

As many of you know, this lent we are taking time to reflect on the meaning of certain words for the purpose of deepening our spirituality. When Rev. Mary asked me to speak tonight on the word sacrifice I immediately felt resistance. Sacrifice is such a loaded word and we all have strong feelings about its meaning, its value and its purpose. I was hoping to reflect with you on a word such as beauty, love or peace....That seemed allot easier than the word sacrifice! So you could say that I felt it was a sacrifice to talk about sacrifice!

Linking love with sacrifice is so natural that if I surveyed 100 people whether, spiritual or not, and asked them if love means sacrifice I bet 100 people would respond "Of course it does!"

So it's not that we are unaware of this belief. But what we may not be aware of is its impact on our spiritual journey, how it slows our process of awakening, our ability to be miracle workers and to receive miracles for ourselves. So tonight I will attempt to present a case for why we might want to give up sacrifice for lent.

I realize that to change a belief that is the foundation of a religion and universally accepted as a "fact" is not an easy thing to do. So I will teach the way the Holy Spirit teaches me:

To change any long held belief it is helpful to notice certain things about it:

- Does the belief deepen your spirituality or block you from what you really want?
- Is the belief a source of pain?
- And if it were not true how would you feel? How would your life change? How would your relationship to God change?

Here is an example of how the Holy Spirit uses these questions to change my mind. One day, I was ruminating on an idea about myself. Round and round the story went in my mind. I was in so much pain. I cried out to the Holy Spirit; "Help". An image instantly came to my mind. I saw a cactus plant with long sharp needles sticking out and my hands clutching it with a firm grip. The gentle Voice said; "Just let go." How easy it is to let go when we realize that to do so- is sweet relief.

So let's take a close look at the meaning, value and purpose of sacrifice to see if it is something you still want to hold on to. Everyone in this world wants the same thing. We all want to love and to be loved. Our desire for God, for our innocence and to experience peace, joy and love is not in question. What is in question is whether believing "love means sacrifice" is helping us get what we want.

Let's imagine our mind or consciousness as a large gymnasium. In the middle of the gym is a divider wall w/ a door that separates one half from the other. On one side is the light and love of God and the other darkness and shadows.

If we are in the dark- feeling fearful, sad, lacking or unfulfilled we merely need to knock on the door, open it and the light will stream into the other side and the darkness will disappear. This all seems simple enough. But what if we believe that to knock and open that door would result in even greater loss, pain; suffering? What if we believed that the love on the other side would demand that we give up something we need? Would we hesitate to knock? Of course we would & do.

Let me give you an example of this: Years ago I had a big decision to make. So I prayed every night and every morning "God, what is your will?" As each day past without an answer I became frustrated and confused. So I changed my prayer to; "Why can't I hear your ans? That night I had a dream. In this dream I was standing in a room dismayed over not knowing what decision I should make. God suddenly appeared as an orb of light. On seeing God, I was overcome with relief. "Finally you are here and can tell me what to do!" I approached the light and asked "What is your will?" God spoke and told me what to do. Upon hearing his words, I fell to the ground totally distraught, in anguish, and through my weeping I managed to say; "Ok God I will do your will."

Have you ever felt this....the hesitation to join completely with God's love, or to ask God for an answer but are afraid to hear for fear of what you will lose?

Jesus states in ACIM; "How fearful, then, has God become to you, and how great a sacrifice do you believe His Love demands! For total love would demand total sacrifice."

If we want to be in Love's Presence, to live from this place, and let the spirit of God have full expression through our lives, it is essential that we not be afraid of love. Believing that love punishes or joining with love results in loss, is the very thing that prevents us from "seeking first the kingdom of God."

Let's look at another problem that occurs when we hold onto the idea that love means sacrifice.

Let's go back to the analogy of the mind being a gymnasium with a divider wall. We are in the dark so we ask: "Where can I go for protection?"

