



MISSION ENRICHMENT

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The Spirit of the Gospel in Service of the Mission

Christmas (noun):

The only time of the year in which one can sit in front of a dead tree and eat candy out of socks.

Here's the final word on nutrition

Here's the final word on nutrition and health. It's a relief to know the truth after all those conflicting nutritional studies.

1. The Japanese eat very little fat and suffer fewer heart attacks than us.
2. The Mexicans eat a lot of fat and suffer fewer heart attacks than us.
3. The Chinese drink very little red wine and suffer fewer heart attacks than us.
4. The Italians drink a lot of red wine and suffer fewer heart attacks than us.
5. The Germans drink a lot of beer and eat lots of sausages and fats and suffer fewer heart attacks than us.



CONCLUSION:

Eat and drink what you like. Speaking English is apparently what kills you.

Year of Oblate Vocations

Maturity in Relationships and Prayer - by Fr. Ron Rolheiser, O.M.I. (Oct. 2010)

Several years ago, a friend shared this story with me: Raised a Roman Catholic and essentially faithful in going to church and in trying to live an honest moral life, he found himself, in his mid-forties, plagued by doubts, unable to pray, and unable (when he was honest with himself) to even believe in the existence of God.

Anxious about this and looking for spiritual guidance, he went to see a Jesuit priest who had a reputation as a spiritual director. He anticipated the usual counsel about dark nights of the soul and how these are given to us to purify our faith and, already familiar with that literature, he wasn't expecting much. Certainly, he wasn't expecting the advice he received.

... The Jesuit simply told him: Make a promise to yourself to sit in silent prayer for a half an hour a day for the next six months. I promise you that if you are faithful to that you will, by that time, recover your sense of God.

My friend, beyond being upset with what he felt was an over-simplistic bit of advice, protested that the biggest part of his problem was precisely that he couldn't pray, that he couldn't talk to a God whom he didn't believe existed: How can I pray when I no longer believe that there is a God?

The Jesuit persisted: "Just do it! Show up and sit in silent prayer for half an hour a day, even if you feel like you are talking to a wall. It's the only practical advice I can give you."

Despite his skepticism, my friend took the Jesuit's advice and faithfully sat in silent prayer for half an hour a day for six months and, by the end of that time, his sense of God had returned, as had his sense of prayer.

This story, I believe, highlights something important: Our sense of God's existence is very much linked to fidelity to prayer. However, and this is the catch-22, it is hard to sustain a life of prayer precisely because our sense of God is often weak. Simply put, it is not easy to pray.

... prayer has the same inner dynamics as love and love is sweet only in its initial stage, when we first fall in love, and again in its final, mature stage. In between, love is hard work, dogged fidelity, and needs willful commitment beyond what is normally provided by our emotions and our imagination.

Prayer works in the same way. Initially when we first begin to pray, like someone young and in love, we tend to have a period of fervor, of passion, a time when our emotions and our imaginations help give us a sense that God exists and that God hears our prayers. But as we grow deeper and more mature in our relationship to God, just as in a relationship

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Ideas or comments are welcome.

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The Man and the Birds

by Paul Harvey

Now the man to whom I'm going to introduce you was not a scrooge. He was a kind, decent, mostly good man, generous to his family and upright in his dealings with other men. But he just didn't believe all that incarnation stuff which the churches proclaim at Christmas time. It just didn't make sense, and he was too honest to pretend otherwise. He just couldn't swallow the Jesus story, about God coming to earth as a man.

"I'm truly sorry to distress you," he told his wife, "but I'm not going with you to church this Christmas Eve." He said he'd feel like a hypocrite and that he'd much rather just stay at home, but that he would wait up for them. And so he stayed, and they went to the midnight service.

Shortly after the family drove away in the car, snow began to fall. He went to the window to watch the flurries getting heavier and heavier and then went back to his fireside chair and began to read his newspaper. Minutes later, he was startled by a thudding sound. Then another, and then another. Sort of a thump or a thud. At first he thought someone must be throwing snowballs against his living room window.

But when he went to the front door to investigate, he found a flock of birds huddled miserably in the snow. They'd been caught in the storm and, in a desperate search for shelter, had tried to fly through his large landscape window. Well, he couldn't let the poor creatures lie there and freeze, so he remembered the barn where his children stabled their pony. That would provide a warm shelter, if he could direct the birds to it.

Quickly he put on a coat and galoshes and tramped through the deepening snow to the barn. He opened the doors wide and turned on a light, but the birds did not come in. He figured food would entice them in. So he hurried back to the house, fetched bread crumbs and sprinkled them on the snow, making a trail to the yellow-lighted, wide-open doorway of the stable. But to his dismay, the birds ignored the bread crumbs and continued to flap around helplessly in the snow.

He tried catching them. He tried shooing them into the barn by walking around them waving his arms. Instead, they scattered in every direction, except into the warm, lighted barn. And then, he realized, that they were afraid of him. To them, he reasoned, I am a strange and terrifying creature. If only I could think of some way to let them know that they can trust me – that I am not trying to hurt them, but to help them. But how, because any move he made tended to frighten and confuse them. They just would not follow. They would not be led or shooed because they feared him.

