

Being Open to Change is a Key to Happiness

For all of us, change can be very difficult. We get set in certain patterns and routines, and there can be a bit of comfort in familiarity. But deep down, we all know changes come whether we like them or not. And very often from change, growth can emerge.

There were a couple of things that had me thinking about how change is so important in our life.

One is the feast day that we have Tuesday, the solemnity of the Assumption. Mary is assumed body and soul into heaven as a culmination of living a life of complete love and service to God; and it was a life that had so much change in it. Rather than having a closed heart, and doing it “her way,” she was always open to doing it the Lord’s way, putting her trust in Him and His plan time and time again. Openness to that change is what made her a saint.

This past weekend was also the start of a new journey for Deacon Steve Boatwright. Deacon Steve has been here with us at Saint Joe’s since 2012, and in the 80s, he felt the call to prepare to become a deacon. He was ordained in 1991, a deacon now for nearly 32 years in our archdiocese, and he has had a special care for the sick and homebound in his ministry. It has been great working with him here these past 8+ years; he always has a smile, is very dedicated to our parish, and truly loves his ministry. Now, he begins to be open to change again as he starts a new journey. Having lost his wife Marcia a few years ago, Deacon Steve began discerning the possibility of priesthood. Getting in touch with the vocations director and the Archbishop, he applied and has been accepted for a special formation program and as such is moving to Hales Corners, Wisconsin for the next two years where he’ll be studying for the priesthood. He’s quite an inspiration, because he’s truly a reminder that when we open ourselves up to not just being on “cruise control” but to the will of God in our lives, God can do great things. Do we trust Him though to take the leap?

As we try to grow spiritually, it’s so important to be open to change, and to persist in our actions once we determine the change that is necessary.

With respect to change, we ask ourselves what are some things that need to be different in our lives?

For some, it might be possessions. We fill our lives with stuff, but as the saying goes there is never a U-Haul in a funeral possession. Do we have a proper balance on our “stuff” or does it control us? Do we pursue materialism too much? Do we need to maybe be more generous in what we give to the poor and those in need?

For others, it might be relationships. All relationships need change at various points. In marriage, we ask is there enough communication? Am I becoming expectant of my spouse or taking advantage of them? Do I do my fair share around the house and with the kids? Am I being sensitive to the needs of my spouse? Do I need to challenge my

spouse to change? Is a relationship or friendship becoming toxic to the point where the other person is causing me to become a person I don't want to become? Or for parents, can you let go or are you the "helicopter parent" who wants to control your children even as they age, or are you able to let go and let your children as they grow make their own decisions and become adults? For kids, do you realize that as we age, it's important to remember money doesn't grow on trees, and to help out parents or with household chores?

How about your relationship with yourself, in particular your past? Do you have a good self-worth? Do you love yourself? Are you able to forgive yourself as God forgives you? Sometimes we can't change because we cling to the past too much, and the past can make us fearful of making future mistakes, afraid to take risks, or the shame can be crippling.

How about with where God wants you to go? We can do many things through free will, but we won't be truly at peace unless we are following God's plan. So listen to what God has planned for you and carry it out.

That leads us to the persistence part. As Ringo Starr might say, it don't come easy. We have to persist at achieving God's plans for us once we receive them. Seminary took work and commitment, but I'm still trying to grow as a priest and as a Christian in holiness in overcoming sins and becoming a better man. So how about for you? From parenting and becoming better and working at it even when your children no matter what age are driving you crazy, to working to make others better, or helping the parish to move forward, or making this world a better place, all of us have a job to do. We can't give up when life gets hard at home or work, or it seems people we love aren't living out the faith, or the world just seems to be falling apart.

God has plans for each of us, and while they are all different, what they all share in common is this, namely if we listen to God, and persist in carrying out those plans, and are open to doing it His way and not our own through changing and growing as people, they will ultimately bring us and so many others we encounter along the way happiness. Mary had a sword pierce her heart, but she was also a deeply happy woman for she knew she was doing what God told her to do. I suspect too that is part of the reason why Deacon - perhaps soon Father - Steve is such a happy, jovial man. He's at peace because he knows he's doing God's will. So listen to the words of the Good Shepherd, and do not be afraid of failing along the way or fall into the trap of being too stubborn to do it His way. Because when we carry out His plan and grow in our faith through being open to change and not giving up, ultimately it will truly lead to a joy and happiness we can't even begin to fathom.

God bless!

Fr. Paul