

12 YEARS WITHOUT CHOCOLATE

YEAR 1, 32nd Sunday of Ordinary Time

A Story of Perseverance, Patience and Prayer by Sr. Mary Elizabeth Albers, S.O.L.T
[Discernment of Spirits – Sr. Mary Elizabeth Albers, S.O.L.T.](#) (16:45-20:12)

At the age of 25, Betsy, a lay member of the Society of Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity, decided to give up chocolate for all of Lent so that her grandmother, who had never had any interest in Christian faith or baptism, would convert to Catholicism by the end of the season enjoys the sacrament. So the end of Lent comes and Grandma still hasn't asked for baptism and Betsy reasons, "Well, I can't start eating chocolate now. That wouldn't be very good. So, ok, I'll continue to not eat chocolate until my grandmother comes to the sacrament of baptism." A year goes by and she reevaluates, "Well, I can't stop now. I got to keep going." Two years go by, three years go by, twelve years go by and she would only eat chocolate during the octave of Christmas and Easter and she called it the "choctave". But for those twelve years she refrained from eating chocolate.

At 37 years old, Betsy sends an email to the Sisters of the Society of Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity and asks them to pray because her grandmother really isn't doing well. Then the next day Betsy sends another email saying, "Grandma's asking a lot of questions; keep praying." And day after day the Sisters get her prayer updates until a week goes by and then they hear, "Grandma is asking for a priest. She wants to be baptized!" The next day Betsy sends a text message to the Sisters with six Reeses peanut butter cups all lined up in front of a Dr. Pepper. Her grandmother was baptized, received first Holy Communion and Confirmation then passed away less than a week later. Truly, the mercy of God!

Betsy said she never really struggled with any awful temptations to eat chocolate. Although, one day she thought she had a bit of chocolate on her finger and went to lick it off only to realize that it was magic marker. She had to admit to God, "Oh Lord, you got me!" Despite her moment of weakness, she still never really ate any chocolate. But the hardest times came when another year would pass, and she would reevaluate, "Ok, Grandma's still not baptized do I want to commit to another year?" There were these temptations towards, "Well, it hasn't done any good so far. It's been eight years. Are you sure it's going to bear any fruit?" The evil one would try and disquiet her; he discourages. But in that discouragement she would pray, "Ok Lord what's from you?" She would discern and saw that, "No, this is what I'm supposed to do." And now all can see the peace and joy of that small sacrifice that just radiates through her family now that they know their grandmother is a saint in heaven.

CAUGHT IN THE ACT

YEAR 1, 31st Sunday of Ordinary Time

Explain that the Devil tries to bury every secret deeper and inflate every ego larger to justify any and all sin. God is Love and so sin means that we are outright refusing love and separating ourselves from God. Explain that you are going to put the group to the task of exposing evil's presence in the world by allowing them to catch evil "in the act" of separating us from Love.

Divide the group into two teams. Present each team with a large sheet of paper or space on a whiteboard and instruct each team to write their assigned venial sin category at the top. Assign "Abusive Language" to the first team and "Hatred/Wishing Evil on Others" to the second team. For the second team, emphasize that their category is not about "doing" the evil acts but rather "inviting and wanting" evil to enter into other's lives. On your mark, give the teams one minute to write out, in bullet point form, all the different ways they can commit those sins. After the minute is over, have the teams sit back and ruminate on both categories together.

Reflection: Ask the group as a whole to silently notice the listed sins to which they have consented to in the past (emphasize silence). Ask them to examine their own denial, running, fighting or hiding from those who accuse them of doing these wrongs, especially God our Father. Then ask the group to briefly share, out loud with one another, their feelings about these situations. (Emphasize that they are instructed to share their feelings and not their sins.) *The total reflection time should not exceed 5 minutes.*

After the reflection, briefly explain to the group that we have to give all our thanks to God who accuses us of putting ourselves and others in danger. (Through our conscience, etc...) Unlike the Accuser's* accusations which wills to condemn us, God wills to save us from sin and glorify us in absolute truth and love. Explain that when we examine our sins we aren't beating ourselves up and when we go to confession, neither is the priest or God; rather, we are resolutely trying to forget our selfishness and learn to love. Purifying hurts but it always stitches us up and makes us whole again. After this explanation is made, have each team swap categories. Then, on your mark, give the teams two minutes to come up with at least one "counter-action" for each listed bullet point. Explain that a "counter-action" should be something either like penance which makes up for the sin already done or a good work that directly opposes the temptation for that sin. After the two minutes are over, gather everyone back together and with the remaining time, ask the group to briefly share, out loud, what they think about the responses made against the evils (i.e. Are they effective. Why or why not? Do they make you hopeful?) Wrap up the discussion by saying that hatred and evil cannot stand to encounter supreme and perfect love. The brightness of love's fire torments all falsehood and those attached to it. That's why we, as Catholics, choose to stay close to all acts of love and the Church has no tolerance for selfishness but shares every ounce of forgiveness which is an act of love in itself.

