

November 18, 1984

The words about simplicity which we heard earlier brought to mind a conversation I had just two days ago when I had lunch with a friend who is a school social worker. She was late for our appointment because she had to go in search of a six year old who had simply wandered away from the school because of an altercation he had had with a classmate.

In discussing her work as a school social worker my friend said that she was mainly engaged in crisis intervention—getting meals for children who were hungry, seeing that a pair of glasses was obtained for one who could not see, searching for someone who had been lost track of. The pressure of such happenstances prevented her from really dealing deeply with any individuals and their problems over a long period of time. Yet my social worker friend said that she loved her job, that it was absolutely necessary work, and that she knew that if she were not available to do it someone else would have to be appointed to do it instead.

This conversation brought to mind the image given in the novel Siddharta, when the protagonist, after a strenuous spiritual search, finds joy and peace serving as a ferryman, carrying people back and forth across a river, not knowing from whence they came or where they were going, but confident that he was rendering a valuable service in helping life on its way.

It also brought to mind Jesus' well-known parable of the good Samaritan, who, upon picking a stranger up off the road and depositing him at a hostelry with funds left for his care, went away without ever knowing the exact outcome of his effort.

Our own meeting conducts a shelter program for homeless people. Undoubtedly, some of the people who make use of this service come again and again, and we get to know them, and can take some satisfaction from seeing them evolve more closely toward the destiny they were intended to have, perhaps partly in response to the efforts we have made to provide a loving community, as well as arranging for a roof over their heads. But many people pass through this program of whose ultimate fate we know nothing.

It is not only our pursuit of material possessions which distracts us from the Lord's work, but also our need to see results. A true simplicity of heart not only allows our attention to be given to service, rather than to self-centered material gratification, but also allows us to seize the opportunity to act, while letting go of the need to gratify our egos by seeing the results.

Several weeks ago I had the privilege of descending into the Grand Canyon on the back of a mule. The Canyon is over 5,000 feet deep, that is, its walls are over five times as high as the World Trade Center here in New York City. As one descends into this Canyon, one passes layer after layer of rocks of different ages, until at the very bottom, one comes to rocks which are solidified samples of the earth's central plasma—rocks thought to be fully half as old as our planet itself. And as one gazes upward from the bottom of the Canyon, past all the strata of rock from different ages and eons, up to the very rim, one realizes that the time that human beings have walked on this earth is represented only by the top two or three inches of all these layers, and one is awestruck at the great and long creative process which has raised us up to where we are.

A true simplicity of heart will know in any given moment if we are acting so as to be at one with this great creative principle, or if we are not. And for those whose simplicity is sufficient to perceive the truth or the falseness of each day and each action, there will be a sense of joy and affirmation with which neither scheming for results nor chasing after possessions could possibly compete.

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