

Saints *Alive!*

A Periodic Newsletter of Emmaus Journey

Issue
25

Our Assurance of Salvation is the Assurance of God's Mercy

By Rich Cleveland

Since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. (Hebrews 10:21-22 RSVCE)

"...assurance of salvation is not the issue, but rather upon whom does one place their assurance."

This and other passages of Scripture point out the desirability of knowing with assurance that we have eternal life, while simultaneously warning us to make our salvation sure; (2 Peter 1:10-11). There are those who are assured of their salvation based on their profession of faith, and those who warn them about the sin of presumption. Some with fear and trembling of not obtaining eternal life, re-examine their every word, deed, and thought to over-scrupulously make sure that no sin, however small, is unconfessed. What is the balance? Is assurance feasible?

As a non-Christian young man of twenty I spoke with an evangelical speaker in response to his message invitation; "If you don't know where you will spend eternity if you were to die tonight, I would like to talk with you." After about twenty minutes of his explaining several Gospel passages to me while sitting there in the back row of the Wiesbaden Museum auditorium, I prayed to acknowledge Jesus as my Savior and invite him into my life. Afterwards, when we joined the group of fellow airmen I attended with, they immediately led me through a reasoning process until I could say to *their* satisfaction; "I invited God into my life, the Bible says 'He who has the Son has life' (1 John 5:11), therefore I know if I died I would go to heaven." All this was based on the concept, "God said it, I believe it, that finished it."

Well, it didn't finish it. About six years after becoming a Christian a trusted group of evangelicals I knew embraced a newly popular concept, that if one didn't specifically say, "Lord Jesus, I want you to come into my heart and be my **Lord**" that person was not truly converted. I could not remember exactly the words I

prayed that August night in Wiesbaden, consequently, their dogmatism on this point caused my assurance go flying right out the window. Fortunately, an older Christian leader was able to get me re-grounded in Christ, and this passing perversion of the Gospel was corrected and quickly died out. However, my experience illustrates that when you base your assurance of salvation on what **you** did, your salvation is on rather shaky ground.

Over the years as I have been involved ministering to young adults, I have observed that one's assurance is easily assailed when a person recognizes the moral contradictions in their life. On one hand they read wonderful truths like 2 Corinthians 5:17; "Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come," and on the other hand they struggle with their old nature and the immoral sins that occur again, and again, and again. It is only natural for a reasoning individual to conclude with some degree of terror, either the promises of Scripture are not true, or I must not really be a Christian since I sin so much. From those discouraging and fearful thoughts, it only takes a little challenging misinformation for us to surrender to our fears and pray the "sinner's prayer" again, and again looking for that one *spiritual event* that will make us feel holy enough to merit eternal life. Faced with these tensions "assurance" becomes an essential need, —but assurance based primarily on what we have done is inadequate

The assurance on which we have been reflecting is based on the second part of a feelings oriented premise; "God said it, I believe it, that finishes it". It is not the strength of our belief that finishes our quest for assurance, but

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“His son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son.’ But his father ordered his servants, ‘Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.’ Then the celebration began.”
 —Luke 15:21–24 NAB

Emmaus Journey

MISSION:

Emmaus Journey is a lay Catholic evangelization and discipleship ministry which partners with parishes, small groups and individuals to facilitate a personal encounter with and conversion to Christ, thereby forming missionary disciples actively living for Jesus.

VISION:

By encountering Christ through scripture, discipleship and community—individuals experience: 1) conversion to Christ; 2) transformation in Christ; and 3) mobilization for Christ, where they are actively involved in sharing their faith with others and living out their faith in the greater community. Thus achieving Goal One of the USCCB’s initiative on evangelization, “To bring about in all Catholics such an enthusiasm for their faith that, in living their faith in Jesus, they freely share it with others.”



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From the Heart By Henry Abeyta

With the summer before us, we enter a season of heat, growth, and for some perhaps, lethargy of heart and spirit. What do the seasonal patterns of life reveal in us? In our dining area hangs a picture of Rembrandt’s *The Return of the*

Prodigal Son. Here we have the Father depicted in deep compassion welcoming home his lost son who is returning after abandoning the family. When I consider the assurance of God’s mercy, I can see in the compassion of the Father, God’s love for us when we return home from our wayward ways to re-enter the family, to enter relationship and receive an inheritance for the things ahead in life. In the case of the prodigal son, his contempt for the family and especially the Father is not cause for the Father to treat him in-kind. Instead the Father in an outpouring of grace and mercy, welcomes home his lost son!



