



Friendship with Christ: Key to Evangelization

Presented by Dr. Ralph Martin at the National Cursillo Encounter held at Villanova University in Philadelphia, PA – July 24, 2015.

I have to tell you that a big smile breaks out on my face when I hear De Colores. It just reminds me of so many special moments over the years and the most special moment in my life. I've been involved in lots of things in the Church; I am a consultant to the Pontifical Council for New Evangelization. I teach at the seminary and we do missionary work in 30 different countries but the most important thing that ever happened to me besides being born was making a Cursillo. I was a student at Notre Dame and I was caught up in the confusion of the 60's and I was searching for the truth and eventually I became a Philosophy major which made me more confused than ever.

And just the confusion of the 60's and then a friend invited me to make Cursillo #2 in South Bend, Indiana. And I didn't want to go. And I forgot that I said yes and then two days before the Cursillo, my friend said, oh by the way, it starts Thursday night, and you're supposed to be there, whatever. I said I don't want to go. And I could just see that he was heartbroken. And just out of friendship, I went but I told them, I warn you, I'm not going to compromise my intellectual integrity. Pride goes before the fall, right? I think it is going to be a warm human experience and people are going to call it God, but I'm not going to fall for that. Thank God I fell for it.

I heard the most beautiful explanation of the faith; I heard the most beautiful presentation about the person of Jesus, our Lord, our Savior, our King. And then the encounter with Him, the prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, seeing God's grace working, my brothers around the tables, but then when they started talking about sin and confession, I said gee, why ruin this beautiful positive picture by bringing in sin?

What they were calling sin, I was talking about normal college life. And I had a real struggle and I think they were a little worried about me because it wasn't until Sunday morning that I really surrendered and I went to confession and I was reconciled with the Lord and with the Church. And I turned my life over to the Lord and then at the end of the Cursillo, I know I'm not supposed to talk about it. It's supposed to be a secret but, you know the secret. Just the overwhelming experience of the love of God pouring into my heart and I just feel like the Holy Spirit just flooded in and this tremendous desire got born in me to love Jesus and to help other people know Him. And that's basically been the story of the rest of my life. And it all happened on the Cursillo. I don't know if I'd still be alive today. I don't know if I'd still be sane. I don't know what I'd be doing if I was even here, but the Lord saved me. He really saved me on the Cursillo and He called me to be His witness. And that's what I've been trying to do for the rest of my life. The year after I went to grad school at Princeton, but I was a Philosophy doctoral student but I had found the truth and I got 25 of my fellow students to make Cursillo in Brooklyn.

And we got them into group reunions and one of them ended up being a priest and then a friend of mine, Steve Clark, we left grad school after the first year and we're hitchhiking across the country. We ended up in Kansas City, the first National Cursillo Convention in 1965. It must have been with Fr. Fidelis, one of the early active priests, in Kansas City, in Louisiana and this crazy Franciscan priest wanted us to give the opening talk and wanted us to give the closing talk at the first Cursillo Convention. And we were kids. And then they set up the first National Office with Bishop Joe Green from Lansing and he asked us to come and help out in the National Office and we started translating some of the literature, we developed an English Cursillo de Cursillos and began doing that all over the country and worked on Cursillos and someone came up to me and said he just saw me in the Indianapolis archives, where I was working on Cursillo #1 in Indianapolis and I helped start it in Kalamazoo and Battle Creek and I had a friend down in Texas that I really wanted to bring to the Lord. And so I went down to Austin, Texas and worked on a Cursillo there. Yeah, I lost him but there are so many special things that happened in so many people's lives through the Cursillo. And I'm just profoundly grateful to God and very happy to be here just to give testimony to what God has done to me through the Cursillo Movement.

