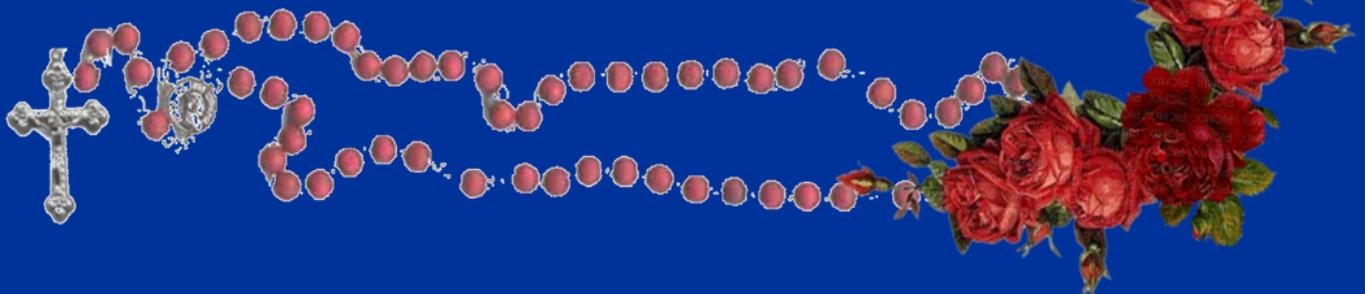




Mary, Mother of Peace

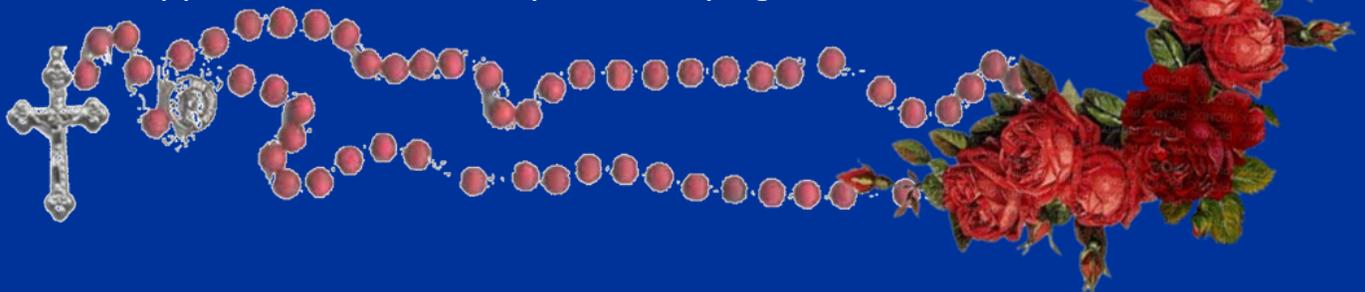
For several weeks I have been thinking and praying about peace, and during this time my sister's car was stolen from her driveway. It happened in the middle of the night and everyone is safe, but it got me thinking about security and how important that is to us as humans. We want to feel and in fact be secure. This is why we lock things. If we want to keep it safe, protected, we put a lock on it. Sometimes however it is not the possession that matters, but it is a matter of control, like my classroom. I lock it when I leave, not because there is anything of great value in it, but because I do not want students in there unless I am in there. It is very interesting to ponder why people use locks and it provides great insight into human nature, but one thing I have noticed is that, regardless the reason we use them, locks come with a price. Every time I use one, it causes anxiety or at least means I am anxious about something: the car, the classroom, the diary I don't want anyone to read. For instance, how many times have you left home and drove away asking yourself: "Did I lock the house? How about the back door? The garage door?" This is all anxiety, unrest. Now I am not advocating ridding the world of locks. Even God has his own security system. After the first sin, Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden of Eden and God guarded it not with a lock, but with an

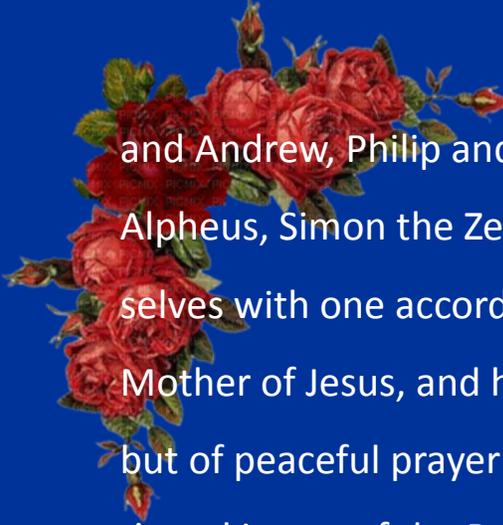




angel with a fiery revolving sword. Perhaps if my sister had one of those her car would not have been stolen!

