

September 3, 2017
“Good Work”

First Reading ~ Romans 12:1-8
(from The Message Translation)

So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life —your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life— and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for God. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what God wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.

I'm speaking to you out of deep gratitude for all that God has given me, and especially as I have responsibilities in relation to you. Living then, as every one of you does, in pure grace, it's important that you not misinterpret yourselves as people who are bringing this goodness to God. No, God brings it all to you. The only accurate way to understand ourselves is by what God is and by what God does for us, not by what we are and what we do for God.

In this way we are like the various parts of a human body. Each part gets its meaning from the body as a whole, not the other way around. The body we're talking about is Christ's body of chosen people. Each of us finds our meaning and function as a part of that body. But as a finger or toe alone we wouldn't amount to much, would we? So since we find ourselves fashioned into all these excellently formed and marvelously functioning parts in Christ's body, let's just go ahead and be what we were made to be, without enviously or pridefully comparing ourselves with each other, or trying to be something that we aren't.

If you preach, just preach God's Message, nothing else; if you help, just help, don't take over; if you teach, stick to your teaching; if you give encouraging guidance, be careful that you don't get bossy; if you're put in charge, don't manipulate; if you're called to give aid to people in distress, keep your eyes open and be quick to respond; if you work with the disadvantaged, don't let yourself get irritated with them or depressed by them, be compassionate and cheerful.

Second Reading

~adapted from Father Richard Rohr in “Staying Watchful”

We cannot *attain* the presence of God because we're already totally in the presence of God. What's absent is awareness. Little do we realize that God is maintaining us in existence with every breath we take. Each time you take another breath, realize that God is choosing you again and again—and yet again (Ephesians 1:4. 9-11). We have nothing to work up to or even learn. We do,

however, need to unlearn some things, and most especially we must let go of any thought that we have ever been separate from God.

To become aware of God's presence in our lives, we have to accept what is often difficult, particularly for people in what appears to be a success-driven culture. We have to accept that human culture is in a mass hypnotic trance. Plato already said this, as most religions do at the higher levels. We are sleep-walkers, "seeing through a glass darkly" (1 Corinthians 13:12). Wisdom teachers from many traditions have recognized that we human beings do not naturally see; *we have to be taught how to see.*

We worship success. We believe that we get what we deserve, what we work hard for, and what we are worthy of. It's hard for Western people to think in any other way. But any expectation of merit or reward actually keeps us from the transformative experience called grace.

Experiencing radical grace is like living in a different world. It's not a world in which I labor to get God to notice me and like me. It's not a world in which I strive for spiritual success. It's not a cosmic game of crime and punishment. Unfortunately, many of the world's religions at the lower levels do teach that, even if indirectly. Many religious people are afraid of gratuity. Instead, we want God for the sake of social order, and we want religion for the sake of social controls. God cannot be seen through such a small and dirty lens.