

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Aug 8th 2015

The scripture readings today speak to me about faith, focus and distractions. In Deuteronomy, Moses tells Israel (and us) to “love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength.” Moses admonishes Israel to “take care not to forget the Lord”. Seems pretty basic.

The psalmist proclaims, “I love you, Lord, my strength”. In Matthew, Jesus drives a demon out of a boy that the disciples could not help. When the disciples ask why they could not drive the demon out, Jesus responds, “Because of your little faith.” Pretty harsh. Jesus goes on to say that with faith the size of a mustard seed, nothing will be impossible for you.

I am recently retired. I was absolutely convinced that, once I retired, I would really be able to focus on my relationship with Christ. I would jump off of that work and spend cycle and focus on God.

Driving out demons would be child’s play. Why, I could feel the halo forming around my head.

Man, was I mistaken. The distractions seemed to increase, rather than decrease. Granted, my oldest son got married and my father-in-law is going through a regimen of chemotherapy, but still, how does that happen? It seems the time I wanted to spend with God is being swept away by the world. It was a wake up call to me that, if I truly want to spend time with God, I have to focus on God and tune out the world. I have to intentionally set aside time to be with God. Easier said than done.

Several years ago I went on a mission trip to Haiti. As I look back on it, it was probably one of the most focused times of my life. No TV, no radio, no phones, no internet, no cars, no stores. The people had no running water or electricity. My initial reaction was to pity them. However, as I worked along side them I realized, they were free to love each other and to love God with unencumbered hearts. I saw how happy they were and, by the time I left, I envied them.

So, how do we get away from the idols and distractions? How do we get to the mountaintop where we can focus on our Creator? How do we listen for God’s voice? How do we acquire the faith the Jesus speaks of? Listening is not easy, let alone listening for God. And the worldly distractions are always there, awaiting our attention. It is not easy. One thing our family has done is to ban phones from the dinner table. Even with that, sometimes I feel we struggle to hear each other.

My youngest son was slow to speak. At age three he would say something to me and I would think, good grief, I have no idea what this kid is saying. It was total gibberish. However, an older brother would quickly come forward and say, Seth wants a cookie or Seth needs a drink of water. I remember thinking, how can they possibly know what he is saying? Is this some sort of foreign language created by the O’Reilly brothers? Well, no. Seth’s brothers were with him on a daily basis and they listened to him constantly. That is how they understood him. I think we just might take a lesson from that.

My prayer today is for those of us who struggle with the distractions of the world. That God would settle our hearts, help us to focus and help grow our faith.

Because of his retirement from Creighton, this is Dan's last reflection. Dan began writing reflections from the beginning of this site. He always brought great faith to the experience of being a father and husband. We will miss his wisdom and grace very much. We thank him for his tremendous contribution to this ministry.

Daniel Patrick O'Reilly-Creighton University's Clinical Education & Simulation Center