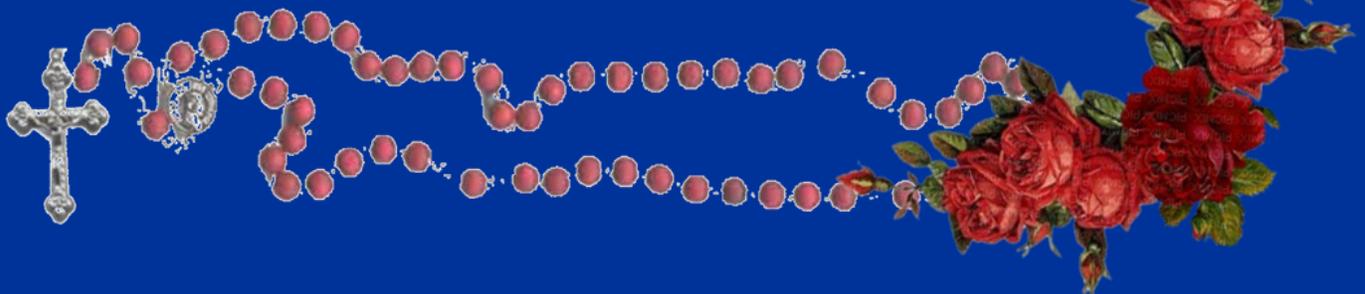
Locks are even spoken of in the New Testament. John 20 begins by describing the events of Jesus' resurrection. Mary Magdalene discovers the empty tomb, runs and tells Peter and John, who run back to the tomb to see ... an empty tomb. And so they go home and Mary stays and who does she see? Jesus himself! Well later that evening the Apostles crowd into the upper room to presumably discuss the situation. Three days before, they had all abandoned Jesus to his death. Now they had either saw or heard reports of the empty tomb and heard of various accounts of appearances of their presumably dead master. The text says: "On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them 'Peace be with you.'" The doors were locked perhaps because the Apostles were anxious about their own safety, thinking the Jews and Romans would be after them next. Or perhaps they were a little ill at ease over their own guilt in abandoning the Lord and this locking the door was an unconscious, unsuccessful attempt at keeping Jesus at bay. Either way there is a profound change fifty days later at the Feast of Pentecost. The Apostles are in the same city, same room, but the feel of the scripture account is very different. Acts 1:13-14: "When they entered the city they went to the upper room where they were staying, Peter and John and James

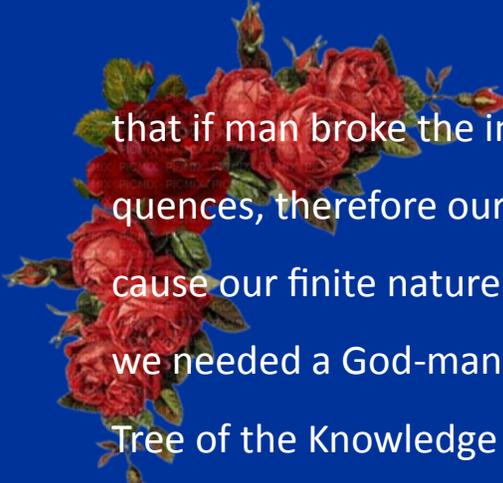




and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alpheus, Simon the Zealot and Judas son of James. All these devoted themselves with one accord to prayer, together with some women, and Mary the Mother of Jesus, and his brothers.” There is no mention of locked doors here but of peaceful prayer and of course the mention of Mary who is not mentioned in any of the Resurrection accounts. Things are calmer, less agitated here.

