

“This book is based upon the conferences that Fr. Cantalamessa gave to the bishops of the United States in January of 2019. It was one of the signal spiritual privileges of my life to have participated in that retreat. Though these talks were directed originally to successors of the Apostles, I believe that any Christian will find them uplifting and illuminating. Relying on the Scriptures, the Church Fathers, the great medieval theologians, and the masters of the spiritual tradition, the preacher to the papal household draws his readers into the dynamics of the Christian life. I guarantee that a careful and prayerful engagement of this text will change your life.”

—Bishop Robert Barron  
Episcopal Vicar of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles

“I am delighted to find available Fr. Cantalamessa’s retreat conferences and reflections. This was my very first retreat as the newest bishop of the United States at the time. This powerful encounter with the Word amid the community of my brother bishops has marked my ministry as shepherd and fisherman, a brother and a priest in Christ’s Church. I am sure I will be back to this book many times for review, encouragement, and renewal!”

—Most Reverend Juan Miguel Betancourt  
Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Hartford

“Capuchin Father Raniero Cantalamessa, preacher to the papal household, takes us on a retreat to encounter the Risen Christ in the love, guidance, and power of the Holy Spirit. These conferences, originally given to the US Bishops, have been adapted so that their reflections can touch the life of all believers: priests, religious, lay men and women. The hope of Father Cantalamessa is that the voice of the Risen Lord rings clear for all who enter this retreat with an open heart. He offers us a message that is spiritually deep and at the same time, practical for living the Gospel message with fidelity, peace, and joy.”

—Abbot Gregory J. Polan, OSB  
Abbot Primate of the Benedictine Confederation,  
Sant’ Anselmo, Rome



# Shepherds and Fishermen

*Spiritual Exercises for  
Bishops, Priests, and Religious*

Raniero Cantalamessa, OFM Cap

Translated by  
Marsha Daigle-Williamson  
and  
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With a Foreword by  
Archbishop José Gomez



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*“He appointed twelve . . .  
that they might be with him  
and he might send them forth  
to preach.” (Mark 3:14)*



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# Foreword

In January 2019, at the urging of Pope Francis, the American bishops began the year with a weeklong retreat held at Mundelein Seminary in Chicago. For this retreat, the Holy Father generously offered us the services of the longtime preacher of the papal household, Father Raniero Cantalamessa, OFM Cap, who led us in reflecting on our vocation and responsibility as successors of the apostles.

For me, this was a memorable time of deepening conversion and spiritual growth, and it was a blessing to be able to pray and learn from Father Cantalamessa, who is truly one of the spiritual masters of our time. I am grateful to him and Liturgical Press for now bringing out this adaptation of the spiritual exercises that he preached to my brother bishops and I, making his insights and guidance available to the whole church.

At the heart of the meditations offered in these pages is the gospel's matter-of-fact account of how our Lord called the first apostles: "He appointed twelve . . . that they might be with him and he might send them forth to preach" (Mark 3:14).

In these simple words, we find contained the bishop's whole identity and purpose in the mystery of salvation. As Father Cantalamessa explains, like the apostles, the bishop is called to live in intimate communion with Jesus Christ and to share in his noble mission of proclaiming God's forgiveness and bringing men and women to the encounter with him—to see his face, to hear his voice, to know and feel his loving and saving presence in their lives.

To carry out our apostolic vocation, bishops must be committed to renewing this daily encounter of “being with” Jesus, growing in intimacy through our private prayer and through our listening to his voice as he speaks to us in the gospels. These pages are filled with practical wisdom and pastoral lessons for bishops—on *lectio divina*, preaching, prayer, stewardship, the beauty of celibacy, forming seminarians, and more.

While originally intended for bishops, these reflections will have value for everyone in the church—priests, deacons, seminarians, consecrated and religious, laymen and laywomen. The life of every Christian, no matter what our station in the world or position in the church, is a call to holiness and mission, a call to walk with Jesus and bear witness to his love in our words and actions. As Father Cantalamessa says, “The call to ‘be with Jesus and go forth to preach’ is not addressed only to pastors but, in a different way, to every baptized person.”