But now I want to talk about the topic Friendship with Jesus. I'm going to probably tell you a little bit about myself. I'm married, I've got 6 kids, I've got 14 grandchildren, I teach at the seminary. I'm just trying to get up every day and do God's will. One of my daughters is the only that lives near me in Michigan, sent me a little video. She's pregnant with her fourth child and she just told the other three children last night. She took a video of their reactions. So the eight-year-old and the six-year-old were jumping for joy. The four-year-old boy smiled and seemed happy for a couple of seconds but then he started crying, saying no, I don't want a baby. He really knows his position in the family as a baby. And after a few moments of reflection, he recognized that this baby was going to be a big threat to his position. It's the funniest little video, really. I mean, I really feel for little Thomas. The pain he has to go through, the adjustment he has to go through.

Anyway, friendship with Jesus and its link to evangelism, we all got introduced to friendship with Jesus on the Cursillo or we got it reaffirmed or we got it deepened or wherever we were coming from, the Lord did something wonderful for us in revealing Jesus to us. But one of the things that is true, is that friendship with Jesus isn't supposed to be a static thing, that just stays at the same level it was on the day we made a Cursillo, nor is it to be something that we try to reproduce by going back to the past but we need to move forward in our relationship with the Lord. The deeper our friendship with the Lord, the deeper our obedience to Him, the deeper our sensitivity to the work of His Spirit in our souls, the more fruitful we're going to be in the mission that he's given us. And sometimes we reach a certain level in our relationship with the Lord and we say, I'm really doing a lot better than I used to do which is thanks be to God, really true or I'm certainly doing a lot better than those people over there. We always find people to compare ourselves to make ourselves feel good. But the Lord is saying, don't look at the past, don't look at other people, look at Me. Teresa of Avila says, if we just keep our eyes on Jesus, we'll find ourselves at our destination . . . if we just keep our eyes on Jesus, we'll find ourselves at our destination. So a lot of times we need to say, the view is nice here from this little plateau and the mountain that I'm climbing, where the journey that I'm making, and the *camino* [road, path] that I'm on, but I need to go *Ultreya* . . . I need to keep going further.

Another name for that is growing in holiness. And St. Pope John Paul II, I still get excited saying St. John Paul II because we knew him, didn't we? He was in our lifetime. At the beginning of the new millennium Paul does a little apostolic letter called the Beginning of the New Millennium and he said, let's step back and ask ourselves what are really the main things that the Holy Spirit has been speaking to the Church since Vatican II to the beginning of the New Millennium? He picked out three things. He says, the first thing that the Holy Spirit has led us to, is *to rediscover the universal call to holiness*, that holiness is not just for a few special people but it is for every single baptized person like the Bishop mentioned last night. The second rediscovery he talked about is *rediscovering the Church not just as an organization or institution although it has those dimensions, but as a communion of love because God Himself is a communion of love* and in an imperfect way right here on earth in our relationships with each other, we're being drawn into that communion of love. And that's why our friendship with one another is so important and particularly in these days as more and more our culture is turning away from Christ and it's more and more it is an aggressive attempt to silence the Gospel. And as more and more unconvinced Catholics are drifting away into the secular culture, our friendship with each other is very, very important. I got into a group reunion right after my Cursillo and I've been meeting with a small group of men ever since, I don't even want to count how many years that was. Fifty years, my goodness! I must have been a teenager. I was. But I know I needed the support of my brothers in the Lord to keep on, to be accountable, to be encouraged. The third rediscovery that John Paul II picks out, he says we were led *to rediscover the power of the Holy Spirit that makes possible a new evangelization, the energy from God, the power from God that impels us to be His witnesses*. I can only talk about one of those this morning and that's going to be the universal call to holiness because there's a tremendous link between holiness and mission.

Before we go much further, let's ask ourselves what's a good definition of holiness because when we hear the word holiness, different pictures come into our mind like holy cards, holy pictures, holding our hands in prayer, saying the Rosary and all of those things have some relationship to holiness but they are not the essence. What's the essence? The way Jesus put it, He says, what this is all about is *loving God with our whole heart and our whole mind, our whole soul, our whole strength and our neighbor as ourselves*. So what it means to grow in holiness is not necessarily to be increasing the count of how many Rosaries we say but widening our heart and letting it be transformed in love, becoming more a heart of love. Saying the Rosary and increasing the count, probably will help but that's not the goal. The goal is growing in love, love of God and love of neighbor.