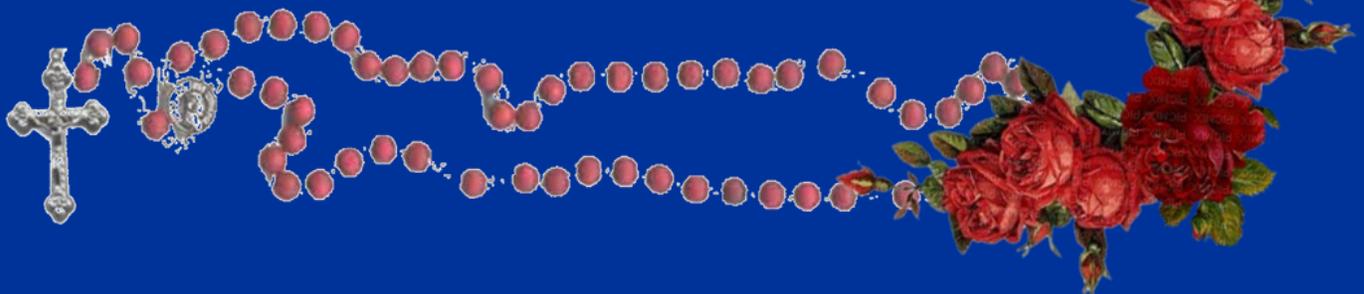
So this leads us to our topic, peace and Mary as the Mother of that peace. So what is peace? What makes a peaceful person? Well Paul gives us the answer very plainly in his letter to the Ephesians. Ephesians 2:14-15 states: “For He (Jesus) is our peace, He who made both one and broke down the dividing wall of enmity, through his flesh...that He might create in himself one new person in place of the two, thus establishing peace.” Jesus is peace. He is the only one who could take man’s complete and total separation from God that happened with Adam’s first sin and fix it, making whole again that which sin had divided. He did this not only on some level out there, some other worldly dimension, but in the human heart. We have been divided because of sin and I, if I choose to cooperate with this grace won by Jesus’ sacrifice, can be made whole again. Our redemption, like our fall, is very real. This is peace. In order to do this, to reestablish peace, God needed a Mother for his Son, so He could become man and stand in our place. It was only just

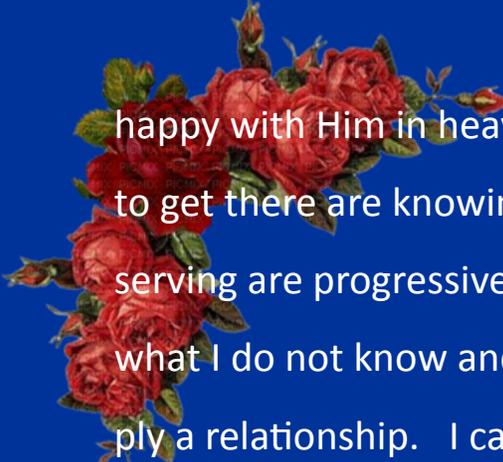




that if man broke the initial covenant that man be the one to suffer the consequences, therefore our Savior needed to be human, but not only human because our finite nature is incapable of repairing this infinite offense. Therefore we needed a God-man. Just as there was a notorious female help mate at the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, there is an Immaculate female help mate at the Tree of Life, the Cross of Christ. There is another dynamic of peace, however, that Pope Francis has spoken of on several occasions and that is the division that happens not only within man, between us and God, but among men: The divisions that occur when sin leads me to despise my neighbor. These two dynamics of peace, the vertical and the horizontal, directly influence each other. Just like the vertical dynamic required a female help mate, a Mother, the horizontal does as well.

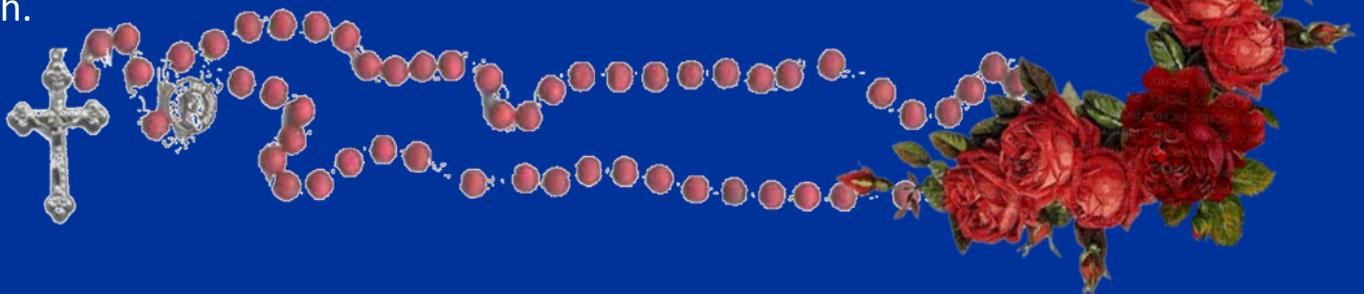
To look at the horizontal dynamic, I want to begin by looking at man's purpose: why we were created. Everything has a purpose: Podiums, tires, trees, and of course the apex of the visible universe, us. The western secular mindset tells us there is no ultimate, objective purpose to our lives. Life is what you make it, your own personal search for success and happiness. Well that is quite illogical. What if what makes me happy happens to hurt someone else, or infringes upon their rights? Who decides who is right or wrong? There has to be an ultimate, objective purpose outside of me. The old Baltimore Catechism says that God made us to know, love and serve him in this life in order to be