*Revelations 12:10, Psalm 109:6, Job 1-2, Zechariah 3:1-2

HAPPY ARE THOSE WHO MOURN

YEAR 1, 1st Sunday of Lent/YEAR 3, 1st Sunday of Lent

Prompt the group by asking them to find the beatitude, "Happy are they who mourn, for they will be comforted." while watching scenes from the [Dorothy Day Story](#) starting at 1:30:55-1:44:40 ("Dorothy, we're having a meeting." -"May the Lord be with you.") This takes 15 minutes.

After watching, read Psalm 126:5-6 aloud to the group: "Those who sow in tears will reap with rejoicing. They go out full of tears carrying seed for the sowing. They come back full of joy carrying their sheaves."

Explain that only by confronting sin can we overcome it and Dorothy Day definitely confronted the sources and effects of sin. Briefly introduce the group to Dorothy Day. Explain that Jesus tells us that only by meeting and getting to know sin (that which injures, destroys, harasses and mocks life) and juxtaposing it with God's love can we break down its barriers and redeem the injury it causes. We have to learn what Love looks like, who He really is and how far humanity really keeps from Him in order to experience true mourning and sorrow over sin. The first step is meeting our own sin. Noticing our own disinterest or hatred of love causes a lot of pain and reason to mourn. Only after we meet this evil, can we then ask God to take it from us and replace it with His Spirit of life and love. We cannot ask forgiveness if we are unaware that we are in need of it. Only after participating in the passion and death, for utter rejection of sin, can we experience the new life and the resurrection. We are called to be instruments of love and therefore reap the rewards of loving others: any easy yoke (Mt 11:30), joy (Mt 5:3-12), and many good gifts (Lk 6:37-38).

Wrap up the lesson by reading aloud Luke 6:37-38 Jesus said, "Stop judging and you will not be judged. Stop condemning and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven. Give and gifts will be given to you; a good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap. For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you."

Ask the group to share their personal feelings and reactions. Ask, "How does it personally touch, relate or speak to you?" Then ask, "How does Dorothy Day's story promotes courage and hope?" "How do you see Christ in Dorothy Day? How can you compare the two?" After the group has answered, emphasis how Christ confronted sin and how his sorrow and pain became opportunity for our healing and our resurrection, for great comfort and joy.
(i.e. the widow Lk 7:11-17, and the way of the cross Jn 18:1-21:25)

THE ONLY ONE IN THE ROOM

YEAR 1, 3rd Sunday of Ordinary Time

Ask, "Who here has ever been challenged to do something good, something good that you didn't want to do, by a parent, an instructor, coach or a boss?" Follow up with how did you know it was good? What was your personal experience?" Follow up again with, "Why didn't you want to do it? What did the pressure to get it done feel like?" After everyone, who wants to, has shared, wrap up the thought by briefly addressing the our negative reactions to such pressure: Blowing off Steam (insults, gossip, complaining); Harboring Anger (grudges, ugly thoughts and attitudes, rejection); Payback Method (opposition, sabotage, fake flattery).

Then explain that everyone treats God in this way because we're all sinners. Sin means that we will to reject God in a prideful presumption of self-sufficiency. We act like we know and are the best. Why do we act this way with God if we know He is good? The prince of lies, Satan, does a good job of convincing us that God is pressuring us. Recall the ways that the pressure felt. This makes us angry because someone is trying to control our actions. We don't like that. We're too proud, even if we know it is good for us, we won't do something if someone is "making us" do it.

Ask the group, "Does anyone recall what gift God gave us that promises that He will never put pressure on us?"

Briefly explain "Free Will."

Then quiet your tone and the level of talk in the room. Explain that Christ knows we are hurting. He knows that we are stuck under our own pride and that it is crushing us. He knows that those over us: parents, instructors, coaches, employers have misused their position of authority and taken advantage of our trust and our vulnerability. And Christ knows that we have done the same to others: those who needed us we walked past, those who are weaker than we took advantage. Christ knows. And He exclaimed in Luke 15:7 "There will be more joy in heaven over the one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance."

