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Eight Principles of Resurrectionist Spirituality Applied to Undergraduate Teaching

In 1728, a group of Catholics wishing to find religious freedom left St. Mary's City, Maryland. The chief family of the group was the Elders, who settled in the Emmitsburg, Maryland area with several others sometime after 1740. They called the valley "St. Joseph's Valley", nestled in the shelter of what they named "St. Mary's Mount". More than a half century later, the area continued to provide a secure haven for Catholics. In 1805, the Rev. John DuBois, a refugee from France, settled here. Fr. DuBois loved St. Mary's Mountain. He found, high on this mountain, a natural amphitheater where nature "displayed itself in wild and picturesque beauty". Amid the wild flowers, a stream divided and flowed around a great oak, where a recessed grotto had formed under the trunk. Here he erected a rude cross, a symbol of the holy work he was undertaking. Fr. DuBois built St. Mary's on the Hill Church in 1807 and founded Mount St. Mary's College in 1808 on the slopes below. He later became bishop of New York.

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, founder of the Daughters of Charity, came to St. Mary's grotto in 1809, where she lived in a log cabin until her home in the valley was completed. She attended Sunday Mass here throughout the remaining years of her life. She died in 1821 after a life of heroic charity for others and strong faith in God, and was declared a saint - the first American born saint - in 1975.

Today, Mount St. Mary's University stands as the second oldest Catholic University in the United States. As one of the few independent Catholic universities - Archbishop William Lori of Baltimore is the Chancellor - the Mount has approximately 1,700 undergraduates (82% live on campus in traditional and apartment style residences) and 500 graduate students in Education, Business, and Theology. In addition to the University and the National Grotto of Lourdes, the Mount is also home to Mount St. Mary's Seminary, which has approximately 160 Philosophy and Theology seminarians from 32 sponsoring dioceses.

The undergraduate school, where I serve as the Chair of the Theology Department, has a large integrated and sequenced core curriculum, which requires all students to complete two courses in Philosophy, two courses in Theology, and an ethics course in either Theology or Philosophy. This is totally in keeping with the Mount's mission "to strive to graduate men and women who cultivate a mature spiritual life, who live by high intellectual and moral standards, who respect the dignity of other persons, who see and seek to resolve the problems facing humanity, and who commit themselves to live as responsible citizens".

All the Mount's faculty members seek to achieve excellence in the areas of teaching, scholarship, and service. I have taught a wide variety of courses over my years at the Mount. All students take an introductory Theology course called Jesus Christ and the Church: A Biblical Introduction to Catholic Theology; it focuses on some of the basics in our Catholic tradition, such as Revelation, the Bible, Jesus, and the Church. For their second Theology course, students can choose among Christology, Church, Synoptic Gospels, Catholic Social Teaching, Sacraments, and Church in the Modern World. I am also responsible to teach the pastoral education courses to the many young man and woman who major in Theology and are preparing for a life as "lay ecclesial ministers", working as chaplains in schools, prisons, and hospitals, youth ministers and directors of religious education in parishes,

and religion teachers, retreat directors, and chaplains in secondary schools. Among the many courses that we offer in this area, I have taught Skills for Ministry, Lay Ministry: A Call to Service, Foundations of Youth Ministry, Youth Ministry Practice, Foundations of Religious Education, and Skills for Ministry.

While there is a deep satisfaction preparing young men and women for lay ecclesial ministry in our Church, I find it even more rewarding teaching the “ordinary” students who are majoring in Business, Education, Psychology, Political Science, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, English, History, Foreign Languages, Mathematics, Fine Arts, Sociology, and History. Over 70% of our students are Catholics and the required Theology courses come at a strategic moment in their lives at the age of 19-21. I think that the seven theologians in our department are well skilled in providing adult answers to the adult questions that emerge at this age. It is not uncommon for students to report on evaluation forms that their Theology courses were the best courses that they took because they were transformational, helping them integrate faith and reason, instilling in them an appreciation of the good, and challenging them to live their lives in closer conformity to Jesus.