St. Therese of Lisieux gives another definition. She says, holiness means saying yes to who we are. Sometimes we think that holiness is a burden that God is placing on us. Oh darn it, I got to be holy, can I still drink beer, can I still watch TV? Probably yes. But holiness isn't primarily a burden that God is placing on us. It's a blessing he is trying to give us because the more we're one with Him, the deeper our friendship is, the freer we will be, the fuller of love and joy we will be, the fuller of confidence that we'll be freer from fear. The Scripture says, perfect love cast out fear and that comes from a deepening union with the Lord.

St. Teresa of Avila gives another definition. She says, what it means to grow in holiness is to bring our will into harmony with God's will, to love what God loves, to desire what God desires, to hate what God hates. What does God hate? God hates what blocks His people from the happiness he created them for. God hates sin.

Now, we've all heard about this call to holiness. But one of the things I've discovered that a lot of times we'll respond to the call something like this, yes I know I'm called to holiness but I'm just a lay person. I've got all the bothers and troubles of lay life. I've got financial concerns. I've got health concerns. I've got teenage daughter's concerns. I've got retirement concerns. I've got relationship difficulties and thank God that those priests and nuns have said yes to their vocation because they're praying for the rest of us. Well ... that's not a good response. It's precisely those difficulties of lay life that our opportunities that God is giving us to let go and let God. He really wants us to get to the point where we say we can't handle these ourselves because we can't and to learn how to draw strength from Him, learn how to depend on Him, learn how to trust in Him, learn how to look for His help and all the situations that we're in. Also, no more of this just a lay person, like the Bishop was saying last night, just a lay person, huh? Just somebody was created in the image of God, is that all you are? Oh yeah, I'm sorry, sorry to hear that. Oh just a baptized lay person? Just somebody whom Jesus had shed His blood for? Just somebody whom God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit come to dwell in? Just somebody who's a temple of the Holy Spirit? Just somebody who's a beloved son or daughter of God the Father? Is that all you are? Ah, really sad. Just somebody destined for eternal life? Wow, just a lay person, wow! And sometimes we also respond, we say Lord I know I am called to holiness but, *mañana* (tomorrow). Are you impressed with my Spanish?

We're so tempted to say yes. A lot of us feel in our hearts that the Lord is calling us to a deeper friendship, don't you know? A lot of us know that there's something in there that there is more the Lord wants for us in terms of intimate close relationship and greater surrender, but we somehow think that there's going to be some better time in the future where the circumstances in our life will be more conducive to making a whole hearted response like establishing a regular prayer time, for example. But, there isn't going to be a better time in the future. It might not be easier to pray when we're retired. We may have more aches and pains. We may have more babysitting duties.

And, we don't know how long our life will be. That's why the Scriptures say, today if you hear His voice, harden not your heart and I could say that to you today. Today, this encounter, this weekend, if you hear his voice, harden not your hearts! The Lord wants to give you a gift. And sometimes the gift simply reveals the little area of shallow or darkness in our life and our temptations to block out the light. But if that light comes to you today, don't block it out. It's God's mercy. It's God's healing love. It's the truth that will set you free. So, be alert to receive the word and the gift that God has for every single one of us during this encounter. One of the Psalms says, meditate on the shortness of life and learn wisdom. Also, why postpone to a possible future time that maybe won't come, the greater freedom, the greater love, the greater fruitfulness of mission that the Lord has for us that He wants to give us right now. Why postpone the deeper relationship with the Lord till later when the deeper friendship with the Lord is going to bring us into a greater freedom? A greater fruitfulness, a greater attentiveness to what He really has in mind for us in our vocations, in our missions. Now, sometimes, we read the

lives of the saints, and we're inspired but we're also a little put off and discouraged, like in that little "Magnificat"; I'm so glad to see it was put in everybody's bag. I read it every day. It's really a great resource. Just a few days ago we read about Daniel the Stylite. Anybody remember him? You know, he built a pillar in the Egyptian desert and lived on it for many years. Now, I have to tell you, I admire his "whatever" but I don't feel attracted to it.

