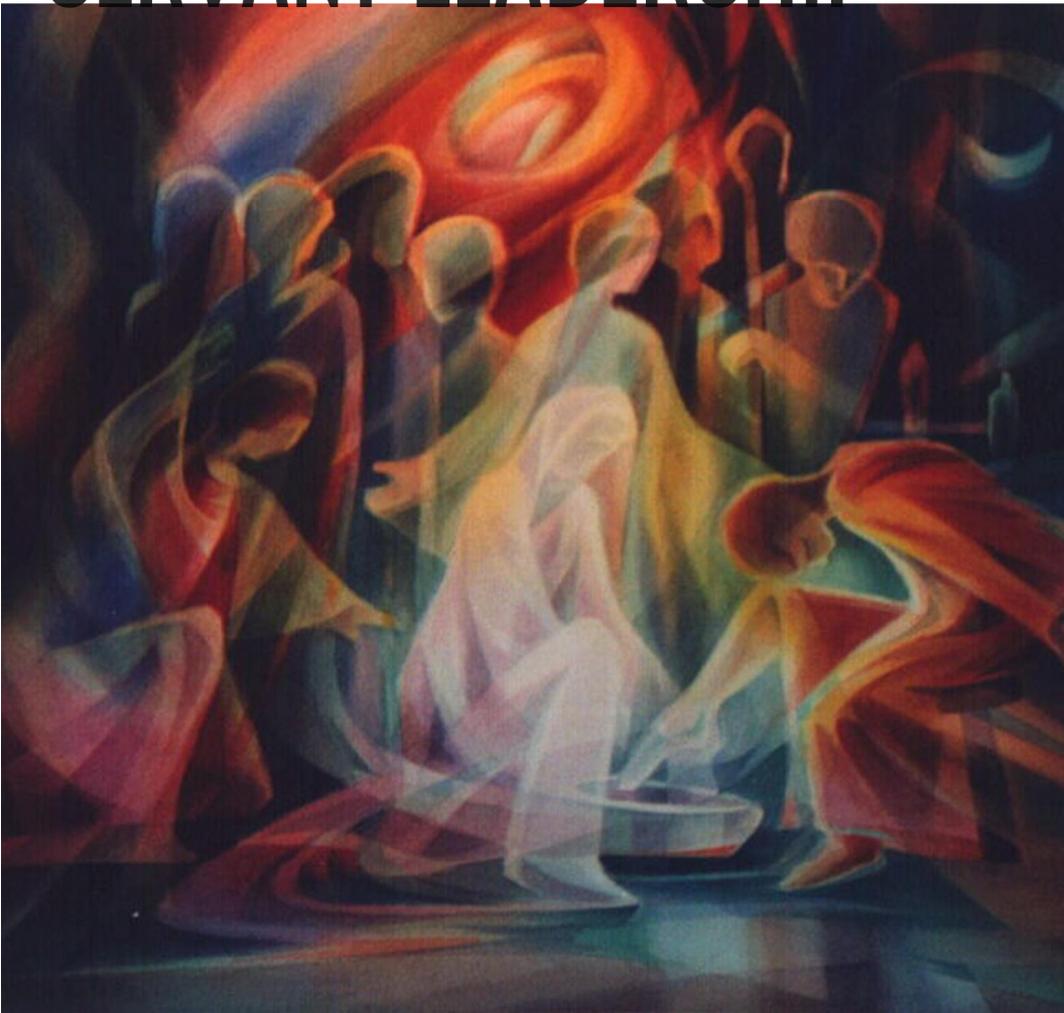


SCHOOL OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP



Learning to receive & respond to God's invitation to love & to serve like Jesus - becoming joyful missionary disciples.

LEARNING COMMUNITY GATHERING #3: Prayer & Identifying Genuine Needs (continued)

The Central Question of Ministry

I am deeply convinced that the Christian leader of the future is called to be completely irrelevant and to stand in this world with nothing to offer but his or her own vulnerable self. That is the way Jesus came to reveal God's love. The great message that we have to carry, as ministers of God's Word and followers of Jesus, is that God loves us not because of what we do or accomplish, but because God has created and redeemed us in love and has chosen us to proclaim that love as the true source of all human life.

