

July 26, 2020: Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

I remember when I went to get my first driver's license. I went to the RMV office in Marlboro. The person I dealt with was a nice lady who really tried to help me. When I about to take the eye exam, she recommended that I take my glasses off. Her reasoning was that it would be better for me if I passed the eye test without them, in order to avoid the restriction that would be put on my license. I thanked her for her kind suggestion but was very clear that I really could not see without my glasses and, therefore, was okay with taking the exam with them on. She insisted that I try anyway, and so I did what she asked. When I put my face up to the machine, she asked, "Where is the red apple on the picnic table?" I responded, "What picnic table?" She then told me, "Put on your glasses." Once I put my glasses on, I had no trouble finding the table. I got my license with the restriction for wearing glasses.

Sometimes people create expectations for what we can accomplish, even when we are clear that it is not possible. And, maybe, if you are like me, we sometimes take on those expectations even though we know we cannot accomplish what the other person wants. It is hard at times to accept our own limitations, and it becomes even more difficult when others are prodding us on. We have the desire in us *not* so much to please people, but to *not* disappoint them. Or, possibly, we don't want to admit that we have certain weaknesses. The reality of confronting our limitations is something that can be daunting. This is particularly true when we have to admit that we cannot do the things we could in the past. Honestly, there were things I could do in my 20's that now, in my 50's, I can't do. And, it is not easy to accept these changes. They are one of the biggest issues with expectations and limitations because they tend to be fluid, while we human beings tend to want to reject the idea that we are somehow different. I should always be able to do what I was once able to do. But, alas we cannot!

What is true of life in general can very easily also be true of our lives with God. But the great thing about God is that He meets us where we're at, and not where He knows we can and should be. Growing in our faith life is *not* about meeting some preconceived expectation. Growing in our faith life is *not* about comparing ourselves to where others may be. Growing in our faith life is *not* about fast-tracking it. Rather, it is about discovering who we are as a person. It is about discerning what our gifts and talents are. It is about taking into account the life we are currently living and how that impacts our understanding of God.

One of my favorite saints is Saint Francis de Sales who wrote an amazing book over 400 years ago. It is called *An Introduction to the Devout Life*. The aim of the book is to help us understand how one grows in the spiritual life. The great thing about this book is that he takes such a practical way of looking at one's spiritual life. Furthermore, he makes a most powerful point, one that has remained with me both in my own spiritual growth and in helping others in their spiritual growth. It is simply that the life we are called to live impacts how we are called to be in relationship with God. Not every person is intended to have the exact same spiritual life or prayer life. Hence, an unmarried woman's spiritual life would be different from that of a married woman. And a woman with children will have a spiritual life different from that of a woman with no children. An unmarried man's spiritual life would be different from that of a married man. And the spiritual life of a man with children will be different from that of a man with no children. The priest's life is different from that of the layperson, the religious life is different from that of the non-religious, and so on! It is most important in living out our spiritual life that we do not see one as being better than another; they are simply different. And, in that difference, we must discover the spiritual life we are being called to live out, and through that life how we are called to express it.

What makes sense in one person's life will not necessarily make sense in another person's. Therefore, you should not compare your spiritual and prayer life to another's. Case in point: I generally pray somewhere between 3-4 hours a day. I get up early in the morning to do the bulk of my prayers. Not everyone has the capacity or the framework in their life to do this. What is necessary in my life is not necessary in everyone's life. I need this time of prayer in order to live the life that God is calling me to. I did not always pray that much, but have grown into it organically. My life has slowly adapted to make this possible.

The question is not about how much you pray, but rather, that you do *indeed* pray. It is, again, not about comparing yourself to what others may or may not be doing, but in the context of your life, what makes sense. It is recognizing

that you need some kind of formal structured prayer life in order to grow spiritually, for growth in a spiritual life is simply about deepening your relationship with God. It is about recognizing who is on the journey of life with me. And it is acknowledging that prayer is simply having a conversation with God, and that God is the one who has begun the conversation. It is accepting the only reason that I do not hear God in my life: because I have chosen *not* to listen and *not* to do something about it.

Let us really allow God to introduce Himself to us, but not based on another's expectations. Let us simply be open to the life God has given us and discover through prayer where He is.

If you have any questions about anything, please do not hesitate to ask me directly, or send your questions to me at fr.brian@chelmsfordcatholic.org.

Please keep me in your prayers.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Fr. Brian", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Fr. Brian