

SACRIFICE, PART II: TREATMENT AND PRESCRIPTION

Sacrifice is not a fashionable concept; it runs too deeply counter to a sense of self-entitlement that insists that the individual is the measure of all things, ethical/moral, relational, professional. This sense produces fragmentation instead of cohesion, sadly. But if I'm my most important person, fragmentation (socially speaking) is worth the risk, and sacrifice (= sense of and deference to the larger community) is not worth the risk. Can this sense be changed?

Perhaps it can. And the best defense is a good offense. I offer the thought that sacrifice should not be apologized for but embraced and celebrated. I have no statistical evidence to know if their campaign is working or not, but one superb example of this is the series of TV and bill-board ads for the United States Marines. I'm not really thinking of "The Few. The Proud...", but rather the caption that declares, "We don't accept applications, only commitments."

It is the traditional spirit also of the Jesuits (perhaps not accidentally once known as "God's leathernecks"). Ignatius always made the challenge of how much more one could do: can you suck it up and go a little further? Can you take it?

It is, finally, the spirit of 19th century Bishop Louis William DuBourg of Louisiana and the Floridas in the solicitation for founding what ultimately became the Archdiocese of Mobile. His quote has been cited often by Archbishop Lipscomb—

*We offer you: No Salary; No Recompense; No Holidays; No Pension.
But: MUCH HARD WORK; A Poor Dwelling; Few Consolations; Many
Disappointments; Frequent Sickness; A violent or Lonely Death; an Unknown Grave.*

This kind of invitation is becoming more and more real as our clergy shrink in numbers and increase in age. More and more is expected of fewer and fewer. But along with this is the attractiveness of the challenge. In virtually no other life's work is there higher personal and professional satisfaction. And nowhere else is there the opportunity to experience true and deep intimacy with so many people who invite the priest into their hearts. The word "intimacy" too often is equated with sexual activity, and this is a pity. It's easy to take your clothes off your body; it's far harder to take the masks off your heart and soul. But people are willing to do this with a priest in ways that constantly astound and amaze.

We have the privilege of being welcomed into contexts where no one else can easily gain access: to death-beds, or to hospital units: we bring the comfort and consolation of Christ to people who sometimes can express their gratitude only with their eyes. But how powerful that is!

In the words of our recent retreat master: “We have a great life, if we truly live it.” In the days of Bishops DuBourg and Poitier, they came. Come join us, and realize that sacrifice is a beautiful word for the joy that it brings and the grace it conveys.