

Malcolm: This is your host, Malcolm Schluenderfritz, and joining me today is Peter Land from Philadelphia. Hello Peter, how are you doing?

Peter: Hey, Malcolm, I'm doing well! Thanks! How are you?

Malcolm: I'm doing pretty well.

Our topic for today is *Consoling the Heart of Jesus*, in particular the book of that name by Fr. Michael Gaitley, MIC, but also the general concept of our goal in the spiritual life: loving the Lord. And I thought I'd start by talking a little bit about my personal experience with this book. I first read it as a young adult; I had fallen into a dark place in my spiritual life for several years past, for quite a long time. I'd fallen into a lot of scrupulosity; it derived from the fact that I saw the spiritual life as a self-improvement project, that I was working really hard at improving myself and perfecting myself in a virtuous manner so that I would merit God's love, so that eventually I would deserve God's love, if I could just behave perfectly. And of course the problem is that it's impossible to behave perfectly for fallen human beings, especially starting out with that mindset. So, eventually, I just didn't want to think about God at all, because all I could think about when I thought of God was all my failures. I saw Him in a very judgmental, negative way. And so I pretty much gave up. I kept going through all the motions, I was even going to daily Mass, confession every month, saying the Rosary with my family, all the outward motions, but I was figuring that this wasn't getting me anywhere, I'm never going to be a saint, it is just too much. Scrupulosity is sort of a mental affliction and it is really hard for those who are afflicted with it, but it can help them to realize that it is actually a subtle form of pride. It's a focus on oneself instead of on the Lord. A focus inwards, instead of outwards. I had a very inward-looking spirituality. Everything in the spiritual life was in reference to *me*. I was worried about *my personal* salvation, the state of *my* soul. And then my mother found this book and recommended that I read it, and I had a certain amount of internal resistance, because I didn't want to think about trying to be a saint which I'd already decided I couldn't do, I just didn't want to do it; and initially I was sort of repelled by the book, it seemed too simple, too happy. But I tried to make a go of it. It is a guided meditation, so over the course of a couple of weeks I went through the guided meditations and considerations in the book, and what I found was a spirituality that is focused outwards, on the Lord, on His great love, and how much He desires us to come to Him, even if we are sinful and weak, and how much we sadden Him by not trusting Him enough to come to Him as we are. I was really moved, I was finally able to set aside all of those worries, all those scruples, and realize that even though I'm far from perfect, that doesn't stop me from having a relationship with the Lord. If only the perfect could have a relationship with the Lord, that would mean that only Our blessed Lady could have a relationship with Him, and nobody else, because we are all terribly

imperfect and that is *no* hindrance, He came for *sinner*s, He came to call the *weak*. And that was such a very consoling, such a very inspiring, and very outward focused spirituality. And then also the dimension of really focusing on a love of other people, instead of an inward focus on oneself.

Peter:04:38 A quote that comes to mind, Malcolm, is from St. John the Baptist: he says "He must increase, and I must decrease." I think a lot of people in the Catholic world, especially young adults, suffer from that scrupulosity that you mentioned, that you had in your own life. This idea that we need to be a certain way before we can experience God's love or before we can come and be in His presence, as if we have to make ourselves pure in order to be worthy of His love, and *earn* any place in Heaven. And I think it's quite tragic, because the Gospel is almost the opposite of that. I've struggled a little bit with that, but at the same time as I grew in my faith, I came from a place of brokenness and desire for affection and affirmation, and finding that human beings couldn't offer me that, that human beings' love was often fickle and constantly changing. And that I was left empty and in need of something greater than what other people could give me. And so out of that place of emptiness I begin to seek from the depth of my heart what is true, what is good, and the love of God. Ultimately that was a long journey and a long discovery, but I would say one of the major breakthroughs for me was learning to accept myself as I am, in all my brokenness, in all my faults and failures and defects, just coming to accept that God loves me, that I'm OK as I am. That was quite incredible to experience, because I think in America we're constantly being measured by others and by social expectations. And so I think we often feel like we don't measure up, or that we are not good enough. People may abandon us for another person who seems better. So I think this is a beautiful topic for today, to talk about this close union that Jesus desires with us, in the midst of our sinfulness and neediness, and in that union He's the one who makes us pure and holy and cleanses us, but also rejoices in our fellowship.

