

"But God said to him, 'You fool, this night your life is being demanded of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God."

- Luke 12:20-21

As someone who is coming closer to retirement age, this quotation in the Gospel of Luke continues to have a deepening value that can certainly help those much younger in understanding how far from the common sense of Jesus this society truly is! We live in a society obsessed with things – we are taught continually throughout our schooling the importance of being a success. We go about our personal understanding about what that means, experiencing successes and failures of various degrees, both personal and professional, then, one day, much like the suddenness described here and in other passages of Jesus' teaching, we realize we are aging. We have accumulated all of this "stuff" – at least for me, it has become more a burden than a blessing.

For many of us, various degrees of poverty have motivated this mad dash in our lifetime to accumulate stuff so that we are looked upon with respect by others, but that stuff only has a personal, idiosyncratic meaning to ourselves and no one else. I don't know that it is all bad, but when you start to realize that you are entering the final phase of life, you realize how little meaning spiritually any of what we accumulated means to anything – so how much were we really religious?

So we collected art, that only a few got to see, or we collected fine crystal, or we collected Hummels or whatever your collection of interest may be, but how many souls have you saved? How many hours have you dedicated to the religious enlightenment of others – or for that matter yourself? The Bible becomes the 500 pound gorilla in the room for most of us and reaching the point of aging, we can no longer deny how we failed – failed in ways only we ourselves and God know. It is the point of honest introspection and accepting of responsibility for what we did or did not do in life that is the reason we need to be more vigilant and insistent that our children spend time every week learning and contemplating the lessons of the Bible and understanding the value of faith – maybe they will seek things less and faith more.

I think if we all look around and see the empty pews and see the nation that is willing to wait in line for hours if not days for non-religious functions, none of us were considering too closely how we might reach the point in which God (life) is staring us in the face requiring that we fairly account for who we have been and what we have done.

I often think it is this quote that we encounter face to face as we age. Some of us will heed the call and divest ourselves as much of our vain pursuits and seek in some way to guide those who have many years left, or we will be deaf to God and continue to prod along fussing over our aches and pains and believing we did the best we can. To me our faith in part must be about honesty before God. Our lifelong inner spiritual development ought to have an ongoing conversation with our Lord – each time you read scripture, certainly by the time you reach 60; you ought to be thinking about how what you are reading relates to your own life with God. The honesty of those moments ought to ground you to being honest to Him.

I've been thinking of my own failures in this life and it is no act of humility on my part to feel shame and sorrow for those failures. Whatever expectation of forgiveness or hope for heaven, for some, not all, becomes heavily laden by the details of life and suddenly you don't feel the surety of a place before our

Lord, suddenly you are faced with the more than likely truth that, well you hope you get purgatory – suddenly, in spite of all that you know of scripture and all that you have learned and all your charitable works – you no longer are sure of anything – to me this is the first time you begin to be honest before God. How can one be sure of a moment one has not been to as of yet? Life is complex – do we know how we really weigh out before Him?

We do gain patience and the ability to forgive and amazingly we find ourselves capable of laughter as we age and maybe even realize that when we were somewhere between 25 and 55 all of our efforts were to curry advantage from those around us socially and professionally – those times were not filled with real laughter – all too shrouded in the illusion we were doing it right. At best we end up with bittersweet understandings of those we loved who never knew how much they meant to us, or we realize just how precious the simple moments were when our laughter and joy was real.

I did an experiment recently in which I expressed my horror over the factual truth that abortion has exceeded the exterminations of Nazi Germany 7 times over – only one person responded and said to me (though they did not know it was me) – to get a job – not one responded thanking me for the insight – I am sure they didn't view the You Tube videos on the actual abortions where they might cry out in utter despair that we are not engaged in an overwhelming outcry to end the evil of these times. I was saddened by the one response because it was one of the children of our extended family – his gut reaction told me in a moment everything that is wrong with what we teach – we harden our children to be these cold uncaring beings because that is the smart way, that is the way, no one can emotionally get to you and thus discover your vulnerability – but I was talking about the murder of the defenseless if you cannot feel anything about that in a deeply spiritual way – well what is it your life's meaning? How many with the hard heart caused others to determine abortion was there only option? How many times will cold gut reactions add up in your lifetime?

I will put the metaphor to you this way – imagine that you and your friends are the nations in the Bible and then read Matthew 25:31-46 for a starter. Is it not so that our individual failures - turning our back on those hungry, thirsty, etc. – do we really need to look outside ourselves when we are cold and indifferent to understand the “signs of the times” for our own souls? Is not the end of the world a personal reality regardless of whether it may become a communally experienced event? If you can see the behaviors of your friends that are like Gog or Babylon – personalize your reality through personalizing the prophecy to those who you do encounter – suddenly the Bible does in fact become up-close and personal and suddenly your life is being demanded of you to account before God – happily humbled to possible real growth!

After all God's forgiveness comes when we can truly realize our spiritual errors and move closer to being thoughtful before we act, being thoughtful about whom we really are experiencing, being thoughtful about how we can find God's blessings for our lives without sacrificing our personal, spiritual integrity in order to attain the comfort we intelligently seek. No one said it was easy. We will fail, but with a conscience we will not loosen our hand from God's!

©2010 Suzanne MarcAurele