Hopefully, this background concerning Mount St. Mary’s University will help as I move forward to share reflections about how I think the Eight Principles of Resurrectionist Spirituality have interacted with my teaching. I use the word “interacted” because, as you might imagine, there is some “cross-pollination” occurring here, for I would maintain that teaching Theology to undergraduates has also helped me to understand these Eight Principles of Resurrectionist Spirituality more deeply as they apply to my own life as a Resurrectionist. My attempt to link these two areas – the Eight Principles and undergraduate teaching – is not an exhaustive one. My purpose is to illustrate, through examples, how each of the Eight Principles is embodied in some part of my undergraduate teaching of Theology in a way that

enriches Mount students, and through the interaction of professor and students, my life as a Resurrectionist.

1. God loves us unconditionally

An entry point to reflect upon this great mystery of God's love for us is the creation story of Genesis 1. In contrast to its neighbors, Israel had a very different understanding of God's love for all creation. This story, written about 500 B.C., reveals how God created the world within a loving plan. All that God creates, God names as "good", and human beings - male and female -made in God's very image and likeness, are named as "very good". This story is markedly different from the creation story of the Babylonians, who Israel had encountered in their exile after the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. The Babylonian creation story, which comes to us in the *Enuma Elish*, is grounded in violence, and describes creation as arbitrary and an after-thought. In the *Enuma Elish*, the world begins with Apsu, the fresh water god, and Tiamat, the salt water goddess. From their union came all other gods. Discord breaks out, and Apsu and Tiamat arbitrarily decide to kill their offspring. Instead, Ea, one of the gods, kills Apsu. Tiamat, aided by Kingu, declares war on the other gods. The other gods choose Marduk (the chief god of Babylonia, perhaps originally a sun god), to lead them. He kills Tiamat, and out of her body makes the heaven and the earth, and from Kingu's body, he makes humans. The *Enuma Elish* was ritually recited in the Babylonian new year ceremonies. It is likely that the Jewish people learned this story during their exile in Babylonia, 587-538 B.C.

While parallels exist between the *Enuma Elish* and Genesis 1, it is the differences that the Priestly writers of Israel convey that point to a different theology that stands in direct opposition to the standard Near-Eastern understanding of who God is, what a human being is, what the world is, and the relationship between

God and the world. The following table summarizes points of contact.¹

<i>Enuma Elish</i>	Genesis 1
It begins with a conquest of chaos by order	The opening statement of Gen 1:1-2
Heavens created and separated from the waters	Day 2, the creation of heavens and separation of the waters
The earth is set over the waters	Day 3, the land appears from the waters
Creation of the sun and the moon	Day 4, the greater light and the lesser light are set in heaven
No mention of plants and animals	Days 5-6, the creation of the fish, birds, and animals
Creation of human beings	Day 6, the creation of human beings
The gods rest and celebrate	Day 7, God rests and humans imitate God

Marduk, the chief Babylonian god, defeats Tiamat in a violent battle: “He released the arrow, it tore her belly; it cut through the insides, splitting the heart. Having thus subdued her, he extinguished her life” (Tablet IV, 101-103).² As an afterthought of this violent encounter, Marduk decides to create a world: “Then the Lord paused to view her dead body, that he might divide the monster and do artful works. He split her like a shell fish into two parts” (Tablet IV, 135-137).³ Similarly after the violent end of Kingu, Tiamat’s consort, Marduk decides to make “savage man”: “They...severed his blood vessels; out of his blood he fashioned mankind” (Tablet VI, 32-33).⁴ One might wonder what should be expected of a world and a humanity that has been fashioned out of hatred and violence and the spoils of war. The answer from many is probably “not much”. This stands in contrast to the creation story of Genesis 1, where God’s loving plan

¹ *The Catholic Study Bible, New American Bible*, Revised Edition, eds. Donald Senior, John J. Collins, Mary Ann Getty (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 105.

² *The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures*, ed. James B. Pritchard (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1958), 34.

³ *Ibid*, 35.

⁴ *Ibid*, 37.

brings about every created thing in its goodness, culminating in the creation of human beings, who are seen as “very good”. Here again, one might wonder what should be expected of a world and a humanity that has been fashioned in God’s love. The answer from many is “a great deal, indeed!”