Before Jesus commissioned Peter to be a shepherd, he asked him, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these others do?" He asked him again, "Do you love me?" And a third time he asked: "Do you love me?" (John 21:15–17). We have to hear that question as being central to all of our Christian ministry because it is the question that can allow us to be, at the same time, irrelevant and truly self-confident.

Look at Jesus. The world did not pay any attention to him. He was crucified and put away. His message of love was rejected by a world in search of power, efficiency, and control. But there he was, appearing with wounds in his glorified body to a few friends who had eyes to see, ears to hear, and hearts to understand. This rejected, unknown, wounded Jesus simply asked, "Do you love me, do you really love me?" He whose only concern had been to announce the unconditional love of God had only one question to ask, "Do you love me?"

The question is not: How many people take you seriously? How much are you going to accomplish? Can you show some results? But: Are you in love with Jesus? Perhaps another way of putting the question would be: Do you know the incarnate God? In our world of loneliness and despair, there is an enormous need for men and women who know the heart of God, a heart that forgives, cares, reaches out and wants to heal. In that heart there is no suspicion, no vindictiveness, no resentment, and not a tinge of hatred. It is a heart that wants only to give love and receive love in response. It is a heart that suffers immensely because it sees the magnitude of human pain and the great resistance to trusting the heart of God who wants to offer consolation and hope.

The Christian leader of the future is the one who truly knows the heart of God as it has become flesh, “a heart of flesh,” in Jesus. Knowing God’s heart means consistently, radically, and very concretely to announce and reveal that God is love and only love, and that every time fear, isolation, or despair begins to invade the human soul, this is not something that comes from God. This sounds very simple and maybe even trite, but very few people know that they are loved without any conditions or limits.

This unconditional and unlimited love is what the evangelist John calls God’s first love. “Let us love,” he says, “because God loved us first” (1 John 4:19). The love that often leaves us doubtful, frustrated, angry, and resentful is the second love, that is to say, the affirmation, affection, sympathy, encouragement, and support we receive from our parents, teachers, spouses, and friends. We all know how limited, broken, and very fragile that love is. Behind the many expressions of this second love there is always the chance of rejection, withdrawal, punishment, blackmail, violence, and even hatred. Many contemporary movies and plays portray the ambiguities and ambivalences of human relationships, and there are no friendships, marriages, or communities in which the strains and stresses of the second love are not keenly felt. Often it seems that beneath the pleasantries of daily life there are many gaping wounds that carry such names as abandonment, betrayal, rejection, rupture, and loss. These are all the shadow side of the second love and reveal the darkness that never completely leaves the human heart.

The Christian leader is the one who truly knows the heart of God as it has become flesh, “a heart of flesh,” in Jesus.

The radical good news is that the second love is only a broken reflection of the first love and that the first love is offered to us by a God in whom there are no shadows. Jesus’ heart is the incarnation of the shadow-free first love of God. From his heart flow streams of living water. He cries out in a loud voice, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me! Let anyone who believes in me come and drink” (John 7:37–38). “Come to me, all you who labor and are overburdened, and I will give you rest. Shoulder my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls” (Matthew 11:28–29).

From that heart come the words, “Do you love me?” Knowing the heart of Jesus and loving him are the same thing. The knowledge of Jesus’ heart is a knowledge of the heart. And when we live in the world with that knowledge, we cannot do other than bring healing, reconciliation, new life, and hope wherever we go. The desire to be relevant and successful will gradually disappear, and our only desire will be to say with our whole being to our brothers and sisters of the human race, “You are loved. There is no reason to be afraid. In love God created your inmost self and knit you together in your mother’s womb” (see Psalm 139:13).

