

THE SPIRITUAL LIFE
(for the Notre Dame Undergraduate Theological Symposium,
31 March, 2008)

This is a reading from the Katha Upanishad, from the sacred writings of India:

The Self-Existent Lord pierced the senses,
And therefore we see outer things and not the inner Self.
Rare discriminating people who desire immortality
Turn their eyes away and see the indwelling Self.

The Sanskrit words used there are very interesting: the word which is translated here as “pierced”—*vyatrnat*—actually means more like “destroyed” or “killed” or at least “injured”: the Self-Existent One (that is, God) destroyed or killed or at least injured the senses; and so we look outside of ourselves and do not see... what? The *antar-atman*—the inner *atman*, what St Paul or St Peter might refer to as “our spirit” or “the inner person”: St Paul (Col 3:3) “you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God”; St Peter (1 Pt 3:4), “let your adornment be the inner self with the lasting beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit.”

I do a lot of study and work in comparative religion, and I must confess that sometimes I myself think that I see too many parallels in things. But listen to this reading from Romans (8:8-11)...

Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.
But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit,
since the Spirit of God dwells in you.
... if Christ is in you,
though the body is dead because of sin,
the Spirit is life because of righteousness.
If the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you,
[the one] who raised Jesus from the dead
will give life to your mortal bodies also
through his Spirit that dwells in you.

... and compare that with what the Upanishad taught: our senses are made to look outward, the Upanishad says. We live so much outside of ourselves, drawn out by what attracts us. I heard a teacher describe it this way: he said our eyes, for example, are always “eating the world,” attaching, craving, drawing things into ourselves. I think this is the meaning of 1 John 2:15-17 when he speaks us “... all that is in the world—the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches...” The eyes here are just a metaphor for the rest of the senses. There is obviously something just fine about that: that’s what the senses are for, to allow us to interact with the outer world, but only up to a point.

Recall the famous section of St Augustine’s Confessions when he says to God:

You were within me, but *I was outside*,
and it was there that I searched for you...

On entering into myself I saw,
as it were with the eye of the soul,
what was beyond the eye of the soul, beyond my spirit:
your immutable light.

God pierced our senses to look outward, and so we look outward, as Augustine would say, “into the lovely things that [God] created.” At some point, every now and again, some rare discriminating people suddenly get the grace of an intuition to look within. And what could they possibly find within themselves? The Upanishads call it *atman*—the Self. What might we followers of Jesus see if we were to look within? St Paul answers that question best of all in Romans 5, a scripture passage that actually gets used on Pentecost: “The love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Spirit living in us.” What we might see if we look *within* is the love of God; what we might see if we look *within* is the Holy Spirit who has been poured into our hearts, at the very center of our being, *as* the very center of our being.

Jesus himself refers to this Spirit, whom he was to send, in John 7:37-39—another reading used for Pentecost, by the way—when he stands up at the great festival and proclaims:

“Let anyone who is thirsty come to me,
And let the one who believes in me drink.
... ‘Out of the believers heart shall flow rivers of living water.’”

And, in case we didn’t understand it, John adds, as if in parentheses: *he was talking about the Holy Spirit*. Even God is not just “out there”: God, the Holy Spirit, shall flow from out of my heart, by that Spirit living in me.

God made the senses to look outward, and so we look outward all the time and fail to see our inner self, our real self that is hidden with Christ in God, that deepest part of our being where we are in some way already in union with God, if for no other reason than by the grace of our Baptism and the sacramental life of the Church through which, as from the pierced side of Jesus on the cross, the love of God is poured into our hearts, into the deepest part of our being.

That is who we are!

What we find out along the way when we study theology is that for the most part all of our theological questions, including our questions about liturgy and especially our questions about spirituality and the spiritual life, are at the same time usually also anthropological questions. We are not just asking who and what God is; what we are asking is “Who am I? And how do those two things go together?”

Who is God? Who am I? And how do those two things go together?

This is who you are: the love of God has been poured into your heart, the Spirit of God, the Spirit of the Risen Christ. This is who you are: a tabernacle, a fount of life giving water, a vessel of Divine Love, a temple.