Malcolm: 07:48 Yes, that idea that to gain love we have to be perfect affects our *human* relationships in a negative way as well. I read a psychological study on how many children (even if they have really loving parents) end up imagining that they have to perform perfectly to win their parents' love, when really their parents are going to love them no matter what. And the child starts to imagine that they have to be constantly putting on an act to gain love. And that of course can unfortunately be the actual case with human beings, but with Christ that's not the way. In the scriptures and in history we see that people come to Him *first*, and become saints *afterwards*. But in certain circles in the Church there's the idea that you become a saint and *then* go to God. Somebody said that we all like to think that we could perfect ourselves and only then show the perfect final project to God: "Look what I did, aren't you impressed!" Well, God isn't going to be

impressed. Somewhere in the Old Testament there is a quote which says that all of our righteousness is as filthy rags before God. God isn't going to be impressed by how together we are. Just before the coronavirus pandemic shut everything down, I was lucky to be able to go to a live retreat with Fr. Michael Gaitley. He talked about the themes in the book, and he had this quote which I really liked, which isn't actually in the book but is summing up a lot of the themes: that in the spiritual life, "Effort is absolutely essential but absolutely useless." And what he meant is that we can't imagine that this idea that we are accepted as we are means that we are OK with our sinfulness. Christ wants to see us healed and see us whole, and we should too; but if we think that our effort is ultimately what is going to get us into Heaven, then we are Pelagians. We think that *we can "do it."* We have to keep on striving because God wants us to, but it is His grace ultimately that brings us to perfection. We have to keep cooperating, but being who we are we will not be able to cooperate perfectly, and that's OK, we just have to keep trying. As somebody once put it, Christianity is the religion of "showing up." We have to keep showing up. And if we keep showing up all our lives, eventually we will make it. In one sense the dying thief on the cross, who'd live a terrible life, and said, "I know I deserve this, I'm a sinner, remember me when you come into your kingdom," is the archetypical Christian. He doesn't depend on his merits, he depends on Christ. And that when we come to Christ, then Christ can make us saints. It is the other way around from how some Christians see this.

Peter: [11:03](#) Great points, Malcolm! What comes to mind is a saying that I remember reading about where the Lord is speaking to a particular religious sister telling her that the value of our lives does not consist in the greatness of our good works, or even the generosity we show to others, but rather in using our generosity, our time, our effort to allow him to transform our lives. The idea was there's an important role for our will to play and our efforts to play in letting Christ into our hearts and our souls. And as we do so, he begins to transform the interior and make us more and more like himself. It's a great reminder for us: yes, there *is* a necessary cooperation that is required of us, to work with God's grace, and at the same time we are called to accept ourselves in our limitations, in our weakness, but still continue to strive amidst this beautiful cloud of witnesses, the saints of God, strive for holiness and sanctity, as St. Paul says, let us rid ourselves of every encumbrance and the sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that is set before us. That to me is such a beautiful statement, because it shows that God invites our cooperation, it is almost like He needs our cooperation to sanctify us. He saves us without our effort, but He does not sanctify us without our cooperation. So I think that it is a beautiful dynamic, how much we are involved in crafting the destiny of our lives, even though it is God who inspires that and brings it to fulfillment, who is the source and end of the

whole process. It is really beautiful to think about this close union that we really share with God in this process.

