



Fr. Peter Mermier



Volume 22, Issue 2

#### Wellspring - Fransalian Center for Spirituality Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales

September 15, 2023

Be Your Best Give Your Best Do Your Best and Leave the Rest to the Lord." Fr. Gus



MAILING ADDRESS: P.O. Box 440 Whitehouse, TX 75791

**TELEPHONE:** 903-839-1280

#### EMAIL:

retreatsatwellspring@gmail.com frgusmsfs@gmail.com

#### WEBSITES:

www.wellspringcommunity.net www.retreatsatwellspring.com

jod'a love steadfast... unwavering and unconquerable

### **EDITORIAL**

Wellspring Community has been on a journey this year trying to understand the nature of God's steadfast love and striving to cultivate this virtue as an integral part of life. Steadfast love is constant, enduring, unconditional, unconquerable, unfailing, unchanging, sacrificial and eternal. This is the nature of covenant love, the nature of God's Love and the nature and character of God. God doesn't simply love. He is Love and He cannot be otherwise. We are called to love as God does – to image God and God's way. Learning to love God's way is a life-long process. We must strive to let "steadfast love" become our way of being, living and acting and let it define who we are.

I have heard the story of a man whose hobby was growing roses. When he worked in his rose garden, he always whistled. It seemed to everyone that he was whistling much louder than was needed for his own enjoyment. One day a neighbor asked him why he always whistled so loudly. The man then took the neighbor into his home to meet his wife. The woman was not only an invalid but was completely blind as well. The man, you see, was whistling, not for his benefit, but for the benefit of his wife. He wanted his blind wife to know that he was nearby, and that she was not alone. How attentive, mindful, and vigilant this man was and how other-centered his love was!

This is a beautiful story of steadfast love which Wellspring Community is striving to understand and nurture this year. Steadfast love is constant, enduring, unfailing, unconquerable, unselfish, other-centered and sacrificial love. It is a gift to know people who are steadfast, people whose inner strength urges them to share their love generously, even when it costs them much. Their lives tell us that it is possible to love as God does, as Jesus did, though not easy, and that it is not only possible, but urgent and necessary to be determined, resolute, tenacious, unfailing, unyielding - steadfast in loving. Faithful people reflect God's faithfulness and steadfast people reflect God's steadfastness. Steadfastness is the character of a person who simply loves and inspires a sense of confidence and trust in another, even when things don't seem to be going well. This issue of "Spiritual Moments" brings you articles and reflections on "steadfast love." It is my hope that these articles will inspire our readers to cultivate steadfast love, loving God's way as their way of being, living and acting.

Fr. Gus Tharappel, msfs







### LOVING GOD'S WAY

One of the of the most important learnings for me through my fifty three years of ministry has been that a person's vision of God has a huge influence on her or his life. In fact, a person's vision of anything determines his or her relationship with the perceived object. The vision of God inspires and moves certain people to embrace challenging and outstanding lives of love, dedication, devotion, service, compassion, justice, generosity, prayer and contemplation. Some people's vision of God leads

them to doubt, insecurity, anxiety, depression, self-hate and fear. There are others whose vision of God leads them to judgmental, hateful, abusive, destructive and violent behavior even to the point of committing unimaginable crimes.

Our vision of who God is and what God is like is tremendously important and it's often significantly shaped by our parent's view of God as well as by any preaching, teaching, or education that we have had. Our vision of God is formed and shaped by what our parents, pastors, and teachers shared with us about God. What they have shared can be life giving, inspiring, comforting, and appealing or it can be disturbing, confusing, scary, or a turn off.

If our vision of God is "steadfast love, loving kindness, all-embracing love, unconditional love" and other similar concepts, our life will reflect the "freedom of the children of God" as St. Paul teaches us. (Romans 8:21) If we believe God to be angry, vengeful, and judgmental that will form us and shape us in a whole different way.

A little boy was fascinated watching different colored helium balloons float up to the sky at a county fair. He asked his father if the orange balloons would also rise. His father smiled and said, "It is not the color of the balloon that makes it rise. It is what is inside that makes it rise."