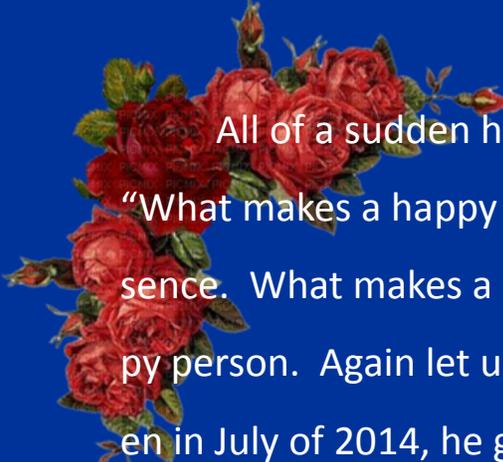




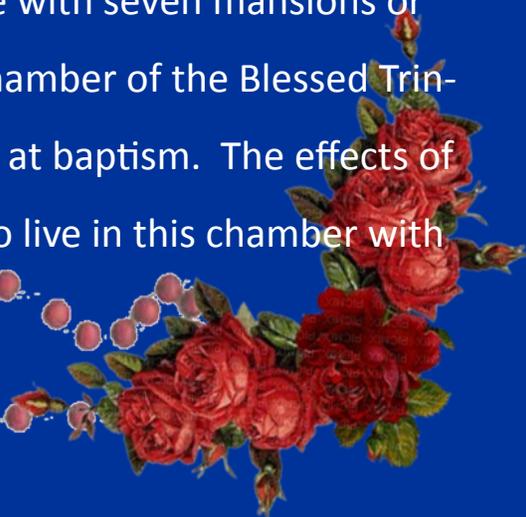
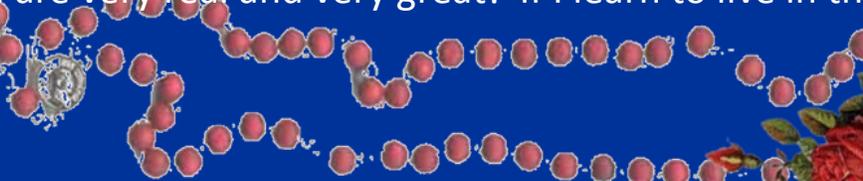
happy with Him in heaven. I am created to be happy in Heaven and the means to get there are knowing, loving and serving God. Now, knowing, loving and serving are progressive, relational words. It begins with knowing. I cannot love what I do not know and I will not serve what I do not love. These words also imply a relationship. I cannot know, love or serve by myself. Each one requires, in the least, a second party: To know someone; to love someone; to serve someone. Of course this is essentially and ultimately God, but as we know from the apostle John, love of God is proven through love of neighbor. 1 John 4:20: "If anyone says 'I love God' but hates his brother, he is a liar; for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen."

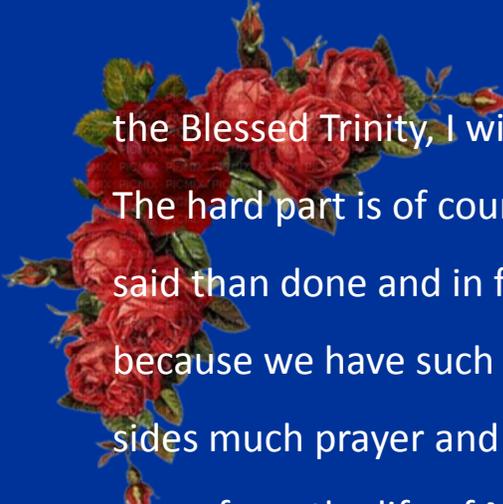
This is why Pope Francis says "Fraternity is an essential human quality, for we are relational beings," and that we have an "irrepressible longing for fraternity" (*Fraternity, The Foundation and Pathway to Peace*, 1). In his 2014 and 2015 addresses for the World Day of Peace, Pope Francis has focused on fraternity. Fraternity, true brotherhood with my neighbor leads to happiness. Peace, the two becoming one because of Christ, is essential to my happiness. Repeatedly the Holy Father links peace, fraternity and happiness, almost using them interchangeably. We see this played out in our own experience. Think about when you have been the most unhappy in your life. It has probably been because there was a division with someone or a break in this fraternity with someone whom you love profoundly and deeply. Maybe it was an argument or perhaps a death.