Malcolm: [13:38](#) That we can be cooperators, that God elevated our dignity so much that He wasn't just going to do everything for us; we're allowed the privilege of participating in this project. I mean, He doesn't *need* us; I think that's where people get hung up; they think, what is going to happen if I don't get this right! What happens if I make a mistake, what happens if I say the wrong thing to someone! God doesn't need us, and God will only allow what He can bring good out of. In a private revelation Christ told the mystic to bring her sins to Him. And she said, "Why my sins?" And He said "that's the only thing that is really yours." We aren't going to be able to contribute anything in and of ourselves to God's almighty power, and yet He allows us to work with Him, even in our weakness. It is the feast of St. Paul; St. Paul's famous line runs, "My power is made perfect in weakness." St. Paul had some kind of struggle, some kind of problem, we don't know exactly what it was; and he asked God to take it away. He'd be so much more effective at working for God if he didn't have this problem! And Christ said, no, my power is made perfect in your weakness. And Fr. Gaitley is drawing a lot on Therese of Lisieux, her "Little Way." And the Little Way is a really important thing because we can often look at the saints and they seem so far above us; they're fasting for forty days, or living on bread and water, working miracles, flying through the air, and we look at these super-hero-like figures and think, "There's no chance for me. I'm destined to be a mediocre Christian. Maybe I'll scrape through purgatory if I'm lucky." And the Little Way is the opposite. The Little Way says that we [should] realize that we are small. And we realize that it is in our smallness and weakness that God loves us. God loves the fact that we can entrust ourselves as little children to His care, and realize that we can't do it ourselves. I mean, imagine how a parent would be hurt if some child said, "Mom and Dad, I'm sufficient, I don't want anything from you, I'm going to go out on my own, I'm going to leave the home and go forge my own path in the world." And for one thing the parents would realize that the child is going to get into a world of trouble by himself. But even let's say he wasn't. Let's say he really was that self sufficient character; it would still be heartbreaking, because he wouldn't accept aid from others. So St. Therese realized that it was actually her smallness, her weakness, that attracted the love of God. Whereas if one has a prideful, I'll-do-it-my-way attitude, it would actually wall off the grace of God from being able to work.

Peter: [16:42](#) I think it's quite fitting that we're speaking on the feast day of the conversion of St. Paul. And one of the thoughts that I had as you were speaking was how St. Paul had this encounter with God. With Jesus. And this encounter led him to experience the mercy of Jesus on him. And he says in one of his

letters, "Don't you know that the mercy and loving-kindness of our God is meant to lead us to repentance?" And it is quite clear in the life of St. Paul how this encounter with Christ, even though it may have been painful at first to realize how off he was in life he was living, that he was actually persecuting the God he thought he was serving, despite the pain, I'm sure in the midst of that pain he realized the enormity of God's love and mercy that wiped away his mistakes and his false zeal. And invited him to serve Him, so that this encounter changed the course of his whole life, and he devoted himself and all his energy to proclaiming this mercy and spreading it abroad. So I think he's such a great example of what we are speaking of in coming to accept ourselves, to accept ourselves in light of God's mercy, our past failings and faults, but in light of that mercy to not be afraid to go forward and to serve our God and get rid of everything that may come in the way of that. And then to move on, to touch on St. Therese, so beautiful . . . I just think of humility vs. self-sufficiency. We talked about this before, Malcolm, but no man is an island. God did not create us to be self-sufficient. I think we can continue to operate under that illusion at times, particularly in modern 21st century America where we have all these gadgets that allow us to operate under that illusion; we often don't need a lot of other people when we have everything that we need for our daily life. But with St. Therese seeing her littleness humble herself enough so that she wasn't . . . she acknowledged the truth of her being; that she was not this great, mighty soul that was able to climb mountains (like the saints in their popular representations.) In that littleness she was not afraid; she was not afraid to lean on the heart of her Savior, like St. John the Apostle at the Last Supper. And to trust in Him, to trust that He would enable her to do what she needed to do, but that of her own efforts she would fail. So it is quite fitting to look at St. Therese in light of St. Paul and to continue to move more deeply into this relational dependence that is ultimately positive, that enables us to become who we are. One of the things that comes to me, is that when we develop a relationship with somebody we really love, and somebody we really admire, that person's example and their heart really rub off on us, in so many good ways. There are so many positive effects of being in the company of a great person, of somebody we really respect and admire, how they conduct themselves, how they treat us. All of a sudden their example begins to not only rub off, but to become a part of us, when we allow it to, and inform how we conduct ourselves with others. And I think as much as this happens on the human to human level, how much more that happens with Christ, when we experience His love, His mercy, His friendship, how much He rejoices in our company. It encourages us to do the same to others. And that's been my experience; if Christ rejoices in being with me, and there's no agenda attached to that, I'm encouraged to do that with others. Just to rejoice in being in someone's presence, to let them be heard and known, which is so often what's lacking in the world and what we do not have in our human relationships.

