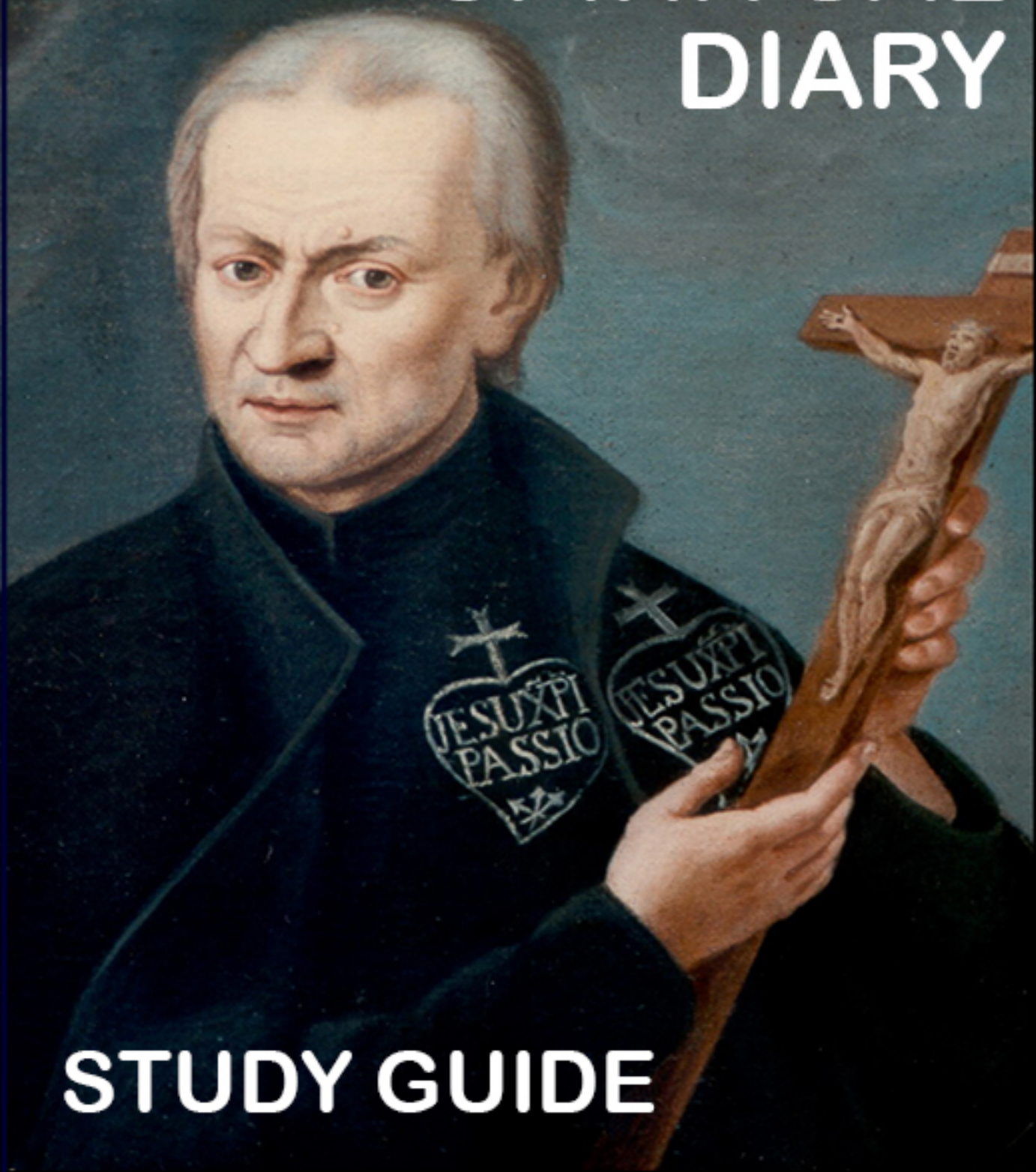


# SPIRITUAL DIARY



**STUDY GUIDE**

# **PRAYER & STUDY GUIDE**

**Based on**

***SPIRITUAL DIARY OF  
ST. PAUL OF THE CROSS***

***Translated by Reverend Silvan Rouse, CP***

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# ST. PAUL OF THE CROSS

## THE SPIRITUAL DIARY

Study based on *The Spiritual Diary of St. Paul of the Cross* as translated by Reverend Silvan Rouse, C.P.

