

"The only real sadness, the only real failure, the only great tragedy in life, is not to become a saint."

This quotation by the French Catholic novelist Leon Bloy is more than simply a pious thought. It speaks of the deepest desire of our hearts for God and for human excellence. To put it differently, "the desire of our hearts" (Ps 37) is to be a saint, and to fail to obtain this blessedness is to live a life of sadness.

In this vein, C.S. Lewis offers us some changing remarks: "It would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures ... when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."

So...how do we go from this lukewarm state of faith, to one that is filled with the fire of God's love? The easiest way may be to assess where we place God in our lives right now. Do we simply go to Mass once a week, or perhaps once a month or once a year? How much of our day is spent in prayer and meditation, if any? We must remind ourselves that if God looked away from us for even one minute or one hour of the day, our lives would result in turmoil and disaster. Yet, how many times in a day do we fail to acknowledge His existence?

We should all periodically ask ourselves, "What distractions in my life may distance or hold me back from growing closer to God?" Then ask, "What could I substitute or add into my day or week that would be pleasing to God?" Once we seek to grow spiritually, then it is time to come back to Reconciliation. Nothing would please God more than for us to change from a lukewarm state of faith to one that is strong. So why wait any longer! Don't put off for tomorrow what we can do today!

Is God Calling Us?

Either God gives me challenges to work on patience, or the evil spirits know my weaknesses. Anyway, I needed to call my credit card company with a question. I was on hold for about an hour, during which time I decided to put the phone on speaker, and tidied the house while I waited for a customer rep to answer. Ah, finally someone answers on the other line and I dash to the phone. What? We have a bad connection and he hangs up right away! This made me question, "How many times have I missed opportunities to communicate with God because of all the noise and distractions of this world? Have I ever hung up on God or totally ignored his call?" (On the other hand, when we call upon God, there is never a bad connection and He will not hang up on us, ever!)

Anyway, I called the company again, waited another hour on hold, and yes, finally they answered. The lady immediately said, "I'm sorry but we are under maintenance right now and unable to help with anything other than basic information. Can you call back in 3 hours?" To myself I said, "It doesn't pay to call back in 3 hours; everyone else will be calling back then too!" This led me to ask, "Do I patiently wait for God to respond to my prayers? How can I spend more time in prayer if and when my life seems to be put on hold?" Praying during those two hours while I was on hold would have been more beneficial than cleaning house. Choose wisely the things of this earth!

"We must be faithful to the present moment or we will frustrate the plan of God for our lives."

Bl. Solanus Casey

Be Aware of Your Surroundings

We can't always avoid certain mishaps from happening. For instance, no matter how careful we drive, we cannot predict when a deer will run across the highway, or someone will back into us in a parking lot. Or, we may have plans for a trip and end up with the stomach flu the day you are ready to leave. But there are certain things in life we can alter. My husband and I learned this over the summer.

We ended up caring for two grand-dogs in June and July. I am allergic to dogs. I can usually handle the situation by washing hands after I pet or brush them. But by the middle of July I was ready to scratch my eyes out from the itching. Lesson learned: Best not to get another dog and don't dog-sit for extended periods of time.

Another mishap was when I left someone's house as it was beginning to darken. They have a bi-level so when I left I had to go down a flight of stairs. It looked like I could take one more step at the top level before the steps started, but I was wrong. My Guardian Angel must have protected me from breaking something that day when I landed at the bottom. Lesson learned: Turn on the lights if you need to, watch more carefully and always use a railing.

Ron also had a couple mishaps. When mowing the lawn, a stone was thrown into our dining room window and broke the glass pane. We are thankful it did not break through the double pane. However, it was right next to a picture of Jesus that we had posted in the window. An omen?! Lesson learned is quite obvious, but perhaps Jesus is telling us a greater lesson. Perhaps he is reminding us "not to cast stones." Each time we (all of us) cast a stone and criticize someone, that stone will be thrown right back at ya! Yikes.

Last incident to report: Ron has cayenne pepper on almost everything he eats. So one day he decides to have a snack of peanuts, and he sprinkles cayenne pepper on top of them in his bowl. Then he plunks down in front of the television, and as he is ready to eat, the oscillating fan turns his way. The cayenne went into both of his eyes. He could barely see to get to the bathroom to wash his eyes out. Lesson learned: Beware of your surroundings. Danger and evil can be lurking around the corner. And, satan is always eager to watch us trip up.