Now, back to that reading from St Paul, and hear it again for the first time:

... you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit,
not because of anything you have done or earned but simply because
... the Spirit of God dwells in you.
And ... if Christ is in you ...
If the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you,
Then the one who raised Jesus from the dead
will give life to *your* mortal bodies also
through his Spirit that dwells in you.

That's why we look within, because this is who we are, someone in whom the Spirit of God dwells.

So the spiritual life begins here—for a moment withdrawing our senses from outside and taking a long loving gaze within. As the Upanishad said, at least those who seek immortality will do so, and when they do they behold the “deathless Self,” who we have come to find out is none other than the Spirit of God, the Spirit of the Risen Jesus poured into our hearts.

Now let me take a step backwards, because from my perspective we often run into a real problem in our discussion about the spiritual life.

It is especially a propos, and for me delightful, to speak of all this during the Easter season, when chrisms is still glistening on foreheads, because Easter focuses so much on the resurrection of Jesus' body and, as I understand it, even though we are “in the Spirit,” Christian spirituality is still also all about the body. And in some way it is discovering the bridge between the body and spirit that the spiritual life is all about.

Unfortunately what often finds its way immediately into Christian anthropology is just the opposite notion. For example, the late great Jesuit Jacques Dupuis says we need only to bear in mind and contrast the Greek belief in the immortality of the soul and the Christian faith in the resurrection of bodies.¹ (A not unimportant side note: what I am about to bring up—challenging Greek philosophy—is a bit of a “hot button” topic right now, especially since our present Pope is such a defender of the marriage of the Hebrew revelation with Greek philosophy even from the earliest days of Judaism. So I am leaning here on real scholars, not on the mere opinion of a wandering, guitar-playing monk, to present this other side of the argument, and point out, for all it has benefited us, some of the deficiencies that we may have also inherited from Greek

¹ Dupuis, *incontro*, pp. 154-155; see also Vagaggini, *The Flesh Instrument of Salvation*, Alba House, 1969, p. 19: “between the Greek mode of thinking and the scriptural notion there is merely a shade of difference... but this nuance is most important.”

philosophy.) According to the Greeks, life is destined to death, since the body (*soma*) is a tomb (*sema*); so salvation can only consist in being freed of the body through some kind of evasion. Tomas Spidlik (in his book *The Spirituality of the Christian East*) gives a list of the most famous invectives, starting with the Fathers, of the church riffing on this theme.

And so, says Clement of Alexandria, we must *free the soul from the fetters of the flesh* or, as Gregory Nazianzen writes, *from its bond (desmos) with a corpse*, because the body is like mire where the soul can only befoul and defile itself.

Gregory of Nyssa says that *the body is a stranger to the soul* and an 'ugly mask,' so we should *free ourselves from the body* and 'lay down this burden,' or, as St Basil wrote, we should "take care of the soul" and never mind about the rest.

The monks are just as bad if not worse.

Palladius, the great monastic chronicler, records the saying of Macarius the Great that we should *despise, mistreat, and kill the body*: "It kills me I kill it";

Antony the Great likewise says of the body, "It flays me I flay it."

And John Climacus says that the body is an ungrateful and insidious friend of whom we should be suspicious.²

The problem is, that couldn't possibly be the final word on the articulation of Christianity, because part of the scandal of Christianity is first of all that the Divine Word could have become flesh at all. It's helpful to recall exactly what this Greek philosophical concept *logos*—"word" had come to mean to Jesus' contemporaries. For example, for Philo (who was a Hellenized Jewish philosopher who lived from 20 BC to 50 AD) the *logos* was both the creative principle and divine wisdom, but he, like all the ancient Greeks always felt it was necessary to maintain the distinction between the perfect idea and imperfect matter. And that's why the *logos* was necessary, he taught, because God *cannot come into contact with matter*. This is exactly what Christianity turns on its ear in claiming, as in the Prologue to John's Gospel, that *the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us*. God has come into contact with matter! Worse yet, God has become matter. *The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us*. God becomes a baby with dirty diapers. So the flesh could not be bad or the Word would not have taken it.

