

Living the Spirit-SpiritualLife

One of my hopes with these inserts is that we will be encouraged to fulfill the above title in our lives. Though individual lives may differ, life itself is to be seen as more than the passage of time. It is an adventure, a challenge. I see it as a journey that begins with God and ends (in this world) with God.

We can think of life as the functioning of our material or physical parts – brain, heart etc. To understand this aspect one does not come to such as me. We seek out physicians as experts, especially for the extraordinary needs we have. This is a good thing to do, but even when we find relief from pain and ills, we still must seek for more in life.

To grow in the understanding of the spiritual in our life we work at actually living the Spirit. St. Paul told the Corinthians very clearly that Christian life involves spiritual gifts. In fact, the first gift is the gift of the Holy Spirit. In him we have all other gifts. Yes, we live as Christians. Baptism has given us a new dimension to our life, our very existence or being. This is irrevocable.

What is it that the Spirit has us doing? The answer is simple, what is quite ordinary. He has us being us, with a variety of gifts or talents or capacities. I am led to be a priest, and to act as one. You are equally who you are. Different people have different gifts. We need them all, for every person is a precious creation of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So we have good mothers, fathers, good cooks, teachers, mechanics, plumbers, bankers etc. Living the Spirit involves what seems ordinary, but is no less necessary for happiness in the wider Creation. It comes down to being good at who you are and what you do.

Our quest is to grow in holiness, to become good images of God. This is the work of a lifetime. We make uneven progress with many ups and downs. We live with successes (often overlooked) and with failures (often exaggerated). We have great expectations, but learn to live with the ordinary. Wisdom reveals to us that the ordinary is often extraordinary indeed.

The spiritual life is not the same thing as being “religious.” Father Benedict Groeschel has taught about this very matter. I have had my own insights in this. Being religious is all about external observances of one’s faith. Catholics, Christians, Moslems, Buddhists may well be “religious”, as they practice their faith. But we can be truly religious or faithful Catholics only by observing, or better living, the Catholic life of the Spirit. We live our laws and customs and traditions as the Spirit leads us. We hear the message of revelation given by Jesus: *If you love Me, keep the commandments.*

The spiritual life goes beyond the external. It is personal. It is interior. The Spirit lives in us, as St. John tells us so well in his Gospel. It is a life of love in its very essence. The mystery of life is love. The love inspired by the Spirit is the love for Christ and of Christ. When we love Him the spirit of Truth is in us. We live a life of grace, and grace is sanctifying, makes us holy. It is a sharing in God’s life, in the life of Christ. While this is the reality of living the Spirit, it is truly a beautiful gift of God for which we must pray and work as best we can.

It is well for those who would lead a life as I just described that they realize that it should be a life that we embrace with joy. There are so many sad Christians that we need no more. We must try not to be of their number. Instead we should allow ourselves to grow in the knowledge of that invisible world in which we dwell. It is the world of the Spirit and touches the human soul. It is able to overflow in many ways into our so-called ordinary life. Every genuine smile is a sign that it is there.

To live this life we need the help of Jesus. He tells us that we can do nothing without Him. He means what he says to us. So we must be in contact with Him, allow him to be with us in so many ways. The first way is through prayer. Our prayer life is life that is spiritual. It takes our mind and heart and raises them to God.

There are many practical thoughts that come about prayer. Some worry about distractions. The advice we are given by St. Teresa is simply that we are not to worry about distractions. If we worry and are anxious we only distract ourselves the more. What we need to do is to pray to God to help us avoid distractions.

We can help ourselves by how we pray and when we pray. We need to set side time, that precious commodity. We need to be quiet at times. We need to make the choice that prayer matters just as much as most other activities of our day. By the way, we need not spend a lot of time. And don't fall for the excuse that your work is a prayer. It can be at times, but certainly not always. Spiritual guides have told us that prayer is our work, not that work is our prayer.

Father Corappi has preached on EWTN about prayer. I was impressed with his advice. Focus on the morning offering. Be vigilant. Know that prayer transcends feelings and emotions. Love is a decision. Prayer is made easier by living our faith. Narrow the gape between what you say and how you live. Don't make God the last resort waiting for a crisis. Be humble. Trust God. There is much more to his advice.

Here I interject my personal thought. Catholic prayer must center in Jesus and through Him address the Father. The Spirit leads the Catholic believer, no matter what spiritual way he follows, to devotion to the Mass and Holy Eucharist. We also find consolation and support by our acceptance of the Sacraments where appropriate. We learn the value of our baptismal promises, renewed each year at Easter. We confess our sins and find reconciliation with both God and the Church. We seek the Anointing of the Sick when needed. We have our marriages blessed by God's grace. These are sure aids to spiritual growth. They are very Catholic ways.

While there are many different schools of spirituality, all of them lead the faithful who follow them to spiritual growth into a more perfect image of God. They address the basic elements of spirituality in a variety of ways. They may include the traditional prayer, fasting and almsgiving found in the early Church and developed to suit the circumstances of the ongoing centuries. Whatever spiritual way we follow, let us make our journey of life with a willingness to use the means God has given us. With God with us, let us journey with our hearts filled with joy, for God smiles on us!

God love you always!

Monsignor Morrison