All of a sudden here the question, “What makes a peaceful person?” and “What makes a happy person?” intersect. They are the same question in essence. What makes a peaceful person is the same thing as what makes a happy person. Again let us look to Pope Francis for guidance. In an interview given in July of 2014, he gave ten tips for bringing greater joy to one’s life. Almost all of them deal with this fraternity. Within it he says that one of the ways to happiness or peace with others is to proceed calmly. Peace, and therefore happiness, has a hard time coexisting with stress, a hectic lifestyle or anxiety. To borrow an image from the Fathers of the Church, man’s soul is like the sea. There’s the surface that is sometimes calm, but often it is tossed about by wind and storms. My soul can be easily agitated by events or circumstances or even by myself and my own attachments. If I have a really nice car, then I’m worried about the really nice car, or, even if I don’t have the car, but let myself want it badly, I am stressed. I cannot be at peace. But there is a part of the sea, down at the depths that cannot be touched by what is happening on the surface. It is always calm. So it is with our soul. There is a part of me, perhaps it is the deepest darkest place and I have never been there before, that cannot be touched by events or circumstances. St. Teresa of Avila calls this place the inner most chamber as she likens the soul to a castle with seven mansions or chambers. It is the place of calm because it is the chamber of the Blessed Trinity. God dwells within us because of the grace given at baptism. The effects of our baptism are very real and very great! If I learn to live in this chamber with

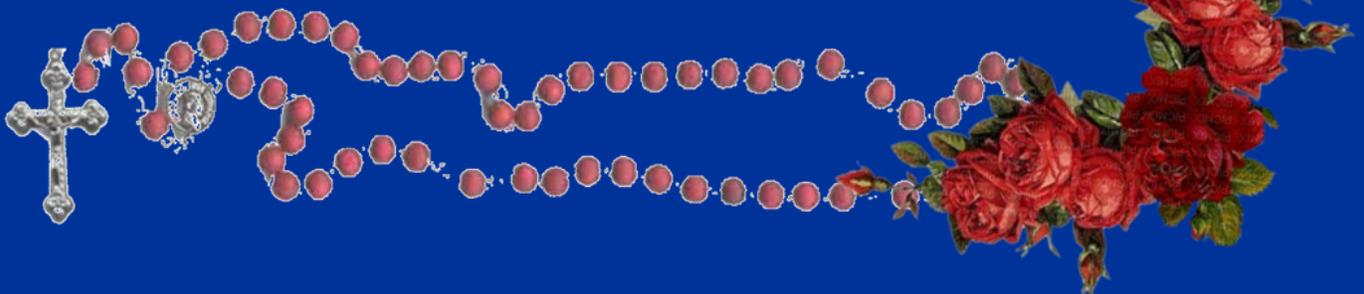


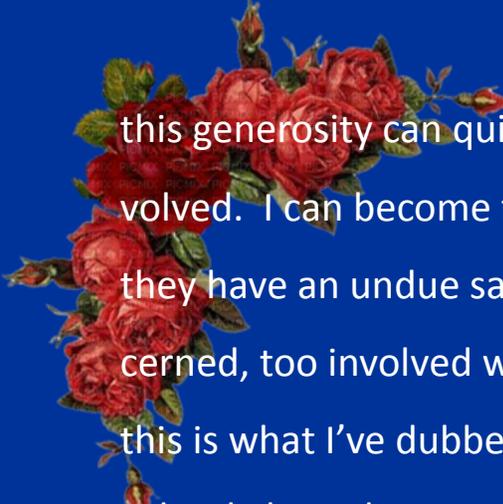


the Blessed Trinity, I will remain calm, no matter what happens on the surface.

The hard part is of course living there, so how do we do it? Well, it is easier said than done and in fact it is only God who can lead us to these depths, but because we have such a great Mother, we can look to her life for guidance. Besides much prayer and a life of dedicated virtue, I have three suggestions that come from the life of Mary, the Mother of Peace. One, give other people their proper place in my heart. Two, acceptance of all that life throws at us and three, humility.

First, giving people their proper place in my heart. Again we come back to fraternity; my relationship with those God has placed in my life. Aristotle tells us that virtue functions like a pendulum; it is the middle of two extremes. This is especially true for fraternity, and again I take some thoughts from Pope Francis. The first rule of fraternity is of course generosity, the ability to see beyond yourself and go there to see what is in the best interest of your neighbor. The Pope says, "If you withdraw into yourself, you run the risk of becoming egocentric. And stagnant water becomes putrid" (Glatz). It is essential to my peace and happiness that I get outside of myself and my world, in order to meet the needs of my neighbor. There is so much involved with this generosity: true empathy, making yourself available for the other or simply providing for their needs. The Prayer of St. Francis is a good guide in this generosity: *Lord, make me an instrument of your peace...* However, because I am fallen,