In the Name of Jesus (p. 30, 36-41)

Reflection Prompts:

1. How have I been relating to others, to God, to myself recently? From a need to be relevant? From longing to know or to reveal the heart of Jesus, God’s first love? I reflect on a concrete experience of encountering a person & ask for insight into my own heart.
2. Henri Nouwen recalled how the wounded and vulnerable Jesus simply asked Peter, “Do you love me, do you really love me?” I imagine this same Jesus taking the form of someone currently in my life or ministry. I allow this person to ask me: “_____, do you love me?” How do I find myself responding?



Jesus’ heart is the incarnation of the shadow-free first love of God.

Identifying Genuine Needs & Imaginative Prayer

It is challenging to identify genuine needs of people we accompany and minister. It is not easy to distinguish wants from needs, even on the more recognizable physical, mental, and psychological dimensions. Moreover, we all have a spiritual depth unknown to ourselves who are continually created in the image and likeness of God. Learning to identify genuine needs goes hand in hand with growth in self-awareness and growth in relationship with God, namely trust and sensitivity to the indwelling Spirit. Praying the imaginative prayer, “To See and Love as Jesus Sees and Loves,” is one of the most helpful ways I have found.

It is not easy to see and love as Jesus sees and loves. Often, we cannot direct our imagination. We begin to pray for a person, then another person “appears.” We try to put on the expansive eyes of Christ, yet our narrow perspectives get in the way. We try to embrace the compassionate heart of Jesus, only to discover that our biases, prejudices, and lack of generosity thwarts the best of our intentions. We genuinely attempt to ask Jesus, “Lord, do you invite me to actively cooperate with you in caring for this person?” Instead, we find ourselves unable to move away from self-imposed “should’s.” Moreover, we struggle to trust our imagination or trust that we can differentiate which voices within is the voice of God.

As difficult as it seems, the challenges we experience is very much part of this schooling of the heart, which involves uncomfortable lessons as well as significant unlearning. Learning to see through the eyes of Christ helps us better identify genuine needs in three interconnected ways: widening perspective, reframing existing mental maps, and receiving greater depth of insight.

Widening perspective: Once, when I was using the same imaginative prayer with a brother Jesuit (whom I shall call James), I kept seeing him as a bull in a china shop. This was reflective of my experience of him in community. After repeated prayer, the way I saw James shifted. I saw him sad, hurt, and lonely. More accurately, that’s what I imagined when I kept asking for the grace and tried to see him through the eyes of Jesus. I slowly realized that there might be more going on with James beyond my experience of him as a frustrated, often angry person. While this is not an easy process, I gradually experienced a shift or stretching of perspective, beyond what I had known and understood. One of the two Latin roots of the English word “education” means, “to lead out of.” Learning begins with an expansion in the way one sees and understands.

Reframing existing mental maps: Since reality is complex, we need mental maps or interpretive grids to make sense of things. Reframing occurs when our mental map is stretched or changed enough to sustain a new way of seeing and understanding. Regarding my brother Jesuit James, I had developed a mental map that framed the way I regarded him as “frustrated and angry.” As I tried to see him as Jesus sees him, I gradually recognized my biases and prejudices towards him. It was the first step of “getting out of the way.” Another step involved accepting, without self-judgment, my tendency to frame my experience of James negatively. As reframing continued, it was easier to let go of the old limited picture I had of James. Letting go of our limited frame (way of seeing and valuing) opens us up to greater insight and learning.

Receiving greater depth of insight: When we genuinely ask for the grace to see and care as Jesus as we begin our imaginative prayer, we open ourselves to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Combined with willingness to shift our perspective and reframe our mental maps, such welcome can generate important realizations. We can receive greater depth of insight regarding spiritual needs beyond the scope of psychological ones that our human seeing, perceiving, and valuing cannot access. I was nudged through prayer to visit the photography club James moderated at a high school. It started with showing interest, then hanging out, and later learning photography tricks, followed by talking to James about the students under his care. In time, this flowed over to conversations about how he sees God, how he became a Jesuit, and deeper spiritual themes. I never became best friends with James, but I grew to see and value him in a light beyond the “problematic community member.” To be honest, the inspiration to visit James’ photography club was not a persuasive ploy or a psychological trick. The instinct came through prayer and persisted beyond my protestations.

