

10th Sunday Ordinary Time
June 10, 2018

We are Not Discouraged

Readings: Genesis 3:9-15; 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1; Mark 3:20-35

“Therefore, we are not discouraged; rather, although our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.”

Certainly, to speak of discouragement may not be a priest’s first choice of topics for a Sunday homily. However, if we are called to address key issues in people’s lives in light of the saving truth of the Gospel, how could we not address them? Discouragement takes many forms, and if unchecked, can easily be a precursor to depression. And yet discouragement is part and parcel of life.

There have been two suicides in the national news of late. You may have heard of one or both of the individuals, or perhaps neither. But each is well known to a large segment of the population. One was a designer of handbags with a label bearing her name, Kate Spade, and other was a writer, cook, and TV personality named Anthony Bourdain. Both individuals were wildly successful from a worldly perspective, extremely wealthy and famous. Each made contributions in their chosen field, even beating the odds given their respective backgrounds.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, suicide rates are up by 30 percent across the nation since 1999. These increases were especially high among middle aged people. Nearly 45,000 people died by suicide in 2016, placing it among the top ten causes of death annually.

I am in no position to diagnose what happened with these two individuals, neither of whom I knew in the slightest. However, it is appropriate to inquire as to the nature of discouragement. Saint Paul goes on to characterize discouragement as a “momentary light affliction,” producing for us an eternal weight of glory. Discouragement often results from unfulfilled expectations. Highly motivated people become discouraged precisely because they expect so much of themselves. They demand excellence of themselves.

The best hitters in baseball, ones who earn invitations to the All-Star Game, hit safely just 3 out of ten times at bat. Only 27 players in the entire league are hitting .300 currently, fewer than one per team. The worlds very best golfers finish in the top ten in tournaments just 1/3 of the time, with the average being twice in fifteen events so far this year. They fail so much more often than they succeed.

Sometimes, discouragement results from people who continue to insist on trying to be someone other than God intended them to be. You will easily become discouraged if you are not following God's will, because at your core, you are frustrating His designs for you. But of course that presumes you know God's will.

Discouragement is different form sadness. Of course we would be sad following the loss of a loved one. "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." (Matthew 5:4) Jesus wept over Jerusalem, he wept over the death of his friend Lazarus., his soul even became "sorrowful unto death" in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Discouragement is sadness multiplied, it results in the person losing hope, literally "losing courage" in the face of their festering sadness. Here is another take. If our lives are not being lived in accordance with God's Law, we should not be surprised if we feel empty inside. How can we have joy and peace if we are mired in serious sin?

In a letter written to a woman named Marie, wife of the president of the Parliament in Burgundy, St. Francis De Sales wrote: "Let us be what we are and be that well, in order to bring honor to the Master Craftsman whose handiwork we are."¹

He went on to write that we ought to be "what God wants us to be, provided we are His, and let us not be what we would like to be, contrary to His intention." Be who God created you to be.

¹ Letter to Marie Bourgeois Brulartto, Letter CCLXXXIX, dated June 10, 1605. Translation by Péronne Marie Thibert, V.H.M. in *Francis de Sales, Jane de Chantal: Letters of Spiritual Direction*.

The great spiritual writers in the Catholic tradition spoke of *acedia*, which may be seen as a form of depression due to lax ascetical practice, decreasing vigilance, carelessness of heart. “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”²The greater the height, the harder the fall. Painful as discouragement is, it is the reverse of presumption. The humble are not surprised by their distress; it leads them to trust more, to hold fast in constancy.³

In short, let us be willing to be humbled before God, including admitting our struggles, which we all have and of which we ought not to be ashamed. In the end, we are truly happy and at peace when we believe in our heart that we are doing God’s will, when we are fulfilling a purpose in life.

The psalms provide a wise ending to my brief remarks today, for they contextualize what we ought to keep in the forefront of our minds. “At dusk weeping comes for the night; but at dawn there is rejoicing.”⁴

² cf. Matthew 26:41

³ Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph # 2733.

⁴ Psalm 30:6