



1ST SATURDAY DEVOTION NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2021

SPIRITUAL LESSONS I LEARNED WHILE DIETING

By Fr. Edward Looney

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January 1st came and went, and hopefully some are still resolutely following their New Year's Resolution. Each year we probably make the same resolutions: eat better, drop weight, and exercise, to name only a few. One family I know shared with me their new diet regiment. I can tell you that losing weight is not one of my New Year's resolutions, but if I continue to drop pounds, I won't complain.

Back in May, I stepped on the scale and saw the highest number I had ever seen. I knew that a change was needed, and I heard the success some people had with an app called My Fitness Pal, a calorie counter combined with computations of calories expended through exercise. At the end of May I started to diligently watch what I ate and did, consequently I saw the number on the scale decline. Throughout the experience, what I found while dieting were pertinent lessons corresponding to the spiritual life. Here's what I learned.

Self-Knowledge

The first few days of counting calories brought me to a point of self-knowledge. It became easy to discover why I gained so much weight in two years and it helped to illuminate what changes needed to be made. The same is true in the spiritual life. If we want to root out sin, we need to become self-aware. Is there a certain time when I fall prey to sin? Or with a certain group of people? What sin is it that I need to address? Self-knowledge sheds light into the areas which need to change and can be beneficial not only to dieting but also in the spiritual life as well.

Self-Control

Counting calories as I dieted forced me to keep my appetite in check and exercise moderation. I love hors d'oeuvres and could eat a ton of Spinach and Artichoke dip in one sitting. With self-knowledge, I knew I couldn't eat whatever I wanted. Instead, I needed to be vigilant and deny myself certain foods. On the very first day of my diet, I went to a graduation party and was faced with a plethora of food options. With the help of the My Fitness Pal app, I was able to identify what I could eat and stay within my limits. Dieting allowed me to grow both in virtue and the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

Root Out Vice

One of the vices that my self-knowledge showed me was slothfulness. If I had a very sedentary day, I did not burn a lot of calories, meaning I would have to eat within the set calorie limit. I was motivated to move from inactivity to activity in order to open up calories for dinner or a snack. Another vice dieting rooted out was gluttony because one's goal cannot be met by overeating. Dieting proved itself to be a way to grow in virtue.

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FEASTS FOR JANUARY

The feasts on the General Roman Calendar celebrated during the month of January are:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1 Mary, Mother of God, Solemnity | 24 Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, Sunday of the Word of God, Sunday |
| 2 Basil the Great; Gregory Nazianzen, Memorial | 25 Conversion of St. Paul the Apostle, Feast |
| 3 Epiphany of the Lord, Solemnity | 26 Timothy and Titus, Memorial |
| 4 Elizabeth Ann Seton (USA and CAN), Memorial | 27 Angela Merici, Opt. Mem. |
| 5 John Neumann, Memorial | 28 Thomas Aquinas, Memorial |
| 6 Andre Bessette, Opt. Mem. | 31 Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Sunday |
| 7 Raymond of Penafort, Opt. Mem. | |
| 10 Baptism of the Lord, Feast | |
| 13 Hilary; Kentigern (Scotland), Opt. Mem. | |
| 17 Second Sunday in Ordinary Time, Sunday | |
| 20 Fabian; Sebastian, Opt. Mem. | |
| 21 Agnes, Memorial | |
| 22 Day of Prayer for Unborn, Opt. Mem. | |
| 23 Vincent of Saragossa, Opt. Mem. | |

The feasts of Holy Name of Jesus (January 3), St. Anthony, abbot (January 17), St. Francis de Sales (January 24) and St. John Bosco (January 31) are superseded by the Sunday liturgy. ☐

THANK YOU

... a small and simple phrase that comes from a grateful heart!

Psalm 106:2

Our great and Gracious God, as we come to the close of another year, we pray that You would abide with us. We thank you that you have been with us through the days of this past year. We thank you that You are constantly with Your people, and that You have enabled us to persevere in grace, especially during this pandemic situation. You have comforted our hearts, You have heard our prayers, You have come so often to our aid. We pray that You will go with us into this new year.

None of us knows what the new year will hold, but we thank you that every moment of that year is in Your hands, and You will be with Your people. We thank you that with that promise girding us, we can go forward with confidence and in Your peace. We pray that You will help us to walk with You in this new year better than we have ever done before.

Forgive us, Lord, for our sins and our backslidings of this past year. Grant to us, an ever closer walk with You. Help us to put sin to death. Help us gladly yield our lives unreservedly to Jesus Christ, our Savior, and God that we may regard ourselves entirely at His disposal to be, to go, to do, as He would wish. We pray that it may be our privilege to serve Him, to bring glory to Him, to help others to know Him better, and to help some, indeed, to come to know Him for the first time.

