

Surrendering to the Giver of Life OTC26 2019

There has been a lot of controversy this week about appropriateness or not of using the word *surrender* in the heat of political exchanges. But I'm not going to go there today. Other than to observe that the word surrender is formed from two French words "*sur*" meaning "over" and "*rendre*" which means "giving back." This kind of ***giving back*** appreciates that every genuine gift establishes a relationship between the giver and receiver. The gift is a means of communication that deepens our connection.

This dimension of ***surrender*** as ***giving back*** chimes in with a theme that runs deep in Christian spirituality. We can only give back because we have first received, as Saint John reminds us; we are capable of love because we have first received divine love. Each time we gather for the Eucharist we are returning the gift we receive in Christ as the greatest expression of our gratitude for all we receive from God's hands. But the joy of the Eucharist is that we do not lose

what we give to God, indeed we receive a hundredfold in return.

This pattern of giving back is echoed each night when the Church recites the song by which Simeon surrenders his personal future to the God who has revealed himself in the Christ child:

Now, Lord, you have kept your word:
let your servant go in peace.
With my own eyes I have seen the
salvation
which you have prepared in the sight of
every people:
a light to reveal you to the nations
and the glory of your people Israel.

Only a person of faith can utter these words because they are words of ultimate surrender, an expression of trust that God's embrace lies beyond the drawing of our final breath. This kind of faith is so much more than mere intellectual conviction. It's a deep seated, trusting awareness; that our lives are a gift bestowed, sustained and fulfilled in God's love.

The same quality of faith is voiced in the words of John Henry Newman that I often use at the close of a funeral. They weren't written for funerals. They are more of a daily prayer expressing an intuitive insight that it is the quality and tone of our daily actions and attitudes that prepare us for a peaceful sleep, secure in the knowledge of God's love. It has some of the ring of Simeon's Song

May God support us all the day long, till the shades lengthen and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and our work is done. Then in His mercy may He give us a safe lodging, and a holy rest and peace at the last.

Being able to pray these words with sincerity and hope can help us discover that seen through the eyes of faith there is a depth, quality, purpose, rhythm, and subtext to our seemingly routine, uneventful, repetitive and mundane lives.

The rich man in the parable suffers ultimate separation not as a malicious punishment but as a natural consequence of conducting his life in an atmosphere of self-entitlement, disregard for others and the satisfaction of superficial appetites. He misses the daily opportunities life offers to surrender even a meagre portion of his own material good fortune.

By way of contrast Paul urges his protégé, Timothy to give constant expression to his faith, his love, his patience and his gentleness. Simple gifts, can carry God's message to others by the example of our daily lives.

So, we don't need to be particularly heroic, strong, or brash to discover the fullness of life. If we can make a habit out of reminding ourselves by prayer and action that life is a gift and we need never fear surrendering into the giver's hands, we keep company with all those who have known God's love as something beautifully received, profoundly real and divinely eternal.