Learning to listen using our imagination can help us access a wealth of subconscious knowing that modern neuroscience has shown to give greater wisdom. Moreover, as St. Ignatius of Loyola and many other spiritual writers have discovered, God works in mysterious ways during prayer unbeknownst to us. We come to realize later in the form of insights about other people, greater self-awareness, and growth in trusting God.

The more I learn to practice this way of praying, the more I grow in trusting God’s Spirit working through my limited, broken, and unique way of imagining and feeling. As in the case of my relationship with James (and many others), this way of praying opens us up to a change of mind and

heart central to the Good News that Jesus proclaimed. This imaginative prayer is an invaluable ministry tool for me. Even though we are all unique and different in the ways we pray and imagine, I am convinced that this kind of prayer can make a difference for many of us. In time and in our unique way, it will help each of us live out the invitation from the One who loved us first and invite us to love as we are loved.

Although there is no one or linear way to identify genuine needs, the process of widening perspectives, reframing mental maps, and receiving greater depth of insight can gradually help all of us become better disciples of Christ and ministers of his Church. In the language of Henri Nouwen, we will be able to better follow and witness God's first love in Jesus. We will cultivate our hearts to become fertile grounds, sustaining growth in recognizing the genuine needs of others, in self-awareness, and reliance on God.

Ongoing Accompaniment (shortened)

A. CONNECT DEEPER

1. Follow-up with the person.
2. Deepen the connection established in the first encounter.
3. Learn his or her "unique language" of the person. Notice how they communicate, their frequent facial gestures, non-verbal cues, etc.
4. Cultivate some one-on-one time with the person.

B. AFFIRM

1. Highlight the person's goodness that comes from God and flows through the person – that he or she bears the divine image and likeness (Imago Dei).
2. Recognize and appreciate the person for who they are, not just for what they do or accomplish.
3. Follow up with personal notes or messages of care.

C. GENUINE NEEDS

1. Be attentive to the person's genuine needs at this time. Check-in with the Lord by seeing the person through the eyes of Jesus, and asking, "Help me to see his or her genuine needs, Lord."
2. Communicate care for the person in a way that they can receive.
3. Wait for an opportunity to make an extravagant gesture of love in meeting a genuine need of the person.

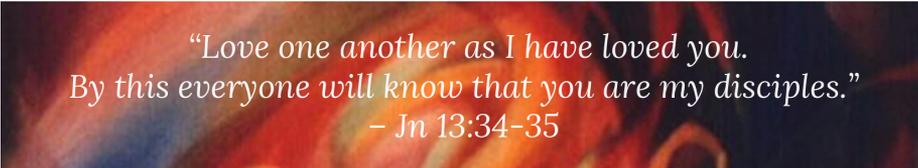
PRAXIS

A. Reading & Noting

1. Read Henri Nouwen's *In the Name of Jesus* pages 51-70 (Chapter 2: "From Popularity to Ministry"). Note what consoles, challenges, or puzzles you while reading.
2. Journal about your response to the following questions:
Have people (or myself) ever expected me to be a superman or superwoman, solving every problem on my own? How did I engage these expectations?

B. Practicing & Noting

1. Continue to pray for a person you're inspired to accompany using the "To See & To Love as Jesus..." imaginative prayer. Listen to a recording at ChristusMinistries.org/November.
2. Spend at least half an hour with the person you've been praying for. Reflect on the following questions afterwards:
 - Did I notice any perspective widening, reframing of mental maps, or realizing greater depth of insight?
 - Is there any point to which I am invited to return and listen deeper?
 - Do I notice any concrete invitation from the Lord to connect deeper, affirm, or empower the person as described on page 7?
3. Journal before the next gathering using these prompts:
 - What did I learn about God, myself, and/or others in my praxis?
 - As I accompany others, do I find myself trusting God (following the Spirit) or relying on myself (making things happen) more? How so?



*"Love one another as I have loved you.
By this everyone will know that you are my disciples."
– Jn 13:34-35*