Grant that this new year would mark the beginning of a new life in Jesus Christ. We are so thankful for the Almighty Holy Spirit, for His limitless power, in Jesus' name we pray through the intercession of our Blessed Mother Mary. Amen.

GOD TOUCHED ME

*Publish his glorious deeds among the nations.
Tell everyone about the amazing things he does. — 1 Chronicles 16:24*

A CONVERSION STORY

*From Defenders of the Catholic Faith
www.catholicconvert.com*

For if you return to the LORD, your brothers and your sons will find compassion before those who led them captive and will return to this land. For the LORD your God is gracious and compassionate, and will not turn His face away from you if you return to Him."

2 Chronicles 30:9

I grew up most of my younger years as a troubled teen. I was in a special behavior self-contained class since 6th grade. I spent a lot of my younger years getting into fights, police involvement and drugs and alcohol usage. My sister was involved in a rival gang where I grew up, so I tried following her footsteps to be popular, and follow a destructive life that leads to prison or death. In 6th grade I was not a big believer in the Father Almighty, but anytime I passed any Church I always felt something. I had the deepest respect for religious people, but I kept my distance. One night, in 6th grade, I felt so desperate because everything was going wrong for me. I was struggling with school, rival gangs and staying alive for the most part, so I prayed for God to lead me to a better life. I spent a lot of time running from the police, being held for shoplifting, and causing a lot of damage in my city. As soon as 9th grade rolled by, I was settling down and grasping with a new life since we moved to a very preppie and higher-class town. I was not used to the lifestyle here, the teenagers were more preppie and jock like, and who thought they were tough. I wanted to show them differently. In 9th grade I was dealing with a lot of anger problems, a lot of buildup from moving, family, and losing all my friends. It caused me to misbehave in school that got me arrested. My life was falling apart by then, now I was involved with a new set of teens as friends. Nothing like the gang bangers and wrongful people I kicked it with, but they were close enough to me feeling closer to as stoners. I was still alone though, I now had few friends, but we were not close.

In 10th grade, I started attending a Protestant Church down the street from me. I found some peace when I went and got involved with some other youth my age. I started reading the Bible, but overtime I started falling again and overtime I would only attend every few months or so. I never really enjoyed the protestant worship

services though. It felt more like a concert than a peaceful time to praise God. I never liked to dance and wave my arms in the air, and I always felt very strange at Protestant services.

So, I was back to struggling. I was sent to a special out-of-school program for those who cannot maintain in a regular class off and on throughout the year. Every time I got in a fistfight or in any trouble, I got sent back to this program. Perhaps this was the time I started to change my morals.

In 11th grade, I was given the privilege to attend a regular high school again, but in a special program called KITE. I was not allowed to have regular classes, but I was allowed to go out to lunch with the regular students, which ended to be a huge mistake. I was being stupid again in 11th grade, started smoking marijuana and drinking again (after quitting for 5 months or so), running across the football field with security behind me, or pat searches in front of all your peers weekly like old times again. I was thrown out of school for breaking a teacher's arm in a fistfight with another student. This was accidental; I loved the teacher. So, I was sent back to the off-campus program where I would grow closer to a new teacher. I could never have graduated from H.S. without this teacher. I was becoming very depressed. I felt I was a curse, and nothing mattered. No matter how hard I tried, things would never work for me. I started attending Protestant Churches again, but this time. I was on a journey to find the right one for me. I was skeptical against Catholics; I was one of those ignorant ones who thought, they are Mary worshipers! Boy, was I wrong! My mother is Catholic, but she doesn't practice, though she did support me. I would ask Protestants what they thought of the Catholic Church expecting a reason to try them out, but I always got negative input.

I went to a Catholic Church one day with my stepbrother, and the second I walked into the door I never felt so

absorbed with the Holy Spirit in my life. It was a feeling very new to me, and the peace and presence of Christ I felt very closely. I knew this was where I needed to be. But my experience to get involved started off bad. I asked after the Mass how to become Catholic, how to learn and no one would answer me. I was given an appointment with the youth director, but he was no help, he explained to me about the Church, but could never give me an explanation how to get involved. He even told me it is too late to get involved in youth group, and for me to wait a year. I was kind of upset with this Church, it wasn't what I expected. So, I went to another Catholic Church and again after Mass I asked the Priest how do I become Catholic? He said for me to make an appointment with him, and he walked off. Not even a welcoming smile. So, now I am wondering if all Catholics are this rude, and if they even care about bringing people to the Faith, the one true Holy Church. I then gave up.

