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# A Life-Giving Approach to Spirituality

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## A Life-Giving Approach to Spirituality

*I will bless you O God at all times;*

*thy praise shall continually be in my mouth.*

*My soul makes its boast in you;*

*let the humble hear and be glad.*

*O magnify God with me,*

*and let us exalt God's name together.*

*Amen*

I'm going to speak to the introverts in the room. If you're an introvert like me, you'll find that you like spending time alone, and you often feel drained by social interactions. Perhaps COVID-19 has made us all introverts. We're told: "Ten people max," "Don't shake hands," "Six feet distance," and so on and so forth. Music to my ears! But friends, it's hard to ignore the lasting change in culture brought on by these new commandments.

The readings for today demonstrate two distinct spiritual cultures. The first approach views our relationship with God as a series of boxes to be checked, the goal being to avoid sin. We see this approach in the familiar story of God giving Moses the Ten Commandments.

But let's unpack it a bit.

I'm sure you would have noticed that eight of the commandments are phrased in the negative, with the repeated words "Thou shalt not ...". On only two occasions are we actually told *what* to do.

The reason for this becomes clear when Moses says, "Do not be afraid; for God has come only to test you and to put the fear of him upon you so that you do not sin."

The people are afraid! And what do you do when you're afraid? Well as someone used to being reprimanded, I can tell you that the first instinct is to do *nothing*.

This approach to spirituality is based on inactivity, stasis, and fear. Paul took this approach when he was "as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless." European colonisers also took this approach when they drove "the fear of the Lord" – in the image of the white man – into the minds of colonised peoples across the world.

There is, however, another approach. The psalmist writes, "The heavens declare the glory of God ..."

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Their sound has gone out into all lands, and their message to the ends of the world.” This is a departure from the fear and trembling at Mount Sinai. The divine experience spurs nature into motion.

But it doesn't stop there. We learn that, “The law of the Lord is perfect and revives the soul, the testimony of the Lord is sure and gives wisdom to the innocent.” Following God's decrees leads to encouragement and enlightenment, not shock and stasis.

As Jesus says in the Gospel reading, we ought to be “a people that *produces* the fruits of the kingdom” – a people not of passivity, but of productivity.

Consider these words from Archbishop Desmond Tutu: “When you worship this God, if it does not make you see and feel like God, then that worship is a cult and for God it is an abomination, however elaborate it might be.” Archbishop Tutu is describing what makes our relationship with God sacramental: worshipping and following God ought to reflect that we are drawing nearer to our God through grace.

Friends, I want to suggest that this sacramental attitude should extend beyond Church. Our personal relationship with God ought to be a model for our relationships with friends, family, classmates, colleagues, and others. In the same way that Jesus invites us to be productive in the service of God's kingdom, so too should our earthly relationships regularly renew us and inspire positive activity. To borrow an ECY cliché, our relationships ought to be life-giving, and not life-draining.

Clearly, we have a part to play in this. If we find ourselves depriving others of positivity, then we should improve.

But friends, so often it's just not in our hands. And despite all the drawbacks of social distancing, one thing I've appreciated about this new way of life is that I've really been able to discern between the friendships that are worth going the extra mile for, and those which are not.

So friends, I truly believe that if we strive like Paul to “know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings,” we will become like him in his death and in his rising. Jesus drew us unto the Cross with open arms so that we could each participate with the divine through our own vulnerability. And friends, that was and still remains the most perfect exercise of life-giving.