

## Homily for January 15, 2017

### *“Attitude Check-Up”*

Isaiah 49:3, 5–6

Psalm 40:2, 4, 7–10

1 Corinthians 1:1–3

John 1:29–34

In 2013 Mike Babcock, the Coach of the Toronto Maple Leafs, - at the time, in 2013, he coached the Detroit Red Wings – gave the Convocation Address at McGill University. He graduated from McGill with a degree in education in the 1980s.

Towards the end of his address, he shared with the graduates a quote written by Charles Swindoll, a well respected Protestant Evangelical preacher. Mr. Babcock said Scotty Bowman, the coach who won more Stanley Cups than any other, had given the quote to him. This McGill grad and one of hockey’s most respected coaches said he has this quote behind his desk and looks at it every day. It is entitled: “Attitude”.

*“The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude, to me, is more important than facts. It is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failure, than successes, than what other people think or say or do. It is more important than appearance, giftedness or skill. It will make or break a company... a church... a home. The remarkable thing is we have a choice everyday regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change our past... we cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude. I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% of how I react to it. And so it is with you... we are in charge of our attitudes.”<sup>1</sup>*

Attitude. This word was originally a 17-century technical term in art for the posture of a figure in a statue or painting. Let’s sit with its original use as a technical term in art. When we think of attitude in relation to this original sense it helps us to better understand what it means for us to be in charge of our attitude. We have a choice to make regarding the posture with which we carry ourselves each and every day. We can, therefore, choose how others will see us based on how we live on the canvas that is our daily lives.

If you think about your attitude, how would you describe it? Is it optimistic, pessimistic, agitated or serene, encouraging or cynical, hopeful or doubtful? Attitude is a dimension of our life of faith which really matters. Attitude affects how we perceive God, how we perceive ourselves and how we perceive others. Attitude does influence positively or negatively how we live out these words of Jesus:

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/267482-the-longer-i-live-the-more-i-realize-the-impact>

***You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.”(Luke 10:27).***

I know that when my attitude is pessimistic, agitated, cynical and doubtful I can experience a deep sense of spiritual desolation and feel cut off from God, others and myself. Conversely, when my attitude is optimistic, serene, encouraging and hopeful I experience a deep sense of spiritual consolation and connection to God, others and myself.

So let’s do an attitude checkup today because life is 10% what happens to us and 90% how we react to it.

Our readings for today can help us with this checkup. They teach us that

- Vows Establish attitude
- Vocation Forms attitude
- Verification empowers attitude

Let me unpack each of these in turn.

### **1. Vows establish attitude:**

A vow is a solemn promise and means by which a person binds themselves to another. We think of how a vow is taken when a couple marries; when a religious person enters an order; or when a priest is ordained. We can appreciate with these examples how vows help to establish attitude. The marriage vow establishes an attitude of lifelong fidelity. The religious vow establishes an attitude of life-long fidelity to serving Jesus and his Church.

The point I am making here is that vows help to give focus to our lives and establish how we will live.

Every committed Christian also takes a vow, expressed in Baptism and Confirmation that establishes their attitude. It is an attitude stated clearly in today’s appointed Psalm where we read this prayer:

***6Sacrifice and offering you do not desire,  
but you have given me an open ear.  
Burnt offering and sin offering  
you have not required.  
7Then I said,  
“Here I am; in the scroll of the book it is written of me.  
8I delight to do your will, O my God;***

Here is the vow of availability to God. Here is someone who says: “Here I am Lord, I delight to do your will.” What a clear statement that truly does establish one’s attitude. The Christian is that person who says: “come what may in life, I am going to cultivate an open ear. I know that my life in this world is about knowing and delighting in God’s will. I will live each day with this in mind”.

### **2. Vocation forms Attitude:**

If vows help to establish attitude, vocation helps to form attitude. Vocation is how vows are lived out. A couple's vow is stated once on their Wedding Day but then renewed daily as they live out the vocation of marriage. A priest and religious state their vows at the Mass where they are ordained or given the Habit. Their vocation then forms how they will live out that vow.

When we know our vocation we are better able to form an attitude that is in keeping with our vow. For those who vow to the Lord "Here I am, I delight to do your will", what is their vocation?

Paul states it succinctly in 1 Corinthians:

***To the church of God that is at St. Peter's to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints***

Our vocation is formed as those who are being made holy by Jesus because we are called to be saints. When you know this is your vocation it will help to really form your attitude. Although we cannot dictate what will happen each and every day we can say that today is an opportunity for me to live ever more conformed to Jesus. To be, in the words of the reading from Isaiah, the kind of person who is a light to others.

One of the prayers that I have found most beneficial in forming a vocational attitude is the Serenity Prayer.

***God grant me the serenity  
to accept the things I cannot change;  
courage to change the things I can;  
and wisdom to know the difference.***

***Living one day at a time;  
enjoying one moment at a time;  
accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;  
taking, as Jesus did, this sinful world  
as it is, not as I would have it;  
trusting that He will make all things right  
if I surrender to His Will;  
that I may be reasonably happy in this life  
and supremely happy with Him  
forever in the next.  
Amen.***

I would invite you to pray this daily. It will help to form your attitude as one who has a vocation to sanctity so that you can emit the light and grace of Jesus.

Vows establish attitude, vocation forms attitude and verification empowers attitude. What do I mean when I say verification empowers attitude? To verify something is to know that it is true.

For the Christian, our vocation is to become saints. Repeatedly such a vocation needs to be verified by looking to Jesus Christ for he is. The One who is always true. Each day we want to live in relation to Jesus. With St. John the Baptist we need to have the conviction that this is indeed the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” Those who live believing that this is the bedrock truth on which they build their lives can be empowered to cultivate an attitude that can face life’s challenges with confidence because we know that One who gives us his Holy Spirit to live assuredly. Jesus is the one of whom the Father said: “This is my Son, the Beloved with whom I am well pleased, listen to him”.

There is no greater truth than this truth. There is no greater name who has promised to lead us into all truth and so set us free. When we know Jesus we know the one who is Veritas, the one who is Truth. Such verification does empower attitude because our confidence is not in ourselves but in Jesus.

Your attitude, my attitude matter. That is why I want you to remember today:

- Vows Establish attitude
- Vocation Forms attitude
- Verification empowers attitude
- 

Our attitude will be represented by the posture with which we present ourselves each day on the canvas of our lives.

We will never coach the Toronto Maple Leafs, or win five consecutive Stanley Cups with the Montreal Canadians as did Scotty Bowman. But, we can with them, learn in the particulars of our lives what they are learning in theirs. Our posture, our attitude matters. That is because:

***The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude. I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% of how I react to it. And so it is with you... we are in charge of our attitudes.”***