Now think again about these marvelous events in Jesus' own life: the Transfiguration, when Jesus' divinity is revealed in his very flesh; the Resurrection and, further on, the Ascension. Having been raised in the theological environment of the historical critical method and liberal exegesis, I had gotten pretty comfortable with accepting the notion that the story of the actual rising from the dead was possibly just a pious myth that was trying to convey a deeper truth. But at some point I came to realize that if we lose the empty tomb, if we de-mythologize the actual risen body of Jesus away, we lose

² All recorded in Tomas Spidlik, pp. 109-110; see his endnotes for specific references.

the fact that this is *all about the body*, Jesus' body and the flesh in general. The body was not annihilated by the death experience, the story tells us; even the body was saved in some marvelous mysterious way. When we lose that empty tomb we are not actually making more sense out of the story; we may in fact be in danger of over-spiritualizing it, no doubt the very opposite of the effect intended. The same applies to the Ascension, when Jesus body and soul goes to the right hand of the Father.ⁱ

What we are also in danger of forgetting is that these events are also all about the triumph of the flesh, not just Jesus' flesh: that triumph for one human being was a triumph for all humanity, so the triumph of that one body was a triumph for all flesh.ⁱⁱ It starts with the fact that Jesus doesn't just preach—he heals bodies. Peoples' bodies are important! But look again at each of these events in Jesus' life and see how they are also all about us.

- On the feast of the Transfiguration the church teaches us through the use of a passage from the first letter of John that “we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” Similar to what Paul writes in the letter to the Philippians that “we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ [who] will transform (some translations say “transfigure”) the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory.” We shall be like him! He will transfigure *our* lowly bodies into glorious copies of his own.
- Our share in the Resurrection should be the most obvious. It's what the whole season of Lent has been about. Paul tells us over and over again in different words:

If the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you,
[then the one] who raised Jesus from the dead
will give life to your mortal bodies also
through his Spirit that dwells in you.

- As for the Ascension, this is my favorite example, using an image that comes from the French liturgist Jean Corbon, what he calls “the continual ascension.”³ Meaning: not only is Jesus at the Father's right side; the Ascension is not simply one static moment in history. The Ascension is a dynamic event; the ascension of Jesus is the first movement of a progressive event. Jesus is the head of the body, and his fullness is in the church. I have a quite literal image in my mind of this: the head of the body is there, but for all of history that head, Jesus, will be dragging, sometimes kicking and screaming, the rest of the body behind him, to follow him, to be with him at the right hand of the throne of God in glory. Us, his body! We are, our flesh is, the work of this continual ascension.

And, I might add, Paul teaches us in the letter to the Romans, all creation is groaning and in agony while we work this out, this redemption of our bodies (Rom 8:22-23).

³Corbon, p. 35

But most of all, let's look at Pentecost: because that's when we celebrate who we are: that the love of God does not just rest on our heads like tongues of flame; the love of God is poured into our hearts, the love of God that makes all of these other things happen in us. This is who we are, and the realization of that and its implications is what the spiritual life is all about.

How does this apply to our discussion of the spiritual life in this day and age? We need and are looking for and slowly finding a new vocabulary to articulate it. I lean often on the teachings of Fr Bede Griffiths who was very cautious in how he worded his critique of tradition. He simply said that perhaps, given all that we have just re-articulated about the body's place in the Christian economy of salvation, for instance, the idea of "mortification of the flesh" derived from the Fathers of the Desert and their tendency toward extreme asceticism had past its usefulness. (He also thought that the asceticism such as that found in Thomas à Kempis' *Imitation of Christ*, was also not a good model for today because it is so limited and so negative.) Their aim was to *conquer* the flesh by watching, fasting and bodily mortifications, and they "probably found these disciplines necessary but it had a very bad effect on the Christian tradition of asceticism. The result is that many people reject asceticism altogether."⁴ On the other hand, what we have grown to understand is that what we are trying to do is rather "learn to appreciate the body and the world, and [learn] to integrate [our bodies and the world] into our Christian lives."⁵ What we are coming to understand that asceticism and the spiritual life in general are all about re-establishing right relationship. Why? Because out of the best of the early Christian tradition we also get this famous adage from Tertullian: because *caro salutis est cardo*—the flesh is the instrument of salvation.ⁱⁱⁱ (There is an Indian equivalent of that in the writings of Sri Aruobindo: *sariram khalu dharma sadhana*—the body is the means to fulfill the dharma.)

