

## Day Three Meditation: Responding with Gratitude

### 3rd Principle and Foundation

Everywhere I looked was the memory of the best life for which I could ever ask, but it was now empty. My wife was a free spirit. The colors of our house, both inside and out, would not be those of a traditional or usual house which most people call home. Her touch was the branches from the woods that were transformed into valances over our windows, each with multi-colored ribbons hanging from them. Our room was a kaleidoscope of interesting things hanging on our walls, all of which spoke of her. Even the footers of our stairs were covered with many colored geometric patterns. Outside, our house was painted four colors. In the pine forest of North Eastern Arizona, we dwelt in her Bohemian Palace.

We are blessed to have eight children who are respectful of our common spaces. When they played with a toy out in the living room and were done, they would put it back in their bedroom. You could drop in at any time and not find our house a mess. As to their bedrooms, that is a different story. But even then, every night, after dinner, they would clean up their rooms. The day they left, they must have been playing before they left because their bedrooms were in disarray. When I opened the door to their rooms, it said that they still lived there. Again, everywhere I looked, I was immersed in the memories of what once was, and I would wonder what it was like for them on the morning they left. One of my daughters had a cat, Melody. The cat was still in my daughter's room. I knew it must have been because my daughter could not get Melody into a cage. I thought of her grief in leaving her kittie.

One day, I was dusting all my wife's things in our bedroom. I loved buying my wife little interesting trinkets that spoke, "This is her!" I stood there with a silver metal jewelry box that looked as if it were from India. My eyes locked on it, and tears began to flow. I could not put it down. It was a connection point with my beautiful girl. It was another moment of crushing grief.

Just as on the day when I returned home, the Holy Spirit meeting me at the door, he was now there to help me again. As a matter of fact, on the wall before me was a relief of the Holy Spirit as a dove with outstretched wings. Of the members of the Trinity, my sweetheart was the closest to the Spirit of God. Stuck in sorrow with no way out, the Spirit said to me, *"Turn your memories into gratitude and give thanks to the Father for the blessing you have enjoyed."*

You are, like I was, surrounded by things, by memories, that instead of giving you life, tear the heart out of your life. Even if you are still with your spouse, one memory after another reminds you of what once was. There is no escape from the past you two so joyfully shared. As the years pass, the memories, as they should, remain. It would be easy to take your thoughts captive, trying to dismiss the life you never considered would end. Your life is a gift from your Father. To dismiss it is to rob Him of glory for the joy and fulfillment in which you once stood. On

that day of what seemed to be meaningless cleaning, the Lord and Giver of Life taught me a life-giving principle, a sure foundation on which I could stand that I might be reduced to love. Instead of memories sucking life out of me, those very memories became a source of celebrating how blessed I am.

*“Turn your memories into gratitude and give thanks to the Father for the blessing you have enjoyed.”*

I looked at that box in my hand, remembering the Christmas evening when we sat in our bedroom, she opening her gift, throwing her arms around my neck, telling me how much she loved it. Instead of that wonderful Christmas night turning into a memory that became pain, through gratitude, it became a memory I wanted to relive. I put the silver Indian jewelry box down, walked through the house, and gave thanks for the wonderful life I have been blessed to share with my beautiful girl and our kids. As I went from room to room, joy began to replace the sorrow that hid behind all I looked upon. Life began to flow through me, replacing the darkness that had been there. I was taking the very weapon the enemy was trying to use against me, and turned it on him. Gratitude offered me freedom in the midst of oppression.

Gratitude also deepened my love for those I already loved. I chose to use my memory as a tool to grow in love.

I am not saying that there is not a time to grieve, but as we realize what has been lost, we can take a turn where grief robs you of life, rather than being a gift that heals you. This is the purpose of grief. It is to be a source of life and not its robber. Dwell in its arms for not too long. For me, it has never made a home in my heart by me constantly calling to mind what I do not have. Giving thanks became a fount from which I can draw life for the here and now. Grief can sometimes cause you to want to avoid seeing the past because memories of the past can become a touch point that leads to despair. Rather, memories can become the gift that turns your heart to seeing how much you are loved and have loved. Memories become not something that you hope will not overcome you with a sense of loss, or they can become hope that overcomes you with gratitude.

As I consider what could have been if I had formulated my own counsel as to how to walk the road of separation and divorce on which I now stand, I am sure that what I would have done without the help of the Holy Spirit would have led to more reasons why my beloved chose to leave, while for me I would have surrendered to a life lacking peace and joy. I could have lawyered up to fight for what was mine, instead of seeing that all I did and had was out of love for her and our kids (remember, this is a husband's perspective). This is not to say that you should deny the rights you have before the law. What I am addressing is for you to remain in the attitude of your heart of when you once stood in our Father's house, asking for His blessing through the Sacrament of Matrimony that you two might love until your lives had run their course. Gratitude for your beloved is easy to lose when you are feeling threatened by them. Guard your heart by keeping it grateful for them, even if, at first, you have to fake it.

Gratitude does not mean that I do not miss the one my heart loves. Yes, I miss her like crazy. For me, life is not all it could be without her. Gratitude has led me to the state where whether our

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marriage us restored or not, though I sure do hope it is, I will spend the rest of my life giving thanks for the years we had together, living the blessed life I could have never designed or created, a life that was a pure gift that has but one response - Thank you, Father!

Do not underestimate the power of what the Spirit of God, who is our Teacher, taught me. Let everything become an opportunity to say, "Thank you, Father!" When I say everything, I mean everything. You don't need to understand why you should be grateful. It is an act of trust, of faith that He, your Father, is bigger than the problems you are facing. Gratitude allows Him to be God and do as He sees fit to bring your soul to the place, for the sake of your wife/husband, where you look more and more like Jesus by being reduced to love. That was the direction your life took when you said, "I do!" and it continues to be that which you are called to be.

*"Turn your memories into gratitude and give thanks to the Father for the blessing you have enjoyed."*