

Along the track

Bringing Out the Best

A multi-award winning winemaker told me once that 'there's nothing much to it really. I just bring out what the grape has to offer. It's already there.' I think he was being a little too 'humble' but there is an element of truth to it. One of the joys of working in a school is to watch a good teacher at work, encouraging, affirming, challenging, recognising the latent skills and bringing them to life, bringing out the best in her or his students. As a parent, a teacher, a boss at work, a professional colleague, a supervisor, our task is to work to bring out the best in those we care for, those we are responsible for, those we work and journey with.

Jesus told us that he had come that we might have life to the full (Jn 10:10) and he also spoke of using the gifts and talents we have been given. His parables about not using our gifts and talents we have been gifted with are pretty dramatic (Mt 25: 14-30). Our calling is to find what life to the full means for each of us. Life to the full is not something to be found outside of us. It lies in what, by the grace of God, we cultivate already within us. In the words of Sr Joan Chittister:

The whole purpose of wrestling with life is to be transformed into the self we are meant to become, to step out of the confines of our false securities and allow our creating God to go on creating in us.

The song You Raise Me Up has some very good words of wisdom.

*You raise me up, so I can stand on mountains,
You raise me up, to walk on stormy seas.
I am strong, when I am on your shoulders,
You raise me up, to more than I can be.*

God's grace does raise us up, if we let it. It does make us more than we often think we can be. How does it work? God often speaks through when we recognise and acknowledge our restlessness. We are never quite satisfied, we never feel complete, never fully at peace. That can be a bit of a pain or it can be a catalyst for growth. We can just be annoyed by it or we can use it as a call to go deeper, to go beyond what we thought might bring us peace and satisfaction, it might challenge our complacency, our set-in-our-ways behaviour. In that way God's grace doesn't transform us magically but rather it calls us to recognise our God-given gifts and talents and the ways they might be calling us to grow.

So we ask ourselves what gives us joy. Pope Francis devoted an encyclical to that. What do we find satisfaction in doing, what do we find gives expression to our passions in life, what gives us purpose, and what joy and happiness do we give to others? What do we really care about? When do we feel as if we are using our gifts?

The gift of grace brings out the best in us. Grace brings it out because 'the best' is already there, gifted to us by God, ready and waiting to be fanned into life, to mature like wine, to grow and develop throughout life. The trick is to find the talents and use them. Gifts and talents can appear to be insignificant – not many of us will be a Michelangelo or a Leonardo, but we may be a very good listener, or one who can explain things well, one who is a joy to be with, a great companion. We may be talented with our hands, a creative thinker, a good administrator. Sometimes we discover other gifts and talents when we find ourselves in different circumstances, different stages of life when we may not just discover what we are good at but why, because we come to realise who are we meant to serve by these talents.

St Paul encourages us with these words:
I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.
(Philippians 4:10-13)

Not someone else – me. I was made this way but I am a work in progress. Life is a continual journey of recognising who am I and what I have to offer.

Life to the full is now, not waiting for things outside of us to get better, for the right time. That is now, and here is the right place. It is about becoming open to the God of Surprises. It is about allowing ourselves to trust in God who created us this way for a purpose, in God who created us to be of service to others in the situations we encounter along the way.

"Each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed. Each of us is loved. Each of us is necessary."

Regards
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