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July 4, 2008

Dear Friends, Fellow-Christians, Workers, and Relatives;

As most of you probably realize, the purpose for “keeping” a personal journal (diary) is not only to record (for an aid to one’s memory) special events and happening in one’s daily life, but a journal also is to enable one to record: reflections, thoughts, ideas, inspirations, questions, “feelings” (sorrows and joys), “dreams”, “hopes”, “visions”, and even “written prayers”.

For many years (sometimes too “sporadically”) I’ve been “keeping” a personal journal – which allows me the discipline (at times) to “look inwardly” at my own spiritual life (sometimes revealing great “flaws” and “shortcomings” and even “sins” of commission or “sins” of omission in my life!). Journaling has proven to “help me in my growth” – sometimes very slow growth during my “Christian pilgrimage”.

The following journal entry (on July 1, 2008) brought some “new insight” into my own spiritual life. Bringing me “conviction of my sin of jealousy”, as well as bringing me considerable comfort as I am continuing to learn the “right attitudes” I should have as I seek to “find my place” in the Kingdom of God, or, as the Scriptures say, “The Body of Christ”. I, of course, did not intend to share this quickly written journal entry with anyone, since it was meant to be personal and private. However, I sensed, (a couple days after writing it), that God would be pleased if I shared the following (important) insights with other “servants of the Lord”.

“Ron”

July 1, 2008.

In terms of humility, I read today a few excerpts from the diary of the young woman (who died when she was only 24) who was Catholic, and had been honored by Pope John Paul II, whose name is St. Therese of Lisieux. This lady was so much in love with Jesus that she was “indifferent whether God chose her, or anyone else, to do his work”. (Divine Providence; by Francis Cardinal Arinze; p. 53) In her diary she wrote, “What does it matter to me that it be I or another person to show this way to souls; as long as it is shown, what does it matter who the instrument is?”

What a Christ-centered, and others-oriented, self-forgetful (and liberating) way to live! It matters not who the instrument is (I or someone else) that God chooses: to preach, to teach, to evangelize, to disciple, to do missionary work, to do linguistic work of Bible translations. Or to write great books, to administrate great colleges or seminaries, to compose great music, to sing heart-touching songs, to raise large amounts of money for missions, to think brilliant theological thoughts, to found and develop great Christian movements, to speak daily on the radio or television about Christ to millions of folks!

As this true young saint said before her death at only 24, “What does it matter who the instrument is?”

Someone said that he believed in heaven every redeemed person will enjoy the accomplishments of other redeemed persons, as if those accomplishments were his very own accomplishments! No envy, jealousy, covetousness, comparison, competition, strife in heaven, between the heavenly citizens, but only mutual love, appreciation, sharing, caring, and enjoyment of each other. There will be only profound respect and total self-giving, with no condescension, no pride (in personal accomplishments). Everyone sharing the God-given gifts with each other, and everyone (with vast diversity of personality, experience, and talent) joining in corporate, united, and totally harmonious praise of the matchless and altogether beautiful Saviour! This is what I think it will be like in heaven – perfect peace, harmony, love, and total humility. Everyone will be learning from one another without intimidation, humiliation or belittlement. But learning together with great discernment, dignity, appreciation, and love. “All for each, and each for all” – praising the great Tri-une God (who has stamped His image upon every human being in that Celestial City!)

But on earth, I have found that, at times, I have not adequately and consistently lived out that reality (of humility), namely: “What does it matter to me that it be I or another person to show the way to souls; as long as it is shown, what does it matter who the instrument is?”

Billy Graham (the greatest evangelist of the 20th century) acknowledges that he has simply been “God’s instrument” to declare the Good News of Salvation. Moreover, what a most amazing, effective, consistent, faithful witness he has been for about 60 years!

I have sought during my relatively short time in the pastoral ministry (1967-1994) to be “God’s instrument”, specifically in five areas (which I hope it is not an act of pride to have placed on my tombstone):

1. Prayer Warrior. I have spent much time, for many years, in prayer, but I know I am only a “novice” compared to the world’s great Prayer-Warriors.
2. Soul-Winner. I tried to intentionally – through “appointments” – win souls to Christ, and God allowed me to pray the “sinner’s prayer” with scores of persons, over a period of about 20 years in my pastoral ministry – but there are many – like Billy Graham – who have won millions to Christ, while I have won only a few persons.
3. Preaching. I prepared and preached many hundreds of sermons during my nearly 27 years of pastoral ministry, but the great preachers (like John Wesley) preached thousands of sermons (Wesley, about 40,000; E. Stanley Jones – about 60,000 sermons!).
4. Teaching. I prepared hundreds of Sunday School lessons, and other lessons for many groups – for many years, but the great teachers have prepared and delivered far more lessons – with greater brilliance.
5. Writing. I have worked hard at writing (about 20 books), but none of my books have been published, while the great writers have sold millions of their books.