It is what is deep within us that holds us together, empowers us to stand our ground and keep rising when we fall. St. Paul tells us, "The love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us." (Romans 5:5) He also tells us, "I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38-39) Nothing is an obstacle to men and women of faith and determination. And nothing is impossible for those who are steadfast in loving God and God's people.

Jesus said to his disciples, "I give you a new commandment: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another." (John 13:34-35) The psalmist says, "The Lord has not withheld his steadfast love from me." (Psalm 66:20) We are called to love others God's way, as God loves us, as Jesus loves us, to reach out to others and "not to withhold" our love from others. We are called to give what we have received as gifts from the Lord. It is never sufficient to abstain from doing wrong.

love one mother

continued on page 4

#### continued from page 3

We are called to be good and to do good - a good word and a good deed proclaim who we are. We have many daily opportunities to share God's gift of love and life. We meet people who are hurting and bleeding and needing a "transfusion" of love. Selfless service, total giving, unconditional love – steadfast love is the call of the Gospel and the challenge of Christian living. It is this steadfast love that we must find deep within us and let it continue to mold and shape and transform our lives. Psalm 86:15 proclaims, "But you, O Lord, are a God merciful, gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness."



Through the heart of the city of Babylon ran a spacious boulevard. At one end of

it was the temple of the god, Bel, (known as Baal in the Old Testament) and at the other end was the temple of the god, Nebo. Once a year in a great ceremony, the position of these gods was interchanged. Their big statues were put on wagons and moved to their new site through the long, bumpy cobbled street. The prophet, second Isaiah, was among the exiles who would be given a holiday on that day. He must have stood on the sidewalk, watching the proceedings and listening to the comments of his fellow exiles about the gods falling off of their wagons. Isaiah (46:1-2) speaks of the gods themselves going into exile.

When the exiles finally returned to Jerusalem, rebuilt and dedicated the temple, the psalmist called them to thank God with their whole heart that they are not guided by these gilded Babylonian gods who couldn't even save themselves from falling off a wagon. Unlike the Babylonian gods who could only fall off wagons, our God has revealed himself as steadfast in loving kindness by carrying his people to safety. (Isaiah 46:3-4)

The exiles had an amazing discovery, a new vision of God: "The Babylonians and the Canaanites have to carry their gods on the shoulders of weak men. We don't have to carry our God. Our God carries us." They had a new and awesome vision of their God and that changed all their lives and relationships and gave the exiles freedom and joy. The psalmist says, "I have now experienced your hesed - steadfast love, loving kindness - for myself. The day is coming when all the rulers will abandon worship of Bel and Nebo and other false gods and worship Yahweh. (Psalm 85-86)

Some of us did not grow up hearing about God's nature as steadfast love. We heard about an angry, judgmental God who is just waiting to catch us in our mistakes, errors, or sin and seems almost eager to eternally punish people. We have heard about God keeping a book of records of our sins and failures which will be opened on judgement day. Yet we all want God to be merciful to us. We don't want God to "remember" our sins, but to remember us according to the Lord's mercy. Psalm 25:6-7 pleads with God, "Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love, do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness sake, O Lord." None of us wants to be remembered for our worst mistakes or faults or for things we did when we acted foolishly. We all want the Lord to see us through eyes of mercy and to remember us according to God's stead-

fast love, according to God's character more than our own. And we want to see our God as love, pure and simple, constant and enduring, unconquerable and unfailing, and we want to proclaim to the whole world: "Our God is steadfast love."

Remember, O LORD, Your tender mercies and Your lovingkindnesses, For they are from of old. Do not remember the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions; According to Your mercy remember me, For Your goodness' sake, O LORD. Psalm 25:6-7

Fr. Gus Tharappel, msfs

## A MOMENT WITH ST. FRANCIS DE SALES



"Bloom where you are planted" is a familiar and popular quote from St. Francis de Sales. Let us meditate on the whole quotation. "Truly charity has no limit; for the love of God has been poured into our hearts by His Spirit dwelling in each one of us, calling us to a life of devotion and inviting us to bloom in the garden where He has planted and directing us to radiate the beauty and spread the fragrance of His Providence."

