview

Robert Mulholland says that spiritual formation is “the process of becoming like Jesus for the sake of others.” But the Jesus we become is one that is embodied in our skin, with our gender, our emotional capacities, our gifts, our intellect, our family, and our ethnic culture. To become like Jesus for the sake of others is to become our truest and best self. Our true self knows she is dearly loved by God. She feels safe and filled with compassion, kindness, creativity, gentleness, humility, and patience towards others. In the presence of Jesus, our true self is also able to compassionately engage our egocentric self, (our narrowly focused internal manager who seeks to protect, promote, and provide for us alone).

This retreat is focused upon the theme of Formation and Identity. You will have three sessions to digest what you have experienced over the past three days. In addition you will be able to reflect on two transformative experiences from the life of Jacob.

You will need your Bible and journal. Art material will be provided for those interested. Turn off your cell phone and find a quiet place where you can relax. If you feel sleepy, try taking a walk. The materials provided are a suggestion. Be open to holy tangents.

## Invocation

*Father, I abandon myself into your hands; do with me what you will. Whatever you may do, I thank you; I am ready for all, I accept all. Let only your will be done in me, and in all your creatures. I wish no more than this, O Lord, into your hands I commend my soul; I offer it to you with all the love of my heart, for I love you, Lord and so need to give myself, to surrender myself into your hands, without reserve, and with boundless confidence.*

*Charles de Foucauld*

Take some time to settle yourself. Invite the Lord to direct and guide your thoughts.

## Pay Attention to Your Life

Reflect upon your time at the conference so far. In your journal make a list of the things that have stirred something in you. (You can also use a sheet of art paper and create a simple image for each experience.) It might be a conversation with someone that warmed your heart. It might be an idea from a talk that inspired you. It might be an experience that encouraged you. It could be a dream you had or a longing you felt. Include in this exercise not just the positive experiences but the unpleasant ones as well. For example, in the past three days, were any of the following emotions stirred in you: anger, disgust, fear, sadness, loneliness, or lust? Prayerfully focus your attention on three or four of these experiences.

- What emotions were stirred in you?
- Rummage through your memory and think of the times when you have experienced similar feelings.
- Even if the emotion is negative, what is the positive message the Lord wants you to know. (For example if you felt anger, it might be because you felt exposed, vulnerable, overlooked, or out of



*Santa Catalina Island Wildflower  
Photo by Paul Byer*

control. The positive message might be that some part of you wants you to pay attention to their concerns.)

## Scripture Reading

<sup>12</sup> Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. <sup>13</sup> Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. <sup>14</sup> And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

*Colossians 3:12-14*

## Reading for Reflection

God speaks through the things that stir us. God speaks through the things that excite and energize us as well as the things that depress and deplete us. So pay attention to your strong reactions and feelings, both positive and negative. The Spirit speaks through both. Imagine, for example, that as I review my day, I remember how irritated and defensive I became when someone criticized me. I pay attention to that, asking the Lord what he wants me to see and know about my response. How was God present to me right then? What are God's invitations to me? As I pray through I may discover that what the person said was true, and now I can explore what I'm protecting by being so defensive.

*Taken from Sensible Shoes, a Story About a Spiritual Journey*

Progress in the spiritual life commences when a person abandons a life built on mindless extroversion or on blind obedience to instincts and unconscious mind-sets. Instead the seeker after God begins to take notice of the promptings of conscience and the first stirrings of spiritual desire...A certain amount of drama is necessary to help us make the transition from a comfortable, easygoing, and relatively mindless existence to a careful, industrious, zealous, and even fervent life.

*Michael Casey in Living in the Truth, page 71*

It is as if each human person constitutes a committee constantly sitting to decide life's questions and the behavior desired in a given situation. This committee has many members within, each voice a particular slant—our fears, feelings, dreams, and hopes, our history and relationships, our memory, our various sub-personalities, and our reason. Hopefully the chairperson of that committee is reason, deeply guided and influenced by affectivity. Descriptively the task of a human person appears to become more and more integrated, whole, together, within that on-going meeting. All the voices need to be heard and listened to. Ultimately, at their best, people make choices that chart the direction and, over time, develop the person. Since this ability and responsibility to choose is at the heart of human motivation, the spiritual director aids another to reach a harmonious decision from this complex and fascinating committee.

*Dyckman and Carroll in Inviting the Mystic, supporting the Prophet page 33*

In a way—nobody sees a flower—really—it is so small—we haven't time—and to see takes time, like to have a friend takes time. So I said to myself—I'll paint what I see—what the flower is to me but I will paint it big and they will be surprised into taking time to look at it—I will make even busy New Yorkers take time to see what I see of flowers.

*Georgia O'Keeffe*

## Benediction

*Restore me to liberty, and enable me to live now that I may answer before you and before men. Lord, whatever this day may bring, your name be praised. Amen*

*Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906-1945*