

Lourdes 2024

Spiritual Orientation reflection

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Chers frères et sœurs, je m'appelle le Père Joseph...

Do you need a translation? We're in France so I spoke in French! We have to learn a new language.

“Bonjour” = “good day”

“Merci” = “thank you”

“1st floor” = “2nd floor” as they consider ground floor to be “0”

“C” on water faucet in France does not mean “cold” but “chaud” meaning “hot”!

“Defense de stationner” means “no parking” not “defense station”!

Translation is tricky and we can get things really wrong. Moses was artistically depicted with horns on his head because the word in Hebrew for “rays” was mistranslated as “horns” instead. Think how strange Michelangelo’s great “Moses” looks because of it!

It isn't just artistic masterpieces which can be spoiled by mistranslation. In fact, there are lots of things in our lives that need translating. God's masterpiece which is the human person can easily get mis-represented and mis-shaped when we mis-translate the things of the spiritual life and remain in confusion where we desperately need clarity.

The theme for this year's pilgrimage is “Come and see.” Learning new words helps give us a fresh perspective on things. Hopefully this pilgrimage can aid us to see ourselves, our situations, and God a bit differently.

We are taking some time this afternoon to give a little spiritual orientation to start our pilgrimage. It won't be a history of Lourdes and the apparitions of Our Lady. Instead, it will be an overview of some of these basic elements of our spiritual lives which too often get lost in translation.

The word “orientation” itself literally means “finding east” from which we could then also deduce west, north, and south. Finding the one direction holds the key to unlocking lots of other information. Knowing the points of the compass helps us

navigate our earthly journeys. In a similar way, getting some basic spiritual matters straight opens the way for us to find the path for our journey through the messiness of life to draw closer to God.

Let's take a shot at some things that need translating even from English to plain English. Especially in spiritual matters, we can lapse into "Church-speak" and lose most people. For example, in announcements at the end of Mass we often use acronyms such as "RCIA." Growing up surrounded by lawyers and judges, it sometimes sounded to me like the R-I-C-O act (or "RICO") which prosecutes organized crime! Let's use this common parish acronym as an example. (Recently changed to "OCIA" in case there wasn't already enough lack of understanding!)

"RCIA"

1. Rite of Christian initiation for adults—HUH???
2. The process for non-Catholics to learn about our faith and become Catholic—oh, now I understand!

But even more beautifully, it can also be translated or more fully unpacked in definition #3: "an invitation for those seeking deeper meaning in their lives to walk with us and learn about the Gospel of Jesus Christ so that He can answer their hearts' deepest longings and open their minds to the meaning of life; they can then become part of our spiritual family the Church to be nourished by heavenly gifts and bound together by love for one another as we seek eternal life."

Which translation helps you the most?? #1 and #2 simply announce a process leading to an event. #3 proclaims a mystery speaking to us on a whole other level.

The Second Vatican Council wanted to help the laity to mature in understanding of our faith and the way we apply it to our lives. Sadly, even highly educated professionals who are experts in secular matters are often relying on an understanding of our faith which they received in 8th grade or perhaps even further back in 2nd grade.

So, let's start re-translating some spiritual things whose deeper and richer meanings may be obscured or forgotten! Some of these definitions are how we normally see things. Some are how others see things. Some are an invitation to see familiar realities in a new way that opens us up to spiritual growth. Can you find a definition that helps you develop a more mature understanding?

“Church”:

1. Building where Christians pray
2. International religious organization based in Vatican City
3. Hypocritical bunch of self-righteous and out of touch people trying to ruin modern life with medieval principles (we hear that in the media too often!)
4. The Mystical Body of Christ (dogmatic truth needing much more definition!)
5. My spiritual home where I am closest to God and He is closest to me

“Parish”

1. Geographic or ethnic grouping of Catholics under the jurisdiction of a pastor; along with other parishes together comprising a diocese led by a bishop
2. Set of local Christians who agree on the most important things in life but often fight over parking spots, the back pews in church, the selection of hymns sung, the quality of coffee and donuts after Mass, why Father’s homily was absolutely right or wrong or too short or too long, and other trivial matters
3. My favorite charity which however seems perpetually to be in fundraising mode and wanting an amount of money from me which exceeds what the IRS will allow me to deduct from my taxes
4. My brothers and sisters in Christ with whom I am called to be the light of the world in our neighborhood
5. Christians under the shepherding of an imperfect priest the bishop sent—so send complaints to the Chancery! (PS No angels were available to take this job!)

“Volunteer”

1. A person who freely steps up to serve in a way which he/she was not strictly obliged to do
2. The person cornered by Father after Mass and strong-armed or “guilted” into taking the job no one in their sane mind wanted and that everyone pretended not to see advertised in the bulletin for the past two months or hear in the pulpit announcements in that special whining tone of desperation
3. The incorrect term often used to describe the disciples of Jesus Christ when in small or great matters they are simply exercising their baptismal dignity taking seriously their responsibility for the mission of the Church

Now let’s turn to some more “big picture” ideas. The hope is to gain more insightful understandings of these crucial elements of our spiritual lives.

