

Five Conferences in a One-Day Retreat

The Way: The First Conference Begins at 8:30; break at 9:45 AM

Opening Prayer

Gospel Reading: Matthew 7:13-21

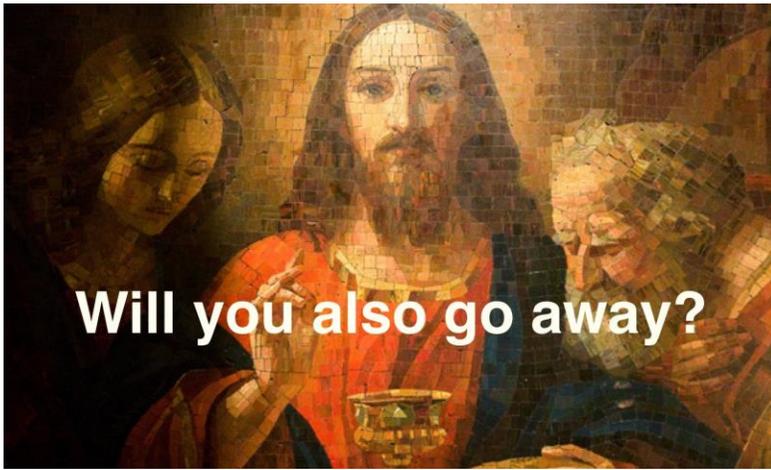
Consider two questions:

1. What do I truly desire in life?
 - a. What do I prioritize?
 - b. Where do I spend my time?
 - c. With whom do I associate?
 - d. What is my North Star?
2. Is my faith important to me?
 - a. Where does my faith fit among my priorities?
 - b. How much time do I dedicate to it?
 - c. Do I give my Divinely-created purpose much thought daily?
 - d. Have I drifted too far to the right or left?
 - e. Is there a fire in my heart for Jesus Christ?

Each one of us is called to holiness. God designed us with a desire for Him which can be satiated only by Him. Along our spiritual journey, we must recalibrate by examining our consciences daily and honestly; by frequenting the sacraments; by attending Mass faithfully; through devotionals and sacramentals; by fully entering into His Presence through retreats, Adoration, and contemplation.

Jesus bids us to take up our cross and follow Him:

1. This is a day by day, moment by moment set of decisions to do His Will, not ours.
2. We live in the hope of eternal beatitude with God. "Salvation" connotes "the life of the world to come."
3. Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and we must sometimes forsake all others to remain in the Truth, the Way, and the Life.



The Devil knows how weak we are and how much we prefer the easy, the convenient, and the instantly gratifying. He thus tempts us with that which seems to offer the broad, smooth path, hoping that we don't know that it leads to destruction.

There are only two ways to live: with God or without God. There is no middle way. We cannot equivocate and proclaim that we believe "this" Truth but not "that" Truth. God gives us the free will to choose and He will respect our choice. He will not force you to choose the Way.

Three points on our spiritual journey:

1. Baptism, through which we are infused with supernatural Grace.
2. Our lifetime.
 - a. This is our opportunity to seek God and to do His Will.
 - b. We will experience periods of challenge and consolation, surfeit and drought.
 - c. When we fall, we are called to pick ourselves up and begin anew.
3. The Resurrection of the Dead at the end of time

St. Augustine quotation from his Confessions:

1. People desire to praise God and are fashioned for it
2. Our restless hearts find respite in God alone

Man is a composite of body and soul

1. The soul, being immortal and made in the Image and Likeness of God, ought to be tended well.
 - a. Spirituality is the norm of human life.
 - b. According to the natural order, man must live in the Spirit.
2. The body, the Temple of the Holy Spirit, has needs and desires. We must satisfy our needs so as to tend the body well; we must not give in to our desires to an inordinate degree.
 - a. Inordinate is when the desires are bad for us - alcohol, tobacco, pornography, etc.
 - b. Inordinate is when we over-indulge a desire that is good for you: food, drink, exercise, etc.
 - c. Inordinate is when you under-indulge a desire that is good for you: food (anorexia, bulimia), exercise (lay around all day, not exerting yourself at all).

Spend some time considering (and journaling, if you desire) the Reflection Questions on pages 14-15.

Consider the quote: "Try God. If you don't like Him, Satan will always take you back." Do you find this to be true? Funny? Frightening?

