

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Sep 10th 2013

The Self-Improvement industry is going strong. Books and blogs abound proclaiming to share secrets about how to manage time for ultimate efficiency, eat a more healthy diet, find the best formula for exercise, remove the clutter, lose weight, find a soul mate, invest money strategically, dress for success and of course, how to be happy. The amount of information and variety of messages is overwhelming and can be very confusing. I know there are 168 hours in a week, but how to count the time for sleeping? How to reconcile all of the conflicting messages about a healthy diet? What is clutter and what is a cherished momento?

Today Paul shares with the Colossians the only self improvement any of us need to know:

As you received Christ, Jesus the Lord, walk in him rooted in him and built upon him and established in the faith as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. See to it that no one captivate you with an empty seductive philosophy according to the tradition of men, according to the elemental powers of the world and not according to Christ.

When we are continually drawn to self-improvement activities we can dig deeper to explore the motivation for improvement. Is it to get a better job? To look more attractive? To win the admiration of colleagues and friends? To improve one's status? It is important to reflect upon what purpose we are serving in our feverish attempts at improvement. Many times the answer to these questions can be difficult to face as our intention may not be grounded in serving God.

We have an obligation and an opportunity to use the gifts and talents we have been blessed with. And it is life giving to be thankful for these gifts. So it follows that we would want to maximize those gifts. Self improvement is not inherently a bad thing to focus on. But it is only truly meaningful when we remember our purpose: to serve the kingdom of God. Now self improvement makes sense. We want to be as healthy and available and happy as we can so we can serve God. Keeping that focus at the center of all of our actions helps us turn away from the seductive philosophy of men and toward a life in Christ.

Mary Lee Brock