

Overcoming Spiritual Discouragement
by Fr. Timothy Gallagher, O.M.V.

Discussion Questions

The book, *Overcoming Spiritual Discouragement*, will be needed as you walk through these discussion questions.

Introduction (pages 1-9)

- 1) What stood out for you in the Introduction? Why?
- 2) What was it that finally and completely drew Fr. Gallagher to Ven. Bruno's life of holiness and his message? What is Ven. Bruno's central message? (page 6)
- 3) What do you hope for in reading this book and discussing it with the group?
- 4) How have you begun to notice that discouragement is the biggest obstacle in life?
- 5) Hope and encouragement are essential. Daily life can pull you down, away from hope and encouragement. When you "fall into a pit" – when you are lacking in hope and need encouragement – these spiritual principles are a resource of truth to re-read and assimilate, and hope will begin to rise in you. You will need to make a choice to move in a different direction by re-turning to one of the spiritual principles, and repeat it over and over again. As you do, things will begin to change. How will this book help you when you find yourself in the midst of discouragement?
- 6) When is your chosen, set-aside time for 15 minutes of spiritual reading each day, to spend time absorbing the principles of this book?
- 7) How will you slow the pace, to be able to read this book in a peaceful manner?

Living with Hope (pages 11 – 33)

A Call to Hope

- 1) Read 4 pages per day and underline a word or phrase in each spiritual principle or the commentary that stood out for you. Go back and look at your underlining, and choose two things that stood out for you the most. Why did these points stand out for you?
- 2) What is the spiritual principle that stood out for you in this chapter of Living with Hope? Why?
- 3) Say aloud to yourself: "Now I begin!" And say it with boldness – boldness because God's grace is always with you, because He loves you, because it is never too late, because nothing is impossible for God (Luke 1:37). Can you foresee that this will be helpful to you? Why?
- 4) What does Ven. Bruno mean by "having respect for your humanity? How can you better respect your humanity? Give a specific example. (pages 12-13)



- 5) Do your failings sometimes surprise you or discourage you? What does Ven. Bruno say about this? (p. 13)
- 6) What does it mean to think of God in a spirit of goodness? How have you thought of and concretely appreciated God's goodness to you in the last 24 hours? (pages 14-15)
- 7) Having hope means to have confidence in God. God's love casts out any fear in your heart and increases with it the gift of hope. How have you experienced this dynamic in your life? (page 19-21)

Living the Spiritual Life (pages 35-54)

Practical advice for the life of prayer

- 1) What spiritual principle from this Chapter stood out for you the most? Why?
- 2) What does Ven. Bruno mean by the words: "Live as close to the Eucharist as you can?" (page 35)
- 3) Have you been able to incorporate 15 minutes of spiritual reading on some days, or every day? Have you noticed any change since you began to include 15 minutes of spiritual reading per day? (page 36)
- 4) Give an example from your life of how your attitude is different when you stay close to God throughout the day? (page 37)
- 5) Why does Ven. Bruno request with such earnestness that we wage continual warfare against negative moods, discouragement or heaviness of heart, and never fail to begin again? (page 37-38)
- 6) Which sentiment of the heart for approaching the different parts of the Mass resonated strongly with you? (pages 38-45)
- 7) Why does Ven. Bruno encourage people to receive the Sacrament of Confession frequently, such as on a monthly basis? (page 47-48)

Living the Day with Jesus (pages 55 – 68)

How to live the day with Jesus

- 1) What spiritual principle from this Chapter stood out for you the most? Why?
- 2) What can you do to accept better the difficult persons, events or circumstances of your state in life, through which the Lord has allowed in your life to work your salvation? (page. 55-56)
- 3) How will you go about seeking to leave the past to the mercy of the Lord and the future to His Divine Providence? (pages 57-58) Put into words your thoughts about this significant matter and make it into a personal prayer, and pray it daily?
- 4) Ven. Bruno encourages you to carry out the actions of every day by living your day in union with Jesus: this includes the beginning, middle and end of each action. (pages 58-