Fashioned in love by Love itself, humans are called to ponder this love which is beyond our understanding and imagining. In a world where many young people struggle with questions of meaning and purpose, the creation story in Genesis 1 grounds our being in the experience of love. But, this story also challenges us to continue to be God’s unconditional love in the world, for we are made in God’s image and likeness. It is through life’s journey that we will have opportunities to grow in awareness of this love, even in the ways and times that we have failed to accept this love and are part of failed human love. For it is especially in these moments of failure that we have the opportunity to experience God’s love as unconditional, and going forward in forgiveness, we can love others more freely and generously as we have been loved freely and generously by God.

2. God created us from nothingness⁵

I continually remind our undergraduates that God has a plan for us. Indeed, I would characterize this plan for us as a lofty one. In fact, it may be almost too much for us to comprehend, for the plan is for us, who have been created out of nothingness, to be one with God who has created us. In his first letter, Peter suggests that the goal is nothing less than “to share in the divine nature” (1 Pet 1:4). Certainly, humanity has done its part to thwart this plan, but throughout history God has taken different initiatives and patiently waited in time for humanity to respond freely to the

⁵ This part is adapted from a chapter in a forthcoming book that I am working on with David Matzko McCarthy.

invitation that has been given. God has called a people, Israel, and made a covenant with them, providing them with the Torah, with judges and kings, and with the prophets to guide them. At different points in time, God has saved God's chosen people, Israel, from captivity in Egypt, from death in face of Pharaoh and the desert, from the consequences of their rebellion and rejection of God's ways, and from exile in Babylon. God's greatest deed in revealing God's plan, of course, is the Incarnation, where the invisible God is made visible. This is what the author of the Letter to the Hebrews writes when he says, "In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets; in these last days, he spoke to us through a son, whom he made heir of all things and through whom he created the universe" (Heb 1:1-2). In other words, the God who was veiled is now made manifest in Jesus so that all can come to know most fully who God is – that God is love (1 Jn 4:8). But, Jesus also reveals to us what it is to be a human being – what is at the core of being human, what brings us happiness and fulfillment, and what is our destiny. It is the Incarnation that not only makes this destiny clear, but it also makes it possible; it is through the Incarnation that humanity achieves its deification, or as 1 Peter states it, to be partakers of the divine nature. This might startle and amaze us! Yet, it is something that is repeated at every Eucharist when the priest adds a few drops of water into the wine as he prepares the gifts, saying, "By the mystery of this water and wine, may we come to share in the divinity of Christ, who humbled himself to share in our humanity". In other words, God humbled himself to share in our humanity so that we might become partakers of the divine nature. What a plan! What a destiny! What a perspective for us to have as we live our lives each day!

Having said this, we must acknowledge that this plan's coming to realization is hard to recognize. Knowing our own weaknesses and our tendency to be attracted to evil, we might wonder how God will ever manage to bring this plan to fruition! It might

be helpful here to remember that this is God's plan and that God is Almighty. Gerhard Lohfink is particularly helpful here when he reminds us that God's omnipotence consists precisely in the fact that God's plan for the world will succeed!⁶ Lohfink recognizes that God has given us the wonderful gift of freedom, which means that we are entirely free to refuse to cooperate with God's plan. He suggests that every "no" to God incarnates itself into the world and already exists for those who come after, touching them in the depths of their being. Christians call this pre-personal, social reality of evil into which they are born and whose models and structures of evil shape them in their inner-most being "original sin".⁷ It is against this background that Lohfink describes God as Almighty, for despite all human refusals and in the face of the history of evil that flows from it, God will reach God's goal in the end: a people that turns to God in confidence and trust to transform the world.⁸

Lohfink cites several parables to support this view of the imperceptible, yet successful growth of God's reign. In the case of the mustard seed (Mk 4:30-32) and the leaven (Lk 13:20-21), what is highlighted is the *whole process* in which the bush emerges from a small seed, and the *transformation* of the whole mass of flour once the leaven is added.⁹ "In the same way the reign of God, beginning in the world in such a small and hidden way, will at the end have changed and transformed everything. Jesus is absolutely sure of it".¹⁰ Lohfink finds Jesus' awareness of how God will reach God's goal in the end in the parable of the sower (Mk 4:3-8). It is not a story of immediate success, for three-quarters of the parable is about failure! But, this is not about a set of statistics (i.e., one out

⁶ Gerhard Lohfink, *Does God Need the Church? Toward a Theology of the People of God*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 39.

⁷ Ibid, 39-40.

⁸ Ibid, 40.

⁹ Ibid, 40-42.

