

Along the track

Everything is a Gift

President Truman is reported to have offered this gem: “It is amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit.”

We probably don’t meet many unsung heroes in life, those who work quietly away without fanfare or fame. They just get on and do what has to be done, encouraging others to use their gifts and talents. They stand out because they don’t seek to! The world we live in finds that sort of thinking a bit challenging. We structure our lives around achieving and standing out. Our media is full of that. Society tends to divide us up into achievers and non-achievers, winners and losers.

Most of us want some recognition, to be known for something we have done, to set ourselves apart by some achievement or perhaps in what we know, how we have performed as an athlete or whatever. For many of us, our working life is punctuated by performance reviews that encourage us all to achieve, to work so hard to distinguish ourselves from the rest of the pack. That might help productivity and give us direction for growth but the down side can be that we become over competitive and view with some envy others’ gifts and talents. And their achievements. Of course not everyone feels that way but could we honestly say that we agree with Saint Theresa of Avila who wrote that once we reach the highest level of maturity we are left with only one question: How can I be helpful?

Not what have I achieved? What have I gained? How am I important? Just how can I help?

Perhaps not many of us will reach that stage of perfection but asking ourselves ‘*How can I be helpful? How is my life now of service to others, how do I make life better for them?*’ is something that will enrich our own lives. We can do that if we do not feel perennially in competition with others, feeling that what we do needs to be acknowledged and praised. That can leave us in a very unhappy place. St Paul offered good advice: Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be obvious to everyone. Philippians 4 4-5 . Rejoicing can be hard as we are forever on the lookout for praise and recognition.

Gentleness is an interesting word. It is actually one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is perhaps best understood by the opposites of gentleness, anger, a desire for revenge, and self-aggrandizement.

Gentleness involves humility, not always putting oneself first.

Joy doesn’t mean we go around with big smiles and exuding happiness. But it does mean that we find it in our hearts to rejoice in the achievements of others, in their gifts and talents. And we tell them! We also rejoice in our own, not bragging but being grateful for the gifts we have been given and that we are able to use them for the benefit of others. We take time to give thanks for those we love, not just in mind but in action – that everyday we say something positive and encouraging, and we simply rejoice in who they are. How many people do you know who actually take delight in their lives, in their families, in their spouses, in their friends? Asking questions about how others are going, what they are doing is just a sign of interest but also a source of encouragement.

“It is amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit.” That is perhaps another way of taking Jesus’ invitation to heart: “If anyone wants to be first, he must be the last of all and the servant of all.” Mk 9 35. Being the servant of all doesn’t necessarily mean doing everything for everyone but stepping aside sometimes and letting others do what they can, it means encouraging and listening and supporting, even when we may feel we can do a better job in half the time.

“Accomplish’ does not necessarily mean getting things done, doing more work, achieving better results, better productivity. Stepping back so that others might shine can be our contribution, however great or small, to the positive energy, love, creativity and generosity our world sorely needs. Such an act of positive humility makes others feel affirmed, appreciated, encouraged and validated.

Not caring who gets the credit may be difficult but it is a mark of our spiritual maturity, our willingness to see that everything we have is gift, starting with life itself. We have been gifted with talents and abilities, with people who love us, with people who are concerned for us and with people who need us. And we need them.

Regards
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