

DYING IN ORDER TO LIVE

Leo Tolstoy once commented that “each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.” I like to think that restlessness is like that, it takes many forms but each of us is restless in his or her own way.

One form of restlessness that many of us share in common, however, is a sense of feeling trapped in certain marriages, families, vocations, careers, churches, jobs and locations which frustrate us, but which, for all kinds of reasons, we feel powerless to ever leave.

Hence, we live in a state of dissatisfaction and restlessness, unable really to make peace with our lot in life and yet unable to leave it either.

Thus, we all know people who feel that their marriages are really not good, but who cannot ever leave those marriages, just as we know people who cannot make peace with the fact that they are not married, but who themselves know that, realistically, they will never be married.

What we see in these people and in ourselves since we all have our own particular experiences of this is a perpetual kicking against the goad, a cancer of spirit, a refusal to accept one's lot in life, an incapacity to make peace with what one is in fact living.

Theologically this can be described as a blockage of pentecost, an unwillingness to receive the Holy Spirit for one's own life.

How do we move beyond this kind of restlessness? There is an old adage, now the motto for Outward Bound programs in the U.S., that reads: If you can't get out of something . . . get more deeply into it.

There is more than a little wisdom in that line, despite its rather glib sound. Taken seriously, it is a paschal prescription, a challenge to die so that we might live.

If you can't get out of something . . . get more deeply into it. Christ illustrated what that means in his prayer in Gethsemane.

First he prayed that he might get out of it: “Father, let this cup pass from me.” Then, when he couldn't get out of it, he got deeply into it. The result was the resurrection.

Many resurrections, for us, lie in imitating Christ in this matter. Thus, for example . . .

If we find ourselves restless in a marriage which is far from what we would now choose, but which we know we can never leave then we have no other choice but to get more deeply into it. We are so restless because we are no longer drawing life from the relationship.

Only by entering that marriage more deeply can that restlessness be turned to restfulness and can that seeming death be turned to life. Not to enter it more deeply is to condemn ourselves to the living death we are now experiencing—our relationship is neither alive nor dead.

The same holds true for those of us who struggle restlessly with the single life and celibacy. If we cannot get out of it, we will avoid a cancerous restlessness only by getting more deeply into it.

If we do enter more deeply into it and grieve properly our inconsummation we can turn that frustrated longing into a wider hunger that creates advent space, that helps us enter into a deeper mysticism within the communion of saints, and which drives us outward to try to create and enter human union beyond the individual and romantic level.

Again, not to die to our daydreams here, not to enter more deeply into celibacy, is to perpetuate a living death within our sexuality.

The same dynamic is likewise operative in our relationship to our church. Today there are many people who are very unhappy with their churches but, for all kinds of reasons, can never leave those churches.

As some put it: “Even if you leave the church, it never leaves you!” If that is the case, then the prescription is clear: If you can’t get out of it, get more deeply into it. Enter your church more deeply, see and experience in the tensions, pettiness, divisions and angers of this particular community the basic and universal struggle of all people to come together around one table, to have one heart.

The struggle for one community is, singularly, the most difficult and demanding of all human endeavours. Your local church offers you the laboratory to work at the project.

All of us are unhappy in our own way, be it with our marriage, our family, our celibacy, our church, our career, our neighbourhood, our temperament, or even our physical appearance. If we can’t get out of these—get more deeply into them!

<http://ronrolheiser.com/dying-in-order-to-live-040593/#.VpV5puzCb7p>

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