- 62) What is one change that you have made to live the actions of the day with Jesus, in His company, speaking with Him, united with Him?
- 5) To be strengthened in this effort of living your day in union with Jesus, how will you look to the example of and seek the intercession of Mary in this effort? (page 58)
 - 6) How will you seek to give constant and loving attention to the inspirations of God throughout the day by noticing them yourself, as well as talking about them with a family member or friend? (pages 63-64)
 - 7) How do you take care of your body, allowing some moments of peace, of genuine leisure, in the week? It is helpful to remember it is extremely difficult to pray well without a peaceful leisure. You will want to take wise care of it for the love of God, for His greater glory. (pages 66-67)

Living the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus (pages 69-84)

Solace in time of suffering

- 1) What spiritual principle from this Chapter stood out for you the most? Why?
- 2) Spiritual principle #74 communicates this wisdom: “Do not be surprised at your lack of energy, listlessness, and boredom in spiritual things... God asks only that you be patient with yourself, that you always begin with a holy tenacity to be faithful in your spiritual practices” (page 70). Your **desire** for God is what is most important. What matters is what God wants. How have you experienced this dynamic in your life?
- 3) Spiritual principle #76 relates: “All that happens to me, whether favorable or unfavorable, is prepared for me by God as an occasion of gain; may He be ever praised; I desire to profit from it” (page 73). How can this spiritual principle be of benefit to you?
- 4) Read principle #78 slowly, three times: “Keep your eyes on the Crucifix, to which you must conform yourself, remembering as you do this that Jesus Crucified is not only your model but also your help and our reward” (page 75). Why does Ven. Bruno give counsel to keep your eyes on the Crucifix?
- 5) In the midst of grief in the loss of a loved one, what truths can you return to, in order to have an eternal perspective and find solace in this time of suffering? Re-read spiritual principles #81-84. (pages 77-81) Which phrase touched you most deeply? Why?
- 6) Ven. Bruno states: “If you want peace in your life, you must, first of all, decide to accommodate yourself to circumstances and not demand that circumstances accommodate themselves to you.” Have you considered praying for the grace to accept, with Jesus, any difficult circumstances in your life? And if so, have you found that Jesus was present and even brought joy in the midst of these circumstances?
- 7) Spiritual principle, number 87 states: “Cast also upon the Lord all your concerns,” for “the more you trust in Him, the greater will be His care for you.” (page 82) Have you grown in your trust of Jesus over the last months? If so, give an example.



Living with Mary (pages 85-92)

The blessing of Mary's presence

- 1) What spiritual principle from this Chapter stood out for you the most? Why?
- 2) Ven. Bruno surrounded himself with images of Mary. (page 86) What image of Mary in your home is your favorite? How has this image helped you to remember to turn to her tenderness and love during the day?
- 3) As Ven. Bruno read about Mary for some time every week, his knowledge, appreciation and love for her grew. (pages 86-87) Have you decided to deepen your knowledge, appreciation and love for Mary in one concrete way? How?
- 4) Ven. Bruno prayed a specific 9-day Novena leading up to a particular Feast Day in Mary's honor, in order to benefit fully from Marian celebrations during the liturgical year. (pages 87-88) Have you ever made a Novena that helped you to get closer to and/or understand Mary in a much deeper way? Was this particular Novena made with a specific intention or request in mind? If you can share how it was answered, please do. Describe the effect it had on you, no matter how simple.
- 5) Ven Bruno spoke very often about Mary. (page 88) We speak most often of what we love most. Do you ever speak of Mary? Give a personal example, or an example of someone who has spoken of Mary, and what effect that had upon your heart toward her.
- 6) Isn't it wonderful that we can have perfect confidence in Mary? (page 89) As the Memorare says, "Never was it known that anyone who fled to your protection, implored your help, or sought your intercession was left unaided." Have you ever turned to Mary with a problem and she "came through" for you? If so, relate this personal example. Share with the group, in a simple way, how this effected the confidence you have in her.
- 7) While on the Cross, Jesus gave Mary to John to be his spiritual mother. John represents each one of us, and therefore Mary is our *personal* spiritual mother. From John 19:26-27, we read, "Jesus, therefore, seeing His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing by, said to His mother: "Woman, behold thy son." Then, He said to the disciple "Behold thy mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home" – into his own heart.
Ven. Bruno spoke of Mary "as his mother, as the one who nurtured him and as his paradise. She was 'his paradise' – the one in whose presence the sorrows of life diminished, in whose love he found peace and joy." (page 89-90) Has Mary made a difference – is she a warmth, a security and/or a love – in your spiritual life? If so, give an example.