Malcolm 22:09 Peter, that's a really wonderful thing, because I know I often struggle with doing things that don't have an agenda. I remember a spiritual writer said that we're funny beings. We might want to take a walk, just because it is a good thing to take a walk. But we have to say there's some reason, we have to say we're taking a walk because we need exercise, everything we do has a "for what" attached. And the ultimate things are for themselves. Some things are desired as means to others, and some things are desired for themselves. The things that are desired as means are to get us to those ultimate things. And the love of God is the thing that's desired for itself, happiness. Aristotle talked about this, that the ultimate things are wanted for themselves. But we (especially Americans with our ideas of efficiency) tend to be suspicious of things that are just for themselves. We're talking to somebody "to save their soul." We're taking a walk "because we need exercise." We're listening to music "to cultivate our minds." We're always doing something for something else, and of course there are *many* things that we have to do for the sake of something else. But if everything becomes that way, then what is anything for? If everything is for something else, then we are in this endless cycle that we can't break out of. The love of God is "for nothing," and given *to us* for nothing. There's no reason, there is nothing that actually would *make* Him love us. And you brought up the past. That's also really key, because I know I've struggled terribly with the idea that I've made mistakes in the past, there are all these things . . . you can never set them right, the past is gone. And I think this draws us into the heart of Fr. Gaitley's message. He says that our spirituality should be about consoling the heart of Jesus. The heart of Jesus is sorrowful because He is not loved. He desires our love with an intense desire that we couldn't even imagine. And what He especially desires is our trust and our thanks. Because He wants the good for us, and we're always suspicious. We always sort of feel that He probably doesn't, we'd better do it for ourselves because He doesn't really have our best interest in mind, and that really hurts Him, just like those parents with the child who won't trust. Part of trust is being thankful, thankful for everything; to trust that He will only allow the good to happen to us, hard as it can be to see that sometimes. And that even includes the past. To thank Him for exactly where we are right now, and all the steps, all the terrible things that may have led us up to this moment, because we don't know the end of the story yet. But we can see in the scriptures that Christ came and died on the cross; He died because human beings rejected and killed Him: the greatest sin that ever was. And out of that sin Christ brought the salvation of the world. So that if we have this inflated idea of our own importance, we'll think that we have "messed it up." But we have to trust that even out of our failures God will bring good for ourselves and others, that He only allows evil that good may come. If there is no good to be brought out of that evil, He wouldn't have allowed it. So a spiritual writer once said, we have to sit



down and thank God for exactly who we are, what we are, everything that we are right at this moment, with all our sins and brokenness. And then we have to desire and work to be a canonizable saint in the next 15 minutes. At the end of the 15 minutes we'll find we are not canonizable saints! So we thank Him for the last 15 minutes, for who we are right at this moment, because since He allowed it, it ultimately must be for our good, and then we set out again to become a canonizable saint in the next 15 minutes. And so this trust that we have to give is the way to console His heart, that, and then since He's extended such mercy to us, extending love and mercy to all those around us. Giving back what we have received. If we just accept His mercy for ourselves, we won't have fully accepted it. He gives so much that it has to overflow, we have to allow ourselves to look on other in all their weakness and failure with that same mercy and love and acceptance we've been given.

Peter: [27:06](#) Yeah, beautiful, Malcolm. To go back just for a moment to something we touched on, the beauty of being in love, and how love makes all things beautiful. I was thinking of how in love, everything tends to become an end in and of itself. We can use the analogy of two human lovers, people who have fallen in love with each other, and simply rejoice to do things just because they are in each other's company. It doesn't matter so much about what they are actually doing. Going for a walk, traveling, having a meal, doing really nothing, just sitting in each other's company, not having to speak, but simply rejoicing to be in the other's company. And feeling loved in the presence of that person, feeling loved, affirmed, whole, something that love allows us to experience, even on that human scale. And it makes me think of our relationship with our Savior, and how in the presence of His love, what maybe used to be a means all of a sudden becomes an end. You were talking about that dynamic of means, how often we do things as means, but I think what the saints who are so much in love with Jesus reveal to us is that He is always in our presence, and so is His love, and so that we can walk continually, no matter what we're doing, in His loving presence, and do things with love, as I think St. Teresa said: it is not so much the greatness of our actions that matter before God, it is the greatness of our love. The greatness of the love with which we carry out every little thing that we do in our lives. And to me that's so inspiring; whether it's cleaning a toilet or whatever, it glorifies every aspect of human life; it brings an added component that nothing is wasted in God's presence and in God's sight, and everything becomes a means to experiencing His love and sharing the graces of His mercy on us with others and with the world, whether we are in their company or not, because of the mystical body of Christ. So I think that's just a great point, because sometimes we can look at the lives of the saints, and it seems that they had this extraordinary adventure, and that they did so many great things, and we look at our lives and we rarely even come close to measuring up to something like that,