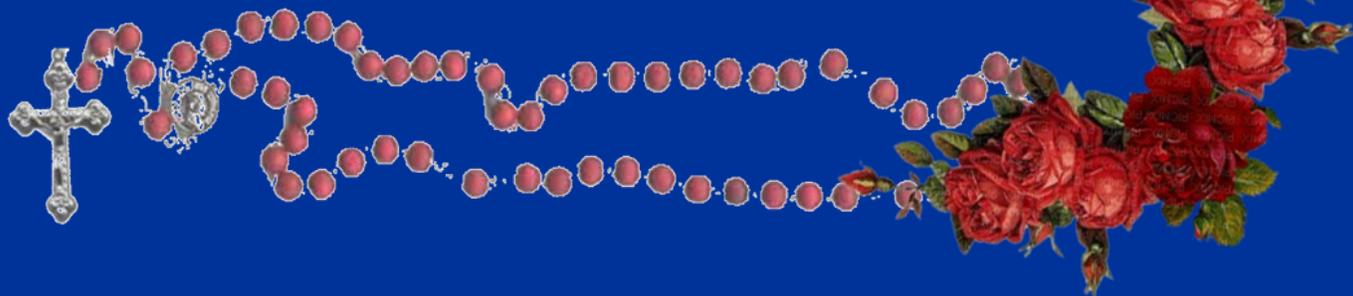


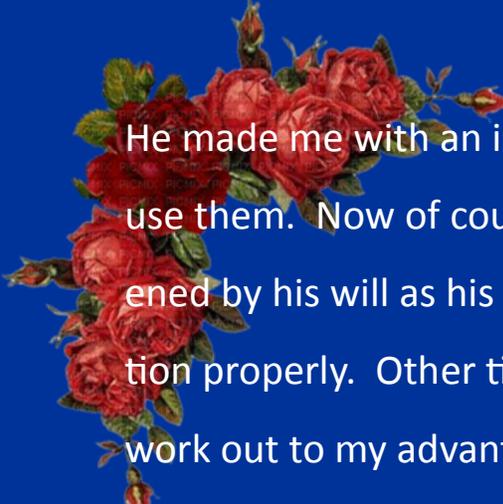


this generosity can quickly become disordered to the point where I am too involved. I can become fixated on the other and their life, to the point where they have an undue say over my heart. I lose my peace because I am too concerned, too involved with the object of my love. Perhaps a good example of this is what I've dubbed the "Facebook Effect." Not that I know much about Facebook, but whenever I use this example with the students they understand it immediately. If I know too much information about the other, which I hear happens on Facebook, I worry or think too much about the other. It can even mess with what I desire and want. It is like the car example I used earlier.

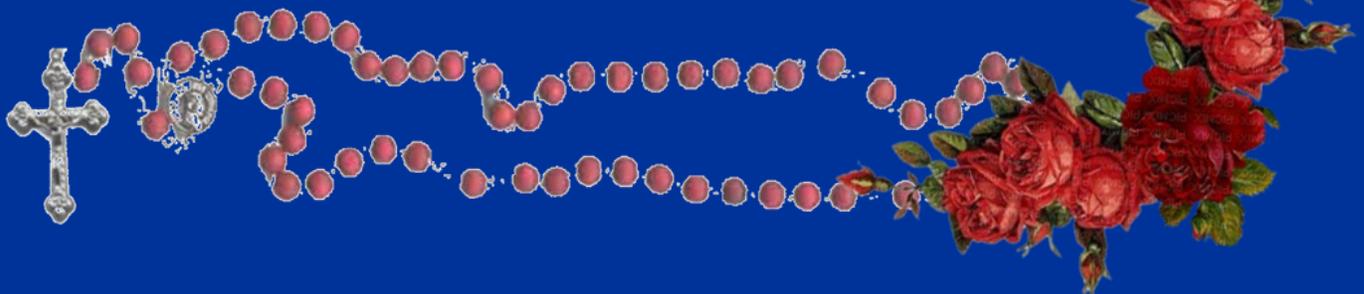
Mary was a great example of fraternity at the Visitation. Her charity moves her to go in haste to help her cousin Elizabeth in her time of pregnancy. Mary saw a need, did what she could to help, but while there her focus remained on God, not solely Elizabeth. She helped, and she loved, but when it was time to go, she left. She also, while there, left room in her heart for God, to where should could truly say "My soul proclaim the greatness of the Lord. My spirit exults in God my savior" (Luke 1:46-47). She had the final say as to what was going on in her heart, not circumstances or events, and certainly not other people.

