

## **On God's Terms**

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Easter (Year A)

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Fr. Tony Davis

Many people experience their religion as a burden. Even though it has its high points, like coming together for worship, it far too often demands too many sacrifices and lifestyle changes to be enjoyable. It seems too much like an imposition upon us, thus draining the life out of us. Maybe that is why so many people fall away from practicing their faith.

In today's Gospel, Jesus presents religion in a different light. Ultimately, he presents it as actually giving us more life. "I have come that they might have life," Jesus says, "and have it more abundantly." That is the purpose of the Christian religion.

It sounds obvious, but our Christian religion gives us life whenever we follow God's plan for our lives. Each one of us has a vocation, a special and unique call from God. If our Christian religion is draining us of life, there is a good chance that we are not following this plan. We are more than likely following our own plan. Our own plan, no matter how detailed and well thought out, is too short-sighted and requires a lot of maintenance. That is what makes it so draining.

Early on in her life, after the tragic death of her spouse and child, Paula D'Arcy saw her Christian religion as draining her of life. Religion was way too glib to speak to her painful situation. Yet, overtime she came to see her Christian religion as that which could still give her life, and even abundant life. The key moment was when she realized that God still had a plan for her. What was taken away from her through that tragedy was her own understanding of what her life should be. God's understanding of what her life should be was still intact. In her book *Gift of the Red Bird*, Paula writes, "ironically, at this moment when I believed myself to be walking away from God, I was closest to encountering him for

myself. I was only walking away from someone else's conclusions about God and from someone else's road. What beckoned me was the roadway which was my own and the God who would not be an idea, but a Presence I was invited to encounter. Every sincere seeker wrestles with this moment and the Mystery beyond it." (19) By letting go of her own little plan so that it could be incorporated into the larger plan of God, she rediscovered her life. Not only was her life given back to her, it was given it back in abundance. As she moved ahead, still with the pain of loss, she went on to write, "now I am left either resenting my life because I didn't get the things I wanted, or learning to love life on its own terms. Really, learning to accept God on his own terms." (33)

*Life becomes abundant whenever we learn to engage it on God's terms.*

Am I pursuing my plan for my life or God's plan for my life?

The distinction is very subtle. The common denominator is that it is my life. Overtime, however, knowing the difference makes all the difference. It is the difference between religion draining us of life and religion giving us life in abundance.