“God”

1. Uncreated Creator of the universe
2. Ruler of Heaven and earth
3. “Big Guy upstairs” whom you don’t want to tick off
4. Love (cf. Letter of St. John)—we could ponder that one-word definition all day!
5. Eternal Father inviting His children into an ever-closer communion with Him
6. My origin and my destination

“Holy Eucharist”

1. The sacrament instituted at the Last Supper in which Jesus gives Himself to us under the appearance of bread and wine
2. Continuation of the mystery of the Incarnation by which God comes down from Heaven to dwell with man
3. The real presence of Jesus truly remaining with us and giving Himself to us in love
4. Bread of Angels and “manna” from heaven
5. Spiritual food for which our souls truly hunger
6. Invitation to communion of life and love with God
7. Foretaste of Heaven for which I must prepare myself by purity of heart

“Commandments”

1. Regulations from God—do this and don’t do that OR ELSE!!!
2. Restrictions on my personal freedom
3. Rules for the game of life after which I get to cash in for an eternal reward
4. Boundaries to keep my actions from offending God and neighbor
5. Ways that I remain faithful to God in everyday life
6. What love looks like towards God and neighbor

“Morality”

1. Obeying the commandments
2. Preserving the state of grace in our souls
3. Living according to the example of Jesus
4. Demonstrating love for God and neighbor in my actions
5. Seeking true happiness in the practice of virtue rather than following the false promises of various temptations
6. Recognizing God as the source of joy and choosing Him above all else

“Social justice”

1. Church teaching on economic and political life
2. Christian principles for regulating human society
3. Honoring the debts we owe to one another due to human dignity
4. Shaping our communal life to look more like the Kingdom of God
5. Seeking the common good of humanity instead of just selfishly pursuing our own interests
6. Expressing solidarity with others in the concrete actions of life despite differences of race, class, or other dividing factors

“Sin”

1. Disobedience to God by breaking a commandment
2. Infidelity to God’s covenant with man, aka spiritual adultery
3. Action which portrays a forgetfulness of human dignity made in the image and likeness of God
4. Lack of love towards God or neighbor
5. Assertion of pride to do things My Way instead of humbly following Jesus
6. Choosing an apparent good over what is truly good
7. Damaging or rupturing my bond of friendship with Christ
8. Turning away from heaven
9. Hurting my soul by acting as less than a child of God

“Sinner”

1. Law-breaker or spiritual criminal
2. One whose actions add to the brokenness of our world
3. Person who chooses spiritual poison instead of heavenly food
4. One infinitely and unconditionally loved by God and the object of His Mercy
5. The intention of Jesus to save on the Cross
6. Wounded person in need of spiritual healing
7. Everyone but Jesus and Mary
8. My brother and sister
9. Me

“Mercy”

1. Forgiveness of sin
2. Cleansing of the soul
3. The way that God loves us without regard for our un-loveable-ness

4. Fruit of God's free choice disregarding our unworthiness
5. Key to eternal life
6. What I am required to give others if I want it for myself ("forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us!")
7. What makes me most like Jesus when sharing it with others
8. The only thing I really need

"Penance"

1. Punishment for sin
2. A prescribed action given during confession which the penitent will do to show remorse for having offended God
3. Lenten practices which unite us to the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross
4. Freely chosen actions of self-denial which strengthen our willpower and orient us on the path of virtue
5. Sacrifices made to show greater love for God and make reparation for our personal sins or the sins of others
6. Way of detachment from earthly goods to become more attached to God

"Death"

1. The end of life
2. The threshold of eternal life
3. The consequence of original sin conquered by Christ in His Resurrection
4. My deepest fear
5. My gateway to joys greater than "eye has ever seen, ear has ever heard, or the mind of man has ever imagined"

"Judgement"

1. Spiritual appraisal of our lives directing us to heaven or hell
2. When God reveals to us the eternal consequences of our earthly choices
3. Encounter in which God opens the gates of heaven to those who die in friendship with Him
4. When sinners are given the gift of eternal life if they repent of their sins and desire God above all else

"Purgatory"

1. Temporary place of punishment for sin before being admitted to heaven
2. Cleansing process for souls who imperfectly love God and neighbor

3. Where God puts the finishing touches on our spiritual transformation to be perfectly Christ-like
4. Readyng the soul to enter the fullness of love in the beatific vision

“Heaven”