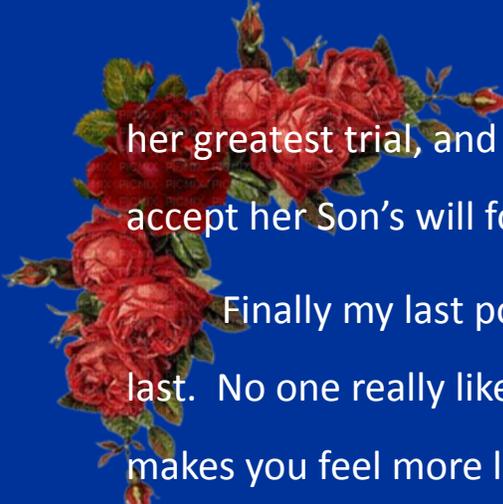
My second tip for maintaining peace and calm is accepting all that God allows. Again there is a fine line here or a middle ground. Often times we are quick to chalk things up to God's will and I perhaps begin to think that God wants me to blindly follow all that He allows, like a robot. This is not the case.





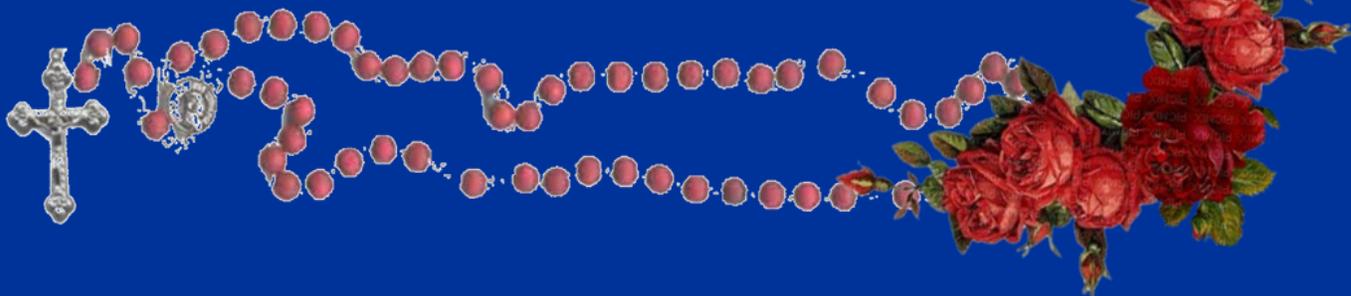
He made me with an intellect and free will because He actually wants me to use them. Now of course, I need to make sure they are instructed and enlightened by his will as his will is the gas so to speak, that makes my faculties function properly. Other times I might think that God's will will make everything work out to my advantage. This is true in the long run, heaven, but it is perhaps not the case in this life. Accepting God's will does not mean that I am going to like it, or that I am going to be a success, nor does it mean that I will dislike it either. God's will is not always the hardest choice before me. Our God is a surprising and unpredictable God, and acceptance does not mean that I won't feel, have to think, make a decision, or that I'll be indifferent toward it. Take death for example. As God is the master of life and death, there are really no clearer manifestations of his will than pregnancy and death. When we lose a loved one, if I accept it, not letting my heart fight God, the doctors, the circumstance, etc., I will be at peace, living in this inner chamber. It does not mean that I will not be sad or not have to go through the whole mourning process, however. I can't help that. I am human and our happiness is always in the context of our humanity. Again let's look to Mary. She stood at the foot of the Cross. She didn't blame the Jews, or Pilate or even God. She accepted the death of her son, but she did so with a broken heart. I cannot even begin to fathom how she actually did this, but I do know that when I am having trouble accepting something, I look to Mary at this moment, in what would have been

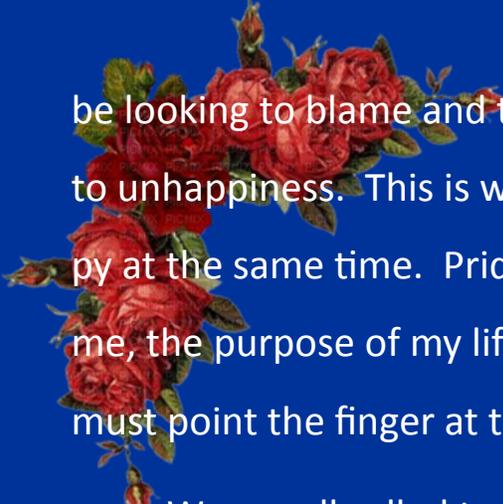




her greatest trial, and she changes my heart. She molds it until it is ready to accept her Son's will for me.

