

Beyond the Chaos

Personal Retreat Day 1

Morning Prayer:

Lord, bless my journey today, as I go deeper into the vast territory of my soul. Just when I think I know myself, I discover a stranger living inside of me. I must accept the truth that I am an endless unknown creature, even to myself – perhaps especially to myself. With every new experience, I have to wonder, “How will I cope? How will I respond to that? What will I say?” I can never be certain what I will do next. There is so much about myself that I do not yet know or understand. Why then should chaos surprise me? I am spinning in a wind tunnel watching the fragments of my life rush by. It is not up to You to stop these fragments. There is no prayer that will move heaven to piece together the odds and ends of my life. But You have given me that authority. It is up to me to become more aware, more attentive, more focused. That is my decision. Clarity of mind and soul will change how I live my life. A chaotic life ends up tossed about by fate. But clear-mindedness leaves room for courage and bold choices. Self-knowledge is the pathway to the soul. So, take me down deep, Lord, and reveal to me my true self. Amen.

The significant question to focus on: What is truly of value to me?

Guiding Message:

Today is devoted to examining the external distractions in your life. How much of what is in our life is truly of value to us and how much is just distraction? Review your life today, returning to the question, “What is truly of value to me?” again and again. Go through this list with your inner self, not just your mind. Reflect on the answers. They should not come easily to you, as you have never asked yourself most of these questions before, if any at all.

- Noise is distraction. Having sound constantly playing in the background prevents you from going into silence, from spending any deeply reflective time with yourself. Are you more comfortable with sound – music? Television?
 - What does constant sound help you to **not** think about?
- Busy work is just that – busy work. It has to be done but how much of it is truly of value to you?
- Review your belongings with the thought in mind, “How much do I really value this?” Do you own that object or does it own you? How many things do you have that you have forgotten that you even own? Is parting with old stuff difficult for you, even when it’s no longer something you value?
- Are you a good listener or are you easily distracted?

- What do you easily remember and what do you often forget?
 - Are emotional memories easier for you than facts? Why do you think that is?
- Do you generate curious and interesting emotional narratives for yourself? That is, are you a good story teller about things that happen in your life and how often do you tell an accurate story?
- If our attention is distracted, we make distracted choices for ourselves. We miss the signs, symbols and guidance that are the markers along the way on our life path. While our attention is on the rattling of all the noise makers in our life, we fail to recognize all that is constant and meaningful. Even obstacles have meaning. We often create chaos in trying to avoid obstacles rather than face them.
- Mindless or negative habits are distractions that create unnecessary chaos. Carelessness, irresponsibility, procrastination, waiting to be rescued from foolish choices. Habits that generate a fog are habits that create chaos by choice. Heaven does not generate that chaos. We do. Observe the pattern of your choices, especially if you indulge becoming “mindless”, less aware of what you are doing, how you are living, and the quality of your thinking. Are you not of value to yourself?
- Dysfunctional relationships and bad habits create the most chaos in our lives. A healthy relationship means that your health thrives or benefits or is nurtured in a positive way because of that relationship, whether it is a partner, spouse, friend, family member, business colleague or neighbor. And likewise, each relationship you are in should thrive in some way because of you. Close relationships require time, love, energy, and support – just as we do. In difficult times – and all relationships go through difficult cycles – more is required of everyone. Distractions and chaos, however, are unnecessary, optional stresses. We cannot change other people and we cannot – and do not – want to detach from loved ones, especially when they are going through dark nights. But we can separate their chaos from our own. Not only can I not solve another person’s problems, I am not supposed to do that anymore than I was supposed to do a child’s homework just because I could. Using my knowledge to compensate for that child’s lack of knowledge would only weaken that child and diminish her survival skills. What looks like help in the moment for that child is in fact an act of supreme life sabotage. Wisdom is protection. Wise choices rooted in strong values, though often difficult, prevent the destructive power of chaos.
- Truth is the greatest of all values. Some people would say that love is. But the truth is that without truth, love and trust become two of life’s biggest challenges.

Prayer and reflection time during the day:

The pursuit of self-knowledge and the examination of values can often start the wheels of change moving in a new direction. It takes enormous fortitude – true courage of the soul – to question yourself. But if you do not pursue the depths of your inner self, who will? “Lord, grant me the grace of Fortitude. I do not know myself in deep soul waters, at least not at soul depth. Still, there is no turning back. I want to discover how deeply I am able to love and what it is to be fearless about my own life.”

End of day prayer:

Lord, I am a beginner at getting to know my own soul. This is not an easy journey, but it is too late for me to step off this path. I have nowhere else to go but inward. I do not want to live such a distracted life that I miss all that is significant and important in big and small ways each day. I do not want to lose touch with my soul because I am so distracted with arguments or insignificant stuff. What I value in life becomes my life. How much love I can give is reflected in my heart. I cannot wait to be loved in order to love. So, Lord, keep a light on inside of me. Help me to grow in mindfulness, truth, and love. Let these be the values that direct my life. Amen