"If only I could be a bird," he thought to himself, "and mingle with them and speak their language. Then I could tell them not to be afraid. Then I could show them the way to the safe, warm barn. But I would have to be one of them so they could see, and hear and understand."

At that moment, the church bells began to ring. The sound reached his ears above the sounds of the wind. And he stood there listening to the bells – listening to the bells pealing the glad tidings of Christmas. And he sank to his knees in the snow. †



Do the Next Right

"I took a long, deep breath and wondered as usual, where to start. You start where you are, is the secret of life. You do the next right thing you can see. Then the next."—Anne Lamott

"What do I do?" ... These are the haunting words I hear from clients daily. That pivotal moment in a session where we begin to get to some serious decision making, whether it be about confessing an affair, a financial decision, or some type of parenting struggles, we seek direction. There seems to be no clear cut answer, no line in the sand, no roads on a map, just questions. Invariably my response is to say, "I am not going to tell you what to do, rather the answer is in you." To which I almost always hear the reply, "What the *%\$# am I paying you for?!" After a good laugh I explain that **they should do the next right thing.**

"God has created us as 24hr creatures," as one friend told me. Meaning that we need to live one day at a time and nothing more. When we start to worry about the next day or the day after, so on and so forth, we can get into a lot of trouble. The phrase "**Do the next right thing**", comes from Alcoholics Anonymous, but you do not have to be an alcoholic to know the impact that this has on your emotional and spiritual life. The actual verbiage in the AA book is "**ask (God) for the right thought or action**" but the variation that is often repeated is "just do the next right thing." For someone suffering the desire to have a drink of alcohol when they know it's the last thing they should do, "the next right thing" could be something that might seem relatively simple to the rest of us. For example, the next right thing might be getting out of bed; watching the sunrise; calling someone; feeding the cat; making a healthy breakfast; going to work; going to church; taking a walk; etc.



It doesn't necessarily mean signing up for a mission trip to a third world country.

The point isn't what you do, it's that what you do is "the right thing to do." So often we are flooded with emotions. In an instance we get angry, sad, happy, confused, frustrated, lonely, depressed, anxious, tired and that might lead us to behavior which might feel good in the short term, but in the long term, can be very regrettable. Stopping ourselves before we get out of control and saying "what would be the right thing to do in this situation," could save us a lot of regret, apologies and broken relationships. I'm the first to admit that many times I react first and think second. And my nature is to feel guilty when I do something like that so then I'm apologizing to the person I hurt, to God, and to anyone who will listen. Then I usually call a friend for validation that I'm not the worst person God put on the planet and I just had a bad moment. And I almost believe them and try to do better the next time I'm in that situation. That works for a little while until once again I "do the next wrong thing." And the cycle repeats itself.

Of course, knowing what the right thing is can be tricky, but this simple saying engages the here and now, taking us out of ourselves and into reality. "Just do the next right thing" brings us face to face with the choice. We are reminded to live presently. It's not about doing the right thing tomorrow. It's what is next. At each moment, we have a choice. In the next moment, we act on the choice. There is no not choosing.

What will you decide to do? †

Children's X-Mas Carols

A teacher in Atlanta asked her students to write the words to their favorite Christmas Carols. Here are some of the humorous lines she received:

- Deck the Halls with Buddy Holly
- We three kings of porridge and tar
- On the first day of Christmas my tulip gave to me
- Later on we'll perspire, as we dream by the fire.
- He's makin a list, chicken and rice.
- Noel, Noel, Barney's the king of Israel.
- With the jelly toast proclaim
- Olive, the other reindeer. (all of the other reindeer)
- Frosty the Snowman is a ferret elf, I say
- Sleep in heavenly peas
- In the meadow we can build a snowman, then pretend that he is sparse and brown
- You'll go down in listerine
- Oh, what fun it is to ride with one horse, soap and hay
- O come, froggy faithful
- You'll tell Carol, "Be a skunk, I require."



Characteristics of a Teachable Spirit

KEVIN / MARCH 2013

What does it mean to be teachable and unteachable?

In David Murray's most recent blog post, he calls being teachable "the most important life skill." Here is his description of having a teachable spirit vs. an unteachable spirit:

What does unteachability look like?

- Don't take notes, read books, or learn anything unless it's the bare minimum or what's essential for exam purposes.
- Don't ask questions or attempt anything that might reveal your ignorance or risk you are looking stupid.
- Don't accept responsibility for your failures but blame anyone and everyone else.
- Don't seek or accept one-to-one personal guidance or mentoring from parents, teachers, pastors, elders, etc.
- Don't listen, but talk, talk, talk about yourself, especially when you're with someone you could learn a lot from.
- Don't take criticism or correction without resentment or retaliation.
- Resist moving out of personal comfort zones in work, study, ministry, or relationships, but always look for the easy and familiar route.

- Don't read, listen to, or learn anything that challenges existing presuppositions, practices, and prejudices.