So now, with that as introduction, I want to give you a practical approach to the spiritual life, because we find out along the way spirituality is ultimately a practical science. Along with being practical, and this language I am also borrowing from others, I want to propose to you an *integral* approach to spirituality. My vocabulary for this for the most part comes directly from Fr Bede again, who taught consistently that instead of thinking of the human person as merely body and soul as we normally do in the Christian West, we think of the human person as spirit, soul and body. What biblical revelation adds to our understanding of the human person is that beyond, behind, and before body and soul we are spirit, that is our openness to the Divine, our supernatural existential, our possibility for self-transcendence, the high point of our soul that in some way is already the place of union with the divine, where the love of God, the Holy Spirit has been poured into the depth of our being. And further, Fr Bede would also teach, and this has been the practical basis for my own spirituality for years now, we need to learn to incorporate all three of those levels of our being at all times, establish right relationship between them.

⁴Bede Griffiths, *River of Compassion*, p. 114, New Creation, p. 26-27

⁵*ibid*, p. 26

I think that the best way that I can present this to you now is in a series of bullet points. First of all... the body:

- Jesus says at the beginning of John's Gospel: "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up again" (Jn 2:19-21) And John tells us he was talking about the temple of his own body. And out of that temple we see the blood and water flow as out of the right side of the temple in the Book of Ezekiel, bringing God's life and salvation.
- But Jesus, as I already cited, also says that the stream of living water shall flow from out of our hearts, too. And St Paul says, "God's temple is holy, and YOU ARE THAT TEMPLE!" (1 Cor 6:19) St Peter says: "You too are living stones" (1 Pt 2:5)
- So this is the place of the encounter, this is the temple. Especially the Eastern Christian writers love to interpret for instance Jesus' saying about "go to your inner chamber and pray in secret to your Father who sees in secret" (Mt 6:6) as referring to our own heart. This (my body) is the temple, this is the inner room, and this is the place of encounter with God.
- So, we must care for our body as we would a temple. Period. And show it reverence as we would, say, a tabernacle, since that is what it is, especially we who receive the sacramental body and blood of our Lord at the Eucharist.
- For me, this affects everything, what I eat, what I wear, if I do or don't exercise.
- If we can now assume the fact that the flesh is not bad—that it only needs to be brought into right relationship, that it is indeed the instrument of salvation—then that changes our approach to asceticism.
- My ascetical disciplines are not so much about punishing or killing my flesh, or beating it into submission, but about respecting it, treating it with reverence and bringing it into right relationship—which actually may be harder.
- That right relationship means for me first of all that the body has to sacrifice its autonomy and submit itself to the higher more sublime aspects of my being, that is, to my mind, my soul, my spirit, and ultimately to the Holy Spirit.
- And all my physical disciplines then become aimed at directing my flesh to submission to those higher parts of my being, my rationality, my intuitions, my spiritual aspirations, and ultimately to the Spirit of God.
- So what we put in our bodies matters, everything from the obvious intoxicants of alcohol and drugs, to the not-so-obvious intoxicants such as caffeine, fat, sugar, white flour and the chemicals with which our foods are loaded.
- Instead of going on a black fast every now and then, I might commit myself to eating healthily all the time, to not putting junk into my body—ever.
- So perhaps instead of flagellation or some kind of corporal punishment, I might submit myself to an exercise routine, every day, and do it for God and for the overall health of my spiritual life, and think of my exercise as

an integral part of my spiritual life. Who knows, you might find as I have that I actually pray better if I have gone running first.

