



Fourth Sunday of Easter May 15, 2011 A

Living Life to the Full

The following two reflections on this Sunday's Gospel were written by Fr. Flor McCarthy.

"I came so that you may have life and have it to the full" (John 10:10).

Is Jesus talking only about eternal life or also about this life? I have no doubt but that these words are to be applied to our life on earth as much as to our hope of eternal life.

There is a lovely Spanish legend that goes like this. When people arrive at the gate of heaven seeking to enter, St. Peter asks them a strange question. He says to each one, 'Tell me this. Have you taken advantage of all the earthly joys which God in his goodness made available to you while you were on earth?'

If a person replies, 'No, I haven't,' Peter shakes his head sadly and says, 'Alas, my friend, I can't let you in—not yet at any rate. How can you expect to be ready for the heavenly joys if you have not prepared yourself for them through the medium of earthly ones? I shall be obliged to send you back down to earth until you learn better.'

In the past the Christian religion tended to be identified with restrictions and prohibitions. Many of us were brought up on a theology of detachment from the world. This present life was viewed as nothing more than a time of trial. This kind of spirituality discouraged enjoyment of life. It led to half-heartedness. It was as if we were always keeping something back. Always living cautiously, fearfully, miserly.

It ought to be possible to enjoy life to the fullest while being devout and religious at the same time. However, to live fully is not the same as to live it up.

Life is a fragile gift. Every moment is utterly unique. This should concentrate our attention on what we are experiencing now. But every moment is also fleeting. How quickly life's stream runs down to the sea. This fleetingness gives life its poignancy and makes it all the more precious. 'For we do not enjoy this world everlastingly, only briefly; our life is like the warming of oneself in the sun' (Aztec Indians).

The Lord, the Good Shepherd, wants us to have life. Therefore, let us not be so timid and fearful. Let us live whatever presents itself to us, because everything is a

gift from God. Life is generous to those who seize it with both hands.

Mere existence is not enough for us. 'What people are looking for is not meaning in life, but the experience of being alive—the rapture of living' (Joseph Campbell). We are meant to live. It is a well-known fact that those who have lived fully and intensely, do not feel cheated at death. 'Fear not that your life will end; rather fear that it may never have begun' (Thoreau). The poet, Patrick Kavanagh, said:

*Autumn I'd welcome
had I known love in Summer days.
I would not weep for flowers that die
if once they'd bloom for praise.
I would not cry for any tree leaf lost,
a word of misery.
I would not make lament
although my harvest were a beggar's woe.*

Jesus began his ministry with these words: 'Believe in the Good News.' What is the Good News? The Good news is: 'I came that you may have life and have it to the full.'

Healed by his wounds

Even though Peter's words were originally addressed to slaves (Second Reading), they have a wider application. He singled out slaves only because their burden of suffering was heavier than that of others.

Referring to the wounds of Christ, Peter said, 'Through his wounds you have been healed.' But we may ask: How could the wounds of another heal our wounds? The following true story shows how it can happen.

Anne's husband died of a heart attack. He was only in his mid-forties. In the weeks and months after the funeral, Anne was consumed by grief. Friends advised her to go on a weekend for the bereaved. Somewhat reluctantly she agreed to go.

She was surprised to find that most of the people on the weekend were not widows but separated people. At a certain stage the participants were divided into groups, and it was Anne's bad luck to find herself the only widow in her group.

She felt she didn't belong in the group. The other members had their husbands. It was their own fault that

they had broken up. They could get back together if they really wanted to. But she had lost her husband. He was dead and gone—a good man who didn't smoke or drink, but stayed at home with the family. She felt she had nothing in common with these people. She refused to share with the group. When invited to do so she said, 'I won't be staying.'

Even though she didn't talk she did listen. As she listened, she began to realize that the other people had suffered a great deal. Some of them had put up with a terrible amount of abuse. What especially moved her was the suffering of the children. Gradually her eyes were opened. She had no idea what went on in some homes. She thought that all marriages were like hers. She realized that she had had it very good.

Whereas earlier she had felt no sympathy for the others, now she began to feel very close to them, so much so that when she was given the chance to join another group, she said she wanted to stay where she was. Eventually she began to talk about herself. One woman said to her, 'What I wouldn't give for just one of your days.' The weekend proved to be a turning point for Anne. Her wounds began to heal.

Suffering softens our hardened hearts and enables us to enter a world of suffering where all people live at some time. In reaching out to others, we move out of our isolation into a world of shared suffering. In the simple act of showing sympathy for others there is healing.

Compassion is not learned without suffering. Unless you have suffered and wept you really don't understand what compassion is, nor can you comfort someone who is suffering. Unless you have cried you can't dry the tears of another. Unless you have walked in darkness you can't help wanderers to find their way. But if you have suffered you can become a pathfinder for others.

The wounds of others can help us to cope with and recover from our own wounds. It is by reaching out to others from our own wounds that we ourselves are healed. Shared pain is a bit like shared bread; it brings its participants closer to each other. Intimacy is the fruit that grows from touching each other's wounds.

If we can draw encouragement from the wounds of others, how much more so from the wounds of Christ, the Good Shepherd. His wounds help us to recognize our own. The sacred, the precious wounds of Jesus are a source of consolation, courage and hope to us. Truly, by his wounds we are healed.

Prescriptions from the Soul

The following is from the book *365 Prescriptions for the Soul*, Bernie Siegel.

Prescription #336 MEASURE ME

*Nobody has ever measured, even poets,
how much the heart can hold.*

-Zelda Fitzgerald

How do we take the measure of a person and know how big he or she really is? Is it from the tips of the toes to the top of the head? Or is it the waistline or head size? I do not think any of these simple measurements takes the true measure of a person into consideration.

I say, measure me by the size of my heart. Take your tape measure and go around my heart, and include all the things my heart is touched by, and you will know how large I truly am.

The actions you take that spring from your heart have a far greater effect than those that come only from the mind or body. Open your heart and allow it to guide you in your actions.

One can become famous for physical accomplishments, but only the accomplishments of the heart truly fulfill. When one heart touches another, we have hearts beating in unison with no fear of rejection. A heart filled with love is eternal and not measurable by our hand.

Solution of the Day

Give of your heart without measure.

The following piece is from *Vision 2000* by Mark Link. S.J.

*Jesus said, "I have come
in order that you might have life-
life in all its fullness." John 10:10*

A woman was diagnosed as being terminally ill. For a while, she continued to live pretty much as she always did. Then, one day, she said to herself, "What am I doing? What am I building a bank account for? What am I living this way for?" Then she decided to begin living as her heart dictated. That woman lived 15 more months. Before she died, she confided to a friend, "The last 15 months of my life were the richest of my entire life."

The woman's experience invites me to ask: What was one of the richest periods of my entire life?

I shall pass through this world but once. Any good that I can do, or any kindness that I can show to any human being, let me do it now and not defer it. For I shall not pass this way again.

Attributed to Stephen Grellet (adapted)

Have a blessed week,

Ar. Saran