¹⁰ Ibid, 42-43.

of every four!); rather, it is about gradual, imperceptible success. First, birds eat part of the scattered seed (no beginning); second, part of the scattered seed sprouts and grows, but it dries up (a little beginning); third, part of the scattered seed grows, but is choked (a bit more growth); and fourth, part of the scattered seed produces great harvest. Only at the moment when the negative history has reached its climax does something new and conclusive emerge. This parable describes the coming of the reign of God from the first words of the parable, which includes the sowing, the opposition that causes severe damage, and finally the abundant harvest. Despite the frightening smallness and hiddenness of its beginning, and the superior power of the opponents who threaten the work of God from the beginning to the end, the parable depicts the unstoppable growth of the reign of God.¹¹ This is what it means to say that God is Almighty: through relentless invitation, God will bring about God's plan.

3. Evil attracts us

The story of the fall in Genesis 2-3 helps our undergraduates to reflect upon why it is that evil attracts us. In the story, God gives a command: "You are free to eat from any of the trees of the garden except the tree of knowledge of good and evil. From that tree you shall not eat; when you eat from it you shall die" (Gen 2:17). God has given the man and woman the entire garden with one command. They must not touch this tree. Sr. Mary Kate Birge, SSJ, in her study of this text, alerts us to the fact that "neither God nor the narrator justifies the prohibition; it simply is".¹² Here, they must simply trust God. Of course, this means that they are not lords of their lives.

¹¹ Ibid, 43-44.

¹² Mary Katherine Birge, SSJ, "Genesis," *Genesis: Evolution and the Search for a Reasoned Faith* (Winona, MI: Anselm Academic, 2011), 18.

The serpent is, of course, very subtle in the way that he broaches the topic of God's command to not eat of this tree. Birge points out several small, but incremental, ways that the serpent plants seeds of doubt when he asks the woman, "Did God really say, 'You shall not eat from any of the trees in the garden?'" (Gen 3:1). Note that the serpent widens God's command to all the trees, changes God's "command" in 2:16 to a mere "say," weakening its force, and alters the identification of God by dropping the sacred name, YHWH.¹³ We see that the woman, lured into dialogue with the serpent, joins the serpent's misrepresentation in three ways: she also refers to God without the sacred name, YHWH, she adopts the weaker "said" over "command," and she adds a clause that God did not use when she says, "and nor shall you touch it."¹⁴

Humans are creatures, and not God, and there are some things that remain a mystery to them. The question is about their willingness to trust in God's plan for them. Can they trust that God will provide for them in God's time and in God's way, or do they need to grasp on their own what ultimately would be freely given to them?¹⁵ The "original sin" that this story reveals is that humans have a deep desire within them to be masters of their destiny; they cannot trust that God will in fact provide for them. Humans are not content to be creatures that must trust, but rather prefer to be "like gods". When God created humanity, God gave humanity a great gift – freedom – because God wants a willing partner, one who chooses God in freedom. But unlike God, humans are creatures, not knowing all things. As creatures they are called to use the gift of freedom to trust that God's plan for humanity will be brought to fruition in God's time and in God's way. Our inability to trust is rooted in a pride that wants

¹³ Ibid, 22.

¹⁴ Ibid, 22.

¹⁵ Jesus, the new Adam, though in the form of God, will not "grasp" equality with God, but rather will empty himself (Phil 2:6).

to see ourselves at the center of all things. As William Mattison puts it: “Despite being created for self-giving love, and being given the assistance to live lives of such love, which are indeed most fulfilling and satisfying, humanity lives not out of self-giving love but rather for ourselves. Out of pride we decide that we, not God, know what is truly best and life-giving for us. And so we turn away from the fullness of life that is offered to us. This is sin”.¹⁶ We are attracted to evil because of our pride which seeks to make us, rather than God, the center of the Christian story. And if we think it is all about us, it cannot, of course, be all about God.

