

Living our Lives for the Glory of God (Rather than Ourselves)

Eduardo Verastegui is a famous actor from Mexico, and in the eyes of the world, he had everything he needed to make him happy: money, fame, women, good looks and professional accomplishments. But there was one thing he wanted more at the time: Hollywood fame.

As luck would have it, his dream seemed about to become a reality. He was with his manager one day on a Miami to LA flight, when next to them was the casting manager for 20th Century Fox studios. He was looking for a Spanish actor with a thick accent, and invited Eduardo to read for it. He ended up getting the part, and moving to L.A. and started learning English, the rags-to-riches story. But, little did he know that the woman who would teach him English would in fact teach him much more than a new language.

His teacher on the set of the film also was a practicing Catholic, and started asking him questions such as “what is the purpose of your life?” and “how are you using your talents?,” “How are you choosing your projects?,” “What sort of message are you sending to society?” and “If you really love God, why do you live the way you do?” Certainly not the kind of questions that one would expect from someone teaching English.

Eduardo admits that he didn't much care for her at first. He'd try to avoid answering them, but she wouldn't go away. For six months she would, he says “patiently and lovingly” persist. And eventually, they cut him to the core. He broke down, and went to confession and promised God to commit his life to Him. In his words, “I realized that a real man is someone who identifies his life with the life of Jesus Christ.” He also cites the words of Blessed Mother Teresa, saying that “we are not called to be successful. We are called to be faithful to God.”

Coming to this realization, he decided to take a career change. He took some time off from acting to sort out his life, taking a retreat and getting spiritual direction and a new life plan for living the faith while living in Hollywood. One day at Mass, he met someone who had also had a conversion, now a theology, apologetics (one who teaches the Catholic faith) and philosophy teacher. Eduardo shared with this man his vision of making movies on these subjects. Joined by the brother of a close friend who also underwent a conversion, they set about trying to get productions off the ground. The goal, says Eduardo, is to get people to leave the theaters “wanting to love more, forgive more and complain less...with a candle in their hearts, full of hope and faith.” Their first fruit was the film “Bella,” which tells the story about a woman considering ending her pregnancy. While it had a hard time getting off the ground due to funding issues, with a lot of prayer, he eventually he secured money from a New York family. The film was shot in 23 days, and accepted into the Toronto International Film Festival, where it won. Financially, it wasn't a huge box office hit. But, Eduardo points out that it's not so much about the money, but really about the many letters and emails and phone calls he got from young expectant mothers who were scheduled to end their pregnancies, but changed their minds after seeing the film.

All of us can relate to Eduardo's story in a certain sense because inside all of us can be the temptation to be noticed, or to be somebody. But if we think about it and are honest, the truth is we could be much more happy if we would just let go of that desire as Eduardo did and Jesus hits that point home for us so well this week

In the Gospel, Jesus sits down at a meal, and we are told that the people look at him carefully, so we already see how the divisions are there - where is He going to sit, who is He going to talk to, etc. And he gives us a parable that almost comes across like a Miss Manners column: when you go to a wedding, don't try to seek out the place of high honor; rather go to a place of lower honor. He explains that this is a great way to avoid embarrassment and to gain esteem of others, but the heart of the Gospel isn't about how to get respect from others. The heart of the Gospel message is to help people understand that when we make honor very important in the sense of people seeing you and being impressed with your achievements, your status, your position, we've got a problem. We need to remember that our focus in life shouldn't be on impressing other people, it should be on serving God. With that in mind, I'd invite you to think about a couple of ways that we can do that.

For one, always try to keep your eyes fixed on the big picture which is bettering yourself and other people, and this is something we can do at all ages. We do this by growing in holiness; through our actions of love and mercy for others that aren't seen by everyone but are by God, so who cares if the world knows or not what we did. If we can look back at something and say "that hard work made me a better person and was important," that's what matters.

Second, try to rid yourself of doing things to win the esteem of others. Eduardo might not be a household name, but while he's found success, he's also found peace because he started living for God and not other people. Sometimes as kids we do things to get in with the "in" crowd; or even as adults do things expecting something back or to be noticed or talked about by others. Rather, like Eduardo discovered, we do things to make this world a better place. And that is why we should also always ask ourselves why we do what we do - is it because you genuinely care and want to make a difference, or might there be a hint of egotism or a desire for praise and winning esteem and honor from other people? For Eduardo, there was the money which he enjoyed but even more than that it was about being seen and noticed. Sometimes though for us, while that might not be the main motivation, we may want to inflate egos, or expect something in return. We can all be susceptible to that, and often it's nothing we'd admit or even think about, but it takes introspection and reflection to always ensure we aren't doing things to be honored, but doing things because we want to help out our family or church or organization.

One of the reasons I love baseball, basketball and football so much is that they are all team sports. Pat Riley, the longtime Lakers coach, once said "Being a part of success A couple of weeks back there was the "Field of Dreams" game between the Reds and Cubs you may have seen, played in the field from "Field of Dreams" where Major

League Baseball is having a yearly game now. If you remember that movie, where Ray builds the baseball diamond as he's felt called to do, but is frustrated as things aren't going easy for him and he's not allowed to follow the baseball players who come out the cornfield back into it, he rants to Shoeless Joe Jackson "I want to know what's in it for me!" to which Jackson says to him "Is that why you built it Ray, for you?" He's reduced to silence and comes to see there's something deeper at work there, and in the end he doesn't get glory for himself, but finds true happiness in reconciling with his father, and bringing joy to the thousands who come to Iowa to see the field and the legends of the diamond play again.

So how about us? Do we do it for ourselves or for God? Day in and day out may we strive to live for God and others rather than for ourselves, mindful that while honor and esteem on earth might be nice, it's nothing compared to the honor of being a part of heaven and helping others to achieve that. So much of what we do might seem to go unnoticed, but never forget the incredible power within to transform the world for the better one action at a time, for when we do that we might not get our name on a wall, but we just might hear the words "well done good and faithful servant, welcome home" at the end of our lives, and look to see so many people in life we crossed paths with waiting for us at the eternal banquet of heaven.

God's blessings to you,

Fr. Paul