"The love of God, poured into our hearts by His Spirit" is what makes blooming possible!

In the eleventh century, King Henry III of Bavaria grew tired of court life and the pressures of the monarchy. He experienced what we would call today, a "midlife crisis." He went to Prior Richard at the local monastery asking to be accepted as a contemplative, to spend the rest of his life in the monastery.

Prior Richard said, "Your Majesty, do you understand that the pledge here is obedience? That will be hard for you because you have been a king." King Henry said, "I understand. The rest of my life, I will be obedient to you, as Christ leads you." Prior Richard said, "Then I will tell you what to do. Go back to your throne and serve faithfully in the place where God has put you."

Fidelity, loyalty and obedience are great spiritual values. But they are not values lived out only in monasteries and religious houses. They are lived out where we are, where we live and work, where God has placed us.

#### God is faithful where God is. We are called to be faithful where we are.

Be still and listen to the advice of St. Francis de Sales.

"Bloom where you are planted."

and

#### "Go courageously to do whatever you are called to do."

Commit yourself to be faithful and bloom where you are now.

Loving God,

Bless me, Heal me, Grace me, Guide me, and Teach me that I may be faithful. I know you are. Empower me to meet the challenges of life, with love, courage and wisdom.

Amen

Fr. Gus Tharappel, msfs



### THE WILDERNESS TRAIL

We have a beautiful winding gravel trail through the piney woods of Wellspring. Throughout our facilities you often see the scripture verse, "Be Still and Know that I am God." (Psalm 46:10) Living in a fast paced world, it is important to take time to step away to be in the presence of God. A walk through our beautiful forest allows our visitors to slow down and bask in the Lord's presence in His creation. The sound of the birds, the feel of the gentle breeze blowing through the canopy of trees, the smell of the pine trees and the sights of the forest changing from season to season all speak of the majesty of God's creation. Our shrine and grounds are open each day to visitors and well wishers.



## STEADFAST LOVE

What does love look like? Love has hands to help others. It has feet to hasten to the poor and the needy. It has eyes to see misery and want. It has ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of others. That's what love looks like. Saint Augustine Acts of kindness are done not for a reward, not even thinking that it is done for the Lord, but it has become part of a person's nature.

These simple and yet inspiring words of Saint Augustine tells us that steadfast love is not an abstract idea or a philosophical construct or a theological position or a doctrine of the church. It is our nature...we are made of love and for love! Steadfast love must flow into our daily behavior patterns and find its way even into the little things we do for each other, especially for those in need. It reveals who we are as children of God and disciples of Jesus.

Jesus taught his followers about the need to be attentive, awake, watchful and vigilant because God breaks into our life at the least expected and even unexpected times, and often, through surprising events, people and situations. He gave them several parables to help them understand and appreciate the need to be vigilant. One of these parables is about the last judgement, "When the Son of Man comes in his glory..." as he says. (Matthew 25:31-46)

In this parable of the last judgement, Matthew invites us into a vivid imaginative courtroom scene where judgment of those who are worthy to be welcomed into eternal life is taking place. The highlight of the scene is the criteria for the judgment of worthiness: acts of mercy, of loving kindness and of generosity – steadfast love in action!

Loving persons do loving acts. Kind people do kind deeds. It is help in simple, ordinary things, a response to the daily needs of ordinary people: giving food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, comforting the sick – things that anyone can do, things that do not require training in skills or a degree or diploma from a university. It is not performance of miracles or preaching of great sermons or donations of large sums of money or holding high positions in society or any recognition offered to a person by the world, but in simple acts of loving kindness which has become part of the very nature and the character of a person.

