

Losing Gracefully

13th Sunday in Ordinary Time

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I once heard someone say that a Christian is one who can lose gracefully. We probably don't like this saying very much. To lose goes against our instincts and certainly against the storyline of our own nation. We want to be successful; we want to be first; we want to be winners. Yet, I think this saying is on to something. As we heard Jesus tell us in our Gospel today, those who think they are the winners in life aren't actually winners. "Whoever finds her life will lose it."

This may sound shocking, but as Christians, we should be alright with losing. God really doesn't care about us being rich, popular, or successful. In fact, those are not the types of people Jesus hung out with anyway during his ministry. Jesus associated with what we would call the losers: the poor, the weak, the widow, the outsider, the foreigner, and the marginalized. Those were the people who knew what it was like to carry their crosses.

Notice that this saying does add a key word, though, that we cannot leave out: gracefully. Perhaps this qualification is cautioning us against being a sore loser. A sore loser is almost as bad as being an arrogant winner. Sore losers have a lot of unhealthy resentment, bitterness, and anger. They don't let their experience make them more empathetic to others or allow their suffering to be transformative. As a result, their losing is in vain. As Christians, we must do our losing gracefully, trusting that something good can still come out of it.

Our second reading today from St. Paul to the Romans speaks of baptism. Baptism, we could say, is the sacrament in which we are gracefully incorporated into the loser's script of history. It is where we join the ranks of the weak, the insignificant, the struggling, and the poor. "Are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" St. Paul asks.

In his document on joy, we might be surprised to hear Pope Francis write the following: "I can say that the most beautiful and natural expressions of joy which I have seen in my life were in poor people who had little to hold on to." (*The Joy of the Gospel*, 7) True joy is found among those at the margins because they have nothing to prove and nothing to protect. They understand the cross. By not having to hold on to their own righteousness, reputation, wealth, self-image, or power, they are free to hold on to God.

Christians are the ones who should know how to lose gracefully.

Question: How do I feel about losing?

Losing involves pain and suffering, embarrassment and humiliation. It is a hard lesson to learn. Yet, we should be honored to join the losers of history, for to finish the quote from Jesus, "and whoever loses her life for my sake will find it."