

TWO

Refreshing the Soul: Choices That Energize

SETTING

Have ready a simple loaf of bread and small cups with a beverage. Select music for a calming opening meditation prayer. Music with a Communion theme is suggested.

GATHER AND PRAY

Invite the group to gather for prayer. Play the selection through once, as people settle down and center themselves. Repeat the musical selection. This time, without any speaking, break and share the bread. Pour and pass the beverage, still with no speaking. Thoughtfully eat and drink what you have shared, listening to the music and being present to one another and to God. At the appropriate time, the leader closes the meditation by praying:

God, you have provided everything that we need for our health and growth: food, friends, warmth, peace, life. May we always recognize these blessings as coming from your gracious hand. May we never forget those -- near and far -- who have no food, no friends, no warmth, no peace, no life. May we become your hands reaching out to them. Open our eyes to see them, be life for them. Amen

Reconnect

Reports on Actions

Reflection

“For this command which I enjoin on you today is not too mysterious and remote for you. It is not up in the sky, that you should say, ‘Who will go up in the sky to get it for us and tell us of it, that we may carry it out?’ Nor is it across the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will cross the sea to get it for us and tell us of it, that we may carry it out?’ No, it is something very near to you, already in your mouths and in your hearts; you have only to carry it out.... I call heaven and earth today to witness against you: I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live, by loving the Lord, your God, heeding his voice, and holding fast to him....”

Deuteronomy 30: 11-14, 19-20

The hand of the LORD came upon me, and he led me out in the spirit of the LORD and set me in the center of the plain, which was now filled with bones. He made me walk among them in every direction so that I saw how many they were on the surface of the plain. How dry they were! He asked me: Son of man, can these bones come to life? “Lord GOD,” I answered, “you alone know that.” Then he said to me: Prophecy over these bones, and say to them: Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! ... I prophesied as I had been told, and even as I was prophesying I heard a noise; it was a rattling as the bones came together, bone joining bone. I saw the sinews and the flesh come upon them, and the skin cover them, but there was no spirit in them. Then he said to me: Prophecy to the spirit, prophesy, son of man, and say to the spirit: “Thus says the Lord GOD: From the four winds come, O spirit, and breathe into these slain that they may come to life.”

Ezekiel 37:1-4, 7-9

- What does it mean to "choose life" for ourselves? How will our choices affect our descendants?
- What does it mean to "prophesy"? How is it different from preaching?

SOCIAL INQUIRY

Somewhere each day we have to fall in love, with someone, something, some moment, event, phrase. Somehow each day we must allow the softening of the heart. Otherwise our hearts will move inevitably toward hardness. We will move toward cynicism, bitterness, fear and despair. That's where most of the world is trapped and doesn't even know it. The world's been in love with death so long that it calls death life. It tries to conjure up life by making itself falsely excited, by creating parties where there's no reason to celebrate. We have to create and discover parties of the heart, the place where we know we can enjoy, the place where we can give of ourselves. If you're not involved in giving your thoughts, your emotions, "forgiving," you will be involved only in taking. Yet the only way to experience joy is to give yourself to reality. Joy comes after you go that extra mile and offer yourself, first thing, every day.

--Richard Rohr, *Radical Grace: Daily Meditations*

But what is life? Jesus' intention was clear: The very life of God, which surpasses all the possible aspirations of the human heart (see 1 Cor 2:9). The fact is that through the grace of Baptism we are already God's children. Our daily experience tells us that life is marked by sin and threatened by death, despite the desire for good which gets in our hearts and the desire for life which courses through our veins. However little heed we pay to ourselves and to the frustrations which life brings us, we discover that everything within us impels us to transcend ourselves, urges us to overcome the temptation to superficiality or despair. It is then that human beings are called to become disciples of that other One who infinitely transcends them, in

order to enter at last into true life.... Left to ourselves, we could never achieve the ends for which we have been created. Within us there is a promise which we find we are incapable of attaining. But the Son of God who came among us has given us His personal assurance: "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life" (Jn 14:6)

--John Paul II, *Celebrate 2000!*

Reflections on Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the Father

Observe

1. Identify persons in your life who possesses a joyful, non-anxious presence. Ask what they do to sustain and nourish themselves.
2. Reflect on the past 6 months and name the times when you have felt the most joyful, energized and alive.
3. Ask 2 or 3 friends to describe some of their favorite family times. When, where and what do they do that gives them joy and life as a family?
4. Tell about a recent occasion when your own family experienced refreshment and fun.

Judge

1. If people have a "dry bones feeling," how does our culture contribute to it?
2. What patterns do you see in times you observed as "re-energizing"? What elements were present, i.e., activity, place, people?
3. Why is refreshing the soul essential to living the Christian life? What challenges are we preparing for?
4. What are those things that our culture believes will give us life? How do these compare with those things that Jesus says will lead to life?
5. How do the sacraments and other religious celebrations re-nourish us?

Act

1. Choose one of the Saints and learn about his or her ways of refreshing the soul.
2. Make a commitment to spend time in meditation and prayer in your life. Choose a special place in your house to be your "prayer space." Furnish it with your Bible and other prayer books. Go there at a regular time each day.
3. Create a "party of the heart": Set a date to do something (with your family or as a group) before the next meeting that you have named as "Life-giving." Report on your progress.
4. Go the extra mile. Plan a simple act of loving-kindness that you can engage in: Make a phone call or write a note to a homebound friend or relative living alone; visit a hospital or nursing home; include one new family in your group.

Preparation for the next meeting

1. Date _____
Time _____
Place _____
2. Turn to the next meeting. Read aloud the Observes to prepare for the next meeting.

CLOSING PRAYER

One of the commands of Jubilee: Remember.

Response: Come from the four winds, breathe on these dead, so that they come to life. (Ez 37:9)

We remember those who are deep in depression, whose inner world is bleak and dark...

We remember those who have recently said farewell to a loved one and who feel that joy will never return...

We remember those who are caught up in running through life and are entangled in frenzied activity...

We remember those who struggle to believe in their own goodness...

We remember those who have lost their dreams and their enthusiasm for life...

We remember those who are experiencing failure in relationships or in work situations...

We remember those who never seem to get beyond financial worries and the pain of caring for essentials of life...

We remember those who live in the grips of addiction and the throes of self-absorption...

We remember those who live constantly with worry and anxiety...

God, breath of life, there are moments when we feel like the dry bones filling Ezekiel's valley. When those times come upon us, help us to trust you, to believe in your dance of life in us. Do not allow us to lose heart or abandon hope. You can take the dry bones of our lives and enliven them in a way we have never dreamed possible. Bless our dry and dusty spirits with your deep and stirring love. Renew our dreams. Fill us with enthusiasm for life. May we always look to you as our source of life. Amen.

--Joyce Rupp, May I Have This Dance?