

The School of Mary: Initiation into Spiritual Life

Goal and stages of Spiritual Life

1- Introduction: The goal of the first lesson is to help the student see with all his being that the Union with Jesus and the Fullness of Love are the two goals of our life here on earth.

Setting the goal is in fact a central issue in anything we do, and of course in spiritual life. If we know our goal, then all our energies will be implemented in order to achieve that goal, to reach that goal. If you are in London and want to go by car to Liverpool, first thing you do is to see on the map where is Liverpool. Only after that, you'll try to figure out the journey. It is the same in Spiritual life. First things first, and it is to determine the Goal of our life, our Christian life and our Spiritual life. In fact it is the same.

Knowing our "goal", "where we are going", feeds directly the "Act of Hope" (we will be seeing the "Act of Hope" in the second part of the Course). The Act of Hope is the "Drive" that motivates us, and pushes us to do everything, all what we are supposed to do, in order to reach the Goal (object of our hope).

Pedagogically, this notion is not only an intellectual notion, but it is a vital notion, it drives us from our "guts". This is why it is important to open a way, in the student, in order for him/her to start to "see" better this goal.. come out of the foggy vision, vague, random/amateur way we envisage our Christian life.

2- Pedagogically it is important to get the student involved, by **asking a fundamental question:** "what is the goal of our life here on earth, our Christian life, our Spiritual Christian life?" It is very important to give great attention to each answer, trying to understand what the person tries to say, help clarify the notion of Goal (and not "means"), challenge the use of traditional (i.e. Kingdom of God, will of God, love God, Holiness,...). Gathering on the flipchart all the answers.

The focus is on helping the reality of the "union with Jesus" to emerge ("it is not me who lives, but Jesus who lives in me") as the real goal and purpose of our life.

3- The second stage is to invite people to think **"where to put the 'Union with Jesus'"** on the line of transformation?

First: explaining the line of transformation and the difference between the line of transformation and the time line. It measure growth, transformation, and not time. One can spend 40 years, going around in circles, on halt at one specific stage of spiritual life. While, another person, could spend just 3 years crossing an amazing length of the journey.

Second: it is important to ask each student, where he/she would put the Union with Jesus: beginning, middle or end of the transformative journey? This refers to how the great synthesis of Spiritual Life (see Garrigou-Lagrange, Marie-Eugène,...) are built: where in the book that traces the journey of Growth is the Union with Jesus placed?

Helping the student to start to see things under the angle of Growth. Seeing Union like Marriage or the moment of maturity of a tree, right before bearing fruits. Marriage is not place at the end of our life, but it is a maturity point, where we can create a family, and start (if God gives them) to have children. So: things happen after union.

Remembering the 50 years of P Pio, Mother Teresa, or the 40 years of Paul of the Cross, ...

If S Paul is united with Jesus, who lives and acts in him and through him, this is for S Paul to "complete in his flesh the sufferings of Jesus' Passion, for the benefit of His Body, the Church". Paul, united with Jesus, would like to die, but he remains on earth for the sake of Jesus' Body.

We reach then the conclusion that Union is right at the middle of the Journey of transformation.

4- The third stage is to help people **deeply relate to Union**, with the previous knowledge they already have: where in the Bible, in the New Testament, in Jesus' Life and deeds, in the Church's life, we can see that it is sure that "Union with Jesus" is really the Goal. Like when Jesus says to the Father in John 17: I want them to be one with me.

We are led to the Last Supper, when Jesus offers His Body and His Blood... and after it to the Cross. Here we stop at the Cross: we study the three layers of the Cross: the suffering of the Body, of the Soul and the beatific state of his spirit. We discover the meaning of the salvation Jesus is performing on the Cross, who He really moves, by the Power of the Holy Spirit, like a “sponge” He unites himself to each one of us (impregnates Himself by us) to our darkness, and then brings each one of us back to the light. His spirit is this place in Him where we find ourselves united to Him. So it is important to start to “see” the Cross with its amazing deeper layers, the Soul suffering and the beatific spirit. To see ourselves on the Cross united by Jesus, embraced by him, like the Salvadorian Cross where Jesus is depicted as a Shepherd holding tightly his sheep.

Now: union could be seen. We see it on the Cross, we see our Union with Jesus realised on the Cross, we deeply relate to that and this becomes all together a new vision of the Goal of our Christian life, and a powerful drive for us to do all what is in our power to reach that Goal, day after day.

5- After having explained the central Goal, we could mention **the second goal** (at death), explaining “Christian Death”, how it is a “Fullness of Love” (*Perfectae Caritatis*).

6- At that stage the attention goes to **the stages of growth**, trying to identify them. Purification of the sense, purification of the soul, purification of the spirit, then betrothal, then Spiritual Marriage (Union with Jesus). A rough idea as well is given about the following stage: celebrative time (like a honeymoon), intensification of the Divine Fire of the Holy Spirit (the “sparkling” starts), types of participation to the Passion of Jesus.

Of course, the book: ‘The Spiritual Journey’ is the key text here that gives the full picture of the entire journey. It develops a lot this fifth point.

7- Conclusion: this lesson sets the contents of our **Christian Hope**, gives us the core sense of purpose, and the drive in our life. This lesson is not only chronologically the first one, but as well “bio-logically” the First one because it gives the DNA, the code that will impregnate all the teaching in the Formation given by the School of Mary. In fact, everything is moved by the contents of this Lesson. It inspires all initiative.

This lesson sheds a new light over the general notion of Holiness. From a vague amateurish understanding of it, we start to see – from far – the shape of the “Promised Land”, the shape of the journey that leads to the Promise Lands.

Readings

- Jean Khoury, “The Spiritual Journey, the setting for Christian Hope”, Amorvincit, 2015.
- Reading the Journey of the People of God, in the Old Testament, from Abraham to the Dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem (going through Egypt), gives us a very refined description of the spiritual Journey in Christ (see Origen, “Homelies on Numbers”).
- The Apostle’s Journey as presented in the Gospel (see book: “the Spiritual Journey” or Blog).
- Theresa of Avila, “The Interior Castle”.
- John of the Cross, “The Spiritual Canticle”.
- Adolph Tanqueray, “A treatise on ascetical and mystical theology”.
- Reginal Garrigou Lagrange, “The three ages of interior life”.
- Fr Marie Eugène, “I want to see God”.
- On the internet further reading on the **Spiritual Journey** can be found on the School of Mary’s website: www.amorvincit.com/journey_of_the_gift_of_ourselves

Jean Khoury