

## **ON-GOING CONVERSION OF THE PERSON**

*Source: National Cursillo Center Mailing – August 2011*

### **Conversion in the Three-Day Cursillo**

The Cursillo Leaders' Manual reminds us that "the basic purpose of the PostCursillo is to renew, accelerate and continue the conversion of each individual, and as a consequence provide a continuous transformation of the environments for which those individuals are responsible, especially their families, neighborhoods, places of work, associations and other secular situations. Since these are only transformed from within, we must orientate the new Cursillistas toward their own appropriate environments" (LM Ch. 11).

Our initial conversion experienced in the Cursillo Weekend through our three memorable encounters with God, with self and with others should be maintained in our Fourth Day. The Church asserts to all Christians that "devotion to the Sacred Heart ... calls for a fundamental attitude of conversion and reparation, of love and gratitude, apostolic commitment and dedication to Christ and His saving work" (Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy #166, 172).

In the meditation entitled "*Going Further with God*" in the "*Word Among Us*" (WAU) March 2011 issue \* [www.wau.org](http://www.wau.org), the writer elaborates on the meaning of ongoing conversion as follows: "In this initial conversion, we come to know Jesus and begin to experience the blessings of being members of His Body, the Church. Through conversion and baptism, we are brought into the Kingdom of God and know that heaven is opened to us. Yet within each one of us, there reside pockets of behavior that are opposed to God and need to be eliminated—or, as St. Paul says, "put to death" (Colossians 3:5). These negative pockets have the power to bind us up, lead to further sin, and separate us from Jesus and one another. Ongoing conversion is the process of pursuing habits that lead to holiness and rooting out those habits that separate us from Jesus".

### **Means to Reach Deep Conversion**

Fr. Frank S. Salmani, in his book "*Whom Shall I Send?*", advises us that we should make reference to the Cursillo methodology, "What can help us keep our conversion "*progressive*" and ongoing? Certainly Group Reunion is a tremendous aid. When we come together for our weekly group we come together with people who share the same struggles and frustrations we have. We realize that we are not alone in our religious journey. Having others to meet with also creates a support system to insure that we do not stray away from the course. Ultreya also serves this purpose. I am always encouraged when I see that someone has come to an Ultreya and had not been around for a long time. This person knows that the Ultreya is available and feels the stirrings of the Spirit to attend. We see in this case especially how important that large Christian community is. Where would we go for encouragement and support without the Ultreya" (*Whom Shall I Send?* Ch. 16).

In the above-mentioned meditation from the *Word Among Us*, the author cited "*Three Ways to Deeper Conversion*" as follows: "Ideally, all of our decisions are made in response to the Holy Spirit's guidance and the teachings of Scripture and the Church. In

practice, there are times when this decision-making process is simple and easy to adopt. At other times, however, the issues are more complex, and the decisions aren't as black-and-white. We may not be so sure what the right choice is. Then, there are other times when our own self-drive rises up in opposition to the Holy Spirit, and we knowingly act out of our selfishness.

In the first situation, ongoing conversion would continue almost naturally. The second situation, because it involves more complicated issues, requires something more. It requires a new light to enter our minds— such as a new revelation or an insight from another person—something to help us understand why a certain action is good or bad.

St. Peter had a few of these episodes in his life, and one of them is a classic illustration of the “gray areas.” After Jesus told the apostles that he was going to Jerusalem, where he would be put to death, Peter rebuked him by saying, “God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you” (Matthew 16:22). As far as Peter was concerned, he was protecting his Master and trying to convince him not to follow a seemingly suicidal path. But Jesus shocked Peter by responding abruptly, “Get behind me, Satan!” (16:23; Mark 8:33).

Peter probably learned later on why Jesus had answered so sharply. He probably learned that even though his intentions were good, his vision of what Jesus was supposed to do was faulty. We can also reasonably imagine that when Jesus explained to Peter why his words and his thoughts were “of Satan,” Peter understood and changed. This whole episode probably led Peter to a deeper conversion because he came to see how his words and intentions were in direct opposition to God's plan of salvation.

