

Seven Cairns on the Mountain of Life

Session 3: Community, Hope & Joy

St. John Fisher Parish, Rancho Pasos Verdes, CA

The Fifth Cairn: Community

- The mountain of life is too steep and too long to climb alone
- Hiking with a companion is safer, more enjoyable, and more meaningful
- We imitate three social groups: the close (family/friends), the many (our tribe), the powerful (those with influence)
- One of the best ways to become a person of prayer is to have a friend who prays
- Find at least one person with whom you can be completely honest. Hold nothing back.

The Sixth Cairn: Hope

- Hope appears when the trail gets dark and the summit disappears from view
- Hope is trusting that God is faithful even when we cannot see the next cairn
- Growth happens in the dark. Seeds germinate underground before breaking through.
- God redeems rather than rescues. Through death comes life; through suffering, glory.
- Be a water purifier: transform anger and bitterness into understanding and love
- Let suffering soften your soul. Forgive and set yourself free.

The Seventh Cairn: Joy

- Joy is like the aroma of bread baking. It fills the whole house. It cannot be faked.
 - Happiness is fleeting; joy is deep, lasting, rooted in friendship with God
- "Joy does not simply happen to us. We have to choose joy and keep choosing it every day." — Henri Nouwen*
- A blessing (benedicere) is to speak well of someone: see them, admire them, give them some of your life
 - Obstacles to joy: busyness, tiredness, isolation
 - If we cannot delight in the people around us, we need to return to the earlier cairns

The Seven Cairns: A Summary

Cairn	Description
1. Self-Awareness	The trailhead. Pause. Be honest about where you are.
2. Humility	The rope bridge. Accept the truth with gentleness. Walk with God.
3. Love	The luminous marker. Let God's love move from head to heart.
4. Gratitude	The small, critical marker. See the world as gift. Practice the Examen.
5. Community	The companion cairn. Walk with others. Be honest. Listen.
6. Hope	The cairn in the dark. Trust God's faithfulness. Suffering can soften us.
7. Joy	The summit. Deep gladness. Choose joy. Be a blessing to others.

Living with the End in Mind

- The true test of prayer is change: Are we gentler? Kinder? More empathetic? Less judgmental?
- Pray every day without exception. Create memories that pay spiritual dividends for years to come.
- Forgive those who hurt you. Forgive yourself. Give away everything between you and God.

Questions for Reflection

- Who are the companions on your spiritual journey?
- Where do you need hope the most right now?
- Share a story of a person of blessing or joy in your life.
- What cairn are you stuck at? What one step can you take to keep moving?
- What is one thing from this series you want to carry into your daily life?

Closing Blessing

A Blessing for Those Who Reach the Summit — by Fr. Brendan McGuire

*May you carry these cairns within you
like stones warmed by the sun.*

*When you lose your way,
may honesty bring you back to the trailhead.
When pride builds walls,
may gentleness tear them down.
When love seems far,
may you go back to your Galilee.
When gratitude fades,
may you open your eyes to the grace you almost missed.*

*May you never walk alone.
May someone always be beside you
who knows your name and loves you still.*

*And when the trail grows dark
and the summit disappears,
may you trust the One
who placed these markers long before you came.*

*Go now with joy.
Go now with love.
The trail continues,
and God is already at the summit,
smiling, arms open, waiting.*

Amen.

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