

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Jun 19th 2014

When I was a kid, my family was the last to get anything. I rarely invited friends over to our house because we lacked the latest electronic gizmos and the sugary sweets that my contemporaries craved. I still remember having to write high school term papers at my dad's office or in the public library because we did not have a computer (this was after the year 2000, mind you). We were certainly not poor; my parents' "gismo" budget was just exhausted by the money they spent on Catholic education, extracurricular activities, and family vacations. Looking back, I can appreciate the "no-frills" approach to life this kind of childhood instilled in me – today I find enjoyment in life's simple pleasures: a good book, a night with friends, and occasional travel.

For all my faults, I managed to escape the grip of our global consumer culture, thanks to my parents' priorities. In the noisy, big data, internet marketing world we inhabit today, it can be difficult to escape the barrage of advertisements reminding me that my internet connection could be faster, my floors cleaner, clothes trendier, grass greener, and skin smoother. The trappings of a good life these days don't come cheap! Who has time – or the attention span – to enjoy life's simple pleasures anymore?

In Matthew's gospel today, Jesus urges us to de-clutter our prayer lives by offering a simple, quiet, and honest prayer void of ostentation. He leaves us with such a simple and effective way to approach the Divine: God, You are holy; help us do Your will; nourish us, protect us, forgive us, help us forgive others. Jesus teaches us to pray for the basic nourishment for our spiritual journey.

In a culture of excess, it is not easy to be satisfied with the basics or even recognize what the basics are. The human compulsion to complicate things has certainly permeated our spiritual culture, too. We look for spiritual satisfaction in some dubious places – money, work, self-help books, medication, consumption, etc. – hoping to find the cure for our spiritual anguish. We're looking for the magic bullet to make us whole again – and we can have it, for the right price!

Today's gospel reminds me that my spiritual fulfillment depends on my relationship to the Divine. This does not need to be complicated! My spiritual life can flourish by working every day at the spiritual basics like trust in God, thanksgiving, forgiveness, and love. This week I'll pick out a basic precept of Christian spirituality each day and work on incorporating it into how I live my day and pray to God. Feel free to join me.

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