4. We succumb to sin

In his introductory book to moral theology, William Mattison has a wonderful chapter on sin. He introduces the topic through Fr. Robert Barron’s vivid metaphor of a winter windshield that becomes caked over with road salt. As long as you are driving at night, you can see sufficiently well to drive. However, to drive in the sunshine of the morning hours is a completely different story. What has this to do with sin? Well, many of us are like drivers at night, who think that our windshields are fine, even if they are not. Only in certain moments will the light be shined to illuminate the situation, helping us to see more accurately. This short analogy points out the reality of human sinfulness and how often it is overlooked.¹⁷ Only when we, in Barron’s words, “smell the stench and taste the acidity of sin”¹⁸ will we be able to avail ourselves of the gracious forgiveness and reconciliation that God offers us.¹⁹

¹⁶ William Mattison III, *Introducing Moral Theology: True Happiness and the Virtues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2008), 204.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 232.

¹⁸ Robert Barron, *The Strangest Way: Walking the Christian Path* (New York: Orbis, 2002), 76.

¹⁹ Mattison, 234.

As a way to approach sin for undergraduates, we spend a great deal of time talking about the seven deadly sins. Mattison has a short section in his book on each of the deadly sins. He notes that pride is the root of all sin and that there is an element of pride in all sin, which is not true of the other deadly sins.²⁰ Envy is the delight in the misfortune of others, and sadness in their good fortune.²¹ Anger damages right relations (justice) between others and is an enormous impediment to reconciliation or forgiveness.²² Sloth is about not being attentive to the higher things in life, particularly in relation to God.²³ Greed is the inordinate desire for, and attachment to, material goods, which, ironically, begin to control the person, rather than the other way around.²⁴ Gluttony is the inordinate desire for and an attachment to eating and drinking,²⁵ while lust is the inordinate desire for, or engagement in, sexual activity.²⁶ As Mattison notes, lust, like anger, greed, and gluttony entails the use of a good thing in a manner that defies the purpose of the thing.²⁷

As one might imagine, reading and discussing these vices in class helps students (and the professor!) to be convinced of the bitter reality of sin in our lives. Students start to realize that vices are dispositions of the heart that can become deeply and habitually ingrained. In another winter analogy, Rebecca DeYoung provides a compelling picture for students about how sin and vice become entrenched within us.

²⁰ Ibid, 243.

²¹ Ibid, 243-244.

²² Ibid, 244.

²³ Ibid, 245.

²⁴ Ibid, 245.

²⁵ Ibid, 246.

²⁶ Ibid, 246.

²⁷ Ibid, 246.

By way of analogy, think of a winter sledding party, in which a group of people head out to smooth a path through freshly fallen snow. The first sled goes down slowly, carving out a rut. Other sleds follow, over and over, down the same path, smoothing and packing down the same snow. After many trips a well-worn groove develops, a path out of which it is hard to steer. The groove enables sleds to stay aligned and on course, gliding rapidly, smoothly, and easily on their way. Character traits are like that: the first run down, which required some effort and tough going, gradually becomes a smooth track that one glides down without further intentional steering. Of course, a rider can always stick out a boot and throw the sled off course, usually damaging the track as well. So too we can act out of character, even after being “in the groove” for a long time. In general, however, habits incline us swiftly, smoothly, and reliably toward certain types of actions.²⁸

In addition to studying the cardinal virtues of prudence (the disposition of seeing and acting rightly), justice (the disposition to give others their rightful due), fortitude (the disposition that enables us face difficulties well), and temperance (the disposition that keeps us from excess by balancing legitimate goods against our inordinate desire for them), students reflect upon the remedies for different vices. A few examples might suffice here. In the case of envy, which is closely related to vain glory – excessive love of praise and approval of others – students are reminded of the importance of doing acts of love for others without notice.²⁹ In the case of greed, students are encouraged to know their weakness by documenting all expenditures and examining them, to take a Sabbath rest from consumerism, and practice generosity through tithing or giving something away every week!³⁰

²⁸ Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung, *Glittering Vices: A New Look at the Seven Deadly Sins and Their Remedies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009), 13-14.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 56.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 114.

