

Fr. Bill's Online Study 33 Days to Merciful Love by Fr Michael Gaitley

March 12 – Day 1

1/33 today we also begin our "33 Days to Merciful Love" with Fr Michael Gaitley. Today Fr Gaitley explores the Genesis or root of sin, not only the first sin of Adam and Eve but all sin: a lack of trust/faith in God which results in a choice to be disobedient. Think about it. Reflect on your sins. How many would disappear if we simply trusted the Lord enough to follow His will. I dare say "all of them." What do you think? Our prayer: "Come, Holy Spirit, fire of mercy. Help me better to know the great and unsurpassable goodness of God." I also encourage you to offer three more prayers: pray this prayer on every Brad of your Rosary: "Jesus, I trust in you." Second, pray the Chaplet of Divine Mercy at 3pm, if possible. Lastly, offer your Mass today for this intention: may we grow in faith. Let us pray for one another as we begin our journey!

March 13 – Day 2

2/33 today we continue our Lenten journey with Fr Michael Gaitley's book "33 Days to Merciful Love". Today Fr Gaitley focuses on the Genesis story of Abraham - our father in faith. It is through trust/faith in God that we are able to "trust God's promises" and "hope against all hope" and to withstand the temptations which lead us into sin. God is faithful. God is merciful. God is love! Our prayer: "Come, Holy Spirit, fire of mercy. Please give me such trust in God's Word that I might even hope against hope." I also encourage you to offer two more prayers: pray this prayer on every bead of your Rosary: "Jesus, I trust in you." Second, pray the Chaplet of Divine Mercy (at 3pm, if possible). Lastly, reach out to someone in need. May God bless you!

March 14 – Day 3

3/33. Today, Fr Gaitley, in "33 Days to Merciful Love", introduces Mary, the mother of faith. He encourages us to contemplate Mary's leap of faith - when the angel proclaimed that she, a virgin, would conceive a child - and not any child - but the Messiah - the Son of God! "She believed God's Word, even when it seemed impossible. She hoped against hope, believing that, as the angel said, 'with God nothing will be impossible.'" What do you think? Come, Holy Spirit, fire of mercy. Help me to believe that with God nothing will be impossible. Please also add a Chaplet or at least pray "Jesus, I trust in you!" On each bead of your rosary. May God bless you!!

March 15 - Day 4

4/33. Today's reading is profound as Fr Gaitley talks about our Blessed Mother's faith during the "hidden years" before Jesus begins his public ministry. It is one thing to have faith when God does extraordinary things, it is quite another to see God in the ordinary events of our life. Often that is the leap of faith we are called to make. On another note, yesterday's reading needed a bit more clarification. Sometimes we can be too eager in our quest to honor Mary. I don't think it is quite right to say that Jesus is not the supreme model of faith (pg. 31). He is "the way, the truth, and the life" and is the perfect model of faith ... in fact that is the reason He was incarnate ... fully man - he provided the perfect model of how to love Our Heavenly Father and

our neighbor. (I mention this only because earlier this week I had to convince a group of children that Mary was not God.) "Come, Holy Spirit, fire of mercy. Help me to believe in God and his love for me, even when the darkness surrounds me." Please also pray the chaplet of mercy and "Jesus, I trust in you" each bead of the rosary. May God bless you!

March 16 – Day 5

5/33 As we continue our journey with Fr Gaitley to our consecration to Divine Mercy on April 23, we are again invited to contemplate our Blessed Mother - this time at the foot of the cross. At some point in our life - all of us will face an hour of terrible darkness when all seems lost such as the death of a loved one or physical or mental calamity. Mary provides an eloquent witness of how to hope against hope when all seems lost.

Not to be too nit picky, but I was concerned with the author's contention in the first paragraph that Mary "had" to be witness and give consent to the death of Jesus. While I can't check Father's source at the present time, it is important to remember that Mary had free will and did not "have" to do anything. She was there by choice ... to lovingly support her Son in His darkest hour. This is an important distinction because in doing so, she provided an important witness of how to be merciful to those in need. Sometimes we don't have to "do" anything. We simply have to be there.

There is no biblical evidence that she "consented" to the Lord's death. The Gospels do not comment on what she thought. Personally, I find the idea that she "consented" to the crucifixion to be absurd. But again, I can't check Fr Gaitley's source at this time.

I was happy the the author confirmed that Mary "did not fully understand" and that she "stood in darkness." I agree 100%! If Jesus prayed "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me" (Mt 27:46) - I'm sure her prayer was the same!!! To have fear or to have doubts doesn't mean you are a bad Christian. It means you are alive and perhaps facing great pain or evil Evil itself.