Living with Courage (pages 93 – 108)

Thoughts that build courage



- 1) What spiritual principle from this Chapter stood out for you the most? Why?
- 2) Ven. Bruno says to “be of good courage.” (page 93-94) Courage is the same as fortitude. Fortitude was evident in Ven. Bruno’s life by his steadfastness in times of trial. The **virtue** of fortitude is developed as a **good habit** through proper formation, by deliberately choosing morally good acts and by a perseverance in repeated efforts. Fortitude strengthens the resolve to resist temptations and to overcome obstacles in the moral life. The virtue of fortitude enables us to conquer fear. Fortitude is also a **gift of the Holy Spirit** that we receive from God in Baptism and is strengthened in Confirmation. We should always ask for this gift to be strengthened in us. This gift of fortitude is increased by the power of divine grace by frequenting the Sacraments, cooperating with and readily obeying the divine inspirations of the Holy Spirit, and following His calls to love what is good and shun evil. (See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraphs 1804 - 1811, 1831) How would you actively seek to strengthen the *virtue* of fortitude in your life? How would you actively seek to strengthen the *gift* of fortitude given by the Holy Spirit, in your life?
- 3) “Ven. Bruno never ceases to call us out of discouragement. Persist, continue, do not give up, do not give in. Even if your efforts seem so poor, this refusal to surrender, this willingness to persist, is all God asks. Just begin again each time, and you are solidly on the path to sanctity” (Page 94). Summarize Ven. Bruno’s words in a brief phrase that you can repeat to yourself over and over again.
- 4) “I, of myself, can do nothing good, but I can do all things in God who is so lovingly concerned for my salvation that He will never fail me with His grace” (page 96). Does this statement ring true for you? If so, give a personal example.
- 5) “Let your heart be in peace and have courage, because Jesus, your Spouse, desires that you be a saint, but, let it be understood, a saint with defects, not without defects. Be sure that God is more pleased with weak but humble virtue than with strong virtue that is proud” (page 97). Does this match your understanding of a saint? Why or why not? Do you now feel that sainthood is attainable?
- 6) “It is best to accept the crosses the Lord sends us, because these are always the most suited to us and are always accompanied by great graces.” “If you can avoid wishing that things were different, that is, can avoid ‘castles in the air,’ then all this will indeed be easier.” (page 99) Have you experienced this spiritual principle in your own life? Give an example.
- 7) “The truths that have persuaded me and must always move me – that we are created by God, that we are called to loving and serving Him in the vocation He has given us, that we will find love and grace to do this through Jesus Christ, the Church, and the Sacraments, and that we are called to an eternity of life with the Trinity, [these truths] “are and will always be the same.” (pages 100-101) Is this a bottom-line desire in your heart that these truths guide you in every stage of your life? Consider asking for this grace on a daily basis that these truths always retain a savor in your heart?



- 8) “Inspirations are so many voices of God and share His power.” The Holy Spirit, dwelling in us (1Corinthians 6:19), never ceases to work within us, inspiring, showing the way, opening the next door. “Listen, that you may have life” (Isaiah 55.3) (pages 103-104)
What are 2 or 3 events in your life that you can now look back and see as inspirations from God? What impact have these events had on your life?
- 9) Why are Venerable Bruno’s spiritual principles so important and applicable for these times in which we are living right now?