

Lenten Virtual Retreat Reflection 2021
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1. Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink? (Mt 20:22)
2. But who do you say that I am? (Mt 16:15)
3. Do you also want to leave? (Jn 6:67)
4. Do you believe now? (Jn 16:31)
5. So you could not keep watch with me for one hour? (Mt 26:40)
6. Will you lay down your life for me? (Jn 13:38)
7. Are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss? (Lk 22:48)

So, it occurred to me Friday morning, following the news from the night before that my cousin, Thomas Chapman, took his own life Tuesday night or early Wednesday morning, and as I was looking over potential resources for Lay Dominican formation for our province, that all of our Lenten Virtual Retreat questions are so very relevant to each of us in a singular way: as each of us are meditating on these questions, we are also preparing to make our professions, either temporary or final, to the Master of the Order, all the while our enemy, the father of lies, himself, accuses us, tempts us, sows doubt in our minds, all to knock us off track. We are attacked each and every day, without reprieve. He tries to scare us off the path, so we spend eternity in the fiery Gehenna with him, perpetually separated from God. The Holy Spirit has moved me to address each of our questions today as they pertain to making my own final profession in the midst of spiritual warfare.

1. **Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?** Lord Jesus, I don't know what the future holds for me, but you do. I trust you completely with my life. The cup that you drank for me, the price you paid for me to spend eternity with you, the invitation you personally sent to me, how could I refuse? You say that I can drink this cup; I believe you. I know I am weak; I know that I need you much more than I admit. You know these things too. I cannot drink it without your help every step of the way. The evil one attacks me at my weakest points, Lord. He tells me that I cannot follow you, that I cannot drink this cup, that I am not strong enough to persevere. Lord, in you, all things are possible. Strengthen me so that I may stay the course. Increase my fortitude to refuse the temptations of the enemy; increase my wisdom so I may always remember that he is the father of lies, that he lies to me, even right now. You tasked us with proclaiming the Gospel throughout the world, making disciples of all nations. By following you, we are to be the contradictions in this world, like you with the Pharisees. You demonstrated by words and actions what holiness truly is and we are to do the same. We are to preach the Gospel in a world that denies God, a world that dictates its own version of truth, in a world full of heresy and hatred, a world that rejects the very notion that life has meaning beyond the tangible. This is the cup that I am offered, rancid indeed, its flavor. Can I drink this cup of contradiction to the world? I can because you created me to do so.
2. **But who do you say that I am?** I know in my heart, in my soul, that you are the Son of God, my Redeemer, my Savior, my King. I know this because of the many miracles that you have performed in me. My complete and utter change of heart, my deep conversion, is the greatest miracle of all. My blindness to your reality is cured. My complete rejection of your existence entirely reversed course. I am convinced that you are the Son of God, not because the Gospels told me so, but because you came into my heart profoundly, completely, perfectly. You not only opened my eyes and my heart, but you placed on my soul your indelible marks. I am yours. Now, you have called me to serve you in the spirit of St. Dominic, to set the world on fire with *Veritas*.

You've enlightened my mind with knowledge, wisdom, and understanding. These gifts are among the tools that I need to preach well. You've prepared me all of my life for this mission. How can I not know who you are? I want to preach with fluency, to promote understanding. I thirst to bring souls to you for redemption. You are the Savior of the world.