I heard a priest speak about bad things that happen in our lives. He was referring to people who have been abused, who die by accident or illness, who lose their jobs or homes, and more. He said that the devil does everything in his power to destroy joy within us. The priest mentioned sometimes God ALLOWS bad things to happen in our lives, but if He does, it is to grace us in some other way. We may not always understand it at the time of our suffering, but later we can see more clearly God's hand in it all. It is through our sufferings that the redemption of Christ can become ours. If we handle bad situations effectively, our sufferings can be part of our ticket to heaven. The priest suggests praying this short prayer throughout our days: "Most precious Blood of Jesus Christ, save us and the whole world." We are reminded that God is in control of our lives. He is our protector and our consoler. He is our life-guard. Even through bad times, we are never alone. Thank you, God, for the lessons learned from the challenging times in our lives.

"The only guarantee for failure is to stop trying."

JOHN C. MAXWELL



Getting Our Lives Straightened Out

I heard a homily where the priest told of a man who moved into town. The pastor invited this man to church. But the man had many boxes to unpack yet and answered, "Yes, I will come when I get my life straightened out."

Months later, the pastor saw the man in town and again invited him to church. The man answered the same, "I will be there. I will come when I get my life straightened out."

Well the man died and his body was brought to church in a coffin. Parishioners and neighbors asked the pastor, "Was this man a Christian?" The pastor answered, "I don't know and it's not for me to say, but he was a man of his words, for he told me, 'I will come when I get my life straightened out.'"

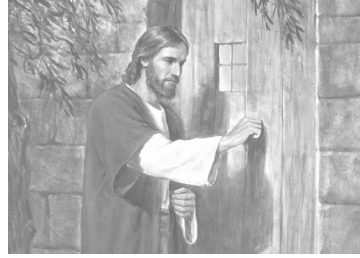
In this joke is a lot of reality. I once invited a lady back to church, and she said to me, "If I come back, everyone will be looking at me."

Sometimes people who have been away for a long time are extra sensitive or nervous about returning. They are concerned about being judged. But just the opposite—we welcome them! Most of us have a relative or friend who no longer practices their faith. It is important that we keep praying for them, and keep welcoming them back. Their return would bring us all great joy, wouldn't it?!

Have you ever wondered if, when we get to heaven, we are asked if we have saved any other souls? Would any of us know if we've made a difference in the lives of others? And just how hard do we work to help one another on our earthly journey? God has those answers. I believe we will one day be shown the number of times in our entire lives we may have turned a blind eye to someone in need, and also the times that we did make a positive difference for others. So, hopefully we all are watchful of one another's needs and respond with love and compassion—just as Jesus did.

Someone you know is probably waiting to be asked to return to the church. They may need to hear that your invitation includes the assurance that you are willing to walk along with them. We don't want anyone to return "when they get their lives straightened out." For God is waiting to do that for them, and for us all right now!

The Door Without a Handle



A famous painter painted a beautiful picture of Jesus knocking at a closed door. He showed it to his friends. They pointed out a defect in the painting. The door in the picture had no visible handle or latch to open it.

The painter said, "The door has no handle outside. It can be opened only from the inside. It represents our heart." It was a portrayal of the verse 3:20 from the Book of Revelation, *Listen! I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come to his house and eat with him, and he will eat with me.*

Jesus is knocking at our door. Do we hear him? He is waiting for us to open up and let him into our heart. It is said that though God is omnipotent and omnipresent, the human mind is a special place where He enters only with our consent.

Making a To-Do List

When our older children were in high school, Ron and I took a trip to Wyoming, while the older children were in charge of the younger ones back home. It was during the week and so with the kids being in school most of the day, what could possibly go wrong? Well, any parent's mind could probably think of a zillion things. But, we knew our parents were nearby and on call. So I made a "to-do" list and went to work in completing it before we left. I stocked the refrigerator with easy meals. I gave specific instructions about meals, bath times and bedtimes, and doing homework. I reminded them about locking doors at night. I had papers signed at the hospital in case of an emergency. Note that this was a time before cell phones, so the tough part was knowing we could only communicate with them in the evening, via a phone on a wooden pole. But, we called them every night, and reminded them that Grandma and Grandpa would be popping in on them now and then. Everything went well, except for a haircut my older daughter decided to give to one of the younger children.

In remembering the above trip, I began to question, "What is on my spiritual to-do list? How prepared am I to meet Christ?" Let us all take time in the quiet to prepare our individual lists, and then decide what changes we may need to make to accomplish those goals.

We all work to have the things of this world—our daily food, clothing, shelter, etc. But, may we never lose sight of what needs to be done to fulfill eternal life with our God.



ARE YOU BORED????

If so, then you are not living out your faith!

Publication of *Everyday Living With God*, by Mary Kauer



An old man said, "*Erasers* are made for *those* who make *mistakes*"

A youth replied, "*Erasers* are made for *those* who are willing to *correct* their *mistakes*"

Make the Sacrament of Reconciliation your spiritual eraser!