### I. General Information

St. Paul of the Cross on November 23, 1720 began a 40 day retreat, authorized by the Bishop of Alessandria. During this time of prayer and fasting, Paul kept a daily diary in which he records his moods, feeling, insights, inspirations, joys, difficulties and reflections. From this retreat, Paul is led by God to the founding of the Congregation of the Passion and to the writing of a rule of life that will become the foundation of the Passionists.

Paul's diary, written in his native language, has been translated into English by Silvan Rouse, C.P. Father Rouse, in his introduction to the diary, explains the background, origin, history, style and relevance of the diary. This background material is important for a better understanding of Paul's work and should be read before beginning this study.

The study format places the 40 days into eight, two hour prayer/study sessions. A particular group may wish to spend more time on certain portions of the diary than others or spend more time than the eight sessions. The questions, observations or insights outlined for discussion can be modified or arranged to suit the needs of a study group.

### II. Approach

The purpose of this study guide is to assist in maximizing the personal benefits for each member of a prayer/study group from God's inspirations in Paul's diary. The discussion questions or discussion generators are based on the premise that attempting to understand the heart and mind of St. Paul is a practical way of attempting to experience his insights into God's will.

As you read the diary and share thoughts, observations and questions with each other, you are asked to place yourself in St. Paul's situation by trying to understand his experiences and relating them to your life as Paul did to his life. What did he feel? What did he mean by the words he uses to express his experiences? How did he understand the work of God in his life? Who is God for Paul? What approaches to prayer did Paul use and what were the results for him? How do you understand Paul's experiences and can you relate to them or to similar experiences in your life?

For each group, there is the coordinator who schedules members of the group to facilitate study sessions. Each person in the group should be given the opportunity to be a facilitator. The facilitator's task is to select people to read a day or two from the Diary; allow and encourage the group to share their ideas, thoughts, and feelings; and ensure that everyone has an opportunity to participate. When a particular question or observation has been reasonably discussed and shared, the facilitator moves the group to the next question or discussion.

It is not necessary to cover all of the discussion questions. The group may spend the entire study time on one area and/or one question. The important aspect of our study is that the sharing is meaningful both spiritually and from the standpoint of building community. The questions are provided to assist the group. If other approaches or directions are more meaningful and enlightening, they should be pursued.

### II. Meeting Format

The format outlined below is a general guide that has been found to be effective in small groups. After a group has been together for a while it will develop its own personality and its approaches may

vary from meeting to meeting.

The important elements in these groups are that prayer is spiritually meaningful to people in the group; study and sharing are substantive and effective; and positive community building is fostered. The role of group coordinators is to ensure that these elements are maintained and to call the group back if it strays.

### Agenda

- A. Gathering/Greeting
- B. Opening Prayer...Readings...Meditation
- C. Study...Sharing with break
- D. Closing Prayer
- E. Hospitality

### Time

10 minutes  
15 minutes  
75 minutes  
5 minutes  
15 minutes  
2 hours

In essence, all time spent together comes under the general category of prayer and community building. The above outline reflects the approximate time formally devoted to each area.

## **III. Prayer Guide**

Prayer time is essential to community life and it must be well prepared and well lead. All members of the group should have the opportunity to be the prayer leader. For some who have had experience with the role of leading prayer, it may not be necessary to use the following guide. However, this guide can usefully assist in facilitating small group prayer.

Environment is an important part of prayer. Such items as a crucifix or cross, candles, pictures, music and other symbols are very helpful in focusing prayer and assisting in meditation.

Meditation or contemplation are an important part of our community prayer time. Reflective silence, Taize, silence with background music, or other meditative approaches can be used. The more we become comfortable with silence in group prayer; the more we will experience spiritual growth in community through the work of the Holy Spirit.

The group coordinators are responsible for assigning individuals to lead prayer at each meeting and to assist anyone who is new or uncomfortable with the prayer leader role.