Preparing The Way The Second Conference Begins at 10 AM; break at 11:45

Repent and believe in the Gospel, for the Kingdom of God is at hand.

Opening Gospel: Luke 3:1-6

Repent: metanoia - turning away from sin and toward God.

1. Preparation and repentance are necessary for salvation.
2. Repentance has been called a "second baptism," for each time we repent, confess, and make satisfaction for our sins, we receive an influx of the supernatural Grace received at baptism.
3. Repentance cultivates in us humility and a desire to please God; it heightens our awareness of His Presence.
4. For a good confession, consider these stages:
 - a. Examination of conscience in the light of the Holy Spirit
 - b. Confessing frankly all of the sins of which you are conscious, in the strength of the Holy Spirit
 - c. Relishing the renewed Communion with God, in the love of the Holy Spirit
 - d. Sober vigilance/watchfulness for sin and temptation, in the peace of the Holy Spirit

Examination of your life with one key question: How well am I doing the Will of the Father? I suggest daily examination at the end of the day with three views:

1. What did I do well today?
2. What could I have done better?
3. What did I do wrong today (where did I sin by omission or commission)?

Difficulties, trials, struggles, challenges, temptations, and weakness are part of our human condition. We cannot avoid sin if we don't look at ourselves each day to assess where our weaknesses lie. Forewarned is forearmed! Know your temptations and sins so as to avoid committing them again.

There are three steps toward sinning:

1. Temptation - this in itself is not a sin when you fight against it.
 - a. Temptation to commit a sin
 - b. Temptation to avoid doing good
 - c. Temptation can arise from habitual sin
 - d. Temptation can arise from a sinful, tempting environment - avoid "occasions of sin,"
 - e. Temptation can be an assault from the Devil
2. Delectation - when you delight in the idea of the sin - this is in itself a sin. Jesus tells us that when one looks at another lustfully, we have already committed adultery with them in our heart. We can delight in the idea of a sin not yet committed or we can delight in the idea of past sins.
3. Commission - this is when you actually commit the sin or omit to do the good which is called for.

Small sins can be more dangerous than large ones, as the smaller ones are generally justified or rationalized as "I'm only human," or "I'm a good person. This sin isn't that bad." These small sins build up and cloud your judgment so that you lapse into habitual sin. The metaphor used is that "fewer people have perished from ferocious beasts than from tiny microbes" - an apt metaphor for our times of COVID. I heard the same sentiment from WW II soldiers who succumbed to flu rather than battle wounds.

Observe the trend of our heart, our thoughts, words, and deeds.

1. Avoid the near occasion of sin - watch your playmates and your playgrounds

2. Maintain custody of our eyes - what do we watch on TV or other electronic devices? Are we watching what is true, good, and beautiful, or do we watch salacious images?
3. Maintain custody of our ears - to what do we listen? Do we listen to ungodly music? Are our ears assaulted by curse words? Do we entertain gossip? Do we allow the usage of God's Name in vain without attempting to correct the speaker?
4. Maintain custody of the heart - avoid anger, pride, envy, avarice, lust, gluttony, and sloth/acedia. Be content with the tasks God sets before you. Fret not at frustrations and apparent interruptions; these may be the very moments of your encounters with God. Sanctify the space and time in which you find yourself through immersion in prayer.

Confession The first step is our regular examination of conscience. Thus will we be best prepared to make our formal confession to the priest. You may write down your sins so that you don't forget any. The Fathers of Mercy offer an Examination of Conscience upon which you can "check off" the sins you find and use that during your formal confession.

1. Be sure to make a sincere and complete confession of all sins of which you are aware.
2. If you forget to confess a sin, your confession is still valid; if you are unaware of a sin, your confession is still valid. The prerequisite is true contrition and a firm purpose of amendment to avoid sin in the future.
3. If, however, you deliberately hide a sin and refuse to confess it, not only is your confession invalid, but you have committed a further sin by refusing to confess all sins of which you are aware.
4. You cannot blame others for your sins. You can put your sin in the context of your life, but you cannot hold another responsible for your sins.
5. You cannot confess the sins of another.
6. Frequent confession helps to ensure that you will not be taken unawares at the hour of your death. You will be adequately prepared to meet your Maker.

Confession to a priest is a Biblically sound doctrine.