And you read these stories about these incredible penances and things that different saints have done. Now, St. Therese of Lisieux had the same experience. She said, I'd really like to be a saint but I don't feel attracted to this kind of stuff. She says, I wonder if there's a shortcut for people like me? You know, that's what she said. I'm going to tell you if I remember in a few minutes about the shortcut. So we read the lives of the saints and we get a little discouraged and so we are tempted to say, well, I don't think I'm really going to be transformed enough to see the Lord face to face at the moment I die. And so . . . I'm going to plan on purgatory.

So, eat, drink and be merry because tomorrow there's purgatory. Now, there are a couple problems with that. One is that nowhere in the Bible does Jesus say aim for purgatory. Even the Catholic Bible doesn't say that. What Jesus says is, He sums up all his teachings by saying be perfect as your heavenly Father's perfect. "And unless you're willing to renounce everything, you're not worthy to be a disciple of mine". He says really tough stuff like that. He doesn't say tough stuff like that to discourage us or to make us miserable. He says tough stuff like that because it's a tough medicine like that, that will cure the illness of sin in our life. It doesn't mean be perfect as God but be who you were created to be. Be the person whom God created you to be. But there's another problem with aiming for purgatory. We don't always hit the target we aim for. And if we're aiming for heaven and miss, praise the Lord, De Colores! Thank God for purgatory. But if we're aiming for purgatory and miss . . . I hear it's hell to miss purgatory!

So this is the message, aim for heaven. Just open wide your hearts like perhaps they're open the first Cursillo you made and just say, Lord I want more. I want you. I desire you. Teresa of Avila says, unless you have great desire for God, you're not going to make much progress in the spiritual life but then she says, if you don't have great desire for God, ask God to give you that desire and He will. So every time we run into our weakness, every time we run into our own selfishness, every time we run into our obstacles to growing in union with the Lord, it's an occasion for qualifying for divine "welfare". We have to admit we're below the poverty level. Lord, I can't do this. I've run into my own selfishness. I've run into my own distractions. I've run into my own attachments. Help! And if we're willing to admit we're below the poverty level, we qualify for divine welfare. So every time you run into a problem, it's an occasion for being discouraged, it's an occasion for casting your anxiety and your weakness on the Lord and opening up for His grace.

Now, in that same letter that St. John Paul II wrote, he also said, in order to really make progress in the spiritual life, we really have to reconnect with the spiritual wisdom of the Church. And then he mentioned in particular "Doctors of the Church." So who are Doctors of the Church? There are only 35 or 36 Doctors of the Church. They're saints and have been recognized by the Church as not only being holy but having a depth of wisdom that's useful for the whole Church. Some are chosen because of their expertise and systematic theology or interpreting scripture or

moral theology, but some were chosen and recognized because of the depth of wisdom that God gave them about how you make progress on the spiritual journey, a practical wisdom. Saints like Teresa of Avila, saints like John of the Cross, Spanish, by the way, I was just reading a little talk that Eduardo Bonnin gave in Canada and he was quoting Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, so this is part of the patrimony of the founders of the Cursillo Movement, the depth of Spanish spirituality in these great Doctors of the Church. St. John Paul II also mentioned St. Catherine of Siena and St. Therese of Lisieux and these Doctors of the Church like St. Francis de Sales and St. Bernard of Clairvaux and St. Augustine. Now, right after I made the Cursillo, I was just overwhelmed by the greatness of God and I just wanted to be one with Him. And I knew there's a lot of depth in writers like St. John of the Cross. I picked up a book by St. John of the Cross and about maybe 60 pages into it I put it down. And so I said, I don't understand what he's talking about, and what I do understand sounds too negative. So in about 25 years later, when I was taking a class on Catholic spirituality at the seminary, I read another book by St. John of the Cross, and this time all the lights went on, wow, this puts together everything I ever wondered about, everything I hoped for, everything I couldn't understand. All I can say is that the Lord may have knocked me out so I could begin to understand it but, also a special grace of understanding and being able to share it. So, over the next 10 years or so I went through each of the Doctors of the Church in the areas of spirituality, and I was struck by the harmony of what they are saying, and I thought if you could ever put these together in an orderly clear way you'd have a tremendous guide for the spiritual journey. So, that's what I did with this book called *The Fulfillment of All Desire*, and Hoang, the Administrator of The Cursillo Movement, ordered 100 of these because it meant so much to him and he thought it would be useful for spiritual growth in the Cursillo Movement. The book is in the bookstore. So I wrote those and put it together in an orderly way and lots of people are using it in small groups and it's really been helpful.