but God gives us the little things of our everyday life that we can continually offer to Him, that we can continue to do with great love and to move on, how much He rejoices in that. He rejoices to be in our company, He made us so that we might belong to Him. And it's almost like He needs us, He desires us, something is missing without us in His most Sacred Heart. And that's incredible to think. I know you pointed out earlier, Malcolm, that obviously God does not have need anything we can offer Him, but He created us in this way, in that He longs and desires for us to be united to Him. And continues to seek us out until we are. Like that Good Shepherd; He can't rest until that one is found, and brought back, like the Prodigal Son; His eyes are looking, waiting for us to come to our senses and return to Him. And that brings me to another point I was thinking of: how important it is for us to come to our senses, like the Prodigal Son! To become aware of ourselves. To take time, not only to examine our life but to reflect on who we are, and in lacking a relationship with God, we can often see how miserable we become, how self focused, how selfish we are, how prideful, vain, you name it. It might be hard for us to admit these things, but we all share them in common. And I think one of the keys is that we need to become aware of our need for God, and our need for mercy. And I think part of our culture continually distracts us from that self-awareness that we are called into. You mentioned Aristotle. Socrates says that the unexamined life is not worth living. And in so many ways I guess that's the danger of our time; we can live an unexamined life. We can continue to distract ourselves, entertain ourselves; it is one of the blessings of what COVID is offering; it is forcing us to slow down, to not have so many options before us, in terms of how we might spend our time, and to simply have to sit with ourselves more. And hopefully not sit simply with *ourselves*, but with others, and with God. To allow God into our presence and into our company. So I think it goes back to this encounter with mercy that changes us, that leads us to repentance, leads us to have gratitude, that beautiful point you brought up about trust and gratitude; we are miserable, but mercy meets us in our misery, like that thief on the cross [found.] And calls us, from the depths of His love to the depths of our hearts, calls us to trust in His love and His mercy. The greatest example of that is Jesus on the cross Himself! Jesus! You suffered and died for us, this is a living testimony to how much you love us, that you went to the cross for each and every one of us. You loved us so much that you were willing to lay down your life before we even appreciated it. So we can always look to the cross, and see how much our Savior loves us and how much we're forgiven, that His precious blood washes away anything that could separate me from Him.

Malcolm: [34:55](#) As St. Paul said, "While we were yet unrighteous, Christ died for us." That "maybe for a good man somebody might be found to die, but that Christ died for us while we were yet His enemies." He didn't wait for us to move. He came. I remember Fr. Gawronski wrote a book about the spiritual life in which he