1. When Jesus healed the ten lepers, He instructed them to "show themselves to a priest." He was here referring on the natural level to the Levitical priests, but on a deeper level, where leprosy of the body can connote leprosy of the soul (sins), Jesus is ratifying the authority Catholic priests have to forgive sins. (Luke 17:14)
2. "Whatever you bind on Earth shall be bound in Heaven; whatever you loose on Earth shall be loosed in Heaven." (Matthew 18:18, John 20:23)

Holy Communion The Eucharist is an encounter with our Divine Healer. Once our relationship with God has been rebuilt through sacramental confession, and we have completed our penance and have a firm desire to avoid sin and to do good, Jesus Christ comes into our hearts in Holy Communion to heal and sanctify us. He reinforces our contrition over our sins and strengthens our love for God and our desire to please Him. The Eucharist is the "medicine of immortality." (St. Ignatius of Antioch, second century)

Sober Vigilance/Watchfulness We cannot relax our vigilant examinations of conscience. If after Confession you walk away whistling Dixie and do not take care to avoid sin, you will soon find yourself in a worse position than before. Jesus alluded to this in the parable of the demon cast out who returns with seven others worse than he to infect the person anew. (Luke 11:24-26)

The Church Fathers use the term spiritual warfare; in other words, a constant battle against the sins of the world, the flesh, and the devil. In Sirach, one of the Books of Wisdom in the Bible, we are told: If you would serve the Lord, prepare for battle. (Sirach 2:1) Your guardian angel stands ready to help you strive to avoid evil and do good.



Importance of a Father-Confessor and a Spiritual Advisor

Find your strength in the sacraments of the Church. Confess regularly to one priest if possible; thus we hold ourselves more accountable. The priest may see patterns of sin in us of which we are unaware and he can guide us. Pride can blind us to our faults, but a good confessor and a good spiritual advisor will guide us along the path of perfection.

Despair Despair of God's mercy is the one unforgivable sin against the Holy Spirit. We cannot limit God; His forgiveness is an unfathomable, inexhaustible treasure. When we refuse to accept God's forgiveness, we condemn ourselves. If we are too proud to seek God's mercy, we condemn ourselves. No one and no sin is beyond God's mercy.

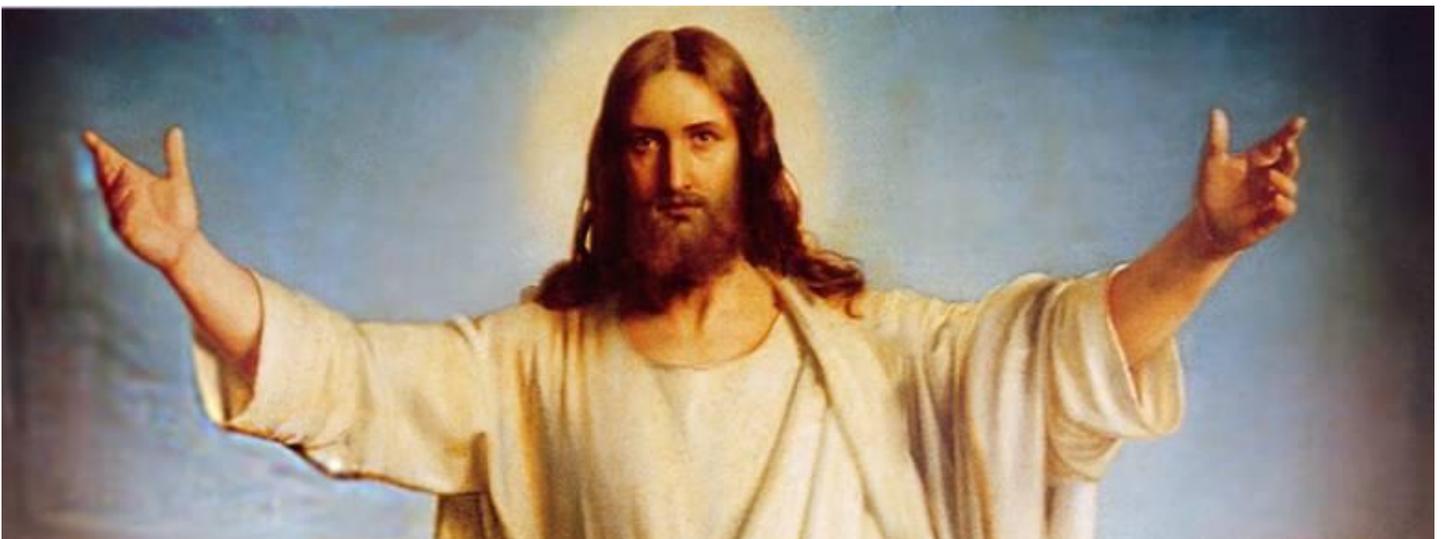
Repentance is the foundation of a healthy spiritual life.