- If one already is an athlete, this might change one's whole scope and intention and method for engaging. I originally thought that I might speak just on the body in the spiritual life, and I was going to entitle my talk "Why Is It So Far From the Gym to the Church?" I always wonder about is why most of our sports seems so far removed from anything sacred?
- I have done a lot of study of yoga (which by the way Pope Benedict has allowed to be taught in seminaries in India), I constantly wish that we in the Christian West would develop physical activities that actually led to spiritual practices instead of leaving our body at the door. Perhaps if we could really take the Incarnation seriously we wouldn't have such mistrust of things like yoga for instance, or even sacred dance.
- Along with all that, Sam Keen reminds us of an insight gleaned from existential philosophy that I think is very important: how we are in our bodies is also how we are going to be in the world. My attitude toward my body is quite often the same kind of attitude I have to the rest of physical creation.
- It resolves itself in very basic things such as knowing that whatever I can smell, for instance, is going into my lungs; or that like a baby in the womb, whatever mother (Earth) is consuming so is the baby (my body).
- It could remain simply that selfish, or we could include it to recognize, as our Holy Father pointed out so strongly in his World Peace Day message this year, that this also means not selfishly thinking that nature is "at the complete disposal of our own interests," because "future generations also have the right to reap its benefits and to exhibit towards nature the same responsible freedom that we claim for ourselves." (#7-8)
- So, care for the earth—what I do with my garbage, how much garbage I generate, what and how much I drive, what and how much and from whom I buy, "paper or plastic?"—suddenly becomes an integral part of my spirituality.
- I am not even going to go into sexuality here except to say these two things: if we were to take the incarnation seriously we would learn to acknowledge, accept, reverence and allow our sexual energy to rise up and be transformed. It must be dealt with in a place of health and safety, at least without shame or fear, or else, we have learned, it becomes poisonous, dangerous, destructive, even lethal. This much we have learned.
- And if our church communities cannot build environments where people feel welcome and safe to openly deal with their sexual issues, we will only breed more of the sexual dysfunction and hypocrisy that has plagued us these past years and/or people will opt for health and find some place where they can deal with their sexuality in an open and safe way. And if they do go, they may be sheep without shepherds—and shame on us!
- Pope John Paul in his Theology of the Body made great strides in opening the discussion and the language up for us, as did Pope Benedict in his first encyclical on Eros. What's next?
- This is also a very important part of our integral spirituality.

Now, let's deal with the soul:

- You probably think I am now going to talk about prayer and liturgy and Scripture. But I am not: I am assuming those things! What I want to talk about is the culture, the environment, the ecosystem in which those things can live and grow and be nourished.
- Steve Kellmeyer in his "Meditations on the Theology of the Body"⁶ refers to one of the marriages that takes place in the human person as the marriage of body and soul. We don't believe that the soul is something contained within the body, nor less trapped within the body. The body is something contained within the soul, interpenetrated by soul.
- This is also why bodies are treated with such high regard, because they are not just flesh and meat to be used and discarded at will. They are interpenetrated by the souls, and that organic unity is further interpenetrated by Spirit that vivifies and gives life.
- So instead of the thinking of the soul as something we have, we can think of the soul as something we are, and, perhaps even more, something in which we are contained.
- The soul is also a realm in which we share—the realm of the psyche (psychology, psychiatry).
- One of my favorite descriptions of soul comes from Bede Griffiths who liked to refer to the human person as the matter coming into consciousness. Even plants and animals share in the psychic realm (even Thomas Aquinas thought so), but the human being has this special self-reflexive consciousness, *that knows that it knows that it knows*. And we believe the human person has a certain share in God's own consciousness, the ability to choose.
- What has been a great source of insight for me is to realize that my soul is multi-layered. I have learned to think of it as a realm that stretches to include everything from my emotions and senses, which are the links between the flesh and the subtler aspects of my being, to the higher realms of consciousness, psychic and so-called spiritual gifts.
- The rational mind is only one part of that spectrum of consciousness, a marvelous one but not necessarily the deepest most sublime way of knowing, and certainly when isolated from the rest of soul can even be cold and destructive, when it is not informed by the deeper realms of intuition—artistic, mythical, spiritual.
- So, I am advocating a consciousness of cultivating soul, a broad soulful life, in arts and sciences and literature, in mythology and poetry and music, as well as a re-invigorating of our Christian and Catholic imagination.
- One of the legitimate claims of those who criticize the state of liturgy post-Vatican II, for instance, is that it has become the receptacle for the cheap, the maudlin, the mundane, stripped of images and archetypes. I quite often do not agree with what some would advocate as the practical antidote for that—a return to the more obvious sacral, a re-invigoration of archaic Western European trappings and a greater separation of the

⁶ The full name of the book is [Sex and the Sacred City: Reflections of the Theology of the Body](#)

sacred from the secular, but I still issue the challenge to all of us to deepen our soul vocabulary in our ordinary every day life as well as in our liturgical life.