But ultimately, we must remember that God does love us - no matter what - and is faithful, that He suffered and died for our salvation, and that He will come again in glory!

"Come, Holy Spirit, fire of mercy. Help me to believe in God and his love for me even when the darkness surrounds me." Please add a Chaplet and "Jesus, I trust in You" on every bead of the rosary

March 17 – Day 6

March 18 – Day 7

7/33. Today we recall the readings from this week. All that is good, including faith is a gift from God. We respond with a leap of faith, through both our words and deeds, a submission of will to God. This in turn leads to more graces. Our song of praise and thanksgiving (which in itself is willed by God), ultimately climaxes in our song with the angels as we enter heavenly bliss. This is the secret of true joy - here on earth and perfectly in the kingdom to come!

Why Mary? Because she shows us that it is possible to follow Christ. She is the example of authentic discipleship and model of the Church. She heard the Word of God, responded with a leap of faith, and then invested her life in sharing the Gospel in both word and deed all while singing her song of praise and thanksgiving.

Fr Gaitley rightly quotes Lumen Gentium. Chapter VIII, n. 52-68, certainly should be reread. As the Council Father's stated, we must be careful "to abstain zealously both from all gross exaggerations as well as from petty narrow-mindedness in considering the singular dignity of the Mother of God" (LG, 67). Everything we say about Mary "is to be so understood that it neither takes away from nor adds anything to the dignity and efficaciousness of Christ the one Mediator" (LG, 61).

Did God need Mary (p. 41)? God did not need Mary to save the world. If He did, He would not be God (omnipotent). At the dawn of creation, He chose Mary to be the Theotokos, preserving her from original sin and providing her with graces she would need to fulfill His will.

So what is faith? Certainly faith is a gift -- grace, which we accept and embrace. This grace allows us to believe (have faith) in God and those things He revealed to us to be true and is expressed through our thoughts, words, and deeds! (Hebrews 11, CCC 1814ff).

Is it obtained through Mary? (P. 41) No. It is a gift from God. It is certainly clear that faith in God is not limited to those who embrace Christianity. But for us as Christians, it did come through Mary in the limited sense that Jesus was born of Mary.

To say that God need Mary because she is a human (p. 41), ignores that gift of the Incarnation - that God became fully human in the form of Jesus to do just that! God became Man - the new Adam, to redeem us.

In the same sense, is she Mediatrix of grace? Clearly the Bible states that Jesus is the sole mediator. (1 Tm 2:5). Again, the Second Vatican Council affirmed that the title "Mediatrix" "is to be so understood that it neither takes away from nor adds anything to the dignity and efficaciousness of Christ the one Mediator" (LG, 62). Personally, "Mediatrix" is a title I try to avoid as it only leads to confusion when dialoguing with our Protestant brothers and sisters.

My last point, Fr Gaitley's treatment on page 43 is important. We do share in the sufferings of Christ and in that limited sense, participate in the salvation of the world.

"Come, Holy Spirit, fire of mercy. Bring me, through Mary to the Fountain of Mercy." Today, I encourage you to offer a rosary (5 decades) and pray for the grace to follow the example of Mary, the model of faith and Christian discipleship.

March 19 – Day 8

8/33. Today's reading from "33 Days to Merciful Love" is amazing. I've marked it in my book so I can share it with those I counsel who suffer from Jansenist tendencies, over scrupulously, and poor self-esteem. As Fr. Gaitley stated, the over emphasis on sins, flaws, and suffering is extremely painful, lonely, and sad - a false Christianity! I can't wait for the rest of the week to explore the ways St Therese overcame these weaknesses!

Please pray "Come, Holy Spirit, fire of mercy. Give me the heart of an eagle, a burning longing to choose all that you will for me." Also, when you go to the Holy Mass, let us offer our prayers for all those who are journeying with you through these Facebook postings - wherever they may be in this world. May they be enlighten by Christ and filled with His peace and joy!

March 20 – Day 9

March 21 – Day 10

March 22 – Day 11

11/33. Today's reading is very beautiful. I love the analogy of a father helping his child climb the stairs. That being said, I'd love to hear from you who are parents. I disagree with some of Fr Gaitley's assertions - especially that our Father God wants to keep us little and helpless.

Personally, I think we are like little children learning to walk. Our Heavenly Father wants us to try, and try hard. He lovingly knows that sometimes we will fall but encourages us to get up and try again. At times, he catches us when he knows we could really hurt ourselves. When we learn to walk, he then teaches us to run, skip, jump, dance, ride a bike, drive a car ... He wants us to grow up ... for as big as we become (or as high we are on the staircase of holiness), we will ALWAYS need Him. He is God and can ALWAYS pick us up. We will always be small, weak, and helpless in comparison to Him. In fact, the holier we become, the more we realize we NEED Him, how much we depend upon His grace and mercy!