1. We turn away from sin and toward God.
2. We train our hearts to follow Jesus and keep our hearts open to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. Repentance helps to cultivate the values praised by Jesus in the Beatitudes: humility, purity, contrition (mourning over our sins), gratitude and praise to God. We will stumble because of concupiscence. But we persevere as we keep our eyes on the prize: Christ Jesus and eternal beatitude with God.
3. We avoid despair, complacency (I'm a good person), and relativism (I'm better than *him* or *her*).

Consider the Reflection offered on pages 30-32. What struck you most about the story? What role(s) have you played in your life similar to the roles in the story?

Consider the Reflection Questions on pages 32-33.

Consider the Icon of the Prodigal Son on page 34.



Remaining on the Narrow Way - The Third Conference Begins at 12:15; ends 1:45 PM

Prepare for warfare with the unseen forces; although they are invisible, they are no less real than visible enemies. Fallen angels can be relentless in their attacks; they do not tire, as we do, as they have no bodies. They can only flag in spirit.

Opening Gospel: Mark 7:14-23

Generally, our blind spot is the same as Eve's: distrust of God, too much emphasis on self. When Satan whispered: "Did God really say..." Eve's heart was ready to believe that God was holding out on her. She grasped at what was forbidden. Ironically, as Satan declared, "You will be like God," he was distorting the truth: Adam and Eve were *already* like God, made in His Image and Likeness. This is not to say that they were God, but they were like Him.

Pride and self-interest are weak areas upon which the devil presses. Today, we see the results in that people deny the nature God gave them; people declare "my truth" and "your truth" while denying objective truth; and they judge themselves (favorably, of course) rather than submitting to God's laws and judgments.

Since thoughts give rise to deeds, we must nurture the positive thoughts and dwell on the "true, the good, and the beautiful." (see Philippians 4:8-9) Our thoughts can be exploited by the devil to turn us away from God.

1. Knowledge of the politics of the day is a Christian duty, but immersion into it to an unhealthy degree, when we despair of the injustice and insanity, draws us away from trusting God.
2. Anxiety about a personal situation may be a natural response to a worrisome situation, but dwelling upon the anxiety to such an extent that we are eaten up with worry is, again, a failure to trust God.
3. Acknowledging a wound caused by our own sin or that of another is the first step towards healing, but to make that wound your *identity*, when you are steeped in self-pity and see yourself as a victim, is a denial of the power of our Divine Physician.

Reiteration of the three stages of sin:

1. Temptation - not yet a sin when we struggle against it
2. Delectation - delight in the idea of the sin - first, the fleeting thought; we dwell upon the thought until it becomes an image; we revisit this image with delight.
 - a. "Fusion" is dialoguing with the temptation.
 - b. "Imprisonment" is when the temptation consumes our thoughts. Our hearts are torn by this tempest and we can lose our peace and our focus on prayer. "Acedia" or "sloth" is the loathing to do the right thing; imprisonment can whirl away our good intentions such that we lay down on the battlefield in sloth.
 - c. Our society is chock-full of temptations and opportunities. We must be vigilant and not grow complacent, or we may succumb to the temptation. "Everybody does it," "I'm not as bad as so-and-so" and other excuses rise readily to mind to justify the temptation.
3. Commission - we act upon the thought. Complacency in our spiritual life can lead us down this path.
 - a. We are responsible for our thoughts, words, and actions. We cannot blame others for our sin; they may have a part in it, but we take our share of the responsibility.

The example given of "chastity for the sake of the Kingdom" is different from chastity because you haven't had the opportunity for an impure relationship. An alcoholic who, with the grace of God, works the twelve-step program and experiences a conversion in his life is on the right path. An alcoholic who chafes at sobriety and awaits the opportunity to take another drink is on a "dry drunk."

Part of vigilance is repentance, or a contrite heart. In the humility of contrition, we confess our reliance upon God. The proud say, "My will be done;" the humble say, "Thy Will be done."