1. More than a limitless and perfect day at our favorite fishing hole or golf course
2. Greater than the greatest chocolate bar
3. Eternal reward for the souls of the just
4. Perfect union with God
5. Only joy and no more tears or suffering
6. Fulfilment of our hearts’ deepest desires
7. What every good thing on earth has tried to hint at
8. Gift of love in which the fullness of love is itself the gift

Now let’s turn to some concepts that have immediate relevance to us here and now:

“Order of Malta”

1. Crusader order dedicated to defending the Faith and serving the sick and the poor
2. Do-gooders with snazzy black polyester work uniforms and fashionable women’s hair accessories
3. Charism given by God to Blessed Gerard over 900 years ago and entrusted to very imperfect people today to keep going strong
4. Christians trying to become more Christ-like through lives of prayer and loving service

“Pilgrimage”

1. Journey to a sacred place for the purpose of spiritual renewal
2. Earthly trip symbolizing the soul’s journey through life to God
3. Not a vacation in which we just relax (e.g. no packing golf clubs)
4. Not a retreat in which we set everything else aside for contemplation
5. Seeking to come closer to God by traveling to a place designated for encounter with the divine
6. Leaving daily life behind to spend time with God

“Lourdes”

1. Village in the south of France where the Virgin Mary appeared to Saint Bernadette in 1858
2. Pilgrimage destination where countless people have experienced spiritual and physical miracles
3. Rainy and sometimes chilly place where we are invited to do a little penance
4. Place of prayerful processions to the Grotto where Mary appeared
5. Spiritual heart of the Order of Malta where we are renewed in our mission to serve the sick and the poor

“Blessed Virgin Mary”

1. Woman chosen by God to be the mother of the Messiah
2. Only human person preserved from original sin from the moment of her immaculate conception—as the preparation for her divine mission
3. First and perfect disciple of her Son Jesus
4. Last gift of Jesus from the Cross to His disciples
5. Our spiritual mother who loves us and cares for us
6. Heavenly messenger to people on earth in various times and places inviting us to repentance for our sins and greater trust in God

“Rosary”

1. Way of prayer given by Our Lady to Saint Dominic in the 13th century here in southern France to help people meditate on the mysteries of our salvation
2. Powerful spiritual weapon for defeating temptations and obtaining heavenly graces
3. Set of prayers honoring the joyful, “luminous,” sorrowful and glorious mysteries of Jesus
4. Privileged way of contemplation which Mary has often encouraged Christians to pray, such as here at Lourdes or in Fatima
5. Described by Mother Teresa of Calcutta as “putting our hand into the hand of our mother”

“Saint Bernadette”

1. Young girl who came from the poorest family in Lourdes and was often sick
2. Chosen recipient of the apparitions of Mary despite or perhaps because of her lowliness
3. Means by which we come to know of God’s special care for the sick through the miraculous spring of water she was shown
4. Example of innocence, purity, and humility for all of us to imitate

5. Member of the communion of saints in heaven who is cheering us on our journey and interceding for our needs

“Cross”

1. Punishment reserved by the ancient Romans for the most serious criminals and set up as a deterrent for others
2. Means by which Jesus saved the world
3. Noble tree on which the Lord of Life freely submitted to death out of love for wayward sinners
4. Heavy burden laid on my weak shoulders by God despite my pleas
5. Painful consequence of the brokenness of the world which I must endure
6. Opportunity for us to share in the Passion of Christ as co-redeemers with Him for the salvation of the world
7. Suffering not sent by God but used by Him to help me overcome selfishness and learn to trust Him more than myself and to be compassionate to the sufferings of others

“Sickness”

1. Failure of the body to function properly
2. Consequence of original sin destroying the harmony of God’s creation
3. Frailty which robs me of the illusion of self-sufficiency
4. Confrontation with my own physical limitations requiring me to depend on others for help
5. Invitation to consider the shortness of life and my eternal destiny
6. Occasion to use pain to identify with Christ in His Passion and renew hope in one day sharing His Resurrection
7. Opportunity for others to serve and show love

“Malade”

1. French word for the sick
2. Order of Malta’s term of endearment for those we serve in Lourdes
3. All of us when we pay attention to our own weaknesses of body or soul

“Miracle”

1. Extraordinary event not able to be attributed to an earthly cause
2. Supernatural overriding of the natural order in a particular instance
3. Manifestation of God’s power
4. Gift of God which brings spiritual or physical healing

5. When God's care for us is dramatically revealed instead of its usually hidden but no less real quality

These definitions are simply the lenses through which we see God and our lives. Jetlagged and in a foreign land with an unfamiliar language, maybe we are disoriented enough to re-boot the way we see the spiritual landscape of our lives. God loves us and sent Mary here to invite us to deeper union with Him.

“Come and see!” God has graces waiting for you here. God wants to renew your way of seeing both Him and your own life.

Let's be confident that we have been called here by God. We will encounter Him in a powerful way in this place He chose. Trust and be open to a new way of seeing!