An optional approach to small group prayer:

- A. *Opening Prayer* - Alternatives: The opening prayer for the following Sunday's mass; the prayer for the day from the Book of Christian prayer; a prayer from one of the many excellent books of prayer available through a Christian bookstore; or extemporaneous prayer.
- B. *An Old Testament Psalm Reading* - Suggested psalms: 8, 19, 33, 46, 65, 67, 84, 96, 98, 100, 111; 128, 138, 145, 146, 147, and 148
- C. *A reading from Scripture* - The Gospel or second reading from the following Sunday mass or a reading from an inspirational text related to the study topic for the day.

D. *Meditative/Contemplative Time* - 5 minutes or more suggested

E. *Closing Prayer* - A brief prayer concludes the reflective time before entering the study period. Prayers asking for the guidance of the Holy Spirit and blessings on the activity of the group are particularly appropriate.

After the study time is completed,

F. *Prayers of the Faithful* - (*Begin with opening prayer*) A time for the community to offer to God its prayers of petition and intentions. General prayer for church and civic leaders, the needy, the CPP community and the Passionists, the sick and the dead are always appropriate.

G. *The Lord's Prayer*

H. *Closing Prayer* - Appropriate prayer might be the Passionist prayer for the season; concluding prayer for the day from the Christian Book of Prayer; a closing song; or prayer from any source related to the study topic.

God's blessings are with each of us as we begin to study the Diary of St. Paul of the Cross.

Bob Link, June 2000

## Meeting # 1

### Diary of St. Paul of the Cross

### *Study Guide*

...November 23 thru November 25, 1720...

Read prior to meeting: *The diary text, for November 23, 24 and 25*

On November 23, 1720, Paul Danei began his forty day retreat to pray and discern his “call” from God. Paul lived in a narrow, damp room next to the sacristy of the Church of Sts. Charles and Ann in Castellazzo, Italy. He fasted on bread and water and slept on vine branches. Paul wrote a diary of these forty days in which he shares his insights, inspirations, thoughts and feelings.

For the eight meetings of this study, participants are encouraged to place themselves with St. Paul in that room and in those circumstances. What was Paul thinking? How did he feel? How was the Holy Spirit working in him? What guidance was he receiving and what directions did he have from God for the future? In the experience of Paul’s seminal retreat, can we gain insight as to how God works in our lives to inspire, direct, and reveal His will? Our search and study of St. Paul is not simply for historical interest or to understand the genesis of the charisms of the Congregation of the Passion, but to be able to apply these spiritual insights to our own lives and relationship with God.

Read aloud at the meeting: Diary text for November 23, 24 & 25

#### **Discussion:**

1. On his first day; Paul was “interiorly afflicted” with a kind of “melancholy”. Discuss Paul’s feelings and experience. Can you empathize with what he was experiencing? Have you had a similar experience which you can describe?
2. What does Paul mean when he talks about being “recollected”?
3. Paul knew that his prayer was purifying and he did not need to taste other consolation. Was this an intellectual understanding or a knowledge of his spirit? Do we have any ways of discerning Paul’s understanding?
4. On the second day, Paul had his usual “interior peace”. In Philippians 4:7, Paul the Apostle talks about a “peace which is beyond all understanding”. Is this the peace that Paul was experiencing? How can we describe or begin to grasp the experience of this peace?
5. On November 25, Paul had no feeling in his prayer and was distracted. It is probably safe to say that each of us has had the same experience on more than one occasion. There is a sense of anger and frustration in Paul at this time. What does our own experience tell us that he was going through?
6. How was God working in Paul’s life during these first three days? What other aspects of these three days would you like to discuss?

## Meeting #2

### Diary of St. Paul of the Cross

#### *Study Guide*

...November 26 thru November 28, 1720...

Read prior to meeting: *The diary text, for November 26, 27 and 28*

Recalling St. Paul's circumstances on his forty day retreat, please place yourself with Paul in that small, damp room. What was he feeling, experiencing and thinking? Ask St. Paul to enlighten you. How was the Holy Spirit working with him, guiding him? What was Paul learning about God's will for his future?

Since we study and search for more than history or the beginnings of a religious community, how are God's gifts and inspiration to Paul relevant to our own lives and relationship to God? Paul's experience was not meant for him and his time alone, but for us as well.