An example of the third situation—that of knowing the right thing to do but failing to do it—is evident at the Last Supper. Jesus was in the middle of saying good-bye to his closest friends and preparing them for his death on the cross. But instead of the sorrow or fear you might expect them to have, the apostles got into an argument about which one of them was the greatest (Luke 22:21-24). They knew the right way, yet their pride and self-centeredness got the better of them. We can assume that in time they too came to see why their behavior was opposed to God.

The Scriptures are filled with exciting and moving stories of ongoing conversion. Thomas had his doubts resolved. Job had his eyes opened. Isaiah had his sins cleansed. Peter had his faith restored after he betrayed Jesus three times. James and John, the “Sons of Thunder,” learned that their desire for places of honor in the kingdom stemmed from pride. Martha learned how to overcome her frustrations with her sister Mary. All these stories show us how much Jesus wants to open our eyes and give us the grace to rid ourselves of everything that is opposed to him so that we can draw closer to his love and power.”

### **How to Deepen Our Conversion**

All of these examples from Scripture are compelling, but how can we deepen our initial conversion? How can we foster ongoing conversion? The first step is recognition. The Holy Spirit wants to teach us how to recognize the positive aspects of our lives and our

behavior so that we can reinforce them. At the same time, the Spirit wants to help us recognize the negative elements and the way they cut us off from Jesus (John 16:8-11).

Sometimes the Spirit will show us personally what needs to change. It may happen at Mass, in prayer, or while we are reading the Bible. But it may also happen in the early morning as we are waking up or during the course of our everyday lives. There are times when the Spirit will use other people to help us, and times when a situation we are in helps open our eyes.

No matter how the Spirit chooses to move us, ongoing conversion is more likely to occur as we step back and try to recognize why we do what we do—or why we did what we just did, for that matter. What circumstances cause us to act in union with Jesus, and what circumstances cause us to act in opposition to him?

Today, try to take some time to review your actions. Ask yourself, “When was my behavior like sugar or milk in my coffee, and when was it more like bleach or mothballs?”

When you see your good behavior, thank Jesus and take steps to reinforce it. Should you see something negative that needs to be dealt with, ask Jesus for the grace to work on it and come up with some practical steps you can take to help root it out of your life.

Finally, be sure to guard your future. Remember that Satan is always on the prowl (1 Peter 5:8), looking for ways to convince us to stop checking our behavior, or worse, trying to convince us to let the negative aspects back into our lives. It’s for this very reason that we ask the Father to give us our daily bread, to lead us not into temptation, and to deliver us from evil.

Sometimes it seems that we will never graduate from the school of Christ. There always seems to be another area in our lives that gets out of hand and needs our attention. But we should never get discouraged or think that our lives are reduced simply to fighting sin and trying to be perfect. We should be clear that as hard as it sometimes seems to be a Christian, every time we take another step closer to Jesus, he takes five more steps closer to us. Jesus wants us to know that every time we put “sugar” into our “coffee,” he transforms us into his image a little more—and like the sugar, that transformation is very sweet” (The Word Among Us \* WAU - March 2011)

### **St. Ignatius’s Spiritual Exercises**

One of the means that helps us with Piety and Study in Our Fourth Day is the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola. These Spiritual Exercises help Cursillistas improve and strengthen their weekly Group Reunions through Piety and Study. St. Ignatius teaches us methods for meditation and contemplation, that is a prayer method, using the Holy Scripture for meditations. When a method becomes a habit, it becomes second nature; the steps are done without thinking. From experience, apostolic actions and good behaviors come out naturally from deep piety and constant study.

