



**Five Important Spiritual Thoughts from the Liturgy of the Word
...and follow up for the Secular Franciscan
July 28 – August 3**

1 – “ Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, house of Israel.” (Jeremiah 18:6)

...Do I honestly try to let the Lord shape my thoughts, words and actions?

2 -- “Do you understand all these things?” (Mt 13:51)**

...Do I try to understand the Lord’s words in the Gospels?

Extended meditation

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus was a perfect teacher. He wanted his students, that is, his disciples and consequently his followers, to learn well what he was trying to teach. He asks them as he teaches them the important question of whether they understood what he was teaching.

For coach Jim White of McFarland High School in the small city of McFarland, California, that understanding happened in two ways, the first with himself, and the second, as he directed his student athletes.

With himself, he saw that his previous teaching experiences had not been totally what he wished. And after he began teaching in the McFarland School District, he slowly became aware of what his job of teaching was all about.

His understanding as a teacher began to mature only when he began to see his students to be people, not unlike himself, who needed to be taught different values than the ones they knew. It is a fact of California high school sports history that with his help, his “runners” all became successful in their lives. (Movie: McFarland USA)

Understanding usually happens in our human natures with two ends in mind, the first being a shaping and forming of ourselves. It comes about only when we maturely accept the principles which Jesus gives to us in his words of the Gospels. Indeed, the Franciscan vows to make the Gospel her/his life.

Secondly and simultaneously, the other accomplishment of understanding comes with the same principles of the Gospel as they relate to other people. Such an understanding directs us to recognize the “personal world view” of another with the intention of helping them as much as we can. As the Secular Franciscan Rule phrases it, “As the Father sees in every person the features of his Son, ...so the Secular Franciscans with a gentle and courteous spirit accept all people as a gift of the Lord and an image of Christ. A sense of community will make them joyful and ready to place themselves on an equal basis with all people, especially with the lowly



for whom they shall strive to create conditions of life worthy of people redeemed by Christ.” (Rule of the Secular Franciscans, 13)

3 -- “I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and anyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” (John 11:26)**

...We readily answer the Lord that we believe that he is the resurrection and the life. How can I show that belief a little more during the upcoming days?

Extended meditation

Perhaps more than any other doctrine, the Christian belief in life after death depends solely on faith. No human being has ever returned from the dead. We have stories from people who claim to have experienced life after death in “near death experiences,” but there is no proof that there is life after death except for what Scripture offers. But Scripture is very clear. This life that we are living is merely “part one” of life. “Part two” is what we choose while we are involved in “part one.” If we choose the path of good, we will have our eternal reward in heaven; those who choose evil will have an eternal punishment.

A person familiar with the Christian Scriptures knows that Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. But the important fact of the story of Lazarus and his sisters is that it did not matter whether Jesus brought Lazarus back to earthly life or not; what mattered was that Lazarus was already alive in the eyes of God. As Jesus tells Martha, whoever believes in him will never die.

An interesting thought from our belief in part two of life, or eternal life, is that part one, our life here on earth, can be better because of our belief in heaven. The thought is cleverly portrayed in the movie “Hereafter.”

Psychic George Lonergan knew that he had a gift of communicating with the dead. He called the gift a curse because inevitably he discovered many people who wanted to know about their past, but the knowledge often did nothing more than make them miserable. At her persistent request, however, George finally listened to Marie Lelay about her experience.

The movie’s philosophical conclusion is portrayed in the present life of George and Marie as they fall in love. They are drawn together by their knowledge of the afterlife, and the unwritten statement is that they will live happily together. Their life “part one” is better because of their mutual belief in life “part two.” (Movie, “Hereafter”)

Such a conclusion is, more or less, the conclusion of Christianity and therefore Franciscanism: once we understand that the afterlife—or in Christian terms, “heaven”—exists, our present life here on earth should take on a different and more profitable meaning.

Further, and a negative thought that must accompany the thought of eternal happiness, as we experience life “part one” here on earth, we must be

SHAPING THE FRANCISCAN FOOTPRINT

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very much aware that although our present life can be enhanced by our belief in the "afterlife," we believe that we can also choose the opposite. We still possess a free will. We may choose to have "eternal death" if we refuse to live that good life.

Knowledge of a good ending is an incentive to work diligently toward such an end. If we do God's work, and do it well, living a truly Christian life, a happy life on earth will be ours, as well as the "afterlife" in heaven.

4 -- "His heart was moved with pity for them." (Mt 14:14)**

...In my life, in general, do I look at others with a desire to help them if they need it?

5 – "Woman, great is your faith." (Mt 15:28)**

...In what ways can I show my faith in a stronger way?

**** One of the most important passages of the Gospels**