When we hear this verse we have to always remember that those ninety-nine have never existed. Every human being is in need of repentance. He does not ask us to surrender to His ways (the absolute good) out of force. He chases after each and everyone of us, leaving the righteous behind, looking at us He takes our insults, gossip, complaining, grudges, ugly thoughts and attitudes, rejection, opposition, sabotage and fake flattery. And He waits for us. Hanging from that cross (point to a crucifix), He waits for us to come out of ourselves and let His come down. From the cross He calls us to a mutual surrender of total self-giving. He shows us how good He is. He wants us to acknowledge our sin and so receive His mercy.

Those 99 do not exist. It is only that "one" who can truly represent each of us sinners. Christ knows we want to be the only one. He has put that desire in our hearts. Healing is not generic. We each need healing tonight. We need to hear it directly from Him. We need to encounter Him personally in Confession. But first we need not to deceive ourselves. We need to acknowledge our sins, so we can willingly ask Him to take them away. (1 Jn 1:8-9)

Invite the group to look at Jesus as He looks at them. (If you can, this would be an opportune time to enter into the presence of the Blessed Sacrament or to dim the lights and focus attention on an image of Jesus Christ.)

Wrap things up by explaining that when we sorrowfully and realistically admit our sins, each one of us can experience the mercy and the joy of being that "only one" for Jesus. (James 4:7-8,10)

((Note to facilitator: *The Blessed Mother and all the saints of heaven were redeemed through Jesus Christ. The Virgin Mary was redeemed before she was born, while others were redeemed completely after Christ's death. This same mystery took place, during the last supper, when Jesus Christ offered the apostles His body -in union with His sacrifice on Calvary- before it chronologically happened. And now He continues to do this in every sacrifice of the Mass. God can use Christ's sacrifice as He is able: omnipresent throughout all of history.))*

-The Lost Sheep (Lk 15:3-7)

ROLE PLAY

YEAR 1, 24th Sunday of Ordinary Time

It's easier for some teens to understand the process of forgiveness when they see it from an outside view. Asking teens from the group to stand up and perform a skit helps the other teens visualize the proper steps to forgive. Tape a 3 different "conflict scenarios" outside the doors of 3 different rooms (one conflict scenario for each door). Explain to the group that we may not always want to defend goodness and peace but God says that is what we are obliged to do. Take five volunteers from the group to be actors. Assign different acting teams to a room and ask them to prepare the scene described outside the door (give actors at least 5 min). Divide everyone else into 3 groups and ask them to approach a door and read the "conflict scenario". After the actors are ready, each group can enter their room. Each group should elect a "counselor" to try and solve the problem inside the room.

Alternative *If you have a small group or a small space, you can elect to send a pair of actors outside the room to practice and then call them back into the room after the rest of the group has elected a "counselor" and the actors are done practicing.*

The actors and the counselor then create the scene for the other teens to watch. Afterward, let the teens dissect the scene and, if necessary, come up with better solutions than the acting counselor. Prompt the end of scene discussion with questions like: "Was the counselor successful?" "What might have occurred if the scene continued?"

Conflict Scenario # 1: Two really angry people are yelling at each other. One says that the other has been a real jerk to his/her friend and needs to go apologize. The other says s/he hasn't done anything to hurt that friend and that his/her friend is a manipulative liar.

Conflict Scenario # 2: A friend punched his/her younger sibling in the face and now the younger sibling keeps trying to run away. S/he is afraid to call his/her parents (who are out of town) or let any adults know about the way s/he treated his/her younger sibling.

Conflict Scenario # 3: A friend is sitting alone after school. S/he is depressed. S/he has even thought about suicide today and doesn't know what to do.

WATER, WATER EVERYWHERE

YEAR 1, 4th Sunday of Lent

Explain that the facilitators are going to stay out of the conversation and let the participants be honest and upfront with each other about their answers. Give the group the first scenario illustrated with two opposing pictures (one illustrating “life-giving” activities and the other illustrating life-taking or “brackish” activities. (See the ready-made visuals and scenarios below.) Do not reveal which activity belongs to which category and keep the categories as hidden information for now. Then ask the group “Which option do you seek, picture A or picture B?” in the scenario. It may be more effective to have the group raise their hands as each option is called. Invite the participants to then explain why they are in favor of their chosen options (3 minutes for each scenario). Repeat until all the scenarios have been discussed and then show them the final page where all the “life-giving” options are illustrated on the top row as option A and all the life-taking “brackish” options are illustrated on the bottom row as option B. First ask the group, “What are the major differences between these two groups?” Read James 3:11-18

“Does a spring gush forth from the same opening both pure and brackish water? Can a fig tree, my brothers, produce olives, or a grapevine figs? Neither can salt water yield fresh. Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show his works by a good life in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. Wisdom of this kind does not come down from above but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every foul practice. But the wisdom from above is first of all pure, then peaceable, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, without inconstancy or insincerity. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for those who cultivate peace.”