We don't pose this question to God because we believe His Answer would result in even more darkness. So the only other choice is ask the ego.

Jesus teaches "because you believe love demands sacrifice the ego seems to demand less of you than God, and of the two is judged as the lesser of two evils, the ego to be feared a little, perhaps, but the other to be destroyed."

Here Jesus gives another reason why we don't want to confuse sacrifice with God's Love. It keeps us turning to the ego for answers! What are the ego's answers? Attack, defend, judge, keep busy, gather lots of things in the world, fame, specialness, power, money, pleasures.... Just to name a few. Here is what Jesus says about following the advice of the ego:

"Everything the ego tells you that you need will hurt you. For although the ego urges you again and again to get, it leaves you nothing, for what you get it will demand of you."

With the belief that God's love means sacrifice, comes the misunderstanding that the choice for God is imprisonment and the choice for the ego is freedom. But it is actually the other way around. Whenever we feel deprived we blame this condition on one of two reasons.... 1) The world or others are doing this to me or 2) God is doing this to me. Let us consider a 3rd option: we are experiencing limitation because we are listening to the ego rather than God.

Let's look at one more way sacrifice keeps us apart from God.

You are on to the ego and want to turn to God and you believe that God wants to welcome you like in the story of the prodigal son; you begin to contemplate knocking on the door. Now the ego pulls out its biggest punch. You don't deserve it. Have you worked for it? Have you sacrificed time, money, effort? Have you earned it? And here you see the most blatant and obvious link of sacrifice to the ego. You must deprive yourself so you can be worthy enough to receive.

I have a simple yet profound example of this: When my daughter was just 2 and half years old, I came downstairs to see her crayon art work drawn all over the walls. She was nowhere to be found. I called to her but there was no answer. I searched for her and finally found her sitting on the couch in the den. I asked "What are you doing?" She replied; "I'm putting myself in time out."

Holding on to the belief that love means sacrifice not only results in fear of God, and listening to the ego, it also keeps us in the loop of limitation and punishment. Is this really what we want?

And how would it feel be free of this idea. How would our life change? How would our relationship to God change?

We only need to look to Jesus for these answers.

He walked in the world with his mind in the awareness of the Father. He lived effortlessly, taking no thought of how he shall eat or where he shall sleep. The Father's love provided both earthly and spiritual fulfillment and healed and blessed many.

Throughout history we have examples of those who have encountered the indwelling source of all good enabling them to be a blessing to all who came into their midst.

Their basic teaching is the love of the Father and the holiness of all of creation. The ones who encountered the God Self relationship taught -not sacrifice or loss- but how much the Father wants to give us the gifts of the Kingdom. In Christianity we call this grace which in essence means- we need do nothing to receive God's love and care.

How can we begin to live this way? How can we not fear that we will lose when we turn inward and seek God's Answer?

Because love means sacrifice is a strong belief in our minds, we must take it one step at a time. We must develop trust through experiences. Each time we turn away from the ego and toward the Spirit, we will learn that love only gives, blesses and heals.

I would like to share with you a teaching I received from the Holy Spirit during a time in my life when I was trying to go inward but the fear was high and my trust was low.

Soon after my divorce, everything within me was screaming to do something to plan for a secure future. I was frantically looking into graduate school, updating my resume, and trying to plan for how I could support myself. As I was seeking guidance and doing my Course practice, I kept hearing "sit still and look w/in."

Intellectually, I understood I was being asked to stop rearranging the external and seek first the kingdom of God. But, the problem seemed so pressing and scary and the guidance seemed so radical.

I began to argue with the Holy Spirit. "Do nothing? Are you crazy? You want me to look within??? I don't have time!" But, there was also a voice very much alive and speaking as well. It was the part of my mind that knew that the love of God was the answer. I ask the Holy Spirit to help me be able to follow such radical guidance in light of such fear. That night I had my breakthrough and it came in the form of a dream.

