

REGRETS

Years ago, when I worked at the Diocesan Office Building downtown, we would sometimes take a walk along the Parkway at lunchtime, maybe twenty minutes. Some exercise. Sometimes I had to walk in Centre City to an appointment. Often, I would pass some homeless people, mostly men. Often, they would be asking for spare change. Initially, I was annoyed at first because of their persistence. But sometimes I would stop and talk with them. Asking them their names. How they came to be panhandling on the street. The stories were almost always tragic. Almost always there was some addiction, or multiple addictions.

Eventually I would have single dollars folded in four. I remember asking this one fellow named John how he got his medications. He explained that they were delivered to a specified safe house and he would pick them up. I asked him if he carried them around with him. Wouldn't someone try to steal them? He told me that he gave them to one of the food vendors who was on that corner every day. Eventually, I spoke with the food vendor. He told me that he felt sorry for these guys who had so little and how they would get beaten up and their medications stolen. So he decided to help him out by holding them for him. He would distribute them a couple times a day.

I thought how wonderful that was? What care! But also, how important. And how invisible. Who knew? But John knew. And the Food Vendor knew. And the Lord knew. And the Holy Spirit was there. It was such a little thing. But really such a big thing. Because it enabled John to have something of a life, even on the street.

It was like it was this little shoot of goodness. Isaiah the Prophet, over 2600 years ago speaks about a shoot sprouting from the stump of Jesse. And from his roots a bud shall blossom. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest on him—a spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel, knowledge, fortitude, devotion, and a reverent awe of the Lord.

That vendor had some street smarts. He had some wisdom. He got what was going on. He understood. He grasped what was happening and how it could be fixed. He knew what he had to do. He had knowledge. He took the homeless man under his wing and told him what he could do for him. He gave counsel. He stepped up and volunteered to help a homeless guy. Fortitude. Courage. I do not know if he was personally a man of devotion. But he showed devotion to the man who lived on the street. And I believe he had a reverent awe before the Living God because he showed reverence for one of these least ones.

When he stands before the Lord on Judgment Day, he may have other sins to atone for but he will have no regrets about helping the man named John. No regrets. Do you have regrets? What are you sorriest for in your life as you look back over the years? What are you sorriest for in your family? As a man? As a woman? As a spouse? As a Mom? As a Dad? As a son? As a Daughter? As a worker? As a person? As a Catholic?

If you could do over one thing that you said “No” to, what do you wish you had said “Yes” to? And what did you say “Yes” to that you wish now you had said “No” to? Another man named John, John the Baptist, preached to the Jews of the first century Israel a call to repentance. What does repentance mean? It means that you realize the times you have said “No” to God and you are now sorry and wish you could get a do over, and say “Yes.”

We can hardly hear a call to repentance today? You certainly do not hear such a call—universally, like John the Baptist’s call was—via social media. Except for political opponents who are regularly castigated and told to change their ways. But a call such as John issued? Or Jesus of Nazareth issued? Not so much. You have to admit you have done wrong, have been immoral, done selfish things. Which brings me around to regrets again. What path have you gone down that you wish you had not gone down? What is there in you that you believe is too far gone, beyond help?

There is nothing beyond help. God’s reach is a very long reach. But we have to be honest with ourselves. We have to admit when we are in the wrong or living in an immoral way. We have to want to be helped. We have to ask for help. We have to admit we need to be helped. We have to acknowledge our regrets.

Advent presents us with such a time. Let us stop looking at the faults, flaws and sins of others. Let us start looking more clearly at ourselves. Let us stop trying to justify what we do, or how we think. Let us stop being so rash in our judgments about others, or our comments about others. Have you regrets? Then it is time for repentance. Mass. Sacrament of Reconciliation. Little sacrifices. Some fasting from food or favorite screen programs. Let the Lord in. Now. So that when we get to Christmas, the little one inside us is ready to greet the little One we call Jesus.

May the Lord bless us today and give us his peace.