



MISSION ENRICHMENT

Volume 13, No. 6 | Nov. - Dec. 2013

The Spirit of the Gospel in Service of the Mission

Be inspired with the belief that life is a great and noble calling;
not a mean and groveling thing that we are to shuffle through as we can,
but an elevated and lofty destiny. – William E. Gladstone

THE GOD WHO EMBRACED ME

(taken from *This I Believe*, edited by Jay Allison and Dan Gediman) by
John W. Fountain, professor of journalism at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

I believe in God. Not that cosmic, intangible spirit-in-the-sky that Mama told me as a little boy “always was and always will be.” But the God who embraced me when Daddy disappeared from our lives—from my life at age four—the night police led him away from our front door, down the stairs in handcuffs.

The God who warmed me when we could see our breath inside our freezing apartment, where the gas was disconnected in the dead of another wind-whipped Chicago winter, and there was no food, little hope, and no hot water.

The God who held my hand when I witnessed boys in my ‘hood swallowed by the elements, by death, and by hopelessness; who claimed me when I felt like “no-man’s son,” amid the absence of any man to wrap his arms around me and tell

me, “everything’s going to be okay,” to speak proudly of me, to call me son.

I believe in God, God the Father, embodied in his Son Jesus Christ. The God who allowed me to feel His presence—whether by the warmth that

I always envied boys I saw walking hand-in-hand with their fathers.

filled my belly like hot chocolate on a cold afternoon, or that voice, whenever I found myself in the tempest of life’s storms, telling me (even when I was told I was “nothing”) that I was *something*, that I was His, and that even amid the desertion of the man who gave me his name and his DNA and little else, I might find in Him sustenance.

I believe in God, the God who I have come to know as father; as Abba—Daddy. I always envied boys I saw walking hand-in-hand with their fathers.

I thirsted for the conversations fathers and sons have about the birds and the bees, or about nothing at all—simply feeling his breath, heartbeat, presence. As a boy, I used to sit on the front porch watching the cars roll by; imagining that one day one would part and the man getting out would be my *daddy*. But it never happened.

When I was eighteen, I could find no tears that Alabama winter’s

evening in January 1979 as I stood finally—face-to-face—with my father lying cold in a casket, his eyes sealed, his heart no longer beating, his breath forever stilled. Killed in a car accident, he died drunk, leaving me hobbled by the sorrow of years of fatherlessness.

By then, it had been years since Mama had summoned the police to our apartment that night, fearing that

continued on page 2

Ideas or comments are welcome.

The Mission Enrichment Newsletter for those working with the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate is published six times a year.

Geri Furmanek, Editor
Mission Enrichment Office
Paul Schulte Center
224 S.De Mazenod Dr.,
Belleville IL 62223-1035
Tel:618-394-6990 Fax:618-394-6987
e-mail: Gfurm224@aol.com

Making Choices

(taken from *Each Day a New Beginning*, 9-30, Hazelden Meditation Series)

We choose the lives we lead. We choose sadness or happiness; success or failure; dread or excited anticipation. Whether or not we are conscious of our choices, we are making them every moment.

Accepting full responsibility for our actions is one of the requirements of maturity. Not always the easiest thing to do, but necessary to our further development. An unexpected benefit of accepting our responsibility is that it heightens our awareness of personal power. Our well-being is within our power. Happi-

continued on back page

A GOOD LIFE

by Steve Goodier

Calvin, of the “Calvin and Hobbes” comic strip fame, once imparted some timeless wisdom: “If people sat outside and looked at the stars each night,” he observed, “I’ll bet they’d live a lot differently.”

I believe he’s right. I try to sit outside every night before bedtime to breathe the night air and look at the sky. It’s a simple practice. For me, a time of deep relaxation and spiritual cleansing.

Year by bewildering year our world grows more complex. We crave peace in our souls. We long for simplicity in lives that too easily become relentlessly tangled in complicated webs.

One man, David, enjoyed the simple things of life. He sometimes took jobs in the American west at dude ranches, national parks and seasonal resorts.

His brother, however, wanted to entice him to get a “real” job and live in a world surrounded by things that only money can buy. So David’s brother often sent him photos of himself enjoying the so-called “good life.” He labeled his snapshots “My new sound system” or “My new car.”

But the photographs stopped arriving after David responded with a picture of his own. He sent his brother a large poster with a breathtaking view of Wyoming’s Grand Teton National Park. On the back was David’s message: “My back yard.”

I believe I understand how David feels. While his brother was striving for THE Good Life, David aimed for A Good Life. There’s a difference. THE good life requires that we take pleasure in new things; A good life requires that we take pleasure in moments. To enjoy THE good life we have to get ahead; to enjoy A good life we have to make the trip worthwhile.

THE good life is supported by feeding our pocketbooks; A good life is supported by feeding our souls.

