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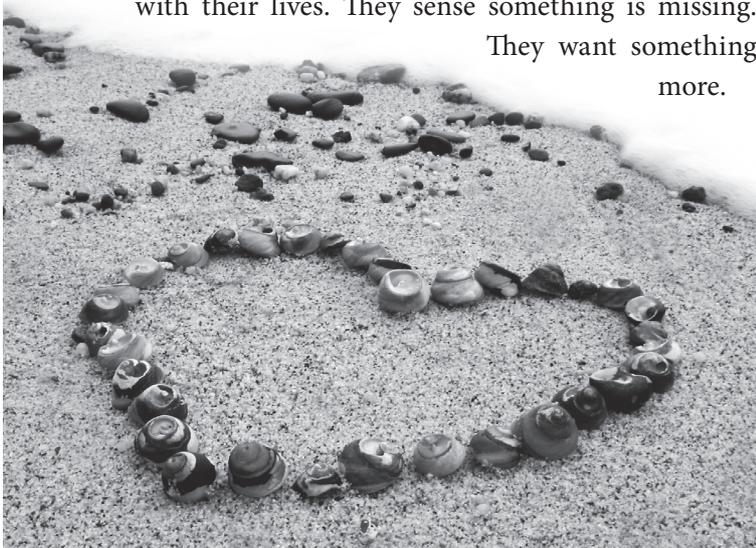
More, Please

by Fr. Preston Westly, C.Ss.R.

The tenth chapter of Saint Mark's Gospel relates Jesus' story about a rich young man. He was living a good moral life, but he wondered whether something was missing. He asked Jesus, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Mark 10:17-22). Jesus invited him to give up everything he had and become a disciple. Sad to say, the rich young man was unwilling to give up things he had become attached to so he could have a deeper spiritual life.

This story illustrates a longing that has affected many good people who keep the rules and obey the laws but are not satisfied with their lives. They sense something is missing.

They want something more.



Embrace your spirit

What we see here is the difference between living a good moral life and living a spiritual life. For Catholic Christians, living a good moral life means we keep the Ten Commandments and other laws of the Church as our moral guidelines. Our reward for doing this is that we have a greater structure in our lives and live in harmony with our neighbors.

This is what many people understand religion to be: an invitation to lead a good moral life and gain everlasting rewards in heaven because of their good behavior.

Nothing is wrong with a life lived according to these principles. What a great world we would live in if everybody did so. But we are all created with a deeper sense of longing, the same longing that led to the rich young man's question.

I believe Saint Augustine best described the spiritual life when

he said our hearts are restless until they rest in God. I believe that in the deepest part of us—the truest part—is the desire to live a spiritual life. God, who created us, placed within us a yearning to know ourselves in relation to our Creator. It stands to reason, then, that until we become alive at this level of our existence, we do not really know who we are or how to live life completely.

To know him is to love him

Our Catholic religion invites us to discover and maintain a spiritual life through a personal love relationship with God. It teaches us that the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, is a person who loves us. It invites us into this type of relationship with God. It says knowing God and loving God mean the same thing.

The truth is that knowing and loving God is precisely what we must do to be happy. Living for self does not lead to happiness. Our hearts long for more than this. We have in our hearts a desire for greater meaning than the world holds out to us. God can and will fulfill that desire.

The problem, as the story of the rich young man illustrates, is that within each of us is resistance to venturing too deeply into the spiritual life. We are too often content to settle for less than the best, because we soon learn the spiritual journey requires us to confront our pride and our pain. We do not avoid our cross. We obey Jesus' command to pick up our cross. That's what Jesus did, and what happened? Through his cross he brought life, happiness, and salvation to the world.

We know what Jesus did and how he did it. We know he told us to pick up our cross and follow him. But it is scary. It is painful. A large part of us would rather try to avoid this pain. We think that if only we can do the right things, say the right things, we'll feel better inside. We want to do it *our* way. Sometimes this works a little bit, but not much and not for long.

The greatest love of all

Our spiritual journey needs to base itself on giving up our own pride, giving up trying to do things our way. It needs us to listen well to professionals who can help us. This often includes medical people, psychologists and psychiatrists, and therapists who are knowledgeable about scrupulosity. Our spiritual journey needs to be rooted in our trying to live a good moral life, obeying the Ten Commandments and the laws of the Church. Our spiritual journey needs to be rooted in knowing and understanding more and more each day the tremendous love Jesus imparted to us in the sacred Scriptures and the love God continues to give us today.