God's love for us is so strong, so unconditional, so steadfast and so unfailing that God is always there in us, for us, with us, around us...always loving us and calling us to love! Acts of kindness are done not for a reward, not even thinking that it is done for the Lord, but it has become part of a person's nature. It is help which is uncalculating. In the parable, those who helped did not know that they were helping Christ and gaining merit for eternal life. And those who failed to help said, "If we had known it was you, we would have helped." Acts of loving kindness flow from loving hearts, from loving people without expecting praise, reward or merits...it is the nature and the character of loving people to do loving things in response to the simple, everyday needs of ordinary people. Steadfast love does flow into our daily behavior patterns and finds its way even into the little things we do for each other, especially for those in urgent need.

Four friends brought their paralyzed friend to see Jesus for healing. (Luke 5:17-26) They tried to bring him to Jesus but could not reach him because of the crowd, so they went up to the roof

continued on page 8

#### continued from page 7



and let him down in front of Jesus through the tiles. Jesus healed the man. What an amazing act of steadfast love. The many acts of kindness from bringing the paralyzed man to Jesus, going up the roof, lowering the mat, facing the crowd – all of these little acts of kindness made healing possible. We have daily opportunities to bring someone to Jesus. There are people, all around us, who are paralyzed physically, emotionally, socially or spiritually. There are people who need a transfusion of love. Even a little bit of steadfast love can make a huge difference in someone's life.

St. James advises us, "What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well.' but you do

not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it? So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead." (James 2:14-18) The wise man advises us, "Do not let loving kindness and fidelity leave you; bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart. Then will you win favor and esteem before God and human beings." (Proverbs 3:3)

A soldier who was a Christian made it his practice to conclude every day with Bible reading and prayer. As his fellow soldiers gathered in the barracks and retired for the night, he would kneel by his bunk and offer prayers to the Lord. The other soldiers saw this and began to mock and harass him. But one night the abuse went beyond verbal assault. As the soldier bowed before His Lord in prayer, one antagonist threw his boot through the dark and hit him in the face. The other soldiers snickered and jeered, hoping for a fight. But there was no retaliation. The next morning when the taunting soldier awoke, he was startled to discover something at the foot of his bed. For all to see, there were his boots, returned and polished. That is the Christian spirit taught by Jesus – going beyond "no retaliation, tolerance and turning the other cheek" to loving kindness, to unconquerable love – STEADFAST LOVE!

Deep down in every man, woman, and child, is the fundamental truth of God, of His Sacred Presence and of His Sacred Love. It may be obscured by many things, but it surely is there for us to touch, feel, experience, celebrate, contemplate and to live by it and share it with the world around us. We must discover the

treasure of steadfast love, buried deep within us and let it flow into our daily activities and relationships. It is the treasure in the field which a man found while doing his daily chores, the pearl of hidden beauty that a merchant found while searching for fine pearls – they found the treasure and the pearl worth all they had! St. Paul reminds us that we are earthen vessels holding the glory of God. (2 Corinthians 4:7) We must strive to be true to ourselves, to be authentic in all we say and do, to be men and women of integrity, to be steadfast in living our faith and in loving our God and giving ourselves generously to one another in love and service.

Fr. Gus Tharappel, msfs

We must strive to be true to ourselves, to be authentic in all we say and do, to be men and women of integrity, to be steadfast in living our faith and in loving our God

### **BE STILL MOMENT**

#### "I have stilled and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother." (Psalm 131:2)

#### The stilled and quieted soul finds confidence, freedom, peace, serenity...

Like the satisfied child who has stopped crying and is in its mother's arms, safe, secure, and peaceful, can "my soul be" in the presence of God. Prayer then needs no words, maybe not even thoughts...just a serene presence in His presence.

Sometimes we are apparently silent, and yet we have great discussions within us, struggling with imaginary partners or with ourselves. Calming our souls requires a kind of humility and simplicity. "I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me." says the psalmist. (Psalm 131:1)

Silence means recognizing that my worries can't do much. This also requires humility and simplicity. Silence means leaving to God what is beyond my reach and capacity. A moment of silence, even very short, is like a minute vacation, a holy stop, a sabbatical rest, a truce of worries.