Read aloud at the meeting: Diary text for November 26, 27 & 28

#### **Discussion:**

1. Paul felt very close to the suffering Jesus and discussed Jesus' pain with Him. How have you reflected on the sufferings of Jesus in your own prayer life? How do you perceive your own failures as affecting the suffering Jesus?
2. Paul experienced melancholy or gloom as he reflected on Jesus' suffering, however he says that his heart remained at peace. Have you experienced this seeming contradiction of depression/gloom and peace occurring at the same time? What spiritual condition or experience is happening in this situation?
3. In the fourth day of his retreat, Paul begins to have ideas about writing a rule for the Poor of Jesus. At times, w particular course of action or ministry?
4. Paul speaks of a "desire for suffering." This is a strange concept to most people in our time. What could Paul mean? How did he live out this desire? What should be our Christian approach to suffering today?
5. God inspires us in many ways. It seems safe to say that we receive God or hear God's voice as we are predisposed by personal gifts, prayer styles and experiences. Discuss God's means of inspiring you or the ways that you have experienced God's messages for your life.
6. On November 28, Paul was into his 6th day of fasting. Please share your experience of a food fast. How did the fast affect you spiritually? How did it affect you physically?
7. Do you have other thoughts, ideas, insights or questions about these three days.

## Meeting #3

### Diary of St. Paul of the Cross

#### *Study Guide*

...November 29 thru December 3, 1720...

Read prior to meeting: *The diary text, for November 29, 30 & December 1, 2, and 3*

Recalling St. Paul's circumstances on his forty day retreat, please place yourself with Paul in that small, damp room. What was he feeling, experiencing and thinking? Ask St. Paul to enlighten you. How was the Holy Spirit working with him, guiding him? What was Paul learning about God's will for his future?

Since we study and search for more than history or the beginnings of a religious community, how are God's gifts and inspiration to Paul relevant to our own lives and relationship to God? Paul's experience was not meant for him and his time alone, but for us as well.

Read aloud at the meeting: Diary text for November 29, 30 & December 1, 2, & 3

#### **Discussion:**

1. Paul explains what his distractions in prayer are like. What are your experiences with distractions in prayer?
2. Paul, with his distractions, knows that his "soul always remains fixed in God." How can Paul have consolation that his soul is fixed in God when his mind is distracted? Is this awareness one that can be understood by the mind or logically?
3. The will is Paul's strength. How do you understand the strength that Paul finds in his will related to prayer and relationship with God?
4. On November 30, Paul asks Jesus to grant him the "highest degree of humility." For Paul this seems to mean regarding himself as the lowest creature on earth. Please comment on Paul's assessment of what it means to be humble? What is humility for you in this time and in our generation?
5. "Everything is from God" is one of Paul's basic beliefs. How do you understand this statement of Paul? Discuss your feelings and/or thoughts about it.
6. After a week of fasting and retreat, Paul seems to greatly distracted, dry in his prayer and suffering (either mentally, spiritually or, possibly, physically). Many people would quit a retreat at this point. What keeps Paul going? How can we apply what we learn from this?
7. Discuss the effective aspects of retreats which you have experienced. For you, what do you think would be the optimum length of a retreat and why?



## Meeting #2

### Diary of St. Paul of the Cross

#### *Study Guide*

...December 4 thru December 8, 1720...

Read prior to meeting: *The diary text, for December 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8*

Recalling St. Paul's circumstances on his forty day retreat, please place yourself with Paul in that small, damp room. What was he feeling, experiencing and thinking? Ask St. Paul to enlighten you. How was the Holy Spirit working with him, guiding him? What was Paul learning about God's will for his future?

Since we study and search for more than history or the beginnings of a religious community, how are God's gifts and inspiration to Paul relevant to our own lives and relationship to God? Paul's experience was not meant for him and his time alone, but for us as well.