While God can use bad things for good, I don't think it is His will for us to remain in sin so we can avoid greater ones. His will is that we always GROW holy in His sight ... just like every parent wants his or her child to develop to his or her full potential. God is not a worse parent than us! He is the perfect Father!

All that being said, his conclusion is spot on. To grow in holiness, 1) Recognize your brokenness, your frailty, your complete need for God's grace and mercy. 2). Keep trying. And when I say try, I'm not saying a half-hearted effort ... try with all your might! 3) Keep trusting. Every parent knows that for children to learn walk, they must develop muscles, learn balance, and figure out how to move. Every parent knows the child will fall. And every parent tries to clear the path so that the child will not get hurt. But last and perhaps most importantly, every loving parent encourages the child, challenges the child, and loves the child ... whether the child takes the first step today or a month from now. Am I right?

Pray: "Come, Holy Spirit, fire of mercy. Help me to do three things: 1) recognize the darkness of my littleness, 2) keep trying to grow in holiness, and 3) keep trusting in your mercy." Make a list of your sins, especially your persistent sins with their root causes. Choose one today to steadfastly avoid. And please offer a chaplet of mercy for those who have stopped trying!

March 23 – Day 12

12/33. Today, in "33 Days to Merciful Love," Fr Gaitley outlines the St Therese's "Little Way" 1) recognizing our utter littleness - our brokenness and helplessness before God ... 2) try the best you can, with all your might, to become holy ... 3) completely trust in God's Mercy and Love.

Do I hear an "Amen?"

Pray "Come, Holy Spirit, fire of mercy. Though wrk, broken, and Sunil, help me to trust that I can become a great saint through the amazing power of Divine Mercy." Also, make a thorough examination of conscience ... inventory "the darkness of your littleness," make an act of contrition and pray the Chaplet. May God bless you!

March 24 – Day 13

13/33. Today, in "33 Days to Merciful Love," we are again reminded to have faith or trust in God. The Gospels are very clear ... we must have faith in the Lord if we are to be open to the graces and blessings He wants to shower upon us.

Are faith and trust synonymous? I've been praying about this. I guess it depends on the context. I think faith is our belief in God. Trust is faith in action. What do you think?

On another note, on this the day of my birth, I thank God for the gift of life, my faith, my vocation, my family, and my friends, and for the great blessing to be able to love and serve Him this day! Jesus, I trust in you!

Pray: "Come, Holy Spirit, fire of mercy. Teach me to pray with my whole heart, "Jesus, I trust in you." Also, be sure to observe the hour of mercy ... by visiting the Eucharistic Lord, praying the Stations, or even by pausing and offering a prayer. Lastly, be sure to pray the Chaplet! (And pray for me!)

March 25 – Day 14

3/14. First of all, thank you for all of the birthday wishes. I really feel your love and support. Thank you so very much and be assured of my prayers for you!

In today's reading from "33 Days to Merciful Love," Fr Gaitley warns against "thieves of hope." They are the ones who say that St Therese's Little Way is too lofty for us to accomplish, that Mary was too perfect for us to follow, or that Jesus was not fully human and his efforts were not enough - that we need other intercessors, co-redeemers, or mediators in order to be saved. (The inclusion of Mary and Jesus as victims of thieves of hope is my thought not Father's.) The bottom line is that St Therese's "Little Way" of recognizing our littleness/brokenness, trying our best to do His will, and complete trust in Him IS for us all. Mary was a human being who showed us it IS possible to do His will, and Jesus IS the way, the truth, and the life ... our sole Redeemer, Mediator, who reveals to us perfectly the Father's Merciful Love.

Today's mystery ... the Annunciation ... models the "Little Way" ... the handmaiden of the Lord consents to His Word and completely trusts in Him to accomplish what was foretold. May we do the same!

Please pray: "Come. Holy Spirit, fire of mercy. Help me to embrace the Little Way with all my heart." Please add the chaplet of mercy and the Angelus (if possible in morning, noon, and night).

May God bless you!

March 26 – Day 15

15/33. Yesterday I went to the Eucharistic Congress in Jacksonville with a small group of parishioners. It was amazing! Fr. Michael Gaitley was one of the speakers. He was incredible as he shared how the Consecration to Jesus through Mary is changing the world. We'll again do the consecration after Thanksgiving. Please mark your calendars to join me at next year's Congress: March 16-17, 2018!