A master preacher, Father Cantalamessa draws from the Scriptures, the church fathers, the lives of the saints, and the church’s ancient traditions of prayer and worship. From these sources, he offers us a rich spirituality for missionary discipleship—rooted in the encounter with the living God, who enters into our lives and calls us to follow him and to work with him in fulfilling his plan of redemption.

Reading these meditations today, I am struck by how much things have changed since I first heard this retreat preached in January 2019. The church is living now in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic that has disrupted our economy and institutions, caused immense suffering and sadness, and will no doubt permanently change how we live and minister.

What seems to me most important now, for all of us in the church, is the priority of our relationship with Jesus Christ, as Father Cantalamessa insists upon. Often, as I reread these meditations, I found myself thinking of those stirring words from *Evangelii Gaudium*, early in Pope Francis’s pontificate: “I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with

Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her.”

I pray that these mediations from Father Cantalamessa will lead all of us to that renewal the Holy Father is calling for—to a deeper, more personal and intimate, encounter with Jesus Christ, and a new desire to bring the joy of the Gospel to every person.

*Most Reverend José H. Gomez*  
*Archbishop of Los Angeles*  
*President, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*  
*July 20, 2020*  
*Memorial of Saint Apollinaris, Bishop and Martyr*



# Introduction

In September 2018, Pope Francis and the president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, asked me to lead a week of spiritual exercises for the American bishops. Their intention was that the bishops, free from their pressing daily commitments and in an atmosphere of prayer and personal encounter with the risen Lord, could receive the strength and light of the Holy Spirit necessary to deal with the serious problems the church is facing. The retreat took place at the Mundelein Seminary in Chicago on January 2–10, 2019, with 250 bishops attending.

Some of those present asked me to publish the texts of the meditations and homilies used for that occasion, believing that those reflections would be able to help other Catholic bishops and priests around the world. I decided to accommodate their request, leaving out what most closely concerned the original audience and preserving what is always valid for everyone in the church.

The central theme of the retreat comes from the brief statement in Mark's gospel: "He appointed twelve . . . that they might be with him and he might send them forth to preach" (Mark 3:14). During the first part of the retreat, we meditated on what it means today for a bishop or priest to "be with Jesus" and during the second part on what it means to go "forth to preach"—in other words, personal sanctification and pastoral activity. The title of this book, *Shepherds and Fishermen*, is meant to highlight the two aspects of pastoral activity: to nourish those who attend church with the word and the sacraments and to reach out to those who are far off or who

have distanced themselves from the church. Shepherds of sheep and fishers of men is just what Jesus wanted his apostles to be.

The essential goal for me in a course of spiritual exercises is to facilitate, or help renew, a personal encounter with Jesus in the Holy Spirit. There is not a theme at the center of everything but a person. More than relying on the exercise of our faculties—intelligence, memory, will—the meditations rely on the grace of God received in faith. They have, therefore, a kerygmatic character rather than an ascetic and voluntaristic one. Parenthesis is present in every meditation but as a result of the kerygma. The model is the Pauline letters, especially the letter to the Romans.

The exercises, however, should also be a time for a review of one's life and of personal encounter with the Word. With this goal in mind, I have added brief texts for the *lectio divina* and an examination of conscience, one for each day. In them I let Jesus be the one who speaks in first person to whoever reads it, as the author of *The Imitation of Christ* so often does. This is not a simple fictional device but a means that helps us become aware of a truth of the faith recalled by the Second Vatican Council: every time we listen to a word from the Gospel, it is the risen One who speaks to us at that moment.<sup>1</sup>

In the daily homilies for the retreat in Chicago, I developed a mystagogical catechesis on the Eucharist that followed the various parts of the Mass: the Liturgy of the Word, consecration, Communion, and adoration. That catechesis is presented in this book as points of reflection for the Eucharistic Hour to which a Marian Hour is added.