In contrast, teachability means:

- You're aware of the limitations of your own knowledge and abilities.
- You admit limitation, inability, and ignorance to others who can teach and help.
- You regularly ask for help, instruction, guidance, and advice (before the event, not after disaster strikes).
- You learn from anyone and everyone you can (the best educated pastor I know writes notes for his own benefit even when listening to a novice preacher).
- You listen to others carefully and patiently with a desire to learn from everyone.
- You're prepared to move out of your comfort zone, try something different, make mistakes, look stupid, answer wrongly, etc.
- You don't give up when you fail at something, but seek help, and try again and again until you get it right.
- You're willing to change your views and practices when convincing evidence is presented to you, even if it means admitting you were wrong.

There's another word for teachability.... **HUMILITY**. "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." (1 Peter 5:5) †

Year of Oblate Vocations

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to someone we love, reality begins to dispel an illusion. It's not that we become disillusioned with God, but rather that we come to realize that so many of the warm thoughts and feelings we believed were about God were really about ourselves. Disillusionment is a good thing. It's the dispelling of an illusion. What we thought was prayer was partly a spell of enchantment about ourselves....

The easy response then is to back away, to quit, to see the whole thing as having been an illusion, a false start. In the spiritual life, that's usually when we stop praying.

But the opposite is called for. What we need to do then is to show up, just as we did before, minus the warm thoughts and feelings, bored, uncertain, and stripped of our enchantment about ourselves. The deeper we go in relationships and in prayer, the more unsure of ourselves we become, and this is the beginning of maturity: It's when I say, I don't know how to love and I don't know how to pray, that I first begin to understand what love and prayer actually are.

Hence, there is no better advice than that given by this Jesuit priest to my friend who thought himself an atheist: **Just show up! Sit in humility and silence long enough so that you can begin to hear someone else, not yourself.** †



Leisure is a resting place. Laziness is a hiding place.

If your get-up-and-go is gone, don't berate yourself.

Figure out what you're afraid of – and how you're going to face it.

--Author Unknown

Sensory Deprivation

(Chicken Soup for the Unsinkable Soul, p. 174)

Note: The following was written by Deborah E.H., a female prisoner, crime unknown.

I want to go dancing and wear a dress that swirls and floats around me, and laugh....

I want to sleep in my own bed and luxuriate in the cool crispness of clean sheets, and rest my head on my own soft pillow. And go to sleep when I want to, with all the lights out, and wake up when I'm ready.

I want to stretch out on my couch under my blue-plaid afghan and listen as my favorite music seeps through the speakers and into my being....

I want to sit on my porch and sip hot coffee from my stoneware mug, and read the newspaper, and hear the dog bark at blowing leaves and trespassing squirrels.

I want to answer the phone and call my friends and family and talk until we catch up on all the words we've saved for each other, and laugh.

I want to hear a train hoot through Loveland, the gravel crunch in my driveway, and car doors slam as friends come to visit. And the tinkle and clink of silverware on china, the hiss and gurgle of the coffee maker.

I want to feel my bare feet on the cool whiteness of my kitchen floor, and soft blueness of my bedroom carpet.

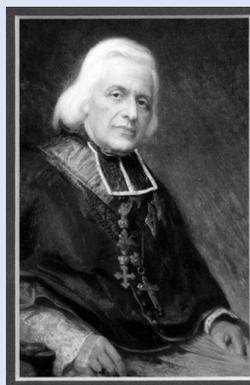
I want to see all the colors, all of them, every color ever spun into existence. And white, true white, pristine and unblemished. And acres of green trees, and miles of yellow-ribbon highways, and yards of Christmas lights. And the moon.

I want to smell bacon sizzling, a steak broiling, Thanksgiving dinner... fresh laundry... and the ocean.

But more than all of this, I want to stand in the doorway of my son's room and watch him sleep. And hear him get up in the morning and see him come home at night. And touch his face and comb my fingers through his hair.... And watch him grow and laugh and play and eat and drive and live. Mostly, mostly, live. And put my arms around him and hold him until he laughs and says, "Mom, that's enough!"

And then be free to do it again. †

FROM THE WRITINGS OF THE FOUNDER:



December 16, 1850 *Diary Notes:*

Is this not the day when I shall receive the vows of the Brothers of Perpetual Help and confer the habit on five of them. These Brothers are men of good will whom I have established to care for the sick. I quickly responded to those who came forward and I was able to bring them together in community. We gave them a Rule which they observe faithfully, and which brings them to the level of wanting to dedicate themselves to God through the vows of religion, at first for one year, then for five and finally perpetually.

These are the Brothers whom I plan to put in charge of the hospice for convalescents which I am in the process of founding (an institute founded in 1852 to care for the sick in their homes). I told them of my intentions in this matter and they fully agree with it. It was with this in mind that I bought the former house of the Ladies of the Blessed Sacrament and there the Brothers will live as in their mother house. They shall care for the convalescents whom I shall send there without ceasing to care for the sick poor whom they will continue to look after.

In order to purchase this house, which cost one hundred thousand Francs, I sold the two country properties which I possessed in Aix, in the Banon area. I thought it would be better, while I am still living, to begin doing what I wanted to have done after my death. †