Today's reading from "33 Days to Merciful Love" is really good. He reminds us of the context of Jansenism and the emphasis on Divine Justice and how St Therese of Lisieux's offering to Merciful Love provides an important corrective. Divine Justice is clothed in Merciful Love.

Think of the scales of justice. While we tend to depict Lady Justice as being blindfolded as she holds the scales of justice, we picture Jesus with his eyes wide open, looking at us with eyes of love. As our lives are placed on the scales of justice, he tips the scales with His hands ... the hands of mercy and love!

He knows our strengths and weaknesses. He knows how we struggle and the challenges we face. And loves us through them. The Little Way reminds us that we must be aware of our brokenness, our need for Mercy, and try our very best ... completely trusting that if we truly do our best, the Lord will do the rest!

Let us pray for one another at Mass today!

"Come, Holy Spirit, fire of mercy. Fill me with Merciful Love so that, through it, I may see all of God's perfections, including his justice, as clothed in love." Please think of one pernicious sin, and make EVERY effort to avoid it today. Also when you go to Mass, pray at least one decade of the chaplet as your post-communion offering. God bless you!

March 27 – Day 16

16/33. Today Fr Gaitley focuses on the nature of God. God is infinitely just and He is also infinitely merciful. So often, we focus on the Divine Justice of God, thinking somehow that we need to "merit" salvation. This is one of my primary concerns with the new translation of the Mass into English - the prayers often imply that we can "merit" salvation, which is, of course, impossible. We respond to God's grace by trying our best to follow the Lord's will, knowing that our efforts are never sufficient to "merit" heaven ... at the end we must all rely on the mercy of God!

Does God "need" to share His merciful love? The answer is clearly "no." God doesn't "need" to do anything. God certainly doesn't "need" us. To imply that God has "needs" is to anthropomorphize God - making Him less than God.

Jesus himself puts it better in his conversation with St. Faustina -- God "desires" to bestow His graces upon souls. He thirsts for our souls and longs to shower His mercy upon us. We just need to be open to it! Are you?

"Come, Holy Spirit, fire of mercy. Prepare my heart to receive waves of infinite tenderness from the Heart of Jesus." Also remember to pause for prayer at 3pm, the hour of mercy and to offer the chaplet sometime today with the intention that more will open their hearts to the Merciful Heart of Jesus!

March 28 – Day 17

17/33. Today's reading from Fr Gaitley's "33 Days to Merciful Love" was excellent. God is infinitely just, but He is also infinitely merciful.

Remember the Little Way of St. Therese? 1. Acknowledge our brokenness, our sins and failings, our need for God's grace. 2) Keep trying to be holy. Weed the garden of our lives by removing not only the sin and vice, but all attraction to that which is evil. 3) Trust and believe in God's mercy!

Today we add 2 important steps. We must ask for and be open to God's mercy. AND We need to share God's mercy with others. We need to try to be merciful as the Father is merciful. The spiritual and corporal works of mercy may give us some ideas of how we can truly be compassionate, merciful, loving ... as Christ taught us!

"Come, Holy Spirit, fire of mercy. Make my heart like the tender Heart of Jesus, full of mercy and compassion." Console the Heart of Jesus by praying the Chaplet, observing His Hour of Mercy, and finally, sharing His Mercy at least once.

Have a beautiful day!

March 29 – Day 18

As we continue our "33 Days to Merciful Love" with Fr. Gaitley, we are reminded that by offering ourselves to Merciful Love we are inviting God to heal our hardened hearts. This is so

necessary. When we first hear of natural disasters, extreme poverty, wars, and famine ... we are deeply troubled. Unfortunately before long we become desensitized and soon become immune to the plights of others. Likewise, in our relationship with God, we can take for granted His many graces and blessings and our hearts become cold.

Today, let us pray for a heart transplant. That we give the Lord our cold stony hearts and receive His merciful heart so that we may truly love God and neighbor.

This experience of love transforms us ... and also invites a certain suffering as we once again are moved by the plight of others, as we long for God with all our hearts. This pain of empathy purifies us like the fires of purgatory and hopefully motivates us to reach out and help others ... In other words, it purifies us, purgates us, just like Purgatory.

How? Try, try, try. As you hear about the victims of the war in Syria, when you think of the needs of our elderly and infirm, when we think of the poor and broken ... let's open our hearts to them and reach out to help them the best we can.

Ask for the grace.

Be attentive to your brokenness and the needs of others.

Try your best to love Him and neighbor.

Completely trust in His merciful love!

"Come, Holy Spirit, fire of mercy.

Help me to live my life so I'll go straight to heaven when I die."

Please offer a Chaplet for the poor forgotten souls in Purgatory, observe the hour of mercy, and perform one random act of mercy towards another.

Have a great day!