

## **The Means to the Goal**

When I was on my 30 day ignatian retreat, my spiritual director impressed upon me a truth that would forever change how I viewed my life. It was a truth that I was aware of but I've never had it articulated to me in that way. This truth was introduced at the beginning of the retreat and it was called the 'Principle and Foundation'. It can be broken into three parts:

- 1) The whole purpose and goal of our life is to praise, reverence and glorify God and in doing so, we find our ultimate fulfilment
- 2) The means to achieve that goal are created things on this earth and they should be used or abstained from insofar as they help us achieve that goal
- 3) The attitude we should have towards these created things is one of indifference where we do not desire wealth more than poverty, health more than sickness, a long life rather than a short life

This forces us to ask ourselves how is this or that helping me or hindering me from heaven and how am I choosing to live in a way that brings me closer to him and gives the greatest glory to God?

St. Paul is trying to get the Corinthian community to have the same mindset of seeing the ultimate goal and the means to that goal. This community had received extraordinary gifts of speaking in tongues, but divisions and jealousy began to arise in the community: how come he can speak in tongues? Why can't I speak in tongues? I feel like I'm a useless part of the community.

So in these past couple of days St. Paul is trying to reassure people that they have a place in the body of Christ and that every member is needed and necessary. However, today he is trying to remind them of an important principle and foundation: love is the goal we are aiming for and love is the means by which we get there.

He is saying, don't strive for the gift of tongues or the gift of prophecy (although these things are very good and beneficial to the community). Heaven is not an eternal babbling of indiscernible languages or a never-ending game of future-telling. It would be like an NBA team striving not for the ultimate goal of the Larry O'Brian Trophy but rather just striving for TV ratings. That is not what NBA players

dreamed of as children—they wanted to play on the greatest stage and be world champions.

So St. Paul is saying, don't strive for the TV ratings, for the flashy gifts, strive for the main goal we have all been created for and for the love we have been all yearning for: eternal union with God in heaven.

If I had the eloquence of the angels to preach with great zeal, if I had all faith so as to make that parking lot finish, if I sold everything I had and gave it to the St. Peter's building fund, if I did all these things without love, I gain nothing. He is not discouraging us to do these things, but he is inviting us to recheck our intentions and ask, what is the attitude with which I am doing all my works (e.g. charitable works, businesses etc)? Am I doing it with love or am I doing it for myself or is it a mixture of both?

True love gives value to all things, love that is not hyper-sentimentality, but a love that flows from the cross, a self-giving, self sacrificial love—that gives value to all things whether we are the president or leader of our ministry or just taking out the garbage.

"Let us not refuse Him the least sacrifice. Everything is so big in religion . . . to pick up a pin can convert a soul. What a mystery! . . . Ah! It is Jesus alone who can give such a value to our actions; let us love Him with all our strength. . . .[xviii]  
"A Map of the Way of Confidence and Love of St. Therese of Lisieux"

Ultimately, every act, every work and every thought can be an opportunity to do all things with great love because in doing so, we practice meeting the God who is Love in our every day life until one day when we shall see him face to face.

"There is not a moment in which God does not present himself under the cover of some pain to be endured, of some consolation to be enjoyed, or of some duty to be performed. All that takes place within us, around us, or through us, contains and conceals his divine action...If we could lift the veil, and if we were attentive and watchful, God would continually reveal himself to us, and we should see his divine action in everything that happened to us, and rejoice in it. At each successive occurrence we should exclaim: 'It is the Lord'."

de Caussade, Jean-Pierre. Abandonment To Divine Providence (Kindle Locations 603-605). Ignatius Press.