Later on, in the year, the summer of 11th grade, I attended a passion play called Jesus of Nazareth. I absolutely loved it. I spent \$110 or so seeing it over and over. I was given an invitation to attend a very huge protestant church and was given directions how to get there. That night I prayed to God to lead me to his Church and to let me belong somewhere. The next morning, I woke up, I got dressed and left the house early to find this Protestant Church. With the directions in my hand, I drove on this back road, following the road signs to turn on. But it was the wrong road. Instead, I came to a Catholic Church sitting in the back of the woods hidden, I did not catch the church's name, but the statue of Mary above it burned into my memory. It was a very tiny Parish, so peaceful looking. I turned around and as I retraced back to where I took the wrong turn, the road signs were not what I thought I saw. I did take the wrong road. Finally, I found my way to the protestant church, which again I could not enjoy, because it felt like a concert just like the others did (respectfully speaking).

All week long, the image of that parish I ran into, stayed in my mind. So, the next week, on Saturday night, I decided to find that Parish. I searched the internet all night, trying to find the street since I had no name of it. I ended up finding directions and I drove out the next morning. I was welcomed as I walked in with greetings and that peaceful Holy presence of Christ as you make your way through the aisle of pews. After Mass, I shook the priest's hand and

went on my way. When I got home, I read the Church bulletin and called the number on the front, it was the number to Sister Catherine. I asked her how do I become Catholic. She was nice, she says RCIA is starting, but since I am 17 (at that time) it's better I wait a year and join the youth group starting up in a couple of weeks. I was disappointed but happy I was able to start youth group. The next Sunday I went to Mass, and Father John, a Nigerian Priest, shook my hand after Mass again. I asked him How do I become Catholic? He immediately said, Come, tonight RCIA begins, and you are most welcome! I told him Sister Catherine told me to wait a year, but he said don't worry, I'll talk to her.

From there on I started a new journey through RCIA. I went to Mass alone every Sunday, but I loved every bit of it. Towards the end of RCIA I was struggling in school again, and missed 3 weeks or so worth of classes, and Father John got upset with me. So, I called him one night as he expressed to me how I would have to start over again in a year, and I told him to give me another chance. I cried when I got off the phone. So Father John gave me another chance and I canceled my trip to Mexico so I can make the rest of the classes and catch up. I was baptized after 7 months of classes, from there on I changed my life and gave up my bad habits. I was very much involved with the Church, I had a strong relationship with God and in school I was offered a chance to attend regular H.S. again, but I decided not to, and I stayed in the special program and graduated from H.S. with honors with the rest of the regular students.

My journey wasn't easy; most of my old friends are either dead, locked up or struggling still. My prayer in 6th grade was to be delivered from this life into a better one. It took nearly 6 years for it to be answered, but God brought me out of a path that led to nowhere back to His Holy Catholic Church. I learned a lot from my past, and I made many mistakes that will haunt me. But God came through and opened my eyes to a new beginning and to a Priest I will hold dear forever in friendship.

God Bless.

Adam Thresher, Contributor

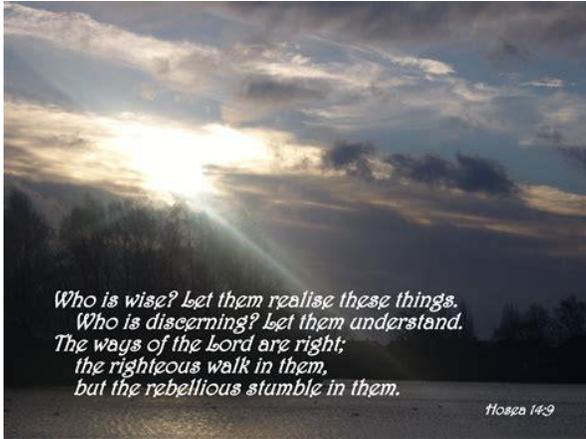
OnlineCatholics.com

SPIRITUAL ENRICHMENT RECOMMENDED

HIS MERCY KNOWS NO BOUNDS

BY VICTOR ARANETA

After Israel engaged in apostasy and idol worship, God the Father called for the nation to repent. If they would, He promised to heal them, to turn His anger from them, to help them blossom like vines and flourish like grain. Yet only the wise understands such things. In today's lives, we focus on what's happening to us and ignore the



validity of all that's coming into play.

If God will pinpoint our worst sin today, He can surmise it in one word, DISBELIEF!

People prefer science than Faith! We grab fear in exchange of Trust.

Considering our nation lives in the shadow under God, even the most educated individuals will play "god" and sow the oldest trick of the enemy: FALSE EXPECTATIONS APPEARING REAL (FEAR).

Let's open our hearts and minds and examine ourselves if these whole situation makes sense in God's eyes. He is forgiving but our choice may be so harmful to us physically and most of all in our relationship with God Almighty! Or do we not need to go around our ways for FORTY YEARS!