Read aloud at the meeting: Diary text for December 4, 5, 6, 7, 8

#### **Discussion:**

1. Paul had the consolation of an understanding of the joy of seeing God face to face. Can you imagine what that will be like? Please share if you have had spiritual insight about seeing God.
2. Throughout his retreat, Paul felt a deep sorrow at seeing the loss of so many souls. Have you ever felt this experience of Paul for the loss of souls? What does the charism of Paul suggest that we do with our concern for others' souls?
3. More than once during this retreat, Paul is inspired to pray for the new congregation that is in his heart. How has Paul's retreat foreshadowed the mission and ministry of this congregation?
4. Spiritually and physically, Paul is experiencing the suffering of Jesus. The tension between the soul and the body becomes clear in this experience. Discuss this tension and Paul's reaction to it.
5. How does the soul's receipt of strength through grace minister to the body? Can you share a personal experience of the soul giving strength to your body?
6. God's mercy and love abound. As sinners, we share Paul's unworthiness to receive God's mercy. What seems to allow Paul and ourselves to receive this mercy?
7. Discuss Paul's idea that the soul must become a kindred spirit with the suffering of Jesus.
8. Now that we have spent about two weeks with Paul on his retreat journey, do you have some ideas about the methods or ways that Paul prays? Discuss

## Meeting #5

### Diary of St. Paul of the Cross

#### *Study Guide*

...December 9 thru December 18, 1720...

Read prior to meeting: *The diary text, for December 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 16, 17, 18*

Recalling St. Paul's circumstances on his forty day retreat, please place yourself with Paul in that small, damp room. What was he feeling, experiencing and thinking? Ask St. Paul to enlighten you. How was the Holy Spirit working with him, guiding him? What was Paul learning about God's will for his future?

Since we study and search for more than history or the beginnings of a religious community, how are God's gifts and inspiration to Paul relevant to our own lives and relationship to God? Paul's experience was not meant for him and his time alone, but for us as well.

Read aloud at the meeting: Diary text for December 9 thru 18

#### **Discussion:**

1. Can you imagine what Paul was experiencing in that small room? Have you experienced a time of hunger, cold or other physical deprivation? Could this have been a time of prayer for you? Discuss.
2. Physical suffering as a means of a closer relationship to God is a central theme of Paul. Is it necessary that we suffer physically to have an imitate relationship with God? Discuss.
3. Our society places little value on suffering of any kind. Paul's era, on the other hand, valued suffering as penance so much so that they imposed bodily pain as part of their spirituality. Discuss these two widely divergent views. Is one better than the other? What might be God's will regarding suffering as we can best understand it?
4. Were Paul's temptations in prayer similar or different from your own? How do you deal with temptations while at prayer?
5. Paul's diary does not go into any detail about his method of prayer; any spiritual reading; nor give much detail as to how he spent his waking hours. Discuss what you suspect a day might have been like for Paul. How have you spent a day in silence with God?
6. Paul crosses the half way mark in his 40 day retreat. Are you seeing any changes in Paul from the first day? Is there growth in understanding or insights into his spirituality and relationship with God? Discuss.
7. At this point in the diary, is there something which you would like to share?

## Meeting #6

### Diary of St. Paul of the Cross

#### *Study Guide*

...December 19 thru December 22, 1720...

Read prior to meeting: *The diary text, for December 19, 20, 21, and 22*

Recalling St. Paul's circumstances on his forty day retreat, please place yourself with Paul in that small, damp room. What was he feeling, experiencing and thinking? Ask St. Paul to enlighten you. How was the Holy Spirit working with him, guiding him? What was Paul learning about God's will for his future?

Since we study and search for more than history or the beginnings of a religious community, how are God's gifts and inspiration to Paul relevant to our own lives and relationship to God? Paul's experience was not meant for him and his time alone, but for us as well.

Read aloud at the meeting: Diary text for December 19, 20, 21, 22

#### **Discussion:**

1. December 21 was a difficult day for Paul. Flesh and spirit were pulling him in different directions. How was Paul's will involved in this struggle?
2. On the 21 St. Paul seeks Mary's help in his struggle. Has Mary been a help when you have difficulties in your life? Please share an experience.
3. Paul had a number of important insights on this day, the longest single day's narrative in the in the diary. Please comment on those which are particularly insightful for you.
4. Paul's personal weaknesses receive the greatest pressure from temptation. Knowing that we are all tempted in this fashion, what have you found to be the best way(s) to strengthen yourself against temptation?
5. Can you understand the desire of Paul's soul to follow Jesus in His suffering? Discuss.
6. Scripture tells us that we are never tempted beyond our ability to cope with the temptation . What is Paul's surety as he experiences suffering?
7. Does Paul have an obsession with pain and suffering? Please discuss.
8. Have pain and suffering in your life led you to a closer relationship with God? For many people, suffering has been a time of separation from God, a rejection of a God who allows suffering to exist. What does this rejection in the face of trial mean to a person's spiritual life?

