

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

6th Sunday in Ordinary Time | For Sunday, February 13, 2022

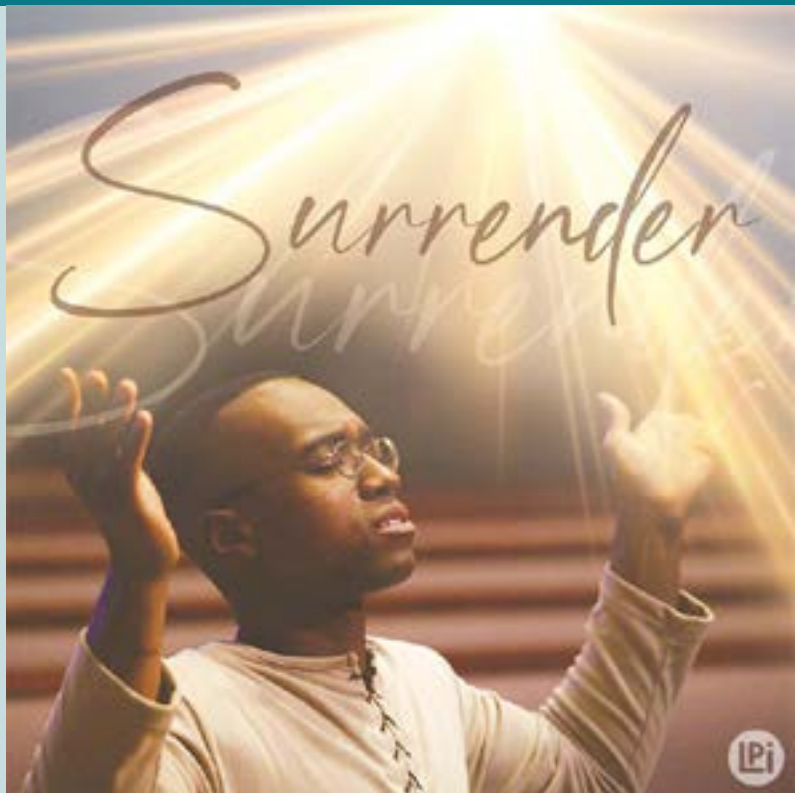
Living in Paradox

Written by Br. John-Marmion Villa

Jeremiah 17:5-8

1 Corinthians 15:12, 16-20

Luke 6:17, 20-26



There's a lyric from a song recently released by one of my favorite worship bands: "I found my life when I laid it down / Upward falling spirit soaring / I touch the sky when my knees hit the ground." ([Hillsong UNITED, 2015](#)). I was struck deeply by those lines in the chorus, but it wouldn't be for a few years that I would really start to understand how deep those simple lyrics can be for any serious Christian.

Here in our monastery, we talk about how the Christian life is paradoxical, it is a different way of being human (cf. [St. Maximus the Confessor](#)). It tends to run contrary to rational thinking ... not as a means of discarding it, but by transcending its inherent limitations so that God's Will could be made manifest here on earth. The notion of paradox is difficult for us to understand because we live in a cultural climate where risk is measured by a profitable return, where pragmatism champions discipline, where image and perception define success. [Today's Gospel](#) teaching is another one of those "showstoppers" precisely because it runs contrary to what we prefer.

You might be thinking to yourself, "How is the Kingdom 'mine' in poverty? We don't live in abject poverty as in some third world country." "How am I 'blessed' when my reputation is smeared all over social media?" I, too, scratch my head when I read things like this. But then I remember that Jesus not only taught these things, he also lived them out! His happiness was precisely in that he was totally free of human compulsions towards unrestricted pleasures, a celebrity reputation, financial prosperity and security, or even undisciplined emotional habits. He invites us to live his freedom, and perhaps in some small way, we also want that for ourselves. Yet maybe, we are too afraid to make the break from "our ways" to "his way." It seems like such an impossibility to follow Jesus, while we have a desire for his life, there's that 'something' that holds us back.

Jesus “came down” (v 17) ... and he invites us to do the same. What pedestals of self-exaltation do we need to come down from? Jesus “raises his eyes towards his disciples” (v 20) ... meaning, he’s looking at us too. Are his eyes stern in judgement towards us for sins unknown or unrepented? Or are his eyes tender in compassion, knowing how frail and weak our character is? Hopefully, there’s a little of both ... more of the latter, but enough of the former.

“I had stacked some rocks out at this little place in the woods, a place I had gone to pray, desperate for God to do something, to show up, or to have some sort of breakthrough. As I was praying, I remember smelling cedar so strong it distracted me from my prayer. I looked around to see this little cedar tree that had been snapped in half from my stepping in there. That was where the smell was coming from. It was a tangible sign of grace. I wrote down on a little notepad “the fragrance of the broken.” (Craig Brian Larson and Phyllis Ten Elshof, [1001 Illustrations That Connect](#), Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2008, p. 439.)

Paradox ... we touch the heavens when we fall on our knees, we are rich when we are poor, the fragrance is released only when it is broken. Jesus invites us to experience his freedom on his terms. Let’s pray for greater courage to respond with greater surrender.

Br. John-Marmion Villa

PRAYER

Loving Father,
I surrender to you today with all my heart and soul.
Please come into my heart in a deeper way.
I say, “Yes” to you today.
I open all the secret places of my heart to you
and say, “Come on in.”

Jesus, you are the Lord of my whole life.
I believe in you and receive you as my Lord and Savior.
I hold nothing back.

Holy Spirit,
bring me to a deeper conversion
to the person of Jesus Christ.
I surrender all to you:
my time, my treasures, my talents,
my health, my family, my resources,
my work, relationships, time management,

successes and failures.
I release it and let it go.
I surrender my understanding of
how things ‘ought’ to be, my choices and my will.
I surrender to you the promises I have kept
and the promises I have failed to keep.
I surrender my weaknesses and strengths to you.
I surrender my emotions, my fears,
my insecurities, my sexuality.
I especially surrender _____*

Lord, I surrender my whole life to you,
the past, the present, and the future.
In sickness and in health, in life and in death,
I belong to you.

(Remain with the Lord in a spirit of silence
through your thoughts, a heart song, or simply
staying in His presence and listening for His voice.)

**Here mention other areas of surrender as the Holy Spirit reveals them to you.*