Then proceed to rhetorically ask, “Which would you choose?” Explain to the group that James warns that salt water may appear life-giving because it looks like good drinking water but in actuality it will slowly kill. Ask, “How are the activities in option B like salt or brackish water and option A like fresh water? How do we know option A is from God and option B is from this world?” (Qualify that the activities from option B are not of themselves life-taking but the way that we use them in “jealousy and selfish ambition” is most definitely life-taking.)

Explain that there is “love” and “freedom” everywhere, in this world, but that its fruits (sin/separation from God) will never give us a satisfying drop to drink. Explain how James references Christ’s own depictions: “Jesus answered and said to her (the Samaritan woman at the well), ‘Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again; but whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.’” (John 4:13-14) and “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5)

Share with the group that it takes the time and effort to find fresh clean water to drink in this world but that all the effort will save your life:

- Learn to be still with the Lord/Pray
- Learn to be alone (not lonely!)
- Don’t be afraid to try radical new things
- Live counter-culturally (confident in God’s love, following God’s lead)
- Give to others what the Lord has given to you
- Forgive and renew relationships (love your neighbor as yourself, no matter what!)

<i>Scenario</i>	<i>Picture A / Picture B</i>
1. You are tired, which option do you seek? away	(A) Resting in nature / (B) Sleeping the day
2. You want to unite your friends, which option do you seek? Lunch talk	(A) After school excitement / (B)
3. You have so much to do, which option do you seek? done now	(A) Pray the rosary / (B) Get it
4. You want some attention, which option do you seek?	(A) Gathering / (B) Party
5. You are feeling overwhelmed, which option do you seek? Mass	(A) Watching TV / (B) Go to

WHERE DID EVERYBODY GO?

YEAR 1, 33rd Sunday of Ordinary Time

Print the answer key for yourself and print the Expressions of Doubt and Loneliness page for each participant.

Explain to the group that we cannot freely love unless we, ourselves, are absolutely confident in love.

We must trust God in all that He is and all that He does. And the only way that we can come into this confidence is if we start counting all the gifts our God has given us and always look at those gifts first and foremost. We have to keep a grateful heart.

"Let the wicked forsake their way, and sinners their thoughts; Let them turn to the LORD to find mercy; to our God, who is generous in forgiving. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways..." (Isaiah 55:7-8)

Explain that we, as sinners tend to think that there is power in violence, anger and grudges. We feel like, if we raise our voices or force people to do things for us, we have more control over a situation but we don't. Power in violence is the greatest illusion. We seem to have "control" because we can see ourselves having our way. However, this violence often leads us to loneliness and doubt about our true worth and we lose all control of seeking our love and happiness.

God is our real worth our real empowerment. He asks us to walk confidently in "control," in any situation we face. All His commandments plant our hearts firmly on love, a rock that will never budge, a home that can weather any storm. (Matthew 7:24-27)

Explain that our hospitality is a real indicator of our confidence in God's love: The more confidence we have in love then the more hospitable we want and know how to be. The less confidence that we have in love then the less hospitable we want and know how to be.

Often we complain about the world being cruel but we too are often being cruel. We are push everyone away in our expressions of doubt and loneliness. Hand out the Expressions of Doubt and Loneliness page. Quickly go over the list and then read aloud the first Hospitality Failure scenario. Have the group match the Expressions of Doubt and Loneliness to a corresponding Hospitality Failure, work out the remedy and revise the situation into a "hospitality success". Read the next scenario and repeat until you've run out of time.