These Spiritual Exercises have been the source of great spiritual growth for 450 years. The Exercises forge saints and this program is rooted in the Universal Call to Holiness. Christ commands us “Be holy, as your Heavenly Father is holy” (Mt. 5:48). We are striving to become saints, even great saints. The program extends over 70 days with assigned meditations based on the Exercises and drawn from Holy Scripture. Every week the attendees hear a presentation that teaches the Ignatian method of prayer and outlines the structured themes of Ignatius and provides encouragement and direction. This Spiritual Exercises course is given by the Priests of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary (OMV), at St. Peter Chanel Catholic Church, in Hawaiian Gardens, Los Angeles Archdiocese in California, coordinated by Fr. Edward Broom, OMV, or Jim & Mary Martorana, [anarotram@verizon.net](mailto:anarotram@verizon.net). It may be given elsewhere, too. This is not a Bible study course. The attendees don’t become Bible scholars, but become Bible lovers.

Among the fruits that participants have experienced are: 1) a deeper, more intense prayer life, 2) an ability to examine one’s conscience more closely, 3) discernment of spirits – the ability to distinguish the voice of the Holy Spirit from the whisperings of the evil spirit, 4) a deeper understanding and love of the Sacrament of Confession, 5) a greater love of Jesus present in the Holy Eucharist, 6) a love of Holy Scripture and last but not least, 7) a deeper filial relationship with Mary, our mother.

According to the Zenit.org on February 11, 2008, Pope Benedict XVI urged more spiritual exercises and said this form of retreat can offer experiences of God. In an audience with the Italian Federation of Spiritual Exercises, the Pope made an appeal for the promotion of the retreats, which are based on a practice begun by St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556). The Holy Father himself began his annual spiritual exercises last Sunday. The Pope told members of the Italian Federation that “*while multiple spiritual initiatives grow and providentially spread, above all among youth, it appears however the number of participants in authentic courses of spiritual exercises is decreasing, and it appears that this is verified as well among priests and among members of institutes of consecrated life.*” He affirmed that spiritual exercises are a “strong experience of God, sustained by listening to His Word, understood and welcomed in one’s personal life under the action of the Holy Spirit, which in a climate of silence, prayer and by means of a spiritual guide, offer the capacity of discernment in order to purify the heart, convert one’s life, follow Christ, and fulfills one’s own mission in the Church and in the world.

For this reason, the Bishop of Rome said he hoped that “together with other laudable forms of spiritual retreat, that there is not a diminishing in participation in spiritual exercises, characterized by that climate of complete and profound silence that favors the personal and community encounter with God and the contemplation of the face of Christ. The Pope contended that “in an age in which there is an ever stronger influence of secularization, and , on the other hand, in which there is experienced a widespread need to encounter God, the possibility of offering spaces of intense listening to His Word in silence and prayer should not falter.” This implies, he added, making an effort to have houses dedicated to spiritual exercises, where there are well formed “guides, men and women leaders who are available and prepared, gifted with those doctrinal and spiritual

capacities that make them masters of the spirit, experts in and passionate for the Word of God and faithful to the magisterium of the Church” ([www.zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org) Feb. 11, 2008).

### **Stories of Conversion**

In the Lent 2011 Issue of the “*Word Among Us*” Magazine, Fr. William Kneemiller, who shared the following conversion stories, served as a U.S. Army Reserves chaplain in Afghanistan in 2009-2010 and in Iraq in 2003-2004. He is currently pastor of three parishes in the Diocese of Davenport, Iowa.

*The Power of the Rosary.* Master Sergeant Randy Revell described himself as a former chronic and repetitive sinner with a “rock star” lifestyle of drinking and partying. Though he believed in Christ, he said, his will power was never strong enough to break the cycle of sin. Then about a year ago, Randy rediscovered the rosary.

“Through God’s grace, I came to experience that the rosary is not about how many prayers you speak— it’s an opportunity to spend time with the Lord and be in his glorious presence!” Randy’s breakthrough began when he started praying the Scriptural rosary—contemplating on each bead the biblical events and passages related to each mystery. “Soon I was feeling so close to Jesus that I wanted more. I began attending daily Mass and visiting the Blessed Sacrament chapel.”

