

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

1st Sunday of Lent | For Sunday, March 6, 2022

Growing Pains

Written by Fr. Mark Suslenko

Deuteronomy 26:4-10

Romans 10:8-13

Luke 4:1-13



We forget that to be human means to accept our growing pains. We are incomplete, works in progress. Our lives are never entirely integral, whole, and perfectly constructed creations but a diverse collection of broken pieces. If not welcomed with love, our necessary incompleteness can propel us to consistently, and sometimes compulsively, seek control and satisfaction.

Who am I? Who made me? What is my purpose? These are pivotal and fundamental questions that must be asked and adequately answered. Life's illusions and empty pleasures can distract us from discovering their real answers. When faced with important choices we are tempted to leave the truth of who we are and who God is aside. Achieving self-sufficiency, power, and prestige can appear to be the perfect fix to the loneliness, angst, and emptiness we experience. Any lie can pretend to be true. But this lie can only keep up its pretense for a short time. At some point, it will be seen as the shallow, self-destructive falsehood. Sometimes it's easier to replace our true God with the one we carry in our back pocket, the god we created ourselves.

We like control and satisfaction. One of the most significant sources of anxiety is the absence of control. We're afraid that we are going to fall apart. We instinctively know that we are a conglomeration of broken pieces rather than a complete whole, but we're scared to admit it. We don't want to appear vulnerable. This gives attractions and lures their power. Forgetting who God is increases the temptation to believe the lie. In the end, it is not the foundation of our homes that will support us but the foundation of our souls. Therein lies the mystery and beauty of what it means to be human. Our peace, tranquility, purpose, and identity are not tied to the world but to our Creator. Nothing outside can satisfy and provide better than what comes from within.

We forget some of the fundamentals that can keep us from making wrong choices and falling victim to evil in disguise. Who am I? A child of God. Who made me? God made me. What is my purpose? To know and serve my Creator. While these may appear to be simplistic, they are not. For if we can keep these

questions and their answers firmly rooted in our minds, hearts, and souls they can be game changers for how we approach the things of this world and life's challenges. We can easily forget who is in charge and to whom we belong. This is the highest and worst of the illusions. Once we give ourselves or others more importance than is rightfully theirs, we quickly stumble down the path of sin. Sin is ultimately an absence of desire for God manifested in various intensities. Once other things become more desirable in fulfilling our well-being, purpose, and happiness, we are in trouble.

Temptation does not need to be our enemy. It can become a means to salvation! St. Basil remarks, "As the pilot of a vessel is tried in the storm, as the wrestler is tried in the ring, the soldier in the battle and the hero in adversity, so is the Christian tried in temptation." Here is the reason for Lent: to make temptation our friend. There is no doubt that we sin, even though we often prefer to forget or deny that fact. We are sinners. Given that fact, every temptation becomes an opportunity to choose either for grace or sin. The more we can choose virtue over vice, good over evil, truth over lies, and others over ourselves, the stronger we will become. Properly confronting and dealing with temptation builds Christian character. Ironically, when we build strong Christian character, we gain control and satisfaction. They come from within.

Ryan Stevenson performs a great song entitled "[Eye of the Storm](#)." Life will always present us with challenges, lures, and promises to tempt us, causing us to succumb to weakness. But when we put God first and give God proper thanks and worship, we are given a strong anchor and no longer need to be afraid. "In the eye of the storm, you remain in control. And in the middle of the war, you guard my soul. You alone are the anchor when my sails are torn. Your love surrounds me in the eye of the storm." What we ultimately need more of is love. What we need less of are the cheap imitations that look like it. Love, who is God, fortifies us and keeps us from falling. We come to know and believe that we are guided and led, kept and sustained by a God who is incredibly in love with all he has made. We need to own this truth, and it must be born in our souls.

God is not going to intrude on our space. We have to make the room. Our lives can keep us extremely preoccupied, distracted, confused, tired, conflicted, and task driven. Our existence becomes tied to devices. We interact more with things than with people. We lose touch with the flesh and bones of humanity and risk seeing people more as objects than unique artistic creations. We are becoming widgets who are required to produce and function. There is less time for creativity, imagination, deep thinking, reflection, and focusing our attention on truth. We may even be forgetting how to do these things. This is why we so desperately need Lent. When was the last time you were creative? When did you allow your imagination to soar? When did you last take time to ponder life's more profound questions, to throw yourself into God's presence, or consider whether you are really making the right choices?

PRAYER

Eternal God, the refuge and help of all your children,
we praise you for all you have given us,
for all you have done for us,
for all that you are to us.
In our weakness, you are strength,
in our darkness, you are light,
in our sorrow, you are comfort and peace.
We cannot number your blessings,
we cannot declare your love:
For all your blessings we bless you.
May we live as in your presence,
and love the things that you love,
and serve you in our daily lives;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

(St. Boniface)

We can be so easily swayed and convinced that we are walking down the right path and grazing in the right pasture. For all of our supposed brilliance and intelligence, we are easily fooled. We lunge for the attractive and believe that we are entitled to whatever we want. We pretend that emptiness and imperfection do not exist. All that we are and all that we have, especially our poverty, we place before the Lord. "And, having set them before the Lord, your God, you shall bow down in his presence."

Fr. Mark Suslenko