5. God calls us to conversion – Paschal Mystery³¹

One place that my undergraduates come to know of the Paschal Mystery is through the Gospel of Mark, which provides lessons in the Paschal Mystery for the disciples in chapters 8-10. The disciples must learn to die to themselves, trusting that this path is not one of diminishment, but one to a fulfilled life in this world and eternal life in the next. In three particular places, Mark follows a pattern wherein: 1) Jesus announces his upcoming suffering and death; 2) the disciples indicate that they do not understand what this message entails; and 3) Jesus uses this misunderstanding to teach the disciples what it means to follow him. Chapter 8 includes the first of these encounters between Jesus and his chosen followers about discipleship. Jesus shares with his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem to suffer and die. Peter, hearing this, rebukes Jesus, urging him not to go. In turn, Jesus –in the strongest rebuke of the Gospel – says in response, “Get behind me Satan. You are thinking not as God thinks, but as human beings do” (Mk 8:33). Jesus then begins to teach his followers that in order to follow him, they must pick up their cross. He goes further, using a paradox, telling them that, “Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it” (Mk 8:35).

We see the second of these encounters between Jesus and the disciples in chapter 9. Again, Jesus indicates that he must go to Jerusalem to suffer and die. This news seems to have fallen on deaf ears, as the disciples have been discussing among themselves who is the greatest! This provides another opportunity for Jesus to teach about discipleship in the form of a paradox: “If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all” (Mk 9:35).

³¹ This part is adapted from a chapter in a forthcoming book that I am working on with David Matzko McCarthy.

The third of these lessons in the Paschal Mystery of discipleship occurs in chapter 10. Here, Jesus announces his upcoming passion and death and, in response, James and John ask for seats at his right and left when he comes in glory! Jesus responds with a similar message to the one we have already heard: "Whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all" (Mk 10:43-44). There are two things worth noting in this third lesson in discipleship. First, Jesus points out that they will drink from the cup that he will drink from. Indeed, they do. In Mark's gospel, we are told that "they all drank from it [the cup]" (Mk 14:23) at the Last Supper. But, rather than being a mark of pride, it becomes one of shame. This gesture, which is underlined by Peter's insistence that he will never desert Jesus, is symbolic of their solidarity and commitment to stay with Jesus throughout his ordeal. But the gesture stands in stark contrast to what really happens; they do, in fact, abandon him when he is arrested. Mark's gospel makes this clear in the verse: "And they all left him and fled" (Mk 14: 50). Despite Jesus' efforts, the disciples have remained "blind" to seeing what it means and costs to be a disciple. Second, the story that follows the lesson in chapter 10 is about the blind man, Bartimaeus. Like James and John, Jesus asks the blind man what he wants Jesus to do for him. While James and John ask for prestige and power and glory, the blind man asks to see. Throughout Mark's gospel, this image of seeing is about having faith. In fact, those who can "see" are "blind" and those who are "blind" can "see." Unlike the disciples, this poor, insignificant character asks Jesus for what is important in the life of discipleship. It is significant that Mark ends this encounter with the cryptic phrase that this man now began "to follow him on the way" — a metaphor for what a disciple does.

The story of the healing of the blind man, Bartimaeus forms an end to this collection of stories on discipleship, but the beginning of these stories about discipleship also contains a story about a blind man, the blind man of Bethsaida. The fact that this story

about a blind man begins an arrangement of stories, should immediately indicate the fact that Mark does not think that embracing the Paschal Mystery as a disciple is something that is easily “seen”. In fact, disciples might be “blind” to the requirements of the Paschal Mystery. Indeed, the story itself is instructive, for the man is healed in stages. After touching him, Jesus asks him if he can see, but the man responds “I see people looking like trees and walking”. The gospel then reports that Jesus “laid hands on his eyes a second time and he saw clearly; his sight was restored and he could see everything distinctly” (Mk 8:24-25). After all, as a common refrain in Mark’s Gospel reminds the reader, “You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do”. Mark’s aim is to help the members of his community to see as God does.

These teachings on the Paschal Mystery for discipleship remind us that “the way” of Jesus is about service and sacrifice for the sake of others – learning to give ourselves away in love for others. The fact that these stories are framed in Mark’s gospel by stories of healing of blind men, indicates that we might struggle to “see” this clearly. As with the disciples, we are called to conform ourselves ever more closely to Christ and his way – the way of the service, not self-absorption or power, a way which leads not to diminishment but the fullness of life.

