Religion and Spirituality: Talk 2

It seems the simplest answer to that question is to ask Our Lord for more humility. “Religious humility recognizes one’s total dependence on God.” (Fr. John Hardin, SJ. Pocket Catholic Dictionary pg.183) When we finally realize being a really good person does not depend on our will, and all our gifts and actions, we begin to pray more and seek God in the sacraments. Christ said **I am the way, the truth and the life.** He did not say I HAVE the way, the truth and the life but He said I *AM* the way, the truth and the life.To become more religious we need to say with St. Paul (Gal 2:20), “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” Frank Sheed, in his Christian classic book, The Map of Life,said when *we believe Christ is truth,* then we must try **to understand him** and if *He is life,* **He must live in us**. I find people who are religious seem to have an inner joy. Their love for God animates them and touches all aspects of their lives. Their concern is the glory of God and the good of all souls. They know that God is their loving Father and despite all their weaknesses, they try daily to be true friends of Jesus Christ, filled with his Holy Spirit.

Yes, a religious person becomes sad, falls into sin and often fails to fulfill what they planned to give to God but the *difference is they struggle* anew each day *to know, love and serve God.* A religious person keeps beginning again every morning! Being more religious is seeking God more, which helps us to **know him more intimately and thus makes us love him more completely.** It also compels one to share his love with others. Saints are declared to have lived lives of “heroic virtue” because they loved God so completely by always knowing and doing God’s will above their own. The lives of the saints are filled with incredible sufferings and setbacks and yet they were always happy.

People have been trying to seek and discover the true meaning of happiness since the time of Aristotle. Even our own Declaration of Independence seeks life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. The Catechism of the Catholic Church in the section called ***Life in Christ*** talks of “The Desire for Happiness” which is described as a natural desire “of divine origin”. God has put this urge, this desire into each heart, “in order to draw man to the One who alone can fulfill it.” Eccl 3:11, says, “God has put the timeless into their hearts” and it follows that man at heart, is truly dissatisfied with the vanities of life. St. Augustine, the great sinner and saint said it so well, “Though hast made me for thee, O God, and my heart is restless until it comes to rest in thee.” If we know we were created for life beyond the grave, then it seems reasonable to try to become a bit more religious each day because that seems to be where happiness lies. Since God is the source of all Love, it follows that one who is united more to God, is happier. As St. Thomas Aquinas said “God alone satisfies.”

Borrowing from many spiritual writers, I’d like to call a relationship with God, ***Interior Life* or *Interior Worship*.** It is the honor, the justice, the love we owe to the one who created us, who keeps us in existence and who died and rose again to open up the glories of heaven to us. **Interior Life** is treating God with care; it adores God with inward acts of the heart and mind. To quote St. Josemaria, having an active, vibrant Interior life, is like having a “supernatural aerial”, whereby we keep in touch with God. (Forge #510) We can also say “being religious” is having *Unity of Life,* which means one is living a life that is consistent with one’s faith. It is not going somewhere and then “checking your faith at the door.” (St. Josemaria).

Being religious is talking to God who is within us in grace,because praying more and frequenting the sacraments of the Eucharist and Confession, brings one closer to God in all aspects of daily life. One begins to notice the Holy Spirit ***within*** and actually begins to understand (as some children were taught) they truly *are* temples of the Holy Spirit.

 Interior life needs external worship to keep it alive. People who consider themselves religious Catholics try to go to regular confession and frequent Mass. The Mass is the root of many people’s interior lives. (Again, Frank Sheed, in A Map of Life, pg. 120), says, “In prayer, man approaches God. In sacraments, God approaches man.” And again he says, “Both culminate in the same point, for the highest prayer is the mass and the highest sacrament is the Eucharist.” I would say without a moment of hesitation, if one wanted to become more religious, they should begin with these two pillars, which Christ gave us, the Eucharist and Confession.

Many people trying to live their faith more completely, say a daily morning offering, a rosary, visit Our Lord in the Tabernacle, or read Scripture. Having crucifixes, pictures or statues of Mary and St. Joseph help ones devotion, as they become reminders of where one wants to be. Some do daily Spiritual reading, meditative prayer and many other acts of worship because the more one is generous with God and schedules Him into their day, the more God showers graces on that soul. People discover that the more they pray, the more they pray!

When we compare for example, the sad, sordid lives of many people with fame and money with the lives of Blessed Mother Theresa and her sisters, it seems obvious that possession of Christ and the true meaning of life are the key to authentic happiness and not the *acquisition* of possessions. The sister’s lifeline is a daily plan of prayer and commitment based on their love of a person! *They love Jesus Christ* and they want to *be* Christ to others, and bring others to HIM.

We most likely are not called to live and work with the poorest of the poor but we are called to be living, fruitful members of the church, which is Christ’s Mystical Body. He did not ask St. Paul, “why are you persecuting my church”, but “why are you persecuting *me*?”. We need the church to find Christ since as St. Augustine said, “Christ and the church are two in one flesh.” To become more “religious’ is to become more a soul in grace, IN LOVE WITH THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST, our true model, with all the means the Church offers. Being more religious means trying to live a supernatural life; a life above our nature. That is what Jesus wants of us; “be ye perfect as my heavenly Father is perfect.” Perfection means holiness and as the Vatican II document, Lumen Gentium (Christ is the Light if the Nations) tells us in Chapter 5, all the faithful by baptism have this “Universal Call to Holiness”. It IS something attainable and it does take a lifetime but the Saints have proven by their great love in every detail of their lives, that ordinary people can become like Christ. As Fr. George Rutler said in a talk he gave in 2003, Holiness does not require great things, but ordinary things done well with love.