Prayer: Lord God, my willingness to forgive and extend mercy for the worst of my sins is almost beyond my comprehension. I repent for my behavior and will embrace Your ways beginning anew today, in Jesus most Holy Name, Amen.

Upcoming Events

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

1ST FRIDAY DEVOTION

JANUARY 1, 2021

IN LOS ANGELES:
VIA ZOOM

IN LAS VEGAS:
VIRTUAL

1ST SATURDAY DEVOTION

INFANT JESUS FEAST DAY

VIRTUAL CELEBRATION

JANUARY 2, 2021

IN LOS ANGELES:
VIA ZOOM

IN LAS VEGAS: VIRTUAL

1ST SUNDAY DEVOTION

800 OUR FATHER DEVOTION

IN PETITION FOR THE INTEGRITY

OF THE UNITED STATES

PRESIDENTIAL

ELECTION RESULTS

JANUARY 3, 2021

IN LOS ANGELES:
VIA ZOOM

IN LAS VEGAS:

SAINT SHARBEL CHURCH

10325 RANCHO DESTINO RD.

LAS VEGAS, NV 89183

MASS AT 9:30 AM FOLLOWED BY
DEVOTIONAL PRAYERS AT THE CHAPEL

800 OUR FATHER DEVOTION

JANUARY 16, 2021

VIRTUAL

SPIRITUAL LESSONS I LEARNED

Solidarity

I sometimes went to bed with a slight hunger during the first few weeks of my diet. It was the days that I ate a bulk of calories in the morning or for lunch that forced me to eat a smaller dinner, maybe even just a yogurt. Going to bed with a little hunger can become a spiritual act by remembering that so many people are going to bed hungry, not only in third world countries, but also on our streets. Even if I wasn't completely satiated, I realized that I had experienced many blessings throughout the day and could offer such a small sacrifice as penance.

Planning Ahead

With the help of tracking calories on the app, I knew how many calories I could eat in a given day. If I projected that I would be having a bigger meal in the evening, it would require me to eat smaller meals or be more active so as to open up calories. I had to plan ahead. This is true for the spiritual life. If we want to have a good spiritual life and dedicate some time to prayer each day, we need to plan ahead. If I normally pray in the morning but have a 5am flight, when will I pray during that day? Or if I have a late evening commitment and that is my time for prayer, when could I pray earlier? The saints called this remote preparation. It was needed for dieting and it is something we need in our spiritual lives if we want a healthy relationship with God.

Honesty with Self

The goal of dieting, especially when tracking through an app, is to not use up all your calories for a given day. The goal would be to have a deficit every day. Sometimes that didn't happen. There was a temptation for me not to enter all my food intake so that I could have the satisfaction of coming in under the count when I knew I exceeded it. I had to be honest with myself and admit what I ate and adjust going forward. This is true for the spiritual life as well. Sometimes we need to be honest with our selves about the changes we need to make. If we desire holiness, and we know that one path will lead to it and the other won't, we need to be honest, and journey down the right path. It's true for the confessional. Some people might find they are embarrassed by their sins and want to omit it from their confession. We need to be honest and admit our sins, not only for the validity of the Confession, but also for ourselves as we strive to reject sin and live virtuously.

Habits of Life

From the time I began counting calories back in May to the present day, I've dropped nearly 30 pounds and am very content with my progress. I had a little extra help in the process by having orthodontics installed on my teeth which also serves as a preventative measure against harder, high calorie food. After just three months of calories, I really haven't logged into the app to enter my food intake or measure my activity level. I acquired the habit and now know what I need to do and how much I can eat. It took a little training but now it has become a way of life for me. Again, the same is true for the spiritual life. When we give God time each day, when we attend Mass weekly or even daily, it becomes a habit, and we couldn't imagine our life without it.

At the present moment, I continue not to count calories and I consistently am seeing the declining number on the scale, getting me closer to the goal I set when I first began. If I should see the number on the scale creep up, I know what I need to do: become self-aware of what I'm eating, exercise self-control, and begin planning ahead once again. As you carry out your New Year's resolution after about several weeks into the New Year, may you discover good health, not only physically, but also recognizing the spiritual value of what you have undertaken.

Fr. Edward Looney was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Green Bay in June 2015, and is an internationally recognized Marian theologian, writer, speaker, and radio personality. Author of the best-selling books, *A Lenten Journey with Mother Mary*, *A Heart Like Mary's* and *A Rosary Litany*, he has also written a prayer book for the only American-approved Marian apparition received by Adele Brise in 1859 in Champion, Wisconsin. He currently serves as Administrator of two rural Wisconsin parishes. □