6. God calls us to community

Among the great challenges of teaching undergraduates is the awareness that, like most people today, they think of themselves as autonomous individuals. With iTunes, iPads, iPhones, and iPods, it is not surprising that young people are often seen as self-absorbed and isolated from reality. In an interview with David Wood, Albert Borgmann talks of the need to “tame technology”. Because technology makes things available to us in a comfortable way, we do not have to work hard for it. According to Borgmann, in the case of television, information and

entertainment become easily available and we find that we watch more and more of it each day, leaving less time for telling stories, reading, socializing with friends and family, being part of our neighborhood.³² Borgmann recognizes that technology is not just a tool but an inducement – one that is so strong, most are unable to resist it. He asks,

Why do 90 percent of all families or households watch television after dinner? Is it because they decided that that's the best way to spend their time? No, something else must be going on. And what's going on is that the culture around us – including work that is draining, food that's easily available, and television shows made as attractive as some of the best minds in our country can make them – encourages us to plop down in front of the TV and spend two hours there.³³

Borgmann argues that the tug of technology toward isolation needs to be addressed in homes and schools through what he refers to as “focal activities” with “high thresholds.” By his account, a focal activity is something that engages the mind and body, and engages people with one another. Focal activities and the kind of engagements that they foster have the power to center a person's life, and to arrange all other things around this center in an orderly way. Borgmann cites, for example, preparing and sharing a meal together as a focal activity that has the power to reorient the life of a family.³⁴ He recognizes that these types of activities take more energy; that is, they have a higher threshold. The threshold to a Nintendo game, television show, or other technology-focused activities is low, but the rewards are low as well. Borgmann points out that research indicates that

³² Albert Borgmann, “Taming Technology,” interview with David Wood (Maine: The Christian Century Foundation, 2003), 2.

³³ *Ibid.*, 2.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

when people get up from two hours of watching television or internet games, they do not feel well. So with low thresholds, come low rewards.³⁵ In contrast, the higher investment made into focal activities will reap a higher reward.

The threshold is high morally not materially. It is not as if people have to exert themselves strenuously to face some danger before they can sit down at the table. It's right there, within reach. But there is a moral threshold. It's a bother; it's a pain. There is a high threshold, and so it is difficult to get across it. But once you are across it, the reward is high as well. After a fine meal, you get up with a glad heart. After playing tennis with your kid for a couple of hours both of you feel good...You should expect it to be hard, but there is something on the other side of that high and difficult threshold, and those are high rewards.³⁶

This talk of technology and its effect on friendship and community is only the tip of the iceberg. In the isolated world of iDevices, it is increasingly difficult for undergraduates to perceive and articulate the sufferings of others, especially those outside their immediate circle of community. This is, of course, the prerequisite of any future politics of peace, of every new form of social solidarity in the face of the widening gap between rich and poor, and of every promising interchange between different cultural and religious worlds.³⁷ In this vein, Johann Baptist Metz suggests that we can “keep a safe distance from the front lines of justice” or we can encourage innovative ways to understand compassion, or suffering with others:

- As a public and political commitment rather than a private and personal conviction;
- As a dangerous participation in justice rather than a comfortable expression of charity;

³⁵ Ibid, 6.

³⁶ Ibid, 6.

³⁷ Johann Baptist Metz, quoted in Maureen H. O'Connell, *Compassion: Loving our Neighbor in an Age of Globalization* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2009), 120.

- As an ongoing process of conversion rather than a series of unrelated acts of kindness;
- As a transformative relationship between giver and receiver rather than an unreciprocated gift of self.³⁸

We are in danger in our global age of becoming “voyeurs of others’ hardships.” This can perpetuate unilateral, paternalistic, and unreciprocated connectivity with others. We can become comfortably unaware of the web of structural sin. Therefore Metz thinks that rather than “passively, comfortably, and discriminately” reading the signs of the times, we should “actively, uncomfortably, and intentionally face the suffering of people in the world”.³⁹ Only when we make “an about-face”, interrupting the logic we use to make sense of our reality – a logic influenced by individualism, free-market capitalism, and autonomous rationality, will we give community and solidarity its due.

7. God calls us to work for the resurrection of society

All students at the Mount take an ethics course, and in this course they are required to write an interdisciplinary paper that describes and analyzes a selected moral practice within their chosen career or work path. In this paper, students need to: 1) describe a particular moral challenge or issue related to the selected practice; 2) provide a thesis/claim about the challenge or issue in relationship to the practice; 3) utilize the moral and ethical terms that have been covered in the course (happiness/well-being; virtue/vice; character; rights and responsibilities; duties and obligations; justice; sin/evil; human dignity and the human person; the common good; *caritas*-charity; *agape*-love; and law) in a way that shows that they have engaged in substantive moral reflections; and 4) identify the moral assumptions underlying social life and social structures in the discussion of the selected practice.