Why have I found it so difficult to say (in light of the accomplishments of others who have been more fruitful than I, in all areas of life): “What does it matter who is the instrument that God chooses to use?” Those whom God is able to use so effectively are the same ones who have learned “self-forgetfulness” and “true humility”. Ones who are not concerned who gets credit for the work that has been or is being done for God! No self-seeking and no pride for results (visibly) that God allows the servant to have – and no jealousy when God chooses to use another servant to accomplish more (visible) results in some area that I am less qualified and less talented to do! Just fitting into the “Master Plan” of Christ (who desires to redeem the entire world)! No running away from the “high profile leadership” (of a large Church or a large Christian organization, etc.), if God calls one of his servants to that place of awesome responsibility! Also, gladness to stay hidden in an obscure place of service, if God calls a servant to do the hard, menial tasks of caring for the neglected and poor persons in God’s world. No pride on one hand, and no self-pity on the other hand. Each servant finding his “Christ-given assignment”, doing it humbly, cheerfully, faithfully, hopefully, confidently and prayerfully, but working for the Master – not for the praise or recognition of man! Using the spiritual gifts that God has allotted to His servants – and saying, “What does it matter who the instrument is?”

Never drawing attention to yourself, and never being envious of another fellow servant (whom God seems to have “favored” with “more or better” gifts!). What does it matter whom God has chosen to do certain things – better than what you can do them? Better preaching, better teaching, better administration of a much larger local Church, better evangelistic outreach with more souls won to Christ, better music than you can ever even begin to produce, etc., etc.

What does it matter whom God chooses to use to get His work done? Why is there so much temptation to comparison, competition, envies, jealousy, strife and ill feeling? None of these attitudes and feelings is pleasing to God! All are carnal feelings, condemned by the Father of love who has an assignment (a wonderful and Christ-honoring assignment) for every one of His children. A “yoke” that is “custom-made” for each of His children!

I, in heaven, will probably enjoy the accomplishments of all the heavenly citizens, as if those accomplishments were my very own accomplishments! Can I progressively approximate that same attitude towards all fellow Christians while I am still here on earth?

“What does it matter to me that it be I or another person to show the way to souls; as long as it is shown, what does it matter who the instrument is?” (No wonder this mature young 24 yr. old lady was considered a saint!)

I increasingly must learn to get my eyes off of the Instruments (i.e., myself or all the other multitudes of instruments), and instead “focus” on the Master whose sovereign right it is to choose the instruments that He wisely deems best for every “job” he desires to perform. I think most of the Instruments will be used in less visible places and in seemingly ordinary settings (particularly in the homes of millions of persons). Yes, the Master has chosen a few high profile instruments to do important “up front” leadership-type jobs (preachers and evangelists before millions of people, in person or through media), but God also takes great delight in using instruments to minister to the homeless ones in darkened alleys in large cities. God uses instruments (like myself) to write several books which will probably be read by only a “handful” of persons (a few hundred probably), but God has other instruments (professional writers) whose books will be read by millions of readers. Does it matter that my books (which took much time and effort to write) will have a ‘small audience’ of readers, while other writers (instruments) will be used of God to touch the lives of millions? NO, it does not matter at all – as long as I attempt to make myself available to God as a well-equipped (yet imperfect) instrument!

All that matters in the end is that Christ is glorified and that God’s people are edified (i.e., built up in the “Holy Faith”)! All are to use their gifts for these two purposes – Christ’s glory and the Church’s edification – but it is Christ the Master, who, alone, has the right to give the specific assignments to each member of His Body. Each of us is only ONE CELL in the Body (no more and no less).

Yes, it is true that God will reward every person hereafter (in eternity) according to the degree and quality of works, which each person (on earth) has performed. Only God (in mercy) is qualified to Judge on that “Great Day of Evaluation”. There will be different degrees or levels of rewards in heaven – based on the quality of life each person has lived for Christ on earth. But, with this awesome “Judgment of Evaluation” in mind (which every Christian must anticipate and prepare for), however, each Christian must not panic or become competitive for greater “success” (fruitfulness) on earth (in order that he might get greater rewards in heaven, for himself). Why do we work on earth, as Christians? To build up a greater “store” of accomplishments, so that we will be assured of greater rewards hereafter? Surely not! For is not

such reasoning an expression of “egotism” and “selfishness”? We work because we deeply love Christ and sincerely love others! Love is the greater motivator of our actions (good works).

I should use my gifts gladly, in a self-forgetful way (not in a self-conscious or proud way, seeking the recognition and applause of my fellow-believers). I should “work at” enjoying the gifts of others (and the God-ordained place and position of others), and learn to enjoy their gifts “as if those gifts were my own gifts”. NOT covet their gifts, but truly appreciate their gifts, and even to develop joy in their expression of their gifts. Perhaps on earth (different from heaven) I will never completely be able to enjoy their gifts as if their gifts were my own gifts.

Nevertheless, I at least can practice such humble, grateful, and glad attitudes, which are attitudes that reflect a deeper understanding of the mysterious and mystical nature of the “organic Body of Christ”, where all cells are interdependent.

By
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