

From the desk of Fr. Tim

The Importance of Growth

One of the best ways to get ahead in any endeavor is to make improvements in skills or understanding. In fact, we expect this as a minimum standard. It simply would not do if our doctor or our auto mechanic did not continue to learn and grow in their skills. The motivation might be different, but the same is true for a Christian. We are called to grow. To fall short of this is not simply a failure in applying a particular window dressing to our practice of the faith. It is to lose something essential.

Before we consider the “what or how to” concerning growth, we need to consider the “why”. Christianity is oftentimes misunderstood as a philosophy of life or a set of teachings or truisms. Great energy is spent on radio stations and in pulpits outlining the various erroneous ideas about life or religion. Those who engage in this effort provide answers to modern questions. This or that idea is proclaimed as evil, and everyone goes home patting themselves on the back for no longer thinking the wrong way. Tragically, they may have missed the point entirely.

In a similar fashion, it was not so much that the Pharisees taught things that were not true (**Matthew 23:1ff**), although they were eventually found to be misguided on many issues. Their problem was made worse by their preoccupation with religious arguments of various kinds. God did not primarily call them to be right. He called them to be holy:

“The Lord Jesus, the divine Teacher and Model of all perfection, preached holiness of life to each and every one of His disciples of every condition. He Himself stands as the author and consummator of this holiness of life: ‘Be you therefore perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect’.”

(“On the Church”, Vatican II, 40)

Now, we may hear this and find the notion of perfection so foreign to us that we simply turn a deaf ear. Or we may see it as circumstantial. Saints, holy ones, simply come along from time to time, but the idea that this is the goal of every person is simply too much for us. It is, however, evidence of the goodness of God.

Jesus does not call us to something that we cannot achieve. Admittedly, we might have to really stretch our imagination to accept this. The idea that I can be a perfect human being is beyond what I can imagine. Jesus’ disciples objected to this as well and his response was clear:

“Jesus looked at them and said, “For human beings it is impossible, but not for God. All things are possible for God.”

(Mark 10:27)

We cannot allow the limitations even of human experience to stand in the way of this reality in our life. We can be saints. It is our purpose in life, our goal. And as God accomplishes it in our life, we also experience happiness. What we long for becomes a reality as the joy of God is nurtured in us.

“If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and remain in his love. ‘I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.’”

(John 15:10-11)

There is a darker side to all this. We may see our growth in holiness as optional, but it is not. The crux of the Christian Gospel really does come down to accepting this goal to be a saint or rejecting it. Spiritual mediocrity may be the acceptable model of our age, but it is rejected by the God who set us on this earth.

(Revelation 3:16)

Our God is a God of growth and health. Perhaps that is the model we can understand. A tree is in either of two states of existence; it is growing or it is dying. A tree cannot be in a middle state. So it is with the human soul.

There are many aids to the growth of a soul. The entirety of the life of the Church is devoted to this. We should find ourselves actively involved in that life so that we are moving along this path to holiness.

The mysterious evolution by which Christ himself is formed in us is the principal purpose of divine revelation and the basis for all growth and development. To this evolution is ordained the divine light of faith, to it the entire Gospel, to it the institution of the Church and even the incarnation of the divine Word. For faith is ordained to charity, which is the bond of perfection; and the dogmas of our faith are not so much for finding intellectual satisfaction as for motivating us to seek the gift of God, the living water of the Holy Spirit, and the power of his life giving grace.

**(The Mystical Evolution in the Development
and Vitality of the Church, I,2)**

by John Arintero