

## What's the Point?

Homily for October 29<sup>th</sup> 2017  
30<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinarily Time

The Movie "Up in the Air" has this scene where a young man is having second thoughts about getting married. The wedding ceremony is about to begin, but he has a serious case of cold feet. He's not sure he can go through with the wedding. A member of the family, Ryan Bingham, played by George Clooney, is sent to talk with him.

The young man says, "I don't think I'll be able to do this." Ryan asks, "Why would you say that today?" The frightened young man says, "Well, last night I was kinda like laying in bed, and I couldn't get to sleep, so I started thinking about the wedding and the ceremony and about our buying a house, and moving in together, and having a kid, and then having another kid, and then Christmas and Thanksgiving and spring break, and going to football games, and then all of a sudden they are graduated and getting jobs and getting married and, you know, I'm a grandparent, and then I'm retired, and I'm losing my hair, and I'm getting fat, and the next thing I know I'm dead. And it's like, I can't stop from thinking, what's the point? I mean, what is the point?"

The Pharisees had one of their entourage ask Jesus the same question, but he phrases somewhat more formally.

### ***Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?"***

Now there is a nuance here that we can easily miss. The person who poses this question is a lawyer. Not like a barrister but one who was an expert in Jewish Law. They were the men who studied the Laws of Moses as found in the opening five books of the Bible. This is what these law experts determined. The Books of Moses had in total 613 precepts, 248 do's and 365 don'ts. One don't for each day of the year. For them getting to the point was hard to do. And so this man wants to know from Jesus, of all those laws, all 613, which is the greatest? What is the point of all those laws? Jesus answers by drawing from two books, Deuteronomy and Leviticus. From Deuteronomy 6:5 he quotes:

***"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. 38 This is the greatest and first commandment.***

From Leviticus 19 he states:

***And a second is like it, You, shall love your neighbor as yourself.***

Jesus replies by citing the two love commandments found in Moses. That is the point of all 613 laws.

What is the point? It is to discover that love is cruciform. To love God is to realize love's vertical dimension. To love our neighbour, is the cross' horizontal dimension. To love one's self in the place where the vertical and horizontal beams are joined. What's the point? To live a cross shaped life.

To be truly religious is to love God and to love those whom God made in his own image; and to love God and other people, not with a vague sentimentality, but with that total commitment which issues in devotion to God and practical service of others.

So how do we grow in living out cruciform love? The great Italian artist Michelangelo answered the question about living a life of cruciform love this way:

***We discover our true "I" by offering it to a "thou." "For where I am thine, I am wholly mine"***<sup>1</sup>

This is the point. When we can truly offer ourselves to God and are wholly his, we can then discover the genuine me.

To be loved by God and to love God requires of us a humility that recognises apart from God life is a question without an answer. It is a road with no destination. It is like a symphony that ends on the dominant with no resolution. It is like a hockey season with no playoffs and Stanley Cup. It is like playing Clue without knowing if it was Mr. Plumb or Mrs. White "who done it" in the Library with the knife, revolver or rope.

Conversion happens and continues to deepen when we recognize that what matters most in life is to answer the question "What's the point?" by centring on love for God. To love him with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is what we call conversion. It is gradual and lifelong. We call the heart, the soul and the mind the "three faculties". To love God with all of our heart, is to desire God above all else. It is to have our will awakened so that we truly begin to pray: "Thy will be done". How easy it is to pray the Lord's Prayer and not really mean it. But as we come to sincerely pray these words we have a deepening desire to know God both cognitively and volitionally and this is to love him with our mind and soul. The person whose mind is awakened to God has a desire to know the Deposit of Faith. This deposit is the Divine Revelation as found in the 73 books of the Bible and the great Catholic Tradition. It is this tradition that has for 2000 years grown out of Biblical Revelation. The person whose soul is awakened wants to then put into practise what he or she is learning. That is, such a person voluntarily wants to say with Mary, "I am the servant of the Lord, let me live my life according to your word".

When we use our faculties of the heart, soul and mind to love God we can then consider that place where the vertical and horizontal beams meet, an ability to love ourselves. Developing

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<sup>1</sup> Esparza, Michel. *Self-Esteem Without Selfishness: Increasing Our Capacity for Love* (Kindle Locations 1357-1358). Scepter Publishers. Kindle Edition.

and strengthening a good relationship with oneself is no easy task. But it is worth the trouble—not only for our inner peace but because the happiness of all our relationships depends on it. Indeed, experience shows that the quality of one’s relationship with oneself determines the quality of one’s relationships with others. As Aristotle said long ago:

***in order to be a good friend to others, one must be a good friend to oneself.***<sup>2</sup>

To some, it might seem strange to speak of the centrality of self-love, as if this were a kind of egotism—something clearly incompatible with the idea of the virtue of humility. However, a proper love of self allows us to cultivate a true humility where we are learning to be patient and understanding with our own limitations, which leads us to treat others’ shortcomings with similar forbearance. There is a close relationship between being loved, loving oneself, and loving others. In the first place, we need to be loved in order to love ourselves. Knowing that someone loves us, most especially God, makes us aware of our dignity. There is also a connection between the attitude we have toward ourselves and the quality of our love for others. In order to live at peace with those around us, we must first be at peace with ourselves. Nothing separates us so much from our neighbor as dissatisfaction with ourselves.

As we grow in loving God, loving ourselves we can in turn live lovingly in relation to others.

In his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis calls all Catholics to “live in fraternity” and to share “a fraternal love capable of seeing the sacred grandeur of our neighbor.” What an evocative phrase. To see the sacred grandeur of our neighbour. We are to see this in everyone but most especially in the poor as the reading from Exodus clearly teaches.

To love our neighbour in the language of Exodus means that negatively we will not violate the vulnerable, described here as “not abusing any widow or orphan. (Exodus 22:22).

Positively it states:

***If you lend money to my people, to the poor among you, you shall not deal with them as a creditor; you shall not exact interest from them.***<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Esparza, Michel. *Self-Esteem Without Selfishness: Increasing Our Capacity for Love* (Kindle Locations 181-182). Scepter Publishers. Kindle Edition.

In learning to love our neighbor in the poor we are, in special way extending the loving mercy of God to others. This is something the Catholic Church takes to heart and is the reason why the Roman Catholic Church is the largest charitable organization in the world. <sup>4</sup>

For us, all of our social actions is an expression of what it means to love our neighbour.

Consider the following stats given to me by St. Vincent de Paul that tangibly reaches out to the poor of Calgary, thus taking to heart the Exodus call.

The Calgary Diocese (in 2016):

- 900 volunteers
- Visited 7,513 families
- Delivered over 21,000 food hampers
- Spent over \$1.6 million on helping needy people.

For St. Peter's Parish (year to date):

- 70 volunteers
- Handled 414 calls
- Made 15 home visits
- Delivered 394 hampers
- Spent over \$72,000 in assisting people.

Perhaps some of you here would like to become involved with SVDP. Check out our website for contact information.

Love that is cruciform and lived out in all the events of daily life.

**That is the point.**

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<sup>4</sup> See article for support of this claim: <http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/issues/february-17th-2017/a-worldwide-force-for-good/>