The material here may thus be useful for any retreat for bishops, priests, candidates for priesthood, and religious as a kind of manual for spiritual exercises with content that corresponds to the theology and spirituality of the post-Vatican II church. In it I have tried to put to good use the experience accumulated during my

1. See *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy) 7.

forty years of preaching to the papal household and in retreats to bishops and priests in various countries throughout the world. I also had the privilege of being invited to preach retreats and to share the word of God with Christians of other denominations: Lutherans, Anglicans, Evangelicals, and Pentecostals. I would be pleased if pastors of other churches sharing the same passion for unity also would find something useful for them in the pages of this book.

The essential content of Christian life being the same for all the members of God's people, I dare to hope that this book could be of some use not only for the clergy but also for laypeople who desire to deepen their own spiritual life. The call to "be with Jesus and go forth to preach" is not addressed only to pastors but, in a different way, to every baptized person.

Each day is structured in the following way. It begins with the *lectio divina* in order for the very words of Jesus to be at the foundation of everything. Two meditations follow, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. The day ends with a Eucharistic or Marian Hour. On the afternoon of the third day, a penitential liturgy is scheduled in preparation for the sacrament of reconciliation, and on the fourth day a prayer for interior and physical healing. If the retreat is done as a community, in the final Mass (possibly the Mass of the feast of Pentecost), it is suggested that a solemn invocation to the Spirit takes place instead of the prayer of the faithful to obtain the grace of the new Pentecost desired by Pope St. John XXIII for the whole church as a fruit of the council.

The important thing during a course of spiritual exercises is not to hear new and original insights but things that are useful and essential for life. It should not be a surprise, therefore, for readers to find thoughts and reflections in these pages that appear in my other writings.

At the beginning of his treatise on contemplation, the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* gives readers a piece of advice that is fundamental to making a good spiritual retreat as well. In order to pierce the cloud of unknowing that is above us,

between us and God, we need to put a cloud of forgetfulness beneath us, leaving aside for a certain time every problem, project, and anxiety that we currently have.<sup>2</sup> If we do not make a firm decision to do this, it will be very difficult for God to have his light and his consolation reach us, and we will be wasting our time. We therefore ask the Holy Spirit for an unusual gift: not that of remembering but that of forgetting. This is the time to take a break, to withdraw, as the psalmist says, “from the strife of tongues” (Ps 31:21), so as to listen to the voice of the Lord. This is also the best way to get to the root of personal and ecclesial problems that are different and deeper than those we ordinarily think of.

2. See Anonymous, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, chapter 5.

# *The First Day*

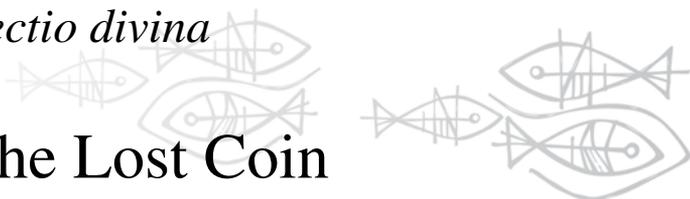




# 1

## *Lectio divina*

# The Lost Coin



**F**irst of all, I want to give you some advice about how to proceed with the reading. Before reading, recollect yourself before me. Feel my breath and imagine being in my presence full of love and salvation; imagine that I'm speaking to you personally. Ask my Spirit to reveal my word to you and to open your heart to me. Then sit down and read the passage attentively that I suggest to you (preferably from your own Bible). Let every word enter deeply into your heart; try to taste it, to savor it, to repeat it, until it penetrates you. Believe that I myself am addressing every word to you. If you picture a biblical scene, for example, a healing story, imagine it concretely. Transport yourself to that scene. You're the sick person who comes to me or who is touched by my love. Look at me and let me look at you. Tell me what's bothering you right now, and ask me what I want to say about it. And then listen in silence to my response.