But in these Doctors of the Church, St. John Paul II identifies four basic principles of the spiritual journey. I'm going to run through those as much as I can with my remaining time. First principle, the spiritual journey is totally dependent on the grace of God. I actually found that rather good news to find out because my own effort to make progress on the spiritual journey wasn't totally successful. I'd say there's something missing here. And St. Therese of Lisieux particularly is a tremendous teacher of dependence on God. She writes in the *Story of a Soul*, she says, I've been in the convent almost seven years, and she goes on to say, almost every time I go to pray I fall asleep. Well, when I read that, I woke up.

I said, goodness, you can have sleepy prayer times and somehow become a saint. How does this happen? And she only had another year or two to live. She entered the convent just short of her 16th birthday. She died at the age of 24, suffocating from tuberculosis. She only had a couple of years to live and she says, you'd think I'd be absolutely discouraged because the whole life of the Carmelite is to pray. She says, I'm not. And the reason why I'm not discouraged is that I know that God loves me even while I'm sleeping. And there's a line in one of the Psalms that says "The Lord gives to His beloved while she sleeps." So we can claim that Scripture passage, right?

She also goes on to say, I know that God loves me even while I'm sleeping because I see that when parents put their children to bed, they love them just the same. As a parent, I might add

that sometimes when we put them to bed we love them even more. They finally stop screaming, it was driving me crazy, I was losing my holiness!

And then she says, I also know this is true because I see that surgeons put their patients to sleep when they're doing life-saving surgery. So Therese's confidence wasn't in the quality of her prayer times, Therese's confidence was in the power of God's love to take her sleepy prayer times and work transformation in her soul, and that's a very important principle of spiritual life.

Teresa of Avila writes in one of her books, for the first 14 years after I renewed my relationship with the Lord, I couldn't pray without the help of a book because my mind was like wild horses with thoughts going in every direction. You don't start off in deep contemplation uninterrupted by sleep or distractions. And Teresa of Avila says, the most she's ever been in that kind of really deep contemplation is for the length of a Hail Mary; she says, it's never been more than a half hour. So there's always a bit of a struggle in prayer, there's always a bit of regaining our focus on the Lord, and sometimes we get pictures of the saints so we forget that. We forget Therese falling asleep. We forget Teresa of Avila being distracted and needing the help of spiritual reading to really keep focused on the Lord.

Second principle of spiritual journey, even though the spiritual journey is totally dependent on the grace of God, our effort is necessary. It's not sufficient but it's necessary. What kind of effort? First, the effort of paying attention to God. Looking at Jesus as Teresa of Avila says, I think that the most important decision I ever made in my life was that decision I made on the Cursillo to swallow my pride and humble myself and admit that Jesus is Lord. He's real. He's risen from the dead. He's standing before me. He's inviting me to be His disciple and to say yes. I think that's the most important decision I've ever made in my life. The second most important decision I think I ever made in my life was to begin to take some time each day for personal prayer. Now, a lot of times, we go to Mass and that's really, really super special, it's the height of Christian worship and prayer. But like in the human family if we just had meals together and never spent one-on-one time with our father, or mother, or brothers, or sisters, uh, there'd be something missing in the relationships. And so, we really need to balance the prayer of the Mass, the community prayer with one-on-one time with the Lord. And every saint says this, taking some time every day to be with the Lord in personal prayer is really, really important. And lots of times whether it's in Cursillo groups or charismatic groups or marriage encounter groups, sometimes I just feel I'm not feeling this year, I'm not trying to discern anything here that people have leveled off in a certain way. I just stay in the same place and they're celebrating a past experience rather than going on in relationship with the Lord. And so, I think the thing that makes the difference there is taking some time each day in personal prayer. Saint Francis de Sales who wrote the first book of spirituality for laypeople, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, says, busy Catholic laypeople should not pray any longer than an hour a day.

