

DARK NIGHT: WEAKNESS

We are here to think together about how to take care of ourselves in the mission, living in the Dark Night of the Soul. We are not simply talking about taking care of people presently here in the Kemper building or taking care of the Movement. We mean taking care of the world. For if we intuit things the right way, in one dimension or another the whole world is in the midst of a Dark Night of the Soul. It is a time when we need to learn all over again to take care of ourselves in the mission. There is probably nothing more painful to me right now, than to observe someone trying not to live in the Dark Night of the Soul, when he is in the Dark Night of the Soul. The pain is not only that he cannot escape; the pain is that of watching someone literally destroy his own being. So, we want to talk about how to care for life, how to care for ourselves in the mission, in the midst of the Dark Night.

It is as if we have journeyed to the very center of being. In that journey, we talked under several categories. We are in the second Dark Night of the Soul, I suppose. We woke up and discovered one day that we were on the journey into the depths of selfhood. Somewhere along the line we discovered ourselves wandering around on the périphery of life. We did not know it was the periphery at that time and we would never have called it the periphery. If someone had told me I was living there, I would have hit him in the face.

But after that something happened to us. We discovered that we had been on the periphery and began to journey to a new depth of human self-consciousness that had never happened to us before. Sometimes this discovery happened through taking RS-I. (I think it always used to happen that way.) But now, you have a two-minute conversation with someone and, lo and behold, you both have journeyed into the depths of self-consciousness. So you are terrified. You are afraid to have any kind of in-depth conversation with anybody anymore, because in two minutes you have done that kind of job. If you are an old liberal like me, you do not want to cause that kind of pain to anybody and therefore you try to avoid those in-depth conversations because you never know what they will elicit.

At some point, I want to suggest, you were wounded by God, by God's love. That is why you are here. Anybody would be crazy to have come to do what we are doing save somewhere along the line, in a forty-four hour course or a two-minute conversation, he discovered himself wounded by the love of God. Some of you probably have a lot of resentment and hatred and think that somebody conned you into coming along, but nobody conned you. Really, it was the one who wounded you who called you to be here. When you were first wounded, if your journey is anything like mine, you thought this journey into self-consciousness was the most fantastic happening of your life. It was a time when you were going to save the world, in our generation or in the next ten years. That journey to the center, if you translate the word fantastic, is still a fantastic journey. But somewhere

along the line when one is wounded by the Mystery, the Mystery becomes what some poets in the past have called the Hound of Heaven, who stays with you and journeys you on into the kind of depth of humanness where there is a beginning of pain. Probably it was right after that fantastic happening that you really recruited RS-I. Then sometime later, you stopped recruiting, because you said, "I don't want anybody to go through the pain I went through." I do not know if that is your story or not, but something like that may have happened as you journeyed to the center.

Or, maybe the Dark Night happened all the way through the journey to the center. During that period of time, the images out of which you formulated your life began to go away. Perhaps you could not even remember why you took RS-I. Suddenly you discovered that what was brightly illumined, at one point, then became so incredibly opaque that you felt literally blind. It was as if all of the history and all of the images that brought you into being, motivated you, and gave you direction, began to collapse. What happens to you is the experience of humiliation and weakness. Your decision-making process is darkened. You cannot even remember how you make decisions anymore. Or why it is that you would do what you were doing. You begin to experience resentment and suffering. Maybe suffering is the overarching category that really holds all of those.

Another way to talk about caring for ourselves is to ask what it means to live with your passion all dried up. What does it mean to live in the kind of situation in which a person finds his life? This dark happening has happened to the whole world. It is not a religious happening, nor does it just happen to people in the Order. It is something that happens to everybody.

I am fascinated with reading the stories of the astronauts, when they return from the moon or wherever they go out there, and what happens to their lives. Something happens to shift all their images of life. Most of them have quit the program, have they not? They were not tired of flying. Something happened to darken their images of life. John Glenn even talked about the Dark Night of the Soul. I would like to sit down sometime and talk with him to see if he meant by the Dark Night of the Soul some of these things that St. John of the Cross meant.

One of the clues to me that this has happened in our time was a strange kind of experience I had. About four years ago, I was in Japan and we got little excerpts out of that book called The Dark Night of the Soul by St. John of the Cross. We were supposed to do a Solitary Office, and the airmail came with these little excerpts from The Dark Night of the Soul. We were supposed to read them in Solitary Office—and then write our reflections. Whoever was assigned would painfully read these little excerpts. We would sit there for awhile; then a bell would ring and the leader would say, "Write your reflections." We would sit there and ask "What in the world does that mean?" Finally we would just write a little poem about a tree.