Expressions of Doubt and Loneliness:

1. **All or Nothing:** Believing work and/or relationships need to perfect or that they are no good; you beat yourself and others up over trivial things, not being thankful for the gifts that outweigh any trials.
 - Accept that God has chosen to uphold and magnify an imperfect world – that's life. Work with what He's given you. Count your blessings.
2. **Overgeneralizing:** Hesitating, in belief that bad past experiences will recur; doubting the mercy of God.
 - Be present to the current moment. Don't think about the past. Recall that God is good and that He is more present to you than you are even to yourself.
3. **Mindreading:** Thinking that you know someone's thoughts .
 - Remember that an assumption is just an assumption. There is no possible way to really know anyone's mind unless they directly tell you what they are thinking.
4. **Catastrophizing:** Envisioning and anticipating the worst to happen.
 - Remember that God is in control and He will never give you anything that you cannot handle. Pray for a clear perspective and pray for courage and help to fight the evil you face everyday.
5. **Minimizing/Filtering:** Giving attention to the bad things and downplaying or disregarding the good things.
 - Count on the good things first and foremost. Make a point to look for the good, look for God first.
6. **Magnifying/ Exaggerating:** Amplifying an issue; believing that things are much worse than they really are.
 - Recall what you know to have actually happened. Be creative rather than destructive: respond with love and charity in any situation rather than choosing self-righteousness and overreacting.
7. **Fortune Telling:** Foretelling a bad situation, even when you have no proof that bad things will happen.
 - Believe that God wants the best for you and that His love for you is greater than your own. Let go and let God. Look at the gifts he has given you and use them for good.

Hospitality Failures:

- John is a university student invited to move in with a family during his last semester. After thankfully accepting the offer and moving in, he realizes that the husband and wife have become strangers to each other and want John to satisfy their needs for affection. John soon feels pulled apart by the questions: Are you for him or for me? Are you on her side or my side?
- Kyle and his little sister Eulalia have generally gotten along but when it comes obeying their parents Eulalia always redirects the attention to Kyle by being the first to point out what Kyle has done wrong and cries when Kyle picks on her at all. Kyle has watched her get away with so many things while He's gotten most of the punishment and repercussions and he's getting sick of it. This week especially, Eulalia is acting really innocent and has been really quiet so Kyle has decided to keep his distance from her. She keeps bothering Kyle to hangout but he knows that would be a great opportunity for her to set him up. He has decided to not take any chances and maybe this will teach her a lesson if she really wants his attention. Kyle has decided that she really isn't worth the trouble anymore.
- Kim is single, forty years old, working, living alone and has invited her niece to stay with her for the summer. Kim even accumulated some vacation time so that she could use it to spend some more time with her niece. Gladly accepting, her niece moved in a couple weeks ago but is hardly ever available at the house. She is always taking off in the evenings, staying out late and then waking up around noon to watch some TV before she goes out again after dinner. Kim is now a bit irritated and upset because the girl she wanted to get to know better does not seem to be interested in getting to know her. Kim would like to ask her to leave but does not want to encourage any more distance between their relationship. Kim is now considering all the things she could possibly do to keep busy this summer and distract herself away from her house guest's ill manners.
- Betsy attends a small private school and has grown up with one very close friend there. In the cafeteria, Betsy waits for her friend, as she always has, only to notice that this friend is already making her way through the lunch line with another girl. Confused, Betsy makes her way through the lunch line and sits down to meet this new girl. Both are very friendly toward Betsy when she joins them and then they pick up talking about a TV show that Betsy has never seen. Betsy listens but feels left out and doesn't contribute anything to the conversation.

Answer Key:

- **Husband and Wife's hospitality failures:**
 - *All or Nothing - If you don't give me all your attention then you don't care about me.*
 - *Overgeneralizing - John should spend his quality time with me.*
 - *Catastrophizing - I'll never have an intimate relationship again.*
 - *Fortune Telling - I'm going to always be lonely if I don't always have attention of others.*
- **Kyle's hospitality failures:**
 - *All or Nothing - Treat me with respect or I'll never respect you.*
 - *Overgeneralizing - The only reason I get into trouble is because of her.*
 - *Catastrophizing - She is trying to sabotage me.*
 - *Minimizing - She's just acting nice so she won't get into trouble.*
 - *Fortune Telling - If I'm nice to her now then I'll pay the price later.*
- **Kim's hospitality failures:**
 - *All or Nothing - Show me appreciation or I can't appreciate you.*
 - *Overgeneralizing - She's going to do this every day.*
 - *Mindreading - She thinks I'm old and boring.*
 - *Catastrophizing - If I tell her how I'm feeling then we'll never speak again.*
 - *Minimizing - If I just ignore her when she's busy than all of our problems will go away.*
 - *Magnifying - All she does is party and I can't relate.*
- **Betsy's hospitality failures:**
 - *All or Nothing - If you don't give me all your attention then you don't care about me.*
 - *Mindreading - They could care less about whether I was their friend or not.*
 - *Catastrophizing - If I don't watch this show then I won't have any friends.*
 - *Minimizing - They are just acting friendly so that I won't get mad at them.*
 - *Magnifying - I've lost my best friend to this new girl.*