It's okay to react to that. Unless you have the permission of your spiritual director but they should pray an hour a day he says, because they're busy Catholic laypeople. He says, how do you expect in all the demands of your life, of work, of family, of all the interactions you have with people, all the busyness and challenges in your life, how do you expect to be there, led by the Lord attentive to the Holy Spirit if you're not spending some substantial time listening to the Lord and being quiet. You know, "Be still, and know that I am God." Now, in my prayer time

sometimes I'm quiet and sometimes when nobody is around, I'll walk around and sing or shout or whatever, but whatever keeps me awake, whatever keeps me focused. Prayer before the Blessed Sacrament is absolutely wonderful but if you can't do that, do it in your home, do it in your car, but as much as possible, build in to your daily life some time for personal prayer. I really think it is the second most important decision I ever made. It's one of the reasons why I'm still here today. I think the third most important decision I ever made was to get into Group Reunion. And it's not always been a formal Group Reunion but, I've been in a small men's group for 50 years and that's been really important too. When a brother falters, we need to reach out and help him, we need to pray with him, we need to encourage him, we need to help him along the way, and people have helped me and I've helped other people. And we have such tremendous help for doing these in prayer, like that little Magnificat. It was ideal for me, going to early morning Mass, staying after Mass to have a time of personal prayer. If I'm awake after Mass which oftentimes I am, I'll just be with the Lord quietly and just be grateful for the amazing gift of the Lord giving Himself to us and if I start to drift off, I'll get out my Magnificat and do the morning prayer and then go over the readings again, and when it comes time for intercessions, I'll get off my little list of people that I'm praying for and then read the meditation, and if it's not by a German theologian, I generally understand it.

And then, I read the Life of the Saints and those are so inspiring. So many martyrs in the life for their Church, so many Vietnamese martyrs and Hispanic martyrs and an English priest, I mean just so many people who have had the courage to be loyal to Christ and we're going to need that courage in the days to come. Really difficult decisions are awaiting Catholics in the days ahead. Tremendous pressures are coming on people too, are you loyal to Christ? Are you loyal to the prevailing secular pagan culture? This is going to be very, very hard for people to remain faithful to Christ unless they have the support that we have like groups in the Cursillo Movement and all the things like that.

Okay, what else can we do? We could turn away from those things that block our relationship from growing, or slow it down. And this next stuff I'm going to be telling you is some of the most useful stuff. Sin blocks our relationship with the Lord. And the first thing the saints tell us is we have to turn away from serious sin. Now, when you talk about serious sin these days, you can't really count on people understanding what that is, what are you talking about? Like not believing in global environment? or, global warming or not recycling, is that what you're talking about? Well, that certainly has a moral dimension to it but so many people I've heard these days that God isn't concerned about these little personal things in your life, I mean that's no big deal. The Church is hung-up on those things and we're getting over it now. But as a matter of fact, besides the big global issues, God is very concerned about those personal choices and actions we take in our life that most deeply affect our souls. Not to recycle is at a much further out level from sins that really impact our soul and our relationships. So, we have to remember what St. Paul says about serious sin, 1st Corinthians Chapter 6, "Don't let anybody deceive you." There's huge deception in the environment today. There's huge deception even in the Church. He says, "Don't let anybody deceive you." The immoral will not be able to enter the Kingdom of God, the fornicator, the adulterer, the person who engages in homosexual activity, the thief, the robber, the miser, the drunker, the idolater and then all kinds of other lists. People who commit serious sin and don't repent will not enter the kingdom of God and that's why evangelization is so important. We're not just about offering people enrichment for their life. We're offering