3. **Do you also want to leave?** Lord, I do not want to leave. As St. Peter responded to this same question, I also ask, "To whom shall we go?" There is no one else, yet I find myself running away from you at times, especially, these days in the midst of this COVID trial. It's very easy for me to fall to temptation, to laziness, to things that do no good for my soul, because I no longer feel free to worship you. In reality, it tests my faith and I am afraid. I don't attend Mass in-person on Sundays because I don't want the door shut on me, as has actually happened to people at my own parish. I could not take that type of rejection. I don't want others to experience that hurtful and unnecessary scourging because I chose to attend. These times make me realize, in a very tangible way, how much I need my Church, my community, frequent confession and spiritual guidance. I miss each of these greatly. I can see plainly how important they are for my faith to endure. One thought that occurred to me is this may be why you instituted the Eucharist; we need your very real presence, your body, blood, soul, and divinity hidden in each crumb. It sustains our faith. It provides the spiritual nourishment we need to endure. No, I don't want to leave, Lord. I miss you too much already. Please, increase my faith so that I may withstand this trial. The evil one tempts me, he tells me that I cannot endure. That I am doomed to spend eternity in hell, each time I stumble. I don't believe him, but he leaves little crumbs of doubt on the path back to him. Help me, Lord. Rescue me from his snares.
4. **Do you believe now?** I do. I don't merely believe, but I am convinced that you are the way to eternal life. Before I came to the Church, I did not know the truth. I was ignorant to so many things. I was empty; I hungered for fullness. What I did not know, is who you are. I think that is the missing piece for so many who are lost. I know it's dangerous to be this contradiction in the world, to preach the truth, to be your disciple in the spirit of St. Dominic. It was dangerous for you too, for your apostles and disciples through the years; so many were martyred, imprisoned, or exiled. If you are not the way, the truth, and the life, then these many thousands, perhaps millions, who lived and died to bring your message to the lost would be in vain. I cannot believe that. It isn't logical. Blessed are those who suffer persecution on your account. I do believe this, with all of my being. I see evil everywhere and it's frightening to be a contradiction in this sea of wickedness, but I know I must. Lord, please, sustain me in this fight.
5. **So you could not keep watch with me for one hour?** I see this in relation to my prayer life. This is the question that I constantly hear in my soul, especially in these days of COVID. I have no excuse and I often bring this guilt to confession. I so need time with you. I hunger and thirst for you. When I pray during Adoration, I am often distracted by what is going on behind me. My patience and attention are tested and I fail, even in your presence. I am so ashamed of this, and just like Adam and Eve, I hide. Sometimes, I won't attend, and I drift father away from you. When we have Mass after Adoration, I will always, to the best of my ability, attend despite all of the distractions, but when we have Word and Communion, I don't. It's no replacement for Mass. I fear that this "service" has become the alternative in the absence of our priest. It isn't. Word and Communion services are supposed to be few and far between, only to be used in extraordinary circumstances. I've also read that the Bishop is to be consulted for each one and only on his approval each time is it to take place. I cannot be a part of this misuse. Help me, Lord, to fill this time that I would normally attend Adoration, seek Confession, and Mass, these three very holy hours that I long for so much, help me to keep them holy each week. I want to pray more but my discipline fails me. Keep asking me that question, Lord, for it does help me keep on the path. I truly want to keep watch with you.

6. **Will you lay down your life for me?** I want to say yes, but I find myself falling short of giving my life over to you completely. It scares me to think that we could very well see martyrs in our own country, in my own lifetime. Communism is on the rise here, as you know. I think this could very well be the consequence of insufficiently consecrating Russia to the Blessed Virgin Mary in a timely manner. Their errors have been sown and now we are suffering the consequences. This consecration could only have been done by a pope because he is the only one with the apostolic authority to do so. I cannot dwell on what has not been done. I hope to have the grace to lay down my life for you, Lord, should it be my future. In another way, I want to lay down my life for you in the mission of preaching the Gospel in the world. I have given up many of my own aspirations already. So, in a sense, I have given my life to you, yet I feel like I have given nothing. O Lord, it's so easy to become confused. Please, take my hand and lead me through this darkness, this period of uncertainty, that I may, once again, be that fire in world, the preacher that you created me to be.
7. **Are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?** Oh, this question hits right at the heart. Am I giving you lip service? Do I really love you, first, above all things or am I merely saying it? I wrestle with this question often. I think it hits my sore spot called authenticity. The evil one wreaks havoc on me with this, too. He accuses me by telling me that I don't really love God more than I love my life, more than I love my family, or even ice cream. As often as I refute his allegations, the doubt is still sown. The snare is set. The opportunity to resist God is presented and I fall for it too often. Lord Jesus, I do not want to betray you. Deep in my heart I know this to be true. Thank you for the Church Triumphant who prays for me, guides me, intercedes for me, protects me from the enemy. Keep me true to you, Lord.

Each of these questions hits me right in the heart, in my soul, in my mind, every part of me, every time I read them. I can drink this cup precisely because you are the Son of God, my Savior, my Redeemer, my King and you say that I can. I don't want to leave because I believe that what you have revealed to me is the Truth. You are the way, the truth, and the life. I struggle keeping alert during the watch, and despite that weakness you still laid down your life for me. I must do the same, ever watchful that I could too easily betray you with a kiss. Spiritual warfare is real. The consequences matter. The devil really is prowling about the world, seeking the ruin of souls, so he may devour them. I do not want to spend eternity without you, Lord. I look forward every Easter to renew my baptismal promises. I reject Satan and all his empty show. I believe that you are the only begotten Son of God. I give myself to you freely. Sanctify me, Lord, that I may be an instrument of your holy will.

St. Michael the Archangel, guard me from the snares of the devil.

St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, help me to always recognize the truth and pursue it.

St. Dominic, guide me to be a tenacious preacher in the service of God.

Blessed Mary, Ever Virgin, protect me from the evil one.

Lord Jesus, bless me in this journey.

Amen.