said that all other religions are where man seeks for God. Christianity is where God seeks for man. You brought up the point that even though He does not need us, He *made* himself need us. Aristotle thought that man and God couldn't be friends because man needed God, but God didn't need anything in return, we couldn't exchange gifts; friendship of any sort is an exchange of gifts. And God didn't need us. And that's true, before the Incarnation. But Christ came so that He would need us. And Fr. Gaitley talks about how we can think that we can console Christ; I mean, isn't He happy in Heaven? How could we add to His happiness? Because Christ's life happened at a particular point in time and yet at the same time He is eternal, we can console His sorrow during His early life at His rejection. There is a tradition that in the Agony in the Garden, when the angel came to strengthen Him, He was shown all those who would love Him, all those who would give themselves to Him in times to come. We can actually be present to Him during His earthly life, as much as if we'd actually lived almost two thousand years ago, because there is no time with God. You also brought up that point that those who love just want to be with the other. And that includes just as the other is. When we love another person, we can share with them things that we wouldn't share with a stranger, our weaknesses, our failings, our idiosyncrasies, and yet we often think we can't do that with God. We think we have to put on a pretty face with God, we have to impress Him somehow. We metaphorically have to put on our best clothes and approach Him in just the right way, and be very formal and only present the good to Him, and say things we don't really mean; for instance, let's say we're not feeling like we love Him much at all, but we say "O God, I love you above all things" in a rote kind of way. C. S. Lewis pointed out that there can be a danger in that. It is actually best to be honest with God, because He already knows. There's no use hiding things. Saying "Lord, I want to love you but I'm finding it really hard, I'm going to trust you enough to show you what I really am, knowing that you already know it, knowing that I can't shock you, I can't surprise you, here I am." You touched on the point that we have to realize our need, and sometimes in prayer is somehow the last place that we can bring that realization home. We have to be able to say, "Lord, I really am in trouble!" Fr. Gaitley, towards the beginning of the book, talks about various obstacles that could keep us from coming to Christ in trust, and he talked about attachments. We hear a lot about detachment, particularly since he's covering the Ignatian exercises. We're supposed to be detached. He uses a funny example of doughnuts; let's say we're attached to doughnuts. And so we might use a lot of will-power, and say, "I'm going to detach myself from these doughnuts so I can go to the Lord." Well, by using our own willpower, we're probably not going to get very far, and if we do manage to detach ourselves from doughnuts, something else will fill the void. So he said, Christ doesn't say, "Leave those doughnuts before you come to me," He says, "Even if you have to hold on to the doughnuts with the other hand, give me your free hand. And then,

there we are, the two of us together, you're still hanging on to those doughnuts, and eventually I'll help you drop the doughnuts when I'm ready for that to happen. You can't drop the doughnuts by yourself, but I don't care how many doughnuts you're hanging onto so long as you'll come over here." And then Fr. Gaitley says that if the thing really needs to go, if we just come to Him and say here I am, with the doughnuts, suddenly He'll make us let them go. If He doesn't make us let go, we just have to keep trying, keep coming to Him, and eventually, in His own good time, we will get loose. But a certain kind of spirituality emphasizes the detachment side first, like we've got to detach ourselves from all these things before God wants to see us. And that's so counterproductive, so backwards to the way it actually works

Peter: [39:54](#) Yeah, beautiful thought, Malcolm. It goes back to that idea that in light of God's mercy and grace, we're enabled to let go of things that on our own we cling to. The sin that clings to us so closely. It changes everything because on one hand there is a recognition (I think A.A. does this really well) a recognition that on my own I can't overcome this addiction, and really attachments are very much like addictions. I think it is an important point to realize in America that we are addicted to so many different things. We often think of alcoholism and drugs as the primary source of addiction, and that most of us don't have any serious issues with addiction. But shopping is an addiction, gambling, sports; there are so many things which we are really addicted to, and I think that is what happens when there is a void in our hearts. We inevitably become addicted to things that we enjoy, that are pleasurable to us. And we are not able to free ourselves from them on our own efforts. I was thinking of this quote as you were talking, from St. Paul: "God has imprisoned all in disobedience, so that He might have mercy on all." God has imprisoned *all* in disobedience. So we all have rebellious hearts. No one is free from this condition of rebelling against God's will and God's laws. God has allowed that so that we might encounter His love and mercy. It is really incredible to think about. Our disobedience in various ways which results in various forms of addictions and attachments, becomes the very means for us (and this goes back to your point that God brings good out of all things, but in a particular way the things that seem to us very negative) it is in the midst of those things that we come to encounter our need for God and the mercy that makes us new. And A.A., it is incredible how it has impacted various people by leading them to that recognition that they need to have a power greater than themselves that releases them from these attachments. And what's beautiful is that they begin to drop away as if they were nothing at all. It no longer has power in the presence of One who is greater. There's a lot that you brought up, I was thinking about how Jesus spoke to St. Faustina and told her that He was consoled on the way to Calvary by hearts that drew close to Him, hearts that trusted in His love and were grateful for His sacrifice. Having that human heart that could be