Henry Abeyta

Consider that Jesus in his birth, life, death, and resurrection has restored our relationship with the Father and set out the path to life, eternal life in the kingdom of God as part of his Body! At Baptism we are anointed with the chrism oil of salvation as priest, prophet, and king. We are made part of God’s family, with a mission to grow in knowing him and acting as his ambassadors wherever he has placed us in life. You and I are part of this family through Jesus! We are the beloved and pursuing a deeper realization of the life path this entails is a worthy reflection for this summer season. The outpouring of God’s transformational work in us should be manifested in the workplace, in our families and neighborhoods, and in our society. What actions are we called to as members of God’s family? What does Jesus say about how we will live our lives as his representative and as one who has shown the way?

This summer, Emmaus Journey will send our seventh team of young adults to serve on mission to the kids of Poland. Over the years we have sent over forty young adults to experience a new culture, walk in the steps of Saint John Paul II, and to serve as hands and feet of Jesus commissioned with proclaiming and teaching the message of faith. The young adults invariably return renewed and strengthened in their faith having experienced firsthand God working through them to impart his blessing on both those that are served as well as those doing the serving.

Our desire is to impact these young adults early in their faith journey, to adhere to the faith throughout their lives, and to recommit themselves to living out their faith as disciples of Jesus in relationship with the Father. As I write this article we are a few thousand dollars short of full funding for this year’s trip and remain prayerful about establishing a base of funding for future trips. Please pray for this mission, that future generations will be impacted as we join with the prayers of St John Paul II for his native land. As we take these steps to invest in this generation, we realize that their lives will determine the future spiritual environment of our countries.

May this summer season bring for you renewal and a reinvigorated family time!

Henry Abeyta became Director of Emmaus Journey in January 2012. With its establishment as a tax exempt 501c(3) organization in 2014, Henry has served as its President. He and Darlene are the proud parents of two married sons and proud grandparents of four grandsons. Henry retired from Sandia National Laboratories where he worked for 30 years. He and Darlene are long-time members of Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary Parish in Albuquerque.

Bringing Him to Others

Emmaus Journey 2019 Poland Mission Trip

The Need: In 2010 the Archdiocese of Swidnicka, Poland and Emmaus Journey agreed to partner to send young adult missionaries from the USA to work with Oaza Catholic summer camp participants beginning with the Diocese and expanding to Dioceses from throughout Poland.

History: Emmaus Journey provided teams of young adults for six mission trips over the past seven years. The 2019 team is the seventh mission team.

Objectives:

- Develop leadership capacity among U.S. young adults as they return with a new/renewed faith through an encounter with Jesus through their service
- Serve Polish youth by providing a faith formation program with our Oaza camp partners
- As the Polish kids return home, encourage their families to engage with follow-up programs offered through the Church and Diocese to further their faith formation and proclamation of the gospel message
- Establish cadres of young people countering the secularization of Europe
- Provide English speaking young adults that help the Polish kids further their English-speaking skills and provide a new in-person model of U.S. young adults seriously committed to their faith.

What do the Missionaries Do: The mission team conducts a daily program with songs, dances and activities, centered around Scripture. They also teach English at daily “Speaker voice” sessions, meetings in small groups for all ages.

Additional activities include, sports, camp games, biking and nature walks.

How you can help: Consider providing a financial donation that will be used to match group fundraising and for missionaries in most need.

By check: Checks should be made to **Emmaus Journey**, and sent to 1311 Tijeras Ave NW, Albuquerque, NM 87102.

Website: www.emmausjourney.org

Emmaus Journey is a 501(c)3 nonprofit serving nationally in Catholic evangelization and discipleship ministry.

“To be Christians means to be Missionaries, to be Apostles. It is not enough to discover Christ — you must bring Him to others.”

