

Your Lot in Life And Mine

The judgements we make about our lives can be excessively harsh. More often than not, they are based on comparisons with other people. The appearances, accomplishments, status and style of others are the reference points for our own sense of self worth. Except for the most self-assured of persons out there, this seems to be the go-to means of self evaluation. And, in my own spiritual reflection, this is the cause of much unnecessary torment.

I will say a bit about my own experience in this regard: Having been a very shy teenager with a terrible self-image—developed according to comparisons with my peers---I was never a “player” in the social scene with the opposite sex. I simply sort of hoped that some chance encounter would produce a meaningful relationship which would become a love life. It never happened. Apparently that’s not how it works.

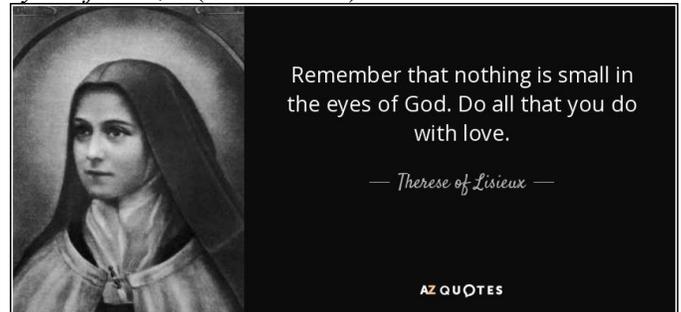
The foregoing is not the reason I became a priest, but it was a factor in the drama. However, this became a source of torment before, during and after my ordination, up until a decade ago. Did I settle for this state of life because I couldn’t make it in the “real” world? Was I some sort of lame, weak version of a man for not having “made it with the ladies?” Was my life one big avoidance maneuver from the game of love and romance?

These questions suggest a pretty harsh judgement and, perhaps, the voice of the “accuser,” Satan. Is it the very definition of a man to be a “player,” and to “make it with the ladies,” (so to speak). It seems like a pretty narrow definition and it would certainly exclude people like Jesus and St. Paul. It is, of course, a judgement from a certain cultural perspective: Where and when I grew up, this was a big part of the measure of a man.

Over time, I have come to accept “my lot in life.” Yes, I was shy and afraid with respect to the opposite sex. I was “crippled” by these issues in that area of life. However, it seems, in retrospect, God took my weaknesses and character flaws and made of them something quite unexpected and fulfilling; my life as a priest. By the grace of God I am who I am, and I have been who I have been.

This has been no mere salvage operation, but it is the work of His grace making me strong through my weakness! (2 Corinthians 12:10).

You may also look at your own life under such a harsh light, provoked by the “Accuser.” You may feel shame about past failures or lost opportunities. You may think that you have not made a significant impact or made a big enough splash in this world. You may even think that you are “a nobody” in a world full of “somebodies,” (“players,” “achievers,” “winners.”). I believe that, when we think of ourselves in such ways, Jesus would want to say to us, “*You are not thinking as God does but as human beings do!*” (Mt. 16:23) And St. Paul would say that “*The wisdom of this world is foolishness in the eyes of God,*” (1 Cor. 3:19)



The world in which we live values the people who make “the big splash.” It exalts the the big achievers and relegates whole swaths of the population to the category of “nobodies.” While it is true that God has filled the lives of each and every person with certain, good potential attributes which we should enact for our good and the good of others; we don’t know how big or small our purpose is. Is it possible that the definition of a one person’s purpose could be one, very small gesture or deed or spoken word; while, some other person has the destiny of making a much more visible difference?

St Therese of Lisieux is a great saint for one to look to for perspective here. She was a woman, locked up in a monastery and doing the underwhelming things cloistered nuns do: She did house work, she peeled potatoes, she prayed and sang and worshiped. Nevertheless, her seemingly “boring” life led to the disclosure of a world-embracing love through the “Story of a Soul,” which was her diary released in the form of a book. This puny nobody changed millions of lives after her death! It is all Grace! You are who you are, by the Grace of God!