- This is very personal and existential for me: my conversion to a greater commitment to my spiritual life when I was a young man came with a concomitant opening of my eyes in wonder to beauty and wisdom in all its various manifestations. I noted how much Pope John Paul loved to quote Dostoevsky, and I believe too that “beauty would save the world.” And certainly he and our present Pope were great supporters of the arts.
- Along with this, I at least want to recognize, in case it has to be defended, that the root of the words “psychiatry” and “psychology” and “psychotherapy” is the word “psyche” which is normally translated “soul.” Could it be that psychology has become the secular religion of the West because somewhere along the way we spiritual leaders failed to explore and understand the deeper layers of the soul ourselves, this which was the realm of mystics and masters of the early centuries of the church?
- A good psychotherapist knows that she or he can only take us so far, that the leap into the spiritual realm is the competence of the spiritual traditions, but psychology, especially transpersonal psychology and depth psychology of the past decades, have re-awakened us to the fact that the journey inward is essential, and is not a dead end, but rather, undertaken well and with the proper guidance can lead to the deepest part of our being, our self-transcendence.
- In other words, psychology can’t make us drink but it can help lead us to the water.
- We generally operate out of the shallow parts of our being.
- Especially in this day and age of IT and business and instant communication and information and plastic food out of styrofoam containers in air-conditioned cubicles—our souls are starving, and in the absence of real depth, which the spiritual traditions could both supply and nurture, Harry Potter and Keanu Reeves and Dungeons and Dragons and the latest exploits of self-indulgent rock stars, athletes and spoiled rich girls in Hollywood spark our imaginations and fill the void and become far too important.
- So those things that cultivate interiority and self-examination can ultimately be instruments for our integral spiritual life; cultivation of soul in all its aspects is vitally important.

So we have talked about two aspects of our being: our body and our soul. But both the body and the soul must sacrifice their autonomy to a deeper reality.

- The body must sacrifice its autonomy to a deeper aspect of ourself: our soul with its will, rationality, intuitions and spiritual aspirations.
- But the soul in turn must also sacrifice its autonomy to something deeper. That “something deeper” goes by different names:
- St Francis de Sales calls it the high point of the soul, many spiritual writers simply refer to it as the “heart,” some of the Greek writers referred to it as the *nous*, our Catechism simply calls it our “spiritual soul,” but St Paul and the Eastern Christian tradition all the way since St Irenaeus refers to it as our “spirit.”

- My favorite example comes from 1Cor. 3:1

And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people (*pneumatikos*), but rather as people of the flesh (*sarkikos*), as infants in Christ.

But just earlier 1 Corinthians 2 (vss.14-15) he had also said,

Those who are unspiritual (*psykikos*) do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit... Those who are spiritual (*pneumatikos*) discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else's scrutiny.

- So, you see, it is just as inadequate to be merely "of the soul" (*anthropos psykikos*) as it is to be of the flesh (*anthropos sarkikos*). There is something beyond both—to be of the spirit (*anthropos pneumatikos*) because the spirit brings both the body and the soul to their fruition.
- What is this spirit? It is that heart into which the love of God has been poured, as Paul says in Rom 5:11, and out of which Jesus says that same Spirit will flow like a stream of living water, (Jn 7:38) the deepest part of our being.
- If it is a *place* in us, it is the place where we are somehow already in union with God due to our Baptism and the sacramental life of the church, if not due to the fact that we have the very breath of life in us, just as God blew the breath into Adam and he became a living being, a *nephesh*—what we usually translate as a "soul."
- But it is not so much a thing, not even so much a place; I have come to think of it more as a function of our human being: it is our ability for self-transcendence, to be open to God and God's influence on the rest of our being.
- And may I remind you again of that section from St Paul?

If the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you,
[then the one] who raised Jesus from the dead
will give life to your mortal bodies also
through his Spirit that dwells in you.