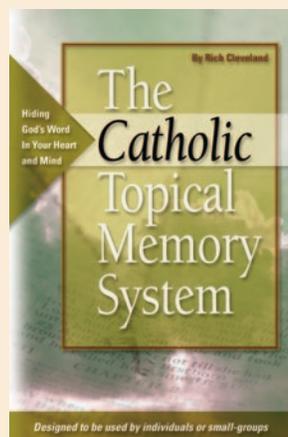
—Saint John Paul II (4th World Youth Day)



Topic: Assurance of God's Mercy

Verses: Philippians 1:6 and John 5:13

Reflection on the Wisdom of the Church



God does not want us to go through life worrying about our salvation, nor does he want us to go through life overconfidently thinking that our eternal destiny rests solely on some past response to God. The former can make us fearful and keep us from focusing on the joy of our salvation and growth in Christ and/or cause us to try and earn that which is truly a gift...

The key to assurance of our salvation is not to look to ourselves but to Jesus...

Questions for Meditation

Philippians 1:6 (For context read Philippians 1:3–11)

- From where or whom do you think the writer of Philippians got his confidence?
- Whom was he relying on to insure Philippians' final salvation?
- What responsibilities did the Philippians have in verses 9–11?
- To what extent do you see God perfecting your life in Christ?

John 5:13 (For context read John 5:10–15)

- What was John's primary objective in writing these words?
- What or whom should we rely on when we doubt what Christ has done for us?
- What are some of the reasons people lose confidence in their salvation?
- On what or in whom does this confidence reside?

Our Assurance of Salvation is the Assurance of God's Mercy *continued from front page*

rather the person and object of our belief; Jesus and his finished work of salvation. We must not look to our self and our faith, but rather "looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, **so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted,**" (Hebrews 12:2–3 RSVCE). It is in contemplating Jesus that we find peace, rest, assurance.

Additionally, embracing the "I believe it, that finishes it" experience as the essence of our salvation puts us in jeopardy, for the decision to believe and become a Jesus follower is not the culmination of our salvation but only the beginning of our salvation. Conversion to Christ must be followed by ongoing transformation in Christ, and hopefully also mobilization for Christ, —it is a lifelong process. As 2 Corinthians 7:1 says, "Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, and make holiness perfect in the fear of God." St. Paul was writing to very troubled Christians reminding them that God's promise to be a Father unto them/us is not based on their/our perfection, rather his promise is given gratuitously, undeservingly, and is intended to be the stimulant and motivation for us to actively participate in the perfecting process of our salvation. Our assurance during difficult, emotional, and spiritually troubling times cannot be secured based on what we did, but rather on the confidence that even when we fail, miserably fail, **God will** remain faithful, for he cannot deny being who and what he is, a merciful and loving Father. Our assurance comes from knowing that

he will remain merciful as he promised.

"Cleansing ourselves from every defilement of the body and spirit" should involve availing ourselves of regular participation in the sacrament of confession. The contradictions we see in our life between what we perceive are God's demands of perfection, and our own imperfections, should generate some degree of respectful fear, and it is in the confession and absolutions of our sins that we are to be able to move forward in assurance, growth, and discipleship. As Abbot, St. Bernard points out, "Where can the weak find a **place of firm security and peace**, except in the wounds of the Savior? ... I may have sinned gravely. My conscience would be distressed, but it would not be in turmoil, for I would recall the wounds of the Lord: *he was wounded for our iniquities*. What sin is there so deadly that it cannot be pardoned by the death of Christ? And so if I bear in mind this strong, effective remedy, I can never again be terrified by the malignancy of sin... My merit comes from his mercy; for I do not lack merit so long as he does not lack pity. And if the Lord's mercies are many, then I am rich in merits".¹ **Assurance of God's mercy**, is the assurance that will sustain us.²

After thirty-five years as evangelicals, Rich Cleveland and his wife Gail became Catholic. Rich is the founder of Emmaus Journey, and he and his wife continue to serve Emmaus Journey, and live in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

1. St. Bernard, from a Sermon on the Song of Songs, as found in the *Liturgy of the Hours*, Vol III, page 125-126.

2. Italics and boldface type in all quotes used in this article were added for emphasis.