In the dream I was on the Titanic. The dream begins at the moment the passengers discover the boat is sinking.

Everyone, including myself, is trying to figure out a way to safety, a way that will hold death at bay.

Hundreds of people were trying to get up to the deck, scrambling to find life jackets and lifeboats. Some passengers were even jumping, hoping a boat would eventually come to their rescue. I stood paralyzed in fear. As I struggled to make a choice on what would be my best bet for survival, I notice a beautiful, loving Presence by my side. This Presence was calm and peaceful. It extended its warmth and light to me and said, "Come and follow me. I know the way that will save you." I immediately became calm and felt relieved that there was someone who *knew* the way to safety because truth be told; I had no idea which way I should go. None of the choices were certain.

He continued, "Here's what we must do. We must go to the very *bottom* of the boat." There was a split second pause, as I wondered to myself "Did He say bottom?" "What!" I screamed out loud, "The bottom? But that's insanity and sure death. How can that be the way?" I'm beginning to feel a bit of panic now. Maybe, the Presence doesn't know the laws of physics and never saw the ending of the movie "Titanic". And yet the Presence remains certain and calm and explains to me, "What they don't know ", as He points to all the frantic people going *up*, "is that the act of hitting the very bottom of the boat creates a propelling motion that rises you up out of the boat and onto dry land with no effort on your part." I began to see the logic here, even though my mind silently argued with the insanity of going in the opp direction of what everyone else was doing! And yet I felt *the Presence knew* it wasn't insanity so I began to trust in what It was saying.

At this moment, I decided that I would feel a lot better about my choice to follow, if others would come along with me so I asked; "Why isn't anyone else following us down to the bottom?" The Presence gently responded "Because they can't hear me." I took a quick look around. Everyone was screaming in terror and did not even notice this Presence talking to me. I see that what he said was correct. No one could hear him speak of this other way.

Even though I still saw going to the bottom as insanity, I took comfort in realizing that the Presence knew what I did not yet understand.

I took his hand and we entered an elevator and began to descend to the bottom of the boat. As I saw the water line rise up to meet my feet I became a little nervous. I looked to the Presence. Even the rising water did

not sway It's calm and certainty. I wondered what it would be like to have the water cover me completely, to not be able to breathe, and to suffocate under the water.

At the very moment I am having these thoughts, I notice the water is surrounding me but I am not touched by it. It seems to stand a good two feet away from me! Like the red sea parting. I say to myself, "Hey, I can breathe. The water is not engulfing me. How can this be? This makes no sense. It's impossible!"

This is when I began to understand that by taking the hand of this loving Presence and trusting It's ways, things were going to be "different". New rules and laws were operating here for the Presence did not operate under the laws of the world but under the laws of God.

Isn't this a beautiful teaching? Even if it looks like we are asked to give up what we believe will work, if we trust and follow the Holy Spirit, we will learn that God's will for us is perfect happiness and His answer is so much better than the ego could ever come up with!

If after careful consideration you do decide to give up sacrifice for lent and to live completely from and in God - here are some ways that worked for me.

- First and foremost you just need to be willing. When you become aware that you hold this belief, (you are sacrificing, you are asking others to sacrifice or others are asking you to, or you believe God is) ask the Spirit to teach you the true meaning of love.
- When you are tempted to follow the ego's guidance or the ego is screaming in your ear what you need to do for safety ask the Holy Spirit to lend you his strength to help you go inward for God's Answer.
- When you feel a sense of unworthiness to receive God's grace and are tempted to accept limitation, pray for help in learning of your value in the eyes of God.

The best part about letting go of the idea that love means sacrifice is that now we can trust the Holy Spirit to make all of our decisions, to lead us in thought, perception, and action- knowing that as we surrender to God's will, everyone will be blessed.

If you are in the midst of fear and uncertainty or need help with anything, let the loving Presence come to you and tell you what you need. And trust the answer you hear, EVEN IF It tells you to go to the bottom of the boat.