

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time | For Sunday, July 31, 2022

Encountering Jesus

Written by Br. John Marmion Villa

Ecclesiastes 1:2; 2:21-23

Colossians 3:1-5, 9-11

Luke 12:13-21



**SEE THE
FACE
OF GOD
AND
ANSWER
HIS CALL**

At dinner the other night, I recounted the experience of my visit to a poor parish community in Venezuela in 2006. On this one day, the hosts knew that the American visitors were coming, and they splurged on us with ice cold glass bottles of Coke to serve! I was so moved by this simple gesture, realizing quickly that they did not have the ability to enjoy Coke for themselves regularly!!! That day, those friends were Jesus to me, and they taught me a huge lesson.

On another occasion more recently, I was in Dallas to play music for a wedding. As I headed over to the church that morning, I stopped by a local grocery store to pick up a bottle of water and some fruit (honey crisp apples, to be specific) to hold me over until the reception. I hopped back in the car and there on the corner sitting underneath the stop sign at the end of the driveway was a homeless man. Immediately, a thousand thoughts started racing through my mind, which can be summarized as, "What do I do?" The drive out of the parking lot was one of the longest drives of my life. As I drove past the man in his early 30s, my eyes caught his, and the look of sadness and rejection pierced my soul and left an imprint as I rounded the corner. There was Jesus, and I had not the time to offer him a bottle of water or an apple on a hot June Saturday in Texas. That day, Jesus also taught me a lesson, one that I hope never to forget again.

In our cultural climate of materialism, the acquisition of possessions is paramount to success and admiration, while, at the same time, contentment and enjoyment decreases. Boredom seems to set in, and the pursuit of 'more' continues. Jesus' countercultural perspective is usually met with doubt and skepticism because we initially sense the negative aspect — the required or imposed sacrifice of a worldly or secular thing — while forgetting that there is an accompanying positive aspect as well — what we receive in return, namely, a foretaste of eternity! In the spiritual world, our possessions can possess us,

for the more we own, the more we must guard, protect and maintain, and this engagement renders our soul heavy in its desire to fly higher into heaven. [St. John Climacus](#) remarks that, "He who despises what is material is rid of quarrels and controversies; but the covetous man will fight till death for a needle." [Mother Mary Francis](#), with her customary elegant wit, comments, "Who has not seen the little pistols of irritability and the hand grenades of petulance with which a religious will defend his small citadel of supposed needs, conveniences, and arrangements?"

Today, Jesus says, "one's life does not consist of possessions," ([Lk 12:15](#)). Even though I live in a monastery, I still struggle with this ... perhaps, I'm not the only one. I want the joy and freedom of a saint like [St. Francis of Assisi](#), but I am slow to embrace the voluntary poverty through which that joy and freedom grew and flourished. Jesus' invitation towards a deeper voluntary poverty appropriate to our vocational state in life is embraced as if an embrace of Jesus' own cross, an expression of our own willed sacrificial love in response for receiving the gift of salvation and grace. It is not a retribution for sin from the hand of an angry deity, nor an exercise of spiritual gymnastics, nor the negation of the necessities of life.

The process of detachment is painful because of how tightly we are possessed by those possessions (both material and immaterial), which we rationalized to acquire and, thus, are required to protect and maintain. Our heavily-guarded silos of possessions are indeed large and probably bulging at the seams, while there are those in our immediate spheres whose legitimate physical, spiritual, emotional, relational, or educational needs could be met IF those silos were more like a local garage sale. A simple story might help illustrate the point:

I had gone a-begging from door to door in the village path, when thy golden chariot appeared in the distance like a gorgeous dream, and I wondered who was this King of all kings! My hopes rose high and methought my evil days were at an end, and I stood waiting for alms to be given unasked and for wealth scattered on all sides in the dust. The chariot stopped where I stood. Thy glance fell on me and thou camest down with a smile. I felt that the luck of my life had come at last. Then of a sudden thou didst hold out thy right hand and say, "What hast thou to give to me?" Ah, what a kingly jest was it to open thy palm to a beggar to beg! I was confused and stood undecided, and then from my wallet I slowly took out the least little grain of corn and gave to thee. But how great my surprise when at the day's end I emptied my bag on the floor to find a least little gram of gold among the poor heap. I bitterly wept and wished that I had had the heart to give thee my all.

Whatever is not given is lost because, as we ourselves must one day die, all that we have clung to, to the very end, will die with us, but what we have given away will escape corruption for it has been sent ahead into eternity.

From another perspective, Jesus' invitation might come to us in the form of a simple question, "Am I not enough for you?"

Br. John Marmion Villa

PRAYER

Take, O Lord, and receive all my liberty,
my memory, my understanding, my entire will.
Whatever I have or hold, You have given me.
I restore it all to you and surrender it wholly
to be governed by your will.
Give me only Your love and your grace,
and I am rich enough and ask for nothing more.