³⁸ Ibid, 122.

³⁹ Ibid, 123.

A practice is some sort of cooperative and formative activity with internal goods, which shapes participants to be and to act in certain ways. Practices are cooperative behaviors, and are often subject to debate and change. Education may be a student's area, but the practices are the nuts and bolts, goods and goals of classroom teaching. For instance, "How is one to run a 'good' classroom and why?" or "How do you deal with racial and cultural differences?" or "What is the role of standardized testing?" While we want students to avoid large "topics" such as abortion or global warming, such issues may be relevant to particular practices, such as "Should Catholic doctors support the practice of prenatal screening?" or "Should Catholic pharmacists dispense the Pill?" or "Does outsourcing production lead to increased reliance on fossil fuels for transportation, and hence to global warming?"

This is a challenging paper for the undergraduates, but it prepares them to live as ethical people in the world as they reflect morally on the many practices that guide our business, educational, and medical interactions each day. Law enforcement students reflect and write about the proper use of force and profiling. Communication majors reflect and write about truth in advertising and the right to privacy. Business students wrestle with practices of a fair and living wage, outsourcing, and intellectual property rights. Each, in his or her own way, wrestles with a practice that occurs in their discipline, preparing them to see things rightly and to act accordingly (prudence) as leaven in the world.

As a final word on this paper, I think it is important to note that through readings by Alasdair MacIntyre⁴⁰ and Robert Sokolowski⁴¹ students' relativistic views are challenged. MacIntyre uses the

⁴⁰ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theology* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).

⁴¹ Robert Sokolowski, "What Is Natural Law? Human Purposes and Natural Ends," *The Thomist* 68 (2004): 507-529.

language of external and internal goods, while Sokolowski uses the language of purposes and ends. While they are not exactly the same, there is a similarity between ends and the good internal to something in which we achieve an excellence. Both the end and the internal good are intrinsic to the activity or profession. Healing people is the end of medicine and the internal good of medicine is to bring healing. On the other hand, it seems that purposes and external goods are similar because both are “external” to the end or internal good. In both cases, there could be many purposes and external goods, and some purposes and external goods could be in line with an end or an internal good. However, it seems that some purposes might subvert the end and some external goods might subvert the internal good. While it might be that my purpose (to help sick people) is the same as the end of medicine (to help sick people), purposes and ends are not the same. In this example the two coincide, but I could have (and probably would have) some other purposes: make money, make my parents proud of me, grow in social status, satisfy my curiosity through learning, get to use complicated machines, etc. Sometimes it is difficult to articulate the end of something, but in the case of teaching it is the education of people, in the case of being a doctor it is health of people, in the case of accountant it is an honest and accurate rendering of accounts. In some ways this seems obvious, but if people are not clear about the end of something than they can justify any purpose. So, if there is no end to medicine or the person is unaware of the end of medicine, then they could justify scheduling unnecessary surgeries in order to make lots of money. Here, however, they would be ignoring the end which is to bring about good health in people. In fact, they would be subverting the proper end through their purpose of wanting to make huge piles of cash.

8. Mary: our model and Mother

The opening line of the hymn *Salve Regina* is: *Salve, Regina, Mater misericordiae, vita, dulcedo, et spes nostra, salve* – Hail, holy Queen, Mother of Mercy, Hail our life, our sweetness, and our hope. The motto of the Mount is taken from this hymn: *Spes Nostra*. Here on Mary's Mountain, the university sits in the shadow of a huge statue of Mary. Our hope is that Mary continues to guide all that we do in our educational and formational enterprise as administrators, staff, faculty, and students. Our hope is that we will take Mary as our model in her courageous ascent to God's invitation and in her steadfast trust in God's ways. Our hope is that we will one day be united with God, in the life to come, as Mary is now. And until then, our hope is that she will continue to watch over us, in this life, as we graduate young men and women who have committed themselves to cultivate a mature spiritual life, who live by high intellectual and moral standards, who respect the dignity of other persons, who see and seek to resolve the problems facing humanity, and who commit themselves to live as responsible citizens.