Then about a year ago somebody introduced that book again and I thought, "How can you understand a book that came out of the Middle Ages? The language just doesn't speak anymore." But, since everybody was buying a copy, and since I am a circumspect man, I bought a copy, too. When I read it, I could understand it! I kept writing "Yes" down the side of the book on passages that I had seen before but never understood. Something had happened in the journey of human consciousness, the journey to the center, where that book, no matter how old it was or how much I had to demythologize or translate it, began to speak in a way that told me something

in my life. So, I would read it to other people and they would say, "Yes", as if something was transpiring not only in my life, but in history.

The Dark Night happening needs to be coupled with the image we have of resurgence. They are one happening in history. For a while, we had a little trouble with the word "resurgence". We had news conversations with questions like, "Where did you see signs of resurgence?" People would answer, "I saw that when an old lady helped a little girl across the street." That is a bit too much. For a while we thought that one has a little bit of resurgence, then one runs over here and has a little Dark Night, and then runs back and has a little resurgence, then a little more Dark Night, and then you light a candle!

The relationship between the Dark Night and Resurgence is not like that. Rather, the images of life collapse around us and darkness covers the earth in terms of our images of what it means to be human. At that exact same time, the faint light of a whole new possibility emerges, as man recreates his human-ness, his history, and his social structures. That is one painful happening. Resurgence is not a series of joy banners strung across irrelevant places.

In describing the Dark Night, I want to talk about the experience of weakness. When I first entered on this journey in the Dark Night, or entered into self-consciousness, I had the vision and the yearning to relieve the agony of man. This task was the meaning of my life. I sang songs, had visions and built models about it. Then one day something happened. I am sure it happened long before I became aware of it happening. I became conscious of it on a global trip. That is to say this happening is not just subjective; it is a happening that happens to you in history. I was in the ghettos of India. Although it seems I always use this incident as a lecture illustration, not a day goes by without the images of that event standing before my eyes. For it was standing in those ghettos that I saw for the first time the incomprehensible burden of the whole world on me. I still see before my eyes what I had never seen before. That world was not the one my imagination had held, whatsoever. I still see before me the first time I ever saw a leper, an old woman with no legs, half a nose and one ear.

I do not say that to be melodramatic, but because I saw that scene the overwhelming burden of the content of my vision was revealed. The most unbelievable weakness came over me as I became aware that I could not possibly change the world. I was too weak. I watched some Roman Catholic priests working there. For a short time I was a zombie who laughed at what they were doing, because of the unbearable burden. I knew the same kind of tragedy would happen again and again. I discovered that I could not relieve the agony of man. I was just too weak.

If anybody talks too much about the movement at the practical level of building models, I experience this weakness. That is the strange fact of the Dark Night. Exactly at the same time all the possibilities stand before you, this weakness experience happens to you. It occurs not when ~~everything~~ is falling apart, but when the possibilities are present. Then you discover your incomprehensible weakness.

When we build theoretical models, I stay awake. But build a practical model for Oombulgurri and I fall asleep. I thought for awhile it is because we do not get enough sleep around here in the summer. So I slept one day for fifteen hours

and nobody could find me. I woke up and was as tired as when I went to bed. The tiredness had nothing to do with sleep. It had to do with a new reality in my life, the reality of being doomed, if you will, to live as the one who could never fulfill his dream of wrapping up the world in this generation.

It is strange that at first one does not see that reality as any kind of gift whatsoever. In fact, one never sees it as a gift and yet, at the same time, one does. For the first time in my life the possibility of breaking through the dream which had plagued my life since I was born, the dream which society had fathered in me, was broken. It is as if I have been given the opportunity of growing up. I have been given the opportunity of being a man in history, who was weak and who stood before the reality of the way life really is.

It is funny that that does not come to us as a gift. I have three daughters and I play this game with my youngest one. I say, "Promise me you won't grow up. Make a covenant with me." And she says, "I promise." But just before she left for camp, I looked at her and discovered she had broken the covenant. You play those games where you do not want something to grow up, but you know that is not true really. You want life to grow up.

When you discover the unbearable burden of the world which God --the Mystery-- discloses, you have the most incredible opportunity for growing up. We have been rehearsing that line "This is my beloved son". The one before it reads, "And it is as if the heavens opened up." And that for me is what growing up is. It is as if the heavens opened up and empowered you to be your weakness in the midst of the life that you have, which is your life, which is growing up, which is living in the Dark Night. This weakness never goes away because you discover that is what it is.