people the chance to save their life like my life was saved. I had to repent from serious sin in order for the grace of God to become effective in my life. We talked so much today about God being so merciful who never let anybody be lost. God is so merciful and He doesn't want anybody to be lost but that mercy isn't automatically imposed on people, it has to be received. There has to be a yes to mercy. There has to be a humbling of ourselves to admit that we need mercy. There has to be the acknowledgement of sin in order for the forgiveness of sin. And this is the message of St. Faustina, people don't know that is the part of the message. Time after time, Jesus says, unless people avail themselves of my mercy, unless they say yes to my mercy, they'll perish for all eternity. It isn't this kind of cheap mercy. It's one incredible prize of the blood of Jesus Christ and there has to be a yes to it. There has to be a humbling of ourselves. There has to be, just like it happened to me on the Cursillo, we have to humble ourselves and accept the mercy of God and repent and believe.

So the first thing is turning away from serious sin. Sometimes when people hear this certain things of serious sin, they're able to immediately turn away from them. But other times, people have become a slave to sin like St. Augustine was. St. Augustine became a slave to sexual sin, but he said he was responsible for having gotten to that point through a whole series of earlier decisions he had made in his life that he repeated. He began able to sin or not sin and he kept choosing the sin and eventually he became a slave to sin. He said by the time he wanted to get free, he couldn't get free, so he had to cry out to God for mercy. And eventually, through a long struggle, the Lord set him free and the Lord will set people free if they're willing to engage on that long struggle. Now, after we're free from serious sin or some of us who have had the great grace have never committed a serious sin. Sometimes it's tempting to feel like we have arrived at a truly wonderful place. We will enter the kingdom of God if we die in grace.

But there are also things that slow down the process of transformation called lesser sins, venial sins. And the saints make a very important distinction between what they call inadvertent venial sins and advertent venial sins. Inadvertent venial sins, St. Teresa of Avila says it's like when the proverb says, "The just person falls seven times a day and living a basically righteous life." You know, you're living a good life but the wounds of sin are kicking out stuff almost against your will, like that little impatience, that little bad thought, that little white lie that you tell out of embarrassment that you weren't planning to tell. And what the saints say is that those inadvertent venial sins aren't significant in slowing down the journey to God. They'll get less over time. But what is significant is what they call advertent venial sin. St. Teresa of Avila describes it like this when I say to myself I know the Lord doesn't want me to do this but I really like doing it. I'm not going to go to jail if I do it. I'm not going to go to hell if I do it and my spouse is probably not going to divorce me if I do it. I really like doing it so I'm going to do it. And what Teresa says is that even though it's a little thing, it's really no little thing to freely choose to offend the Lord even in a small matter. So, what the saint suggests is to make a conscious decision that I never want to freely choose to offend the Lord even in a small matter, a very significant, a very important decision. So there are two practical things. One is if you settle down on a plateau, break camp and say, I want more, I want to go on, I never want to stop. Two, if you don't have a personal prayer time or it's been sporadic, recommit yourself to time each day of personal prayer, it's really important. Third, if you're dealing with serious sin, repent, be honest, humble yourself, go through the painful process of transformation. It will save your life. It will save your soul. If you've been willfully choosing to offend the Lord in small matters,

make a decision that you don't want to do that, very, very helpful in removing impediments to the process of transformation.