Love is not an object the senses can see and observe. It is not an idea or concept for the mind to memorize or to know. This love is the ultimate mystery. Yet we know love is real. We know when we are loved by another. We know when we are not. We seek out love even though at times it brings us suffering because it also brings us greater life. We know giving love is giving life. And God's love for us is our greatest asset: "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13).



We Were Made for Love

The following is adapted from *Overcoming Depressive Living Syndrome: How to Enjoy Life, Not Just Endure It* by Earnie Larsen with Cara A. Macken, Liguori Publications, © 1996.

For as long as our species has had the ability to exercise intelligence and thought, great thinkers, philosophers, poets, saints, and scholars have been saying that we were made for love, that our very nature is social, that we need one another. In fact, academics have built levels, scales, and an entire language around this basic truth, and empirical data gathered from countless clinical experiments have proven the point.

Do you remember the famous experiment that studied the infant mortality rate? Infants were given every need-fulfillment except the nurturing touch of a mother. The babies fared poorly. When this need for intimacy was fulfilled, however, this crucial “medicine”—the tactile nurturing, the sound of a beating heart, the warmth of closeness—worked like magic; the babies’ health improved dramatically.

When those deepest of human needs—the need to love, be loved, and belong—are denied, a pit is dug, and the deficit of intimacy creates chaos. This is true regardless of what the contributing factors of biology and brain chemistry may be, either as cause or result, or in the continuous recycling of both.

Humans, of course, are infinitely varied. Some, it seems, can take the most depressing beginning and translate that energy creatively. Somehow

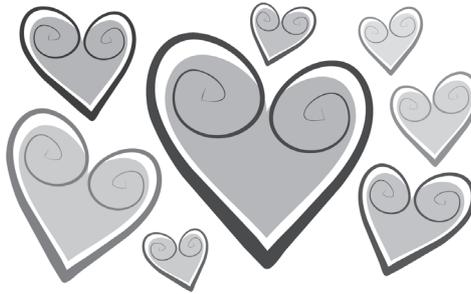
they are able to channel the deepest pool of anger in a positive direction. Much of the world’s great art is the energy of pain made beautiful. Although this magnificent art is expressed in a physical medium, such as paint or stone, more often it shines in the quality of a life and the content of a character. Most of us, however, are not that exceptional. We come up with a mixed bag.

A phrase often used to describe the hole left by intimacy deprivation is “the big empty.” I have also

heard intimacy deprivation described as a throbbing, bleeding, jagged wound. Whatever the image, the resulting pain of intimacy deprivation will always seek to heal itself. Sometimes, as in our compulsions, the energy goes in the wrong direction.

A gentleman at a self-help meeting used a helpful analogy. Think of King Kong, he suggested, grabbing a tube of toothpaste and giving it a squeeze. You can bet the toothpaste is going to come cascading out. Some will come out of the top, some out of the bottom, some out of the sides. The point is not about where the tube breaks when King Kong squeezes it, but why it breaks.

That image makes a world of sense when you think about it. Is it more important to patch the tear, or to get Mr. Kong’s hand off the tube?



Dilemma DEPARTMENT

Q *I receive requests for donations from many organizations. Some are Catholic, some are not. Is it OK to donate to organizations with no Catholic connection? And is it OK to donate to organizations operated jointly by several religions? The two I am thinking of are Cross International and Food for the Poor.*

A It is OK to donate to any organizations you judge to be honest groups who really help the poor. The two you mention are good organizations operated by dedicated people who care greatly for the poor and work tirelessly to help them whenever possible.

It's a good thing when different religious denominations work together. This should not bother anyone; indeed, it should be applauded. Remember what our Lord said in the Gospel of Saint Mark? "There is no one who performs a mighty deed in my

name who can at the same time speak ill of me. For whoever is not against us is for us" (Mark 9:39-40).

Q *My confessor told me to go to Communion at every Mass I attend. Sometimes it's a real struggle to follow his advice. I feel like I'm committing a sacrilege. Should I continue to go to Communion even though some of the time I feel that in doing so I'm offending God?*



A Continue to do what your confessor advised you to do, because you are always safe in obeying your confessor in these matters. Go to Communion no matter how you feel. Be positive you're doing what the Lord wants you to do. Like Christ, you are being obedient to legitimate authority. He obeyed even unto his death on the Cross. One cannot be wrong in acting like

Christ in these matters. Be obedient to your confessor, especially when it comes to the use of the sacraments.

Send your letters and inquiries to sa@liguori.org.

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