Finally my last point is humility. There is a reason why I saved this for last. No one really likes to talk about humility. There's no other topic that makes you feel more like a hypocrite. But I will proceed using the works of St. Dorotheus which are used in the Liturgy of the Hours. He says the secret of peace is finding fault with yourself instead of with your neighbor. He illustrates this with an example which I am sure can resonate with each of us. Think of a time when you've justified yourself either out loud or to yourself in this manner: "I never would have committed this sin if this person wouldn't have irritated me so much. It's their fault." We have all made this rash judgment at some point or another. I blame someone else for something I have done. Adam and Eve both did this in the Garden. Adam blamed Eve and Eve blamed the snake. It is completely irrational however. There is no cause and effect relationship here. It might appear so at first, but it simply is not the case. The sin I committed was caused not by them, but by some uncontrolled passion: anger, envy, etc., within me. Perhaps it was some excessive anxiety or some disordered attachment, but the problem is with me, not them. The fact that I was irritated by them sheds light on my fault and for that I should thank them, not blame them. If I refuse to find fault with myself, I will always

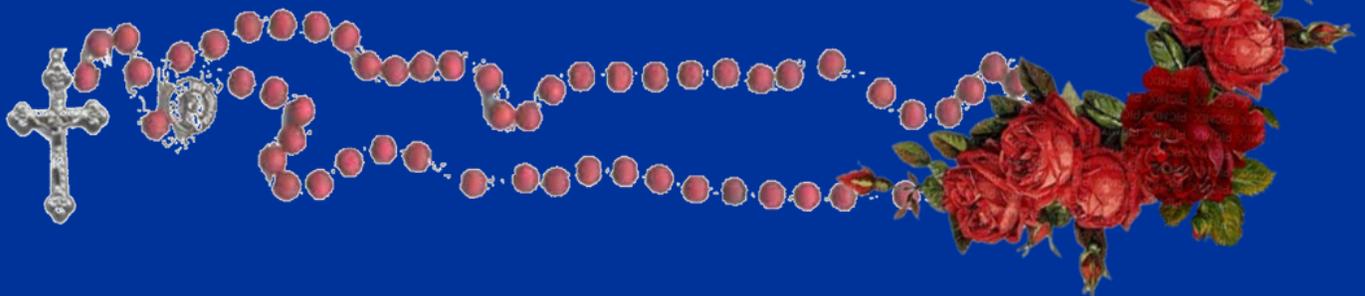


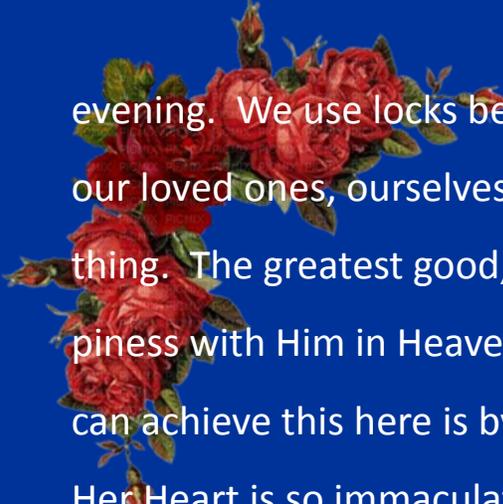


be looking to blame and this always breaks fraternity and therefore always leads to unhappiness. This is why pride is the worst sin. I can never be proud and happy at the same time. Pride is diametrically opposed to the very reason God made me, the purpose of my life which is to be happy. To break this cycle of blaming, I must point the finger at the one whose fault it really is.

We are all called to holiness, happiness, and peace, but not despite of my neighbor. My relationship with Christ is not just a 'me and Jesus' kind of thing. St. Francis de Sales and St. Jane Frances de Chantal founded the religious order of the Visitation, a new kind of community at that time. It was for women who desired the religious life but, for one reason or another, were not able to join the austere religious communities of their day. The spirituality of this new community, known today as Salesian spirituality, focused on this fraternal aspect of peace. One author describes this spirituality as "between": Peace is not "something that is forged only out of the solitary vigil of silence represented by the hermit monk...it is what goes on between persons in their relationships, that is of the essence in making Jesus live" (Thibert, 46).

Now we have come full circle. Peace is essential to my happiness. Peace with God wrought by Christ, but also peace with my neighbor which is also wrought by Christ. This peace, in its various aspects was lived out in Mary's life, as she was the perfect disciple. She is also my Mother as I journey toward peace, the goal of my life, so let's go back to the lock example with which I opened this





evening. We use locks because we want to feel and in fact be secure. We want our loved ones, ourselves, and our possessions to be safe, and that is a good thing. The greatest good, however, the purpose for which God created me, is happiness with Him in Heaven, complete and total peace. The lock, the securest way I can achieve this here is by binding myself to Mary, our Mother and our Queen. Her Heart is so immaculate, so generous that the Mother of Peace cannot fail but to bring us to her Son, the Prince of Peace. So let us pray, remember to pray not only for our own peace, but also peace among all men as this is the sure way to our happiness.

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