The turmoil of our thoughts can be compared to the storm that struck the disciples' boat on the Sea of Galilee while Jesus was sleeping. Like them, we may be helpless, full of anxiety, and incapable of calming ourselves. But Christ is able to come to our help as well. As he rebuked the wind and the sea and "there was a great calm," he can also still or quiet our heart when it is agitated by fears and worries. (Mark 4) Remaining silent, we trust, hope, rest and be still in Him.

When God's word becomes "a sound of sheer silence," it is more efficient to change our hearts. The heavy storm on Mount Sinai was splitting rocks, but it was the sudden silence that spoke to Elijah, the prophet. God's silent word is able to break open human hearts of stone.

Silence and stillness make us ready for a new meeting with God. In silence and stillness, God's word can reach the hidden corners of our hearts. In silence and stillness, we stand before God, and the light of Christ will reach and heal and transform even what we are ashamed of and maybe even afraid of.

#### Be Still and Know That I am God Psalm 46:11

#### Fr. Gus Tharappel, msfs

MY HEART IS NOT PROUD, LORD MY EYES ARE NOT HAUGHTY; I DO NOT CONCERN MYSELF WITH GREAT MATTERS OR THINGS TOO WONDERFUL FOR ME. BUT I HAVE CALMED AND QUIETED MYSELF, I AM LIKE A WEANED CHILD WITH ITS MOTHER; LIKE A WEANED CHILD I AM CONTENT.

# STEADFAST LOVE IN ACTION

"Oh, I have days I lose the fight, try my best but just don't get it right. When I talk a talk that I don't walk and miss the moments right before my eyes. A little more like mercy...a little more like patience...a little more like Jesus, a little less like me."

This popular Christian song speaks to me about "steadfast love," the virtue that we are studying this year at Wellspring. Jesus calls us to love one another as He loves us. (John 13:34) His love for us is steadfast! I want to grow in this virtue and I know that I can do it only with God's grace. Loving family, friends, and others that I encounter offer me many opportunities to be a loving person and be steadfast in loving.

As I read and reflect on the lives and missionary activities of the holy men and women of our history throughout the year, I am inspired by their character and the virtue that helped them to be saintly. In July, I read a small article in the Magnificat on St. Elizabeth of Portugal, whose Feast Day was July 5. She was married, at an incredibly young age, to King Denis of Portugal. She bore him two children.

The king was often traveling about his kingdom. While the king was away Elizabeth tried to help the poor of the kingdom. She relieved their suffering by providing food and clothing to the poorest. Even when she was made aware of the king's several illegitimate children, her heart was tender to these children. She often sent financial support to help them. When the elderly king became ill, Elizabeth cared for him. Her kindhearted care of him on his death bed won his heart for Christ. Elizabeth's love was steadfast and a good example of going the extra mile.

It is inspiring to read about saints like Elizabeth from the past. However, I am even more encouraged and inspired when I meet, hear or read about ordinary people who live extraordinary lives. One such example was from a young couple I met a few years ago. This couple heard about a young baby boy who needed a temporary home. His birth mother was single and struggling to provide for him. The mother sought advice from a social worker who helped her to investigate temporary foster care for her son, Andy. She asked the court system to find parents who could care for her son. After counseling and much prayer my friends entered an open adoption with this single mother. Over the years little Andy's photos were shared with his birth mother. Andy also had supervised visits with his birth mother. In time, his birth mother had been able to finish her education, married and was able to provide for herself and her other two children.

Last year, Andy turned eighteen. His birth mother invited him to a party at her house to celebrate. At this party she asked him to come and live with her and his half siblings. Her birthday gift to him was a sports car to pro-



vide him with transportation to and from school. In the fall Andy would begin his senior year of high school. Andy was now eighteen and could decide where he wanted to live. This offer seemed like such a good deal to Andy!

Later that week, Andy talked to his adoptive parents and told them he was leaving their home. He said he was going to live with his birth mother. They watched him pack his belongings and drive away. Part of their heart drove away too. Andy started his senior year at a new school and with many new freedoms. Things were going great in the fall until Andy was called into the principal's office at his new school. His grades had fallen so low it looked like he might not graduate in the spring. Andy was very worried.