Prayer is a crucial means of resisting temptations. Whether you pray the Our Father, the Hail Mary, the prayer to St. Michael the Archangel, or merely turn your interior gaze upon Jesus rather than upon the temptation, you will re-settle your heart on God and away from sin. Do you follow Christ, and Him Crucified, (1 Corinthians 2:2) or do you let the good times roll?

Do not despair at your weakness; rather declare with St. Paul: "It is when I am weak that I am strong," (2 Corinthians 12:10) and "I can do all things through Him Who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13). Depend upon God, allow Him to be your Refuge and your Strength (Psalm 46; Psalm 48; Isaiah 25:9, 33:2).

If we are truly striving along the path of perfection, we will need to change our priorities. See the questions from the first conference on how we spend our time and energy, where our thoughts and activities dwell, whether we seek to please ourselves or God.

To even begin walking along the Way, we need Grace, which is infused into us at Baptism and Confirmation, and upon which we can call when we need assistance ("special graces"). To continue on the Way, we need to call upon and cooperate with the graces we receive in the sacraments.

Consider the Reflection on pages 44-46. Do you see within yourself the attributes listed: humility; "perfect" attentiveness; power of rebuttal; and prayer. How did you react to this sentence: "If we have not attained prayer that is free from thoughts, we have no weapon to fight with."?

Consider the Reflection Questions on page 46

The world, the flesh, and the devil coax us onto the broad and smooth path to destruction. We must resolutely remain on the twisted, narrow path that leads to life, for it is the only path of salvation. Keeping our eyes on the prize of Heaven, we know that no earthly sorrows compare to the joys awaiting us in Heaven, the consolations the Holy Spirit pours out upon us even here on Earth, the glorious freedom from enslavement to the passions, and the joy that comes from resting in Christ Jesus. Satan's envy seeks to tear us down through sins of omission and commission, through morbid dwelling upon sins and sorrows of the past, and through the glitz and glamor the passions promise but fail to deliver. Jesus is at our side at all times, before us, behind us, above us, and with us. He has suffered all that we suffer. We can turn to Him, our merciful Savior, knowing that He battles for us.



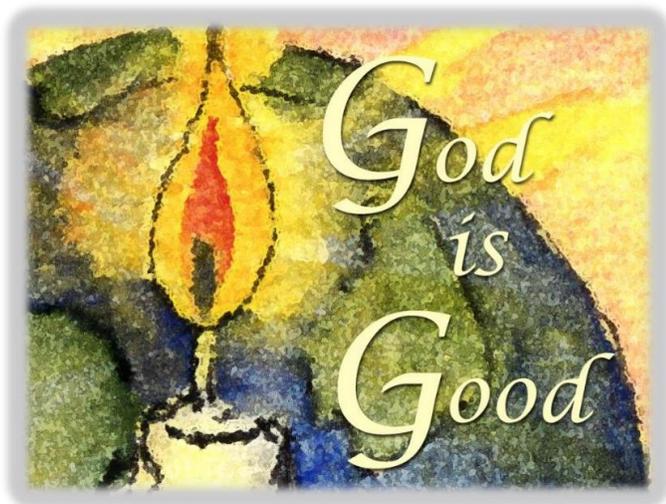
Rendering an Account - The Fourth Conference Begins at 2:15 PM ends at 3:15

We must be prepared to render an account to Jesus upon the day of our particular judgment - upon our death. "You fool!" cries Jesus in the parable of the rich man who built a barn for his greater harvest. "This very night your soul will be required of you." (Luke 12:20)

Opening Gospel: Luke 14:15-24 "No one those men who were invited will taste my dinner." What does this mean to you? Have you accepted Jesus' invitation to the Eternal Banquet, or have you given Him excuses?

We are not invincible. No matter how far medical science progresses, death comes to us all, sooner or later. At that moment, we must be prepared to render an account of our lives to Jesus.