- Earlier I said that in the spiritual life we are looking for a bridge between the flesh and the spirit: well, of course we can say that Jesus himself is that bridge between flesh and spirit—"when he stretched out his hands between heaven and earth." But we can also say that our souls are that bridge between heaven and earth, between flesh and spirit.
- If the soul turns first to the flesh—well, flesh fades, flowers die, "creation was made subject to futility" (Rom 8:20), "the world and its desire are passing away." (1 John 2:17)
- But if the soul, with its will, turns first to the spirit and allows itself to be enlightened by the wisdom and power of the Spirit, our whole being is flooded with light, burns with the fire of the Holy Spirit, is saturated by that life-giving water.

- In some sense then, we don't leave anything behind: we get everything back, but in right relationship—informed by, flooded with the wisdom and power of the Spirit.
- And in regards to prayer, it is the place and the point in us where the Holy Spirit himself prays in us Paul says, in “sighs to deep for words,” (Rom 8:26) though he contradicts himself in another place by saying, Ah, but there is a word, one word, Jesus' own mantra, if you will, “Abba”! (Gal 4:6)
- That's why we take this long loving gaze within: not for simple navel gazing, not for solipsism, not for narcissism, but because this is who we are—temples of the Holy Spirit who wants to be our power and our wisdom if we but direct our thoughts and actions toward conscious contact with that deepest part of our being.

Last things—let me be even more practical since, as I said, spirituality is a practical science. In the words of Fr Bede Griffiths regarding the body, soul, and spirit: “we have to integrate these three levels of reality that exist at every moment.”⁷ I like to use a simple graph, if you can imagine it a circle cut into four quadrants (the fourth element will make sense in a moment) with which I can chart practically how I live my life:

1. Body: what do I do for my bodily health? What do I eat? How am I caring for my immediate environment and the greater environment? How am I incorporating the body in my spiritual life.
2. Soul: how am I cultivating soul? How am I cultivating depth, interiority, my intellect, culture? How am I caring or not caring for my emotional and psycho-sexual health, pressing family issues, addictions? In what way am I polluting this realm of soul? The adage about computers works here: “Garbage in, garbage out!” What am I exposing myself to in literature, film TV, music. And, of course, how much time do I give to spiritual practice, spiritual reading, prayer, liturgy?
3. Spirit: I have only one practical thing to say here: silence, meditation, what we call contemplative prayer. Why? The Spirit is that still small voice we hear Elijah encountering in the Book of Kings. There is a fathomless depth of God, beyond all of our concepts, formula words and images. We discover along the way that so many of our attempts to describe God are like “toy bears banging on cracked drums,” as one poet put it. And just as there is a fathomless depth to God (we call this our apophatic tradition), there is a fathomless depth to us, to me. Paul Evdokimov refers to this as an apophatic anthropology that corresponds to an apophatic theology. We must discover that sanctuary, that depth of our own being, that place of encounter with God—what India calls the *guha*—the cave of the heart, because it is the ground of our being, that which holds that other aspects of our being together and brings them into right relationship.

⁷ Bede Griffiths, “Integration of Mind, Body, and Spirit,” An Occasional Paper of the Fetzer Institute (Kalamazoo: 1994), 1.

4. But there is one other quadrant: I used to call it simply “service,” but I have come to understand that it is much more complicated than that: it is relationship (and relationships), it is tension, it is dealing with our dark sides, it is our insertion in the world. The love of God gets poured in and the love of God is meant to pour back out of us like a stream of life giving water. And part of the way to clear the passage way for that water to flow freely is by going out of ourselves in service and relationship, imitating our Lord wrapping a towel around his waist and washing the feet of his disciples, what could be thought of as the real entrance price for participation at the Lord’s Supper, as we celebrate it in the liturgy of Holy Thursday. Service and relationships are not just ends; they are the means to that end. (I am so glad that Sr Joan Neal of the Catholic Relief Service was here speaking about “A Life Of Service” to keep us rooted not just in our intellect, nor in our own bodies, but incarnate in the world.)
- My dear old friend the infamous Michael Baxter wrote somewhere that he thought of the two poles of Christian life as the Catholic Worker and the Trappists. I like that but I like to add that while we have a venerable tradition of distinguishing between the active and the contemplative life, it is in actuality a false dilemma. In between those two poles are myriad relationships. We breathe in, we breathe out. We breathe in the love of God; we breathe out the love of God. Many ministers in the church get pretty good at breathing out; my role tonight is to point out that we also need to learn to breathe in if our spirituality, as well as our relationships, are to have depth and health and endurance.
 - Sometimes we have a real and profound spiritual experience and we think that sums up everything, and we neglect the other parts of our personhood. But even St Francis apologized to his body at the end of his tragically short life. Let’s learn from our ancestors and find ways incorporate and nurture all these aspects of our being—our bodies, our soul with their minds and imaginations and intuitions; our spirits, that deepest aspect of our being where God blows the breath of life into us.