Then, like the prodigal son, he remembered his adoptive parents and gave his dad *(continued on next page)* 

Let us pray for the gift of love with the Heart of Christ. Give us a New Heart, Q Lord."

a call. After much discussion and prayer Andy asked if he could come back home. With open arms and a few conditions, they welcomed him home. Andy continues to see his birth mom from time to time. She made provisions for him when he was young and things were difficult. He is most thankful for his adoptive parents and their steadfast love and mercy.

My friends' hearts had been stretched to the limit. Yet they remained steadfast in their love and great kindness to Andy. This modern-day true story is an example to me about steadfast love, mercy, and kindness.

*The Magnificat* July prayers also spoke to me about steadfast love. Here are a few examples.

#### "Lord, make us faithful as you are faithful."

-when what you ask of us is more difficult than our own plans...

-when our love has worn thin...

-when our love has grown lukewarm...

"Let us pray for the gift of love with the Heart of Christ. Give us a new heart, O Lord."

Patricia Cussen

# ANSWERING THE CALL TO LOVE

A few weeks ago I was in Dallas visiting my daughter. As I was leaving Dallas to return home, I was waiting at a stoplight when I saw a man and his young daughter on the side of the street selling flowers. It was a hot day, and as they waited in the shade for someone to buy their flowers, I watched the sweet interaction between the father and daughter.

I immediately thought I should buy some flowers, but I hesitated. I was in the far lane of traffic and I didn't particularly like the flowers. While I was deciding what to do, the stoplight changed to green. I missed the opportunity. Then I heard a small voice urging me to make a U-turn and go back but I didn't. I really wished I had. What I saw was a man selling flowers in the heat of the day to support his family. I had an opportunity to help...even if I didn't like the flowers, and I didn't stop. I am still thinking about it weeks later.

Today, I was driving into Wellspring and I noticed that the elderly neighbor's trash can was still out. It should have been put away yesterday. I was hurrying to work, and my first thought was that I didn't want to take the time to walk over and take her trash can up to her house. But today I listened to that small voice that called me to help. I could not walk away. It didn't cost me much to help today. I hesitated but I listened to the voice ,which I believe is the Holy Spirit, calling me to love and service.

I think we are given opportunities each day to show love and compassion to those around us. In one of Fr. Gus' articles in this journal, he reminds us:

#### "We are made of love and for love."

I am encouraged by that reminder that we are made of love because we are made in the image of God and we are called to love and service to others. The motto for the Fransalian priests is: LIVE JESUS. I believe there is no greater way to live like Jesus than to love others with the steadfast love of God.

It is often a struggle for me as I am in a hurry trying to catch up on the many things I must do at work and for my family and community. They are all good things that must be done and I find joy and fulfillment in doing them. But I sometimes wonder if I am missing opportu-

nities to share God's love with others beyond family and work situations because I am too busy checking things off my "to do list." As we continue to study the virtue of steadfast love at Wellspring this year, I will strive more to share the steadfast love of God with the world around me beyond family and friends.

Only a life lived in service to others is worth living. Albert Einstein

Bari Walker





Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord. I Corinthians 15:58

STEADFAST LOVE DEMANDS A LIFE LONG HABIT OF SAYING "YES" TO GOD'S PLAN AND PURPOSE

Though our feelings come and go, God's love for us does not.



STAND YOUR GROUND TRUSTING IN THE GRACE OF GOD AND BE STEADFAST UNDER PRESSURE, UNDER ADVERSE CONDITIONS

Full of life and energy or tired and weary, let us choose to be steadfast in loving our God and doing his will.

"Spiritual Moments" is published each year by Wellspring, Fransalian Center for Spirituality. Its main purpose is to share "spiritual moments" and articles on various aspects of spirituality along with information on programs and events at Wellspring. It is circulated, primarily, among the many volunteers, participants, friends and wells-wishers of Wellspring and the Fransalian Missionaries.

Editor: Fr. Augustine Tharappel

Managing Editor: Bari Walker