When that opportunity happens to you it is like weakness also comes to you in another way. It is as if, in the middle of your life, you still have the desire to bring something to fruition, to have some kind of self-esteem. It is a hellish journey at this point and you will try to find every way you know to run away from it. But you want some kind of self-esteem. And right in the middle of all the possibilities you discover you are totally impotent. In the midst of loving the world, you discover you have no life in you -- that you cannot make a decision -- that you do not know what decision to make -- that everything you touch requires a decision but seems too burdensome to pick up. And there is just a terrifying sense that you are no longer. I like that line from "Hospital". I did not like it, but it was a true line. You remember that when the doctor is confronting that woman he talks about impotency and says, "Hell, I'm not talking about sex. I'm talking about something far deeper than sex. I'm talking about what it means when one is not even a man in his vocation or anything else.."

There are a lot of novels today dealing with sexual impotency, which is probably some kind of symbol of the Dark Night. The Dark Night is an impotency to life itself, to engagement. It is that utter weakness when you discover that you have the world on your hands, and she is not what you wanted but you are married to her for life! All the images that aroused you to her no longer arouse. And you discover that you are called to love this mother earth for the rest of your life, and you cannot even remember why.

That sense of impotency is the experience of the Dark Night which people want to hide from. At least I do. You want to run away from the reality of that kind of impotency. We use up all our psychic energy trying to run away from the fact that that is just how we showed up at this point in our journey. That is the way we will always be in the overwhelmedness of caring for Mother Earth. And it is at that time again that the heavens open up and the words are pronounced, "You are my beloved son -- you are." And you repeat, "I am?" "You are." When one can see that he is the beloved one as the impotent one -- my God, all that psychic energy that I used hiding or running or seeking something else in the midst of the impotency of my life becomes a fantastic power in my existence. That was a power used up in running or finding some other situation, so that I would not be the impotent man I am. And the discovery is that you remain that kind of man, but in the transformation of receiving that Word from the heavens -- You are! YOU are!

Finally, that comes to you in the midst of a silence when you are called into the depths of your life, and you discover there is no help -- no help from anyone. You are called to be engaged in the world; you are called to pick up the task. You want to be upheld in the task and there is no upholding. You discover no help. There is a sense of being utterly abandoned. Have you ever picked up the telephone here and tried to get the operator at the switchboard? I remember once being on it for five minutes, and I clicked the little thing, and there was no help, no help. So, I got off my chair and walked around the corner to talk to the person I really wanted to talk to, who was in the next office. But that kind of no help is experienced as interior panic. It is like being on a tightrope, walking across Niagara Falls alone. Where you are called to stand is the silence of no help. We have used the word Xavier to talk about that kind of standing alone in history with the whole burden on your shoulders. And it is not as if that "no help" was just external; there is no help interiorly. That is, I am no help to myself in my weariness, in my weakness. There is no help!

It is in the midst of that final "no help" that meaning comes. As the one who has no help, as the impotent one, as the one overburdened by the weariness of life -- "You are my son." I like that name. "You are my son." not "my kid", not "my slave". "You are my son." You are the one who is called to live as the one you are when you are ill-equipped, when you do not have the prowess to do the kind of job that you have been called to do, when you see that you are not the spirit giant that you need to be -- in the face of life itself. You feel overly oppressed, but it is more than that. It is the over-oppression of being the one who has journeyed into the center of being and therefore has eyes to see every spirit burden and pain and every spirit wound of everyone else in society.

You know you cannot handle it. You experience being oppressed unjustly. It is right there, and probably only right there, that you hear that kind of word, "In you I am well pleased." You are the one who experiences himself as never being spiritually prepared to be the religious that he was called to be. You are the overburdened, the impotent, the not-helped, the unjustly oppressed one, the weak one; and words come, "Thou art my beloved son in whom I am well pleased." What you know is that you will always be that weak one, and yet the beloved one.

Well, frankly I have never much liked the book, The Dark Night of the Soul. There is only one line in it I like, so every opportunity I get to state that line, I state it again. I think it means about the same thing as, "Thou art my beloved son in whom I am well pleased." St. John of the Cross has described that kind of impotency, that kind of weakness, that kind of heaviness, and then says -- and you will not believe this; in fact he also says that in the midst of that Dark Night you probably will not believe anything, he says -- "You are in no danger." And then he says, (not exactly like this, but what he means is), "The Mystery that wounded you is growing you up. And you are in no danger."

-- Justin Morrill

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