When you experience intimacy with me, what I say is then no longer so important. What's important is for you to be with me; that's enough. Stay with me in this encounter so that your attention doesn't diminish. Then continue to read the text; let the words enter into your heart again and immerse yourself in the next situation. Talk to me, because that makes your heart more fully

engaged. To hear your own voice speaking to me stirs your feelings, and then you sense that I'm truly present and you're encountering me personally. And as you are before me, you confront your reality—all that's usually hidden beneath the monotony of actions. You discover your truth in my truth and sense that you're accepted just as you are and that, despite your faults, all is well. Then you'll experience a profound peace come over you.

Then bring into daily life that inner quality you discovered in being with me. I always dwell in your heart, in the interior room of silence; I'm the same one who spoke to you and who met with you. In everyday life, always remember there's a room within you to which people who badger you with their concrete, often trivial, problems don't have access. Within you remains a secret place that distances you from everything you do. And in this distance you live in freedom; you discover that I'm your center and that you don't define yourself by what is happening outside of you. If you succeed in discovering that room, you'll then feel free and can peacefully be occupied with the practical tasks you need to handle.



For the first text, read Luke 15:8-10:

What woman having ten coins and losing one would not light a lamp and sweep the house, searching carefully until she finds it? And when she does find it, she calls together her friends and neighbors and says to them, "Rejoice with me because I have found the coin that I lost." In just the same way, I tell you, there will be rejoicing among the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

In the other two parables of mercy in this chapter, things are lost because they go away: the sheep leaves the sheepfold, and the prodigal son leaves his family home. The parable of the lost coin makes it clear that someone can become "lost" even staying at home. That woman found herself in a situation that resembles

yours. She has lost a coin, but along with the coin she has lost herself. The number ten is a symbol of wholeness, so by losing that wholeness, the woman has lost her true center.

Because of all your preoccupations and problems, you have often lost sight of your heart. You're doing a lot, it's true, but at times you've lost the clasp that holds together the multiple facets of your life. You don't always live in your center; you don't always live in your heart. And lack of attention to your life makes you lose your true self. So now, in these exercises, I invite you to seek my image in yourself. You need first of all to light a lamp. You need to peer into the abyss of your soul and keep the light of your conscience illuminating the shadows in your soul, in everything that's unconscious and that you've removed. You must sweep the house. A bit of dust has accumulated or you've hidden the coin somewhere else because of the many pieces of furniture you've placed in your home and because of the many things that have become so important to you.

Listen, to do the exercises means to empty and clean out your house so that I can enter it and dwell in every room, and so that I myself am the one who finds the coin that remains hidden in some part of you. Now I invite you to sketch in your mind (or even literally if you wish) your home on the basis of this parable. It's not important for you to draw it well. Design your home with all the floors and all the rooms. What's in the cellar? Are there rooms in which you can't enter? Or some that you're afraid of? What's your ground floor like? In what rooms do you usually live? Where do you feel the best? What part of your home is the coldest? Where do you receive guests? What's the second floor like? What rooms do you prefer to be in? Do I dwell in all the rooms of your house, or have you pushed me out of a certain room?

I myself enter your home to search for the coin, and I'll do what a woman would do who moves the furniture and lifts the chairs to find it. Perhaps the coin is precisely in the place in which you feel most comfortable. After walking through your home, present it to me and ask me what I want to tell you about it. Try

to envision me as present at that moment, and then tell me everything that comes to your mind.

But ask yourself continuously, “What is the real truth about my life? What is my real situation?” What should you tell me that you’ve never told me? Where should you let me in so that you can illuminate all the rooms of your home with my light? There is a “closet” in your life that you’re not succeeding in putting in order by yourself—for example, your sexuality. Talk to me about it, and I’ll illuminate your home and dwell in it with my love and mercy.

Remember my word in Revelation 3:20: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock.” I’m not knocking to enter into you, because, thanks to baptism and your life of faith, I’m already within you. I’m knocking to be let out of the corner where you have perhaps consigned me for times of prayer or Mass. I want you to give me the key that opens everything, the master key, so that I can enter and share all the facets of your life with you—your family, your affections, your finances—to be with you when you’re awake, when you sleep, when you work, when you play. . . . Would you like to share your whole life with me? You’ll see that everything will be easier and better.