consoled. And then His appearance to St. Margaret Mary and how He said "Behold this Heart which has so loved Men, but has received so little in return." That ought to bring pain to our hearts. How little Jesus is loved by the hearts of men! I remember reading in *Genesis* how God "repented" of making Man, or was so grieved in His heart for the wickedness of Men that He was almost "questioning" His creating Man in the first place! And then Noah found favor in His sight. And it's like, wow, we can all be that Noah in the midst of this wicked and corrupt world in which we live. Through our trust, through our love, we can find favor and bring consolation to this God who in the Incarnation makes Himself "needy" for our love and dependent on us in a certain way, as a child that grows and participates in all aspects of human life. Just even think of Jesus in the tabernacle and how lonely at times He must be, with so few visitors. But I also see that as an analogy, a symbol of Christ dwelling in our hearts, in the tabernacle of our hearts; who among us is making frequent visits to His presence within us? It is kind of like our visits in the Blessed Sacrament become an analogy for our recognition of His presence within us and to us. So I think even though we may not always be able to go to the Blessed Sacrament, He dwells in the tabernacle of our hearts and is waiting there like He is in the tabernacle of churches for us to come to Him and to lay out our lives and lay out our struggles, to speak to Him as a friend, as one who rejoices to hear from us everything that we wish to share! I know I find that with my friends, I'm humbled when they just open up to me and when they share with me what's on their heart, when it goes beyond the superficial and gets into the depth of life, that to me . . . it makes me value their friendship all the more when there is not a lot of pretense and there is not a lot of covering up, but when there is vulnerability and transparency with each other. It kind of unites our hearts. And so I think I see that happening with our Savior, how much He longs for that. And how simple it is! You know, it isn't this complicated affair! It isn't like we need to come to Him with all these beautifully written prayers and some kind of formula and agenda in order for Him to hear us. And that's the beauty of the Little Way of St. Therese; we can just come to Him in our littleness, in our fumbling of words; we may not know what to say, but that as a little one in the presence of One who we love we can just be ourselves, and speak freely. And we can all do that, can't we, Malcolm, on some level?

Malcolm: [47:44](#) Peter, I think one of the things that can really keep us from approaching Christ with that kind of humility is our judgements on other people. You brought up addictions, and how most of us feel that's somebody else's problem. I remember one of the most transformative moments in my life . . . I'd been brought up in a nice safe setting and "bad people" were those people out there, you know? That can be a danger for those with a middle class background. I went to work with Christ in the City for a morning serving lunch in

the park to the homeless here in Denver. And there were several hundred people we were handing out lunch to, and it was really weighing on me, all the brokenness, all the despair, all the problems of all these people. And on my bus ride home, it just suddenly struck me that I was no better than they were; that they had . . . Christ in the City estimates that something like seventy percent of homeless people have an addiction, though they also estimate that in a lot fewer cases is that addiction actually the cause of being homeless, since a lot of non-homeless people have addictions as well. Anyway, they had become addicted to something that was socially reprehensible, whether it was alcohol or hard drugs, something that had broken their lives and made them obviously in trouble, but that I was similarly attached to all sorts of more respectable things, that weren't going to land me on the street. But just like them, the bad choices I'd made were in the same way bad choices, and only because of the grace of God and my better social setting did my bad choices not lead to making an obvious wreck of my life. In other words, to God, whether one makes a wreck of one's material life doesn't matter so much; what matters is the interior sin, the turning away, the attachment to something else. And just the staggeringness of this sudden realization . . . and yet it can also be freeing, because if one is seeing oneself as the good, upstanding, respectable person, one will have to keep that act on even when one is in front of God. When one realizes that wow! I'm really in trouble . . . that's the one redeeming aspect of these really broken, down and out people, is that they often realize that. They often do realize that they are in trouble, that they need help from other people, help from God. And for those who are more respectable looking, it can be harder to realize, and that's a theme all through the Gospel: the Pharisee. The Pharisee was respectable and upright, and followed the Law, and looked down on all those dismal people who didn't follow the Law. And then they were really shocked when Christ came, and seemed to favor those people who were obvious failures. Simply because the Pharisee couldn't accept mercy, because they couldn't admit there was anything wrong with *him*. The danger of the pharisee is always the danger of the Christian. Obviously there are many dangers in the world. You can go and be a terrible hedonist! But there's an even more subtle trap for the upright Christian who is not a hedonist. He can become the pharisee. And if we're going to take the Gospel seriously, the hedonists will go into the Kingdom of God before the self-righteous Christian. We can replicate that pharisaical mentality, that "I am good, or my group is good, and those guys are bad," when the truth of the matter is that we are *all* bad, just in different ways. And Fr. Gaitley brings up the Jansenists. Jansenism still affects the Church in certain aspects. Jansenism was the idea that God is hard and unloving, that we have to do really well . . . and usually the Jansenist ends up hanging around with other Jansenists, thinking of themselves as better because they keep a lot of complicated rules, when really the rules won't save you. As St. Paul said, the Law won't save you. Only the mercy of God