Today, Randy feels like a new person. “I am no longer a slave to sin and can say that I want nothing that separates me from the presence of the Lord. I now have a relationship with Jesus that is rooted in faith, hope, and a newfound love. My life will never be the same.”

Sergeant John Garcia shared that he, too, has discovered the benefits of the Scriptural rosary. He and his wife were looking for a spiritual practice that could keep them united during the year that he was deployed. While he was at home, they started praying the Scriptural rosary with their children, ages three to twelve. To the couple’s surprise and delight, their children started to share their insights and experiences as they prayed together.

Often, said John, “Children are not given enough credit for their understanding and concern.” But their thoughts and feelings are deep, and they can respond to spiritual truths in a fresh way. “You will be amazed at what you can learn from them!”

*Prayer Warrior.* Marine Gunnery Sergeant Craig Finger is a soft-spoken soldier who has had seven deployments in about as many years. The Marines have six months on, six months off, and this arduous journey has tested his faith. Fortunately, that faith was formed during his growing up years in Colombia, where his father set an inspiring example. “He was never ashamed to pray,” said Craig. “His heart was with God.” Craig has had numerous combat experiences and has seen the Taliban face-to-face. Still, he considers other battles to be much more difficult: “Spiritual battles are much more difficult than combat, and more subtle. The devil is very sneaky. He attacks your

thoughts and emotions to create anxiety, doubt, fear, and double-mindedness. We need spiritual weapons—faith, prayer, conviction and humility.”

Craig has recognized that he slowly drifts away from God whenever he neglects prayer. For him, praying with the Bible is key. “When I read the Bible, praying it from the heart, I think about God and his presence in my life—how he wants me to be and how his mercy is always there for me, even though my faith is imperfect.”

In so many ways, God unceasingly invites us all to come back to him with all our hearts. My prayer for our soldiers is that when they leave the heat of the battle, where so many have met God in a deeper way, they will continue to find refreshment in their renewed Catholic faith.

In the Advent 2010 Issue of the *Word Among Us* Magazine, Ms. Emily Nelson, living in Frederick, Maryland, shared her following stories.

*Choosing Life.* All of us who staff these centers and clinics—health professionals, peer counselors, and volunteers—are praying and working to save lives. And by the grace of God, we have many success stories. One young woman who came to us had just missed having an abortion (her appointment fell through), but was planning to reschedule. Instead, she talked to one of our counselors, had a sonogram, and decided to carry her baby to term.

The sonogram, which is always administered by a licensed health professional, has helped many women to make this decision. Being able to see your baby in the womb, right down to its little fingers and toes, makes it impossible to deny that this is a real person! It also enables a mother to bond with her unborn child.

*Meeting Jesus.* Like other volunteers at these centers and clinics, I feel privileged that God has called me, an ordinary person, to do the extraordinary work of bringing Jesus to people in desperate need. Though it can be trying and challenging, that is nothing compared to the joy of seeing lives transformed.

I think of a woman who fled to America after being terribly abused by her husband in Africa. Pregnant, penniless, and alone, she somehow found her way to the center. Volunteers took her under their wing, making sure she received the support she needed to bring her child into the world—even a job and a place to live. This woman was so touched by God’s love in them that she has become a Christian, too.

Again and again, we see God intervening to rescue people from seemingly hopeless situations. And so our hearts cry out: Jesus is alive!

**Conclusion**

“The key to the effectiveness of the Cursillo Movement is precisely this: it promotes a constantly renewed conversion of Christians who have a natural influence on their environments and who unite with one another in core communities, living in intimate union with Christ and with one another. In this way they live the mystery of the Church’s communion with the Father, and, moved by the Spirit, they build up the Church and carry out Christ’s mission of service to the world, fully committed to the work of liberation” (FI # 690).