Let me end by paraphrasing St Augustine

God is within us, but *we are outside*,
and it is there that we search for God...

On entering into ourself
we will see, as it were with the eye of the soul,
what is beyond the eye of the soul, beyond our spirit:
God’s own immutable light.

Cyprian Consiglio, OSB Cam.

ⁱ I have found it interesting how many people who are more comfortable with Indian philosophies and metaphysics easily defend both of these events, as well as the Assumption of Mary. They say that Jesus' gross body was transformed into a subtle body—the "glorified body" at his resurrection; and then into a causal or spiritual body at the Ascension. See especially the writings of Sri Aurbindo which were highly influential on Bede Griffiths.

ⁱⁱ Cipriano Vagaggini writes: "Where is the root of this defect? In my opinion it is to be found in a contemporary anthropology that is unwittingly faulty. Without our realizing it, there is a survival in us of a kind of dualism resulting from an exaggeratedly spiritualistic idea of man. The body and its functions in human nature are scorned in favor of the soul.

We therefore no longer understand how within the means of salvation willed by God the physical body of Christ possesses a function *that is always active and permanent and even eternal*. Consequently we no longer clearly see the function of the resurrection of Christ—and therefore that of the paschal mystery and of our own resurrection—nor the function of the Eucharistic mystery. Actually, we can understand both of these notions and therefore the true nature of the liturgy only when we realize the ever active and permanent part willed by God that is played by the physical body of Christ in the accomplishment of salvation in us." (Flesh the Instrument of Salvation, p. 16)

ⁱⁱⁱ Mind you this is not a problem confined to Christianity. On a practical level I have found this issue—what we call dualism—come up in almost every tradition I have studied. It seems like the right thing—body bad, soul good! Here is an example from the Dhammapada, the early Pali text of Buddhism.

Look at the body adorned,
A mass of wounds, draped upon a heap of bones,
A sickly thing, this subject of sensual thoughts!
Neither permanent nor enduring!
The body wears out,
A news of disease,
Fragile, disintegrating,
Ending in death.ⁱⁱⁱ

And antidotes also are articulated in other traditions grappling with the same issue. For example, Sri Aurobindo, the great 20th century philosopher of India wrote: "In the past the body has been regarded by spiritual seekers rather as an obstacle," the body has been regarded "as something to be overcome and discarded [rather] than as an instrument of spiritual perfection and a field of the spiritual change..." But if the activities of human life are taken up and sublimated by the power of the spirit,

the lower perfection [the perfection of the body] will not disappear; it will remain but will be enlarged and transformed by the higher perfection which only the power of the spirit can give... whatever perfection has already been attained included in a new and greater perfection but with

the larger vision and inspiration of spiritual consciousness and with new forms and powers.ⁱⁱⁱ

In other words, “we are waiting for our Savior, who will transfigure our lowly bodies into glorious copies of his own.”

So what’s my point? I am quoting here the late spiritual writer Wayne Teasdale, a close friend of Cardinal George, by the way, from his book *The Mystic Way*:

So many forms of spiritual life work only from the neck up, as if the body didn’t exist. We need to find creative ways to include the body in the spiritual journey. ... the West has had an unbalanced view of the place of the body in the spiritual journey. This lack of balance must be corrected. The body is sacred, and it has to be integrated into the mystical life.