This next thing, I'm just going to do two last things quickly here. This next thing I never heard about and I had it. It's what Francis de Sales calls affection for sin. You may not be committing a particular sin, maybe you've never had and maybe you didn't in the past but you're nurturing affection for it. Nostalgic memory of the past, wishful thinking about the future like maybe the Church will change its teaching and be serious someday. I just got to keep a little door open here. And it gives some practical examples about how to understand this and identify it in our life. He says, the Israelites when they're brought out of slavery in Egypt came into the desert, heading towards the Promised Land, but a journey that could've taken eight days took 40 years because they are going around in circles looking back on Egypt. Remember when they came to Moses and said, Moses, why did you bring us out into the desert? We just read this on a liturgy. Why did you bring us out in the desert? There are plenty of graves in Egypt, why didn't you just leave us there? We could have been buried there. And we're missing the leeks, and the garlic, and the melons we used to have in Egypt. So, they are physically out in Egypt but their hearts were attached to Egypt. So sometimes, as Francis says, sometimes we're no longer committing a particular sin but our heart is still attached to it in a voluntary way and we need to ask the Lord to help us identify any voluntary affection for sin and let go of it. He gives another example. He talks about a man who's extremely allergic to eating melons and the doctor tells him, you've just got to completely give up eating melons because one of these days, you can stop breathing and it's going to be over. So he says, okay, I don't want to die. I'm going to give up eating melons but I could still go down to the fruit market. I can still hangout by the melon stand. I can still smell them, and touch them and I could still talk to the lucky people who could still eat melons because maybe sometime in the future I'll be able to eat them again. That's affection for sin. So what Francis tells us is that if you identify affection for sin, let go of it. Temptation will always be there. Our fallen human nature always will be generating temptation but it's one thing to say no to temptation, it's another thing to nurture an affection for sin. And giving up any nurturing of affection for sin is really, really helpful for the spiritual journey. One last word about temptation. What are the saints saying about temptation? They say that, believe the scripture, 1st Corinthians Chapter 10, "No temptation comes your way that God doesn't also give a way out of it or the grace to endure it. He will not let you be tested beyond your strength." Now, I must admit sometimes when I'm being tested or tempted, I'll ask the Lord, I'll say, Lord, have you done a recent strength test?

I know you did one after the Cursillo last year but have you done a recent strength test? But I could tell you that's absolutely true. God will not let you be tested beyond your strength. He'll always give you the grace to say no.

What else do the saints say about temptation? They say the very best moment to defeat a temptation is the first instant we become aware of it. Sometimes we get into playing with temptation, dallying with temptation like for example, I'm not really planning to kill my neighbor but it sure feels good to think about it for a while.

And what the scripture tells us is that depending on the nature of the temptation and depending on how deeply we receive it into our soul, it itself can be a sin like Jesus said, you've heard Him

say don't commit adultery, I say to you don't voluntarily entertain or nurture lust in your heart. You've heard it said don't kill, I say to you, don't voluntarily entertain hatred or unforgiveness for your brother in your heart. So Jesus is about the healing of the heart. We'll never be free of temptation but we can be free of yielding to it, playing with it, indulging with it, dallying with it, and the sooner we can say no, the easier it is to defeat. So the instant we become aware of temptation we should say, that's a wicked thought, identify it. Don't get into a gray zone, a foggy zone, where you don't want to become aware of what's going on. The instance that you become aware of the temptation, say, that's a wicked thought, I don't want it, I reject it, and you turn away from it. Final example, out in the desert, the Bedouins have tents and camels and sometimes big dust storms come up, and when the dust storms come up, they pitch their tents and the Bedouins get into the tents but the camels also like to get into the tents. So, what happens as the Bedouins get into the tents, they close the tent flaps but they keep an eagle eye on the tent flaps. And as soon as the camel's nose comes under the tent flap, they kick it real hard. If they delay, before they know it, the camel's going to be in the tent and it's going to be biting and kicking and hissing and it's going to expel them from the tent. Same with temptation, as soon as the camel's nose of temptation comes under our tent flap, kick it real hard. It's good to hate sin. It's good to call it wickedness for what it is. St. Catherine of Siena says, we're engaging in a spiritual battle with a two-edged sword. One edge of the sword is love for virtue and the other edge of the sword is hatred for sin.

There is so much more I'd like to share with you but that's why this book is a good resource. I have to go to Peoria, Illinois tonight and so I can only stay until about 12:20 or so, so if you would like me to sign a copy, I'll be at the bookstore after Mass. And this one other book that Hoang ordered called *The Urgency of the New Evangelization: Answering the Call*, and this is about what is the new evangelization, what's evangelization, what's really the message that Jesus asked us to share with people, what did St. Faustina really say about Divine Mercy, what's the truth about salvation. So it's really good basic stuff that's been covered oftentimes in the Church. So it's another book I've read.

I have been really, really happy to be here because Cursillo saved my life! Amen.