1. Those who claim they have no need of salvation stand in danger of Hell.
2. Those who postpone striking out upon the path of perfection risk being unprepared for the hour of their death.
3. Those who have been beguiled by the Enlightenment thinking and the tenets of humanism wrongly believe that mankind has no need of God; we can create Paradise here on Earth.
4. Have you fostered a relationship with the Living God Who loves you? Or do you "check the boxes" of your Catholic faith without encountering the Real Presence?
5. Do you spend the time God gives you well? Consider the story of the demon convention on pgs 52-54. There is no time to postpone God's invitation; no time to waste. We do not know the day nor the hour upon which we must render an account of our lives.
6. Remember that God offers us the free will choice between life and death; the blessing and the curse; choose life, then. (Deuteronomy 30:19)
7. Contrition, humility, and loving, praising, and thanking God help us to eagerly await His coming at the hour of our death. Death arrives harshly for those who are unprepared and did not anticipate their judgment.



Jesus teaches the necessity of living well today so as to merit the Eternal Life He offers, granted as a grace through His sorrowful Passion.

1. Matthew 25:14-30 - the Parables of the Talents - what have we done with the gifts God gave us?
2. Matthew 25:31-46 - the Judgment of Nations - the sheep on His right, the goats on His left. "You did it to Me."
3. Luke 16:19-31 - the Rich Man and Lazarus - each one went to his own reward

Denial of the reality of Hell is thus heresy, since Jesus Himself affirms its reality. God offers salvation for all and desires that all should be saved; He does not abrogate our free will, however, and we can thus choose damnation for ourselves.

Consider the Reflection on pages 58-61. How did Jacques' story affect you?

Consider the Reflection Questions on page 61

Consider the Icon of the Parable of the Great Feast on pages 62-63 in light of Ezekiel 33:11: "For God does not desire the death of any sinner, but rather that they turn from their wicked ways and live."

Accepting the Invitation - The Final Conference – Begins at 3:30; ends at 4:30

“Do not have Jesus Christ on your lips and the world in your hearts.” - St. Ignatius of Antioch

Opening Thought - Jesus calls us each personally to follow Him to the Father. “If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father.” (John 8:19, 12:45, 14:7)

Opening Gospel: Matthew 9:9-13 - “I desire mercy, not sacrifice. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

Following Jesus - Jesus stands at the door and knocks; He waits patiently for us to let Him in. Have you invited this Guest into your heart? Have you evicted Him at times?

Have you discovered the narrow Way? Have you progressed upon it so that it is more a joy to follow Jesus than it is a drudgery to pick up your cross?

We cannot trod the narrow Way alone; grace is first given, then we cooperate with that grace. When we cooperate fully with grace, it increases in us so that we can follow God ***with undivided hearts***. This is a tall order and would be impossible on our own, but all things are possible with God. (Matthew 19:26, Mark 10:27, Luke 1:37)

We can draw God’s grace down upon us through prayer. We must then be prepared to receive it. Harken to the words of St. John the Baptist: “Prepare the way of the Lord!” (Mark 1:3, John 1:23, Isaiah 40:3) Sharing in God’s Divine life, which is grace, pervades our lives and empowers us to love our neighbors.

See the chart on pages 67-68 of the “Biblical Jesus” compared to the “Modern Jesus.”

1. Do you agree or disagree with this chart?
2. How do you see the Biblical Jesus being modernized?
3. Why do you think modern society seeks to change the Biblical Jesus?

The narrow Way consists of:

1. Accepting Jesus’ invitation into your heart
2. Cooperating with the grace He gives you
3. Carrying your cross and following Jesus
 - a. Self-denial
 - b. Putting God first, others second, and yourself third
 - c. Self-control - not permitting emotions or the passions to drive your choices
 - d. Taking responsibility for your free-will choices
 - e. Practicing the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy (see attached list)
 - f. Spending time with God at Mass, in Adoration, and in prayer

What is “cheap grace” as compared to “costly grace”?

Consider the **Rule of Life** proposed on pages 70-73.

1. Which of the suggestions will you incorporate into your life?
2. Which have you already incorporated into your life?
3. What would you add to this list?
4. Why is such a Rule important?

Consider the Reflection on pages 74-77 on Dorothy Day.

1. How is she like St. Augustine?
2. Can you identify with her pride and stubborn resistance to reliance upon God?
3. Have you ever prayed without knowing you were praying? This is when “deep is calling upon Deep in the mighty waters.” (Psalm 42)
4. Do you listen to God in your heart? Are you docile to the Holy Spirit? Or do you want to make your own way in the world?
5. What is the one word on the signposts to Heaven?
6. How did Dorothy Day find Jesus? How is she like St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta in this way?

Consider the Reflection Questions on pages 77-80