## Meeting #7

### Diary of St. Paul of the Cross

#### *Study Guide*

...December 23 thru December 27, 1720...

Read prior to meeting: *The diary text, for December 23, 24, 25, 26, 27*

Recalling St. Paul's circumstances on his forty day retreat, please place yourself with Paul in that small, damp room. What was he feeling, experiencing and thinking? Ask St. Paul to enlighten you. How was the Holy Spirit working with him, guiding him? What was Paul learning about God's will for his future?

Since we study and search for more than history or the beginnings of a religious community, how are God's gifts and inspiration to Paul relevant to our own lives and relationship to God? Paul's experience was not meant for him and his time alone, but for us as well.

Read aloud at the meeting: Diary text for December 23, 24, 25, 26, 27

#### **Discussion:**

1. Paul uses an example of waves smashing against the shore to explain the impact of temptation on the soul. How would you describe the impact of temptation as you have experienced it?
2. How do you understand, experience, or relate to God's interaction with your soul Is it a sense, a feeling, faith, conscience or in some other realm or reality?
3. Temptation withstood by the help of God cleanses the soul. As Paul did, do you have a way of praying in times of spiritual or other turmoil that centers you in God? Please share.
4. On December 24, Paul reflected on incarnational love.. Do you occasionally meditate on the Incarnation? If you do, what insights have you derived that have added to your spirituality?
5. Can you relate to Paul's often used statement that he was "dry as a stump?" What does Paul mean by this expression?
6. It may seem strange to us to pray for a martyr's death. What might cause Paul to long for martyrdom?
7. Infinite Mercy and Love lead God to lovingly chastise and correct His sinful creatures. Can you associate with this insight that Paul received? How does the New Testament deal with God's loving chastisement?
8. What is your understanding of and experience with "spiritual repose"? For Paul, the Eucharist was a particularly important time of spiritual repose.

## Meeting #8

### Diary of St. Paul of the Cross

#### *Study Guide*

...December 28 thru January 1, 1721...

Read prior to meeting: *The diary text, for December 28, 29, 30, 31, and January 1*

Recalling St. Paul's circumstances on his forty day retreat, please place yourself with Paul in that small, damp room. What was he feeling, experiencing and thinking? Ask St. Paul to enlighten you. How was the Holy Spirit working with him, guiding him? What was Paul learning about God's will for his future?

Since we study and search for more than history or the beginnings of a religious community, how are God's gifts and inspiration to Paul relevant to our own lives and relationship to God? Paul's experience was not meant for him and his time alone, but for us as well.

Read aloud at the meeting: Diary text for December 28, 29, 30, 31, January 1

#### **Discussion:**

1. As Paul comes to the end of his forty day retreat, he has a heightened perception of his soul's relationship with God. How did Paul understand the infusion of the soul with knowledge?
2. Paul felt the need to make reparation for the irreverence's in the Church. What kinds of irreverence's might he have been referring to? What kinds of irreverence's bother you today?
3. Paul's family was not unlike many families today. There were apparently many internal problems which Paul foresaw as causing him great trials. How might Paul suggest that we deal with family difficulties?
4. After 39 days of fasting and contemplation, Paul talks about telling Jesus his "miseries without growing tired". To Paul, Jesus is present and personal. Can you relate to Paul's personal conversation with Jesus about his problems? Have you been successful at turning over your problems to Jesus as Paul apparently was?
5. God let Paul know that it was all right to experience a little pleasure in eating when he was hungry. Do you feel God's concern for you, particularly at times when you are in need? What consolations have you felt?
6. On the fortieth day, there is a sense of fulfillment, completion and possibly relief in Paul's diary. How can we characterize Paul's growth during this retreat time? What aspect(s) of Paul's experience during the forty days stand out most in your mind.
7. What insights have you gained from this diary that are a benefit for your spiritual life?