will save anyone. And that doesn't mean we can break all the rules! Thanks be to God if we can keep the rules! We should always strive to keep God's rules. But once we depend on our rule-keeping as if it is going to save us, then we've just replicated the Pharisee or the Jansenist that affected the Church 300 years ago, and we will be unable to come to Christ in humility. We'll be like that Pharisee who went to the synagogue and was praying "Lord, I thank you that I am not like other men." Even if we don't say it outright, we'll feel it. Thanks that I'm not like this bum on the street! If we have even a touch of that, I don't think we'll be able to come to Christ in the way we must.

Peter: [53:48](#) Thank you for sharing, Malcolm, great points. I was thinking of the parable the prodigal son, in relationship to what you were saying and to the Pharisee vs. the Tax Collector. Why? Because often I think we want to associate with the Prodigal Son, but many of us actually tend to be more like the elder brother in the story, who finds himself complaining, resentful, outside of the Father's house when the feast was going on, in the house for the return of his younger brother. And it's like the older brother perhaps went through the motions and did things right, followed the rules to some degree, but something was obviously lacking in his heart, he did not share the heart of his father, the love for his brother. I think to make this more concrete, you brought up the many homeless people in our society who struggle with addiction and various issues, they in the midst of their misery often have a deep faith, and a relationship with God, and know that He is with them, and trust in that and trust in His love, whereas so many of us have this outer covering, we look really good, we are wearing our nice clothes, and rarely take the time to sit down with somebody on the street who is looking for some consolation. I was reading about Pope Francis; he shared this photograph that went viral in Italy that featured the word "Indifference." In the photograph there is a woman in her fur coat, very nicely dressed, had a nice appearance according to our standards, and she was coming out a restaurant. Right at the door of the restaurant was a homeless woman who was holding out her hands to receive something from this woman, but that woman was looking away, walking away. It is something that Pope Francis has been repeating throughout his papacy, that we live in a culture of indifference; it is almost like a pharisaical culture in which we don't want anything to do with those sinners who are obviously wretched and "probably not saved," and we focus on ourselves, we focus on our own self-righteousness, of which we definitely fall short. For me, a lot of this leads to this need for us to encounter, as Pope Francis says, the misery on the peripheries. Life on the existential peripheries. Because I think that life can awaken in us a solidarity with those other people, and a recognition, like you mentioned, that I am no greater than this person, but that certain circumstances led him to where he is now, and if I was in his shoes at that time, perhaps I would have fared worse! None of us can

judge, we are not in a position to judge where people are at, and where they came from, and how they ended up where they are now. And also, that this person may not become a greater saint than any of us. How about St. Benedict Joseph Labre, who lived as a homeless pilgrim just like other homeless, but spent all his time in prayer? I guess there's a lot to take away from this conversation, I think we could probably continue a lot of these themes, but one that comes to mind is our need embrace those who are in need of God's mercy, and in doing so, receive God's mercy for ourselves as well.

Malcolm: [58:44](#) Peter, I'm glad you brought up the idea about going to the peripheries, to have pity and sympathy and solidarity with those on the margins of society. In our next podcast, we're going to be covering the difference between the message of the Gospel and the kinds of attitudes that lead to a cult. We've covered that briefly in various episodes, because if we're trying build a community of love, there's always the flip side, the dark possibility that we'll create a community of fear and control instead: the cult. And one of the ways that a cult can form is if we have this pharisaical mentality that our group is the good guys, everybody outside are the bad guys. That will almost certain lead to a cult-like dynamic. So thanks so much Peter for joining me today; it was a great conversation and I really appreciate it.

Peter: Thanks, Malcolm, it was a blessing!

Malcolm: Thanks again, and watch for our next podcast in two weeks time!