Over a century ago, John Burroughs put it like this: “To find the universal elements enough; to find the air and the water exhilarating; to be refreshed by a morning walk or an evening saunter... to be thrilled by the stars at night; to be elated over a bird’s nest or a wildflower

in spring -- these are some of the rewards of the simple life.” I call it a good life.

I don’t want to collect more stuff at the expense of collecting memories. And I don’t want to let making a buck interfere with my making a difference.

I’m already looking forward to tonight when I’ll sit outside and look up at the stars. †

Mom was preparing the two children for bed and was telling bedtime stories. She remarked that God made eyes to see, ears to hear, noses to smell and feet to run.

The little girl sat up and said, “But, Momma, I guess God got kinda mixed up with Tim, because Tim’s nose runs and his feet smell!”



THE PROMISE OF THE SLOW AND STEADY

(from *Workday Prayers* by Timothy Jones)

We are “quickness,” someone once said, infatuated with the fast and efficient. Now always seems preferable to later, the quick fix more desirable than waiting for lasting resolution. But some things—such as cultivating a deeper life or stronger relationships—take time. Not losing hope requires a long view beyond the present tense.

Pray: Lord, so many areas in my life seem urgent.

Half the time I feel antsy and anxious.

I have grown unaccustomed to waiting.

Sometimes I stop believing that what I cannot see
will someday come to be.

But I want to be patient.

Let me trust you and your timing.

Through him who learned to trust you for everything,
Jesus Christ. Amen.

Remember: Knowing the end result helps us stay steady in the moment at hand. Recall that the apostle Paul told a young church centuries ago, “I am quite confident that the One who began a good work in you will go on completing it until the Day of Jesus Christ comes” (Philippians 1:6, NJB). †

The God Who Embraced Me

continued from page 1

Daddy might hurt her—hit her—again. Finally his alcoholism consumed what good there was of him until it swallowed him whole.

It wasn’t until many years later, standing over my father’s grave for a long overdue conversation, that my tears flowed. I told him about the man I had become. I told him about how much I wished he had been in my life. And I realized fully that in his absence, I had found another. Or that He—God, the Father, God, my Father—had found me. †

Rule 30:

Learn to Ask Questions

(taken from *Rules for Life* by Richard Templar)

Look, you may not like the answers but at least you'll know. More of the world's problems can be laid firmly at the feet of assumptions. If we assume (no, I'm not going to do that dreadful "it makes an ass out of u and me" stuff—I know I did but that was a joke) then, in effect, we think we know but we don't. We assume that our bit of faulty information is a fact and things go on getting worse. We assume that other people like our plan but they don't and it all goes nowhere. Better to ask questions right from the start and know what's what.

Questions help clarify the situation. Questions put people on the spot, which means they have to think—and thinking is always a good thing for everybody about everything. Questions help people clarify their thoughts. Questions demand answers, and answers require

the situation to be thought through, to its logical conclusion.

As someone very wise and very dear to me once said: "The better you understand the beliefs, actions, desires, and wants of others, the more likely you are to make the right response, alter your own thinking where necessary and generally be successful."

A man and his wife were sitting in the living room discussing a "Living Will."

"Just so you know, I never want to live in a vegetative state, dependent on some machine and fluids from a bottle. If that ever happens, just pull the plug."

His wife got up, unplugged the TV and threw out all the beer.

(from Lou-vanuatu-Joke of the Day)

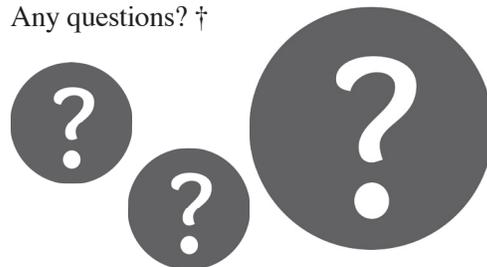
Asking questions gives you time to think, buys you breathing space. Rather than flying off the handle because you think you know the situation, it's better to ask a few questions and find out the truth.

You'll be better equipped to respond logically, calmly, and correctly.

You can always tell those who are a success: they're the ones asking questions while others are reacting, panicking, misinterpreting, assuming, losing control, and generally behaving badly.

Ask questions of yourself constantly. Ask why you think you're right—or wrong. Ask yourself why you are doing certain things, want other things, and follow a particular course of action. Question yourself firmly and rigorously because maybe there isn't anyone else doing it. And you need it. We all do. It keeps us from assuming we know what's best for ourselves.

And, of course, there is a time to stop asking questions; of others and of ourselves. You have to know when to back off. All this takes a long time to learn and we all make mistakes as we go. Any questions? †



Christmas is forever...

