

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time – January 30/31, 2021 – Reflection

“I tell you, brothers and sisters, the time is running out.”

Last Sunday, as we continued our reading journey through St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, we heard many strange ideas ... “let those having wives act as not having them, those weeping as not weeping, those rejoicing as not rejoicing, those buying as not owning ...” It sounds as if St. Paul is saying that the Christian should be against anything having to do with business and commerce! Yet, St. Paul was a businessman, in production and sales. It sounds as if St. Paul is saying that the Christian shouldn't spend much time or thought on the foundational structures of society, marriage and family. Yet, how can that be when the Lord Himself described marriage as a holy and unbreakable bond and welcomed the children of marriages into His loving embrace. It sounds as if St. Paul is saying that the Christian shouldn't feel - feel sadness over the loss of a loved one - feel joy in delighting in the company of friends and family. Yet, Jesus Himself delighted in the company of His friends and wept at the loss when a friend died or walked away.

Today, St. Paul seems to stir the embers into flames once again, railing that the married person is too worried and scattered to give themselves to being a good Christian, too earthly and materialistic to ever be able to give themselves to the things of faith and the work of a Christian.

What are we supposed to do? Most adult Christians are married ... they're not hermits in caves, ascetics in the desert, monks and nuns in the cloister! And, all Christians come from families, live or lived in families, cared about their families, learned to believe through their families. Are we all supposed to turn our backs on them now and pretend that they never existed, that we don't need them, that we don't care about them anymore??

Once Jesus mused out loud to His disciples that it was hard for the rich to enter the Kingdom of heaven, that it would be easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a sewing needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of heaven. The disciples were completely flummoxed at what they were hearing and wailed, "Then, who can be saved!?" Jesus talked them down off the ledge a little bit ... not that any of them had many riches to worry about!!! ... when He said that for man it was impossible, but not for God, with God, all things are possible.

Well, I had a very deprived childhood ... I never went to Disneyland or Disney World ... I never went till I was an adult. We stopped in Orlando on the way to a vacation in the Dominican Republic. We were only gonna be at Disney for a day and a half before we had to catch a flight to the island. Believe me, I knew the time was short and I didn't wanna waste a second. I made sure I went on every ride, saw every attraction that Mickey Mouse had to offer. The time was precious and I made sure I packed a week's stay into just a day and a half!

I think that's maybe what St. Paul's been trying to say to us these past few weeks. Life is precious. Life is shorter than we think. As Christians, we are called to put our relationship with Jesus before any other relationships, before any businesses, before any hobby or sport.

We only have a very limited window of opportunity to respond to Jesus' call to "Come, follow me," to walk in His footsteps, to serve Him in the needs of the "least of my brothers and sisters."

St. Paul is telling us "you know neither the day nor the hour," and you can't keep kicking the can down the road, expecting to have forever to get it right and be the Christian the Lord is calling you to be.

If St. Paul's whacky words the last few weeks have gotten under our skin, made us all hot and bothered, maybe he was just trying to light a fire under our behinds, to get us up off our spiritual duffs. This is your chance to take in, not the Magic Kingdom, but the Kingdom of God.

Don't waste time ... this is the moment. This is the only moment you can be sure of.