CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time | For Sunday, August 21, 2022

The Disciple of Discipleship

Written by Rev. Mark Suslenko

Isaiah 66:18-21
Hebrews 12:5-7, 11-13
Luke 13:22-30



Abraham Lincoln is said to have remarked that "discipline is choosing between what you want now and what you want most." What is it that you desire most? This is a powerful question that must be asked and answered if we want to avoid a haphazard, disjointed, and chaotic life. It also must be asked and answered if we claim to be a person of faith who is committed to living the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We all have smaller desires that motivate us throughout the day. I may desire to complete a project that has been sitting undone for some time or to spend some quality time with someone I love. But at the end of it all, what is it that you *really* desire?

St. Augustine tells us that our hearts are restless until they rest in God. If we really believe that we are lovingly and intentionally fashioned and created by a God who wills us into being — and that we are destined to live eternally with that same God in heaven — then these are wise words indeed. Therefore, in order to be true to our real nature, the answer to the question of what we desire most ought to be, "Union with God."

If we are distracted by our lesser desires, we can easily lose touch with our truth and quickly find ourselves off track and restless. But a person who lives a truly disciplined life is always able to call him or herself back to the greatest desire, to put their wants and impulses in check, and to do what is necessary to achieve the greater goal. For the believer, this can only be accomplished by developing a habit of strong, centered, and focused prayer. The discipline of prayer allows us to keep our relationship with God fresh so that we become best friends with Him and always stay connected and in touch in one way or another.

It is very possible for relationships to go sour, even our relationship with God. While God never abandons us, we can certainly turn our backs on Him. In doing so, we may find ourselves recognizing His presence and surprises less and less and even find ourselves less willing to put ourselves out there for the advancement of the Gospel. Those lesser desires and impulses can gain great control. It is the discipline of prayer that allows us to become the very likeness of God! We then become His true disciples by living and acting in our world as He would live and act in it. The gift of contemplation keeps God in clear focus and our hearts set on our true desire: union with Him.

It will not be easy at first. Who among us really likes discipline? But we all know that the maturity process always involves reluctance, pain, stretching, and honesty. We are constantly learning new lessons about life, God, ourselves, others, and our world, and we must vigilantly be willing to leave one way of doing things in pursuit of another of greater value. Knowing that our ultimate desire is union with God, we can then go about the task of true discipleship and begin living the vision Jesus taught. It is a vision that involves great self-denial, suffering, and possibly even death. However, all of these are always in service of obtaining our ultimate goal.

PRAYER

Loving God,
I can easily get confused
between what I think I need and what I truly desire.
You have placed your glorious presence within me.
You flow through my veins and
reside in the depth of my soul.
May your Holy Spirit help me see
what is within so that as I live and move in your world
I can begin to recognize you in all you have made.
Help me create a discerning and disciplined life
so that I can dwell more fully in your presence,
unite myself with you and contemplate your glory.
May I notice you in the smallest and most humble
of your creatures
and in the vastness of the ocean's depth!
May I smell the nectar of your presence in the air that I breathe
and know that nothing I can imagine
will ever give me what only you can bestow upon me.
May I learn to watch for your surprises
and relish in the daily blessings that come my way.
May I not fall into despair and always live with hope.
Then, when I am asked to leave this world
and continue my journey to you
may I do so without regret and with an eagerness to possess
the wonder of your embrace.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Life teaches us some hard lessons and can easily disappoint. But God's ever-present love is always available to transform even the most self-focused of hearts, and His holiness touches all of His children. It is our task, then, to ensure that everything possible is done to preserve and respect the sacredness of life and the dignity of every human being.

God's vision has a great deal to say about the immigrant, the homeless, our economic system, power, wealth, distribution of the world's good, the value and place of work, abortion, euthanasia, war, violence, and all of the other ills plaguing our world. The problem is that we often seek secular solutions to difficulties that have a spiritual base. The person with a truly disciplined life can recognize the difference and act accordingly.

Rev. Mark Suslenko