*When the song of the angels
is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes
are home,
When the shepherds are back with
their flocks,*

*The work of Christmas begins:
to find the lost,
to heal the broken,
to feed the hungry,
to release the prisoner,
to rebuild the nations,*



*to bring peace among
people,
to make music in the
heart. †*

Dwelling Daily in the House of Love

(from *Spiritual Formation* by Henri Nouwen)

The challenge is to let go of fear and claim the deeper truth of who I am. When you forget your true identity as a beloved child of God, you lose your way in life. You become scared and start doing things not freely, but because of fear. But when you make space for God in your life and begin to listen to God's loving voice, you suddenly start to realize perfect love. You can claim it, and you can gradually let go of fear. The fear may come back tomorrow and you will have to struggle, and you can again return from fear to love. Every time you feel afraid, you can open yourself to God's presence, hear God's

voice again, and be brought back to perfect love that casts out fear and brings in greater freedom....

... We need educational reform, church reform, market reform, and even entertainment reform that makes peace its main concern.... The world is waiting for prophetic men and women who are so deeply rooted in the love of God that they are free to envision and create a new world where justice reigns... where there is a circle of safety, intimacy and hospitality. Justice can be practiced.... Ministry is effective when we live in the house of love. There we can be, and move, and trust and love in freedom and without fear. †

In 1982 Steven Callahan was crossing the Atlantic alone in his sailboat when it struck something and sank. He was out of the shipping lanes and floating in a life raft, alone. His supplies were few. His chances were small. Yet when three fishermen found him seventy-six days later (the longest anyone has survived a shipwreck on a life raft alone), he was alive -- much skinnier than he was when he started, but alive.

His account of how he survived is fascinating. His ingenuity -- how he managed to catch fish, how he fixed his solar still (evaporates sea water to make fresh) -- is very interesting.

But the thing that caught my eye was how he managed to keep himself going when all hope seemed lost, when there seemed no point in continuing the struggle, when he was suffering greatly, when his life raft was punctured and after more than a week struggling with his weak body to fix it, it was still leaking air and wearing him out to keep pumping it up. He was starved. He was desperately dehydrated. He was thoroughly exhausted. Giving up would have seemed the only sane option.

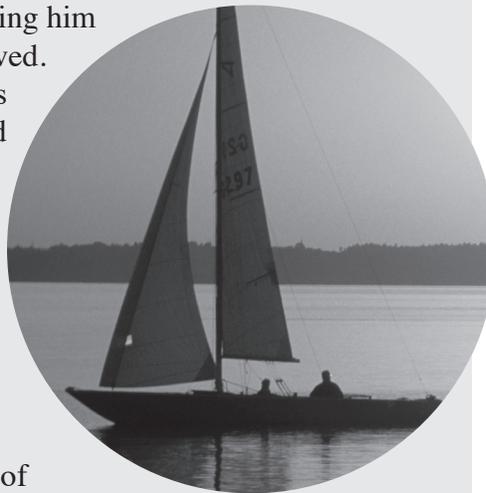
When people survive these kinds of circumstances, they do something with their minds that gives them the courage to keep going. Many people in similarly desperate circumstances give in or go mad. Something the survivors do with their thoughts helps them find the guts to carry on in spite of overwhelming odds.

"I tell myself I can handle it," wrote Callahan in his narrative. "Compared to what others have been through, I'm fortunate. I tell myself these things over and over, building up fortitude...."

I wrote that down after I read it. It struck me as something important. And I've told myself the same thing when my own goals seemed far off or when my problems seemed too overwhelming. And every time I've said it, I have always come back to my senses.

The truth is, our circumstances are only bad compared to something better. But others have been through much worse. I've read enough history to know you and I are lucky to be where we are, when we are, no matter how bad it seems to us compared to our fantasies. It's a sane thought and worth thinking.

So here, coming to us from the extreme edge of survival, are words that can give us strength. Whatever you're going through, tell yourself you can handle it. Compared to what others have been through, you're fortunate. Tell this to yourself over and over, and it will help you get through the rough spots with a little more fortitude. †



from Oblate History

November 8, 1815 letter from Fr. de Mazenod to his father, Charles Antoine de Mazenod in Palermo, Italy:



I am strongly inclined to write to Francois (one of the sons of the Duke of Cannizzaro) that he give me some

money for an establishment that I am forming at Aix-en-Provence. It is a foundation of Missionaries whose duty it will be to cover the countryside and bring people back to the religious sense that they have lost. We will establish ourselves in the former Carmelite monastery and go out from there on our apostolic travels. The newspapers took the initiative of giving an account of it and have totally overlooked me as the leader of this establishment.

In reply, his father replies in a letter dated February 27, 1816: "... In the degree that your followers increase, it will be necessary to increase also the number of your co-operators and since the public considers you as the leader of the good work you must act like a true founder. †

Making Choices continued from page 1

ness is within our power. Our attitude about any condition, present or future, is within our power, if we take it.

Life is "doing unto us" only what we allow. And it will favor us with whatever we choose. We can search out the positive in any experience. All situations present seeds of new understanding, if we are open to them. Our responses to the events around us determine whatever meaning life offers. We are in control of our outlook. And our outlook decides our future. †