

Along the track

A Matter of Time

Augustine when he was asked to give a definition of “time.” “When no one is asking me, I know exactly what time is,” he said, “but as soon as someone asks me what time is, I don’t know how to respond.”

For something we can’t adequately describe, we are all pretty obsessed with time. Time races, time passes and sometimes goes slowly. We spend time and invest time, we need time and lose time, we save time and waste time and find time and we buy it, we gain time and we all seem to want more of it.

If we are not careful, our obsession with time can take over and we can miss out on life itself!

When we were children, time seemed to move very slowly. We were ‘bored’. Why couldn’t we do something, why didn’t something exciting happen? Time moved very, very slowly. As we grow older, time moves a lot faster, to say the very least. Time brings its blessings and its ‘curses’, it brings the good and with it the bad, its joys and its sorrows. Our days are filled with busy-ness, we have precious little “down time” in our lives. As our lives grow more pressured, as we become more tired, and more restless, we long for some quiet time, some solitude, and space away from the hectic pace of life.

Time is not just for doing something, for producing things, for achieving goals. Jesus came, in his own words, so that we might have ‘life to the full’. Life to the full is not so much about making every moment productive. Rather, within each moment lies the gift of grace which invites us to become the person we are meant to be, to discover what it means to be made in God’s image, to be a person who is invited into friendship with God, a person gifted and talented for the service of others, to be a person who discovers what gives life and what diminishes it. So it might be useful to take a moment each day to give serious consideration to what we are becoming rather than to what we are doing as our time goes by.

If we choose to take the time to stop and reflect (and it is our choice), every hour of the day and every month, every season of the year have something special to give us, a gift to offer. The pace of life makes it very difficult for us to make ourselves present to appreciate that gift, to be alert to the gifts of grace which each moment brings. When we are in a hurry, we see little beyond our own agenda.

We can struggle to give proper time to our marriage, our family, to our friends as we struggle to cope with possibly the biggest pressure of all, the workplace that has us forever in a hurry. How, with all this pressure, could we ever have proper time for prayer, time to take

stock, to be still before God, time for helping and for appreciating others? Yet it is in these very things that we are called to holiness or whole-ness, it is through these things that we will find fullness of life. It is through them that we open our vision to wider possibilities, to deeper meanings, to an appreciation of the day to day gifts of God’s grace in those we meet and love and care for and we open our hearts to the joy and love that life can bring. In other words, it is here that we find real meaning in life. Life no longer centres just on ourselves and what we might achieve or produce or possess but who and what we have been gifted with and what for!

We are told sometimes to live everyday as if it were our last. We don’t and we probably won’t, despite every good intention. We can’t even live everyday as if it were our first – we each bring a history to each day, some baggage from the past, memories, regrets, joys and successes. They are part of us and we are part of them. But we can make decisions about our future – we can decide to make new beginnings. A good place to start is to decide to set aside some time to put ourselves into God’s presence each day. If we do not have some sense of God’s presence in our lives, we live with very limited vision, without God’s vision of what life to the full might mean. Only God can give us the true sense of our own preciousness and ultimate significance.

Without some sense of the presence of God in our lives, our outlook on life can become de-railed. For example, we can become obsessed with the rich and famous, the powerful, the ‘achievers’, with those who have attained significance in the world’s eyes and whose stories the world considers to be precious and interesting. In comparison, our lives seem too dull and uninteresting. Despite being told that we are already precious, gifted and talented, we can become obsessed with the need to leave some monument, something that is unique and lasting.

Without some sense of God in our lives, without some sense of God’s presence in each moment, our lives we can feel unappreciated, taken for granted. We are told that our lives, our joys and pains, whatever happens have great significance and yet no-one seems to care. We spend so much of our time waiting for something special to come along...and yet it is already here! It is called ‘my life’. The seeds of our happiness and fulfilment lie within it.

Taking a moment for God gives us